

Sovereignty of Violence



Oh, joven héroe arrebatado por los dioses,
 palmo a palmo ha crecido tu hondo raptó
 y ya tiene el tamaño de la isla,
 el sabor de nuestro aire y nuestro mar!
 iremos por las playas caminando entre tus dedos;
 escalaremos las montañas recordando tu rostro.
 no surcaremos las olas, sino tu ardiente pecho

[Oh, young hero snatched away by the gods,
 inch by inch, handful by handful, your abduction has deepened
 until it now is the size of the island,
 the taste of our air and our sea!
 We will walk the beaches between your fingers;
 we will climb the mountains remembering your face.
 We will ride not the waves but your burning breast]

—Cintio Vitier, “Camilo Cienfuegos”

In a poem dedicated to Camilo Cienfuegos, Cintio Vitier addresses him as the mythical hero of Antiquity’s epics who has been abducted by the gods. Cienfuegos and Guevara were, according to Gott: “The two rebel *comandantes*, perceived as the most heroic, charismatic and romantic figures in Castro’s army” (Gott 2004, 167). Cienfuegos, commander-in-chief of the army in the Sierra Maestra and always loyal to the revolution, was lost in October 1959, as he was flying over Camagüey where he was to replace

Huber Matos. He was never found, nor were his remains. Much like in Guevara's case, Cienfuegos's sudden disappearance confirmed him as the mythical hero he had already become during the armed insurrection. These, at least, are the type of metaphors that circulated in political discourse and culture during the first two years of the Cuban Revolution. After the radical shift of governance, it became imperative to look for new forms of nation building. The revolution took form by bringing into play a new citizen with a new identity. Until then, Cubanness was defined by discourses of cultural miscegenation; with the revolution, national identity was transformed by a new revolutionary ethos. The discourses of racial and cultural difference that were part of the national imaginary during the Republic became political discourses of heroism, sacrifice, and patriotism. The new revolutionary citizen was a hero whose sacrifices would help build the nation. Central to this was the notion of violence.

Following the victory of the Cuban Revolution—and perhaps also influenced by the “silenced” event of the Haitian Revolution in 1791—Roque Dalton published an essay in the Cuban journal *Casa de las Américas* calling for armed struggle against capitalism (1963, 20). José Martí had already argued a century before that it was time for Latin Americans to begin struggling for their second independence from the political and economic influence of the United States (“Congreso de Washington”). Like Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, or Ernesto Guevara, other Latin Americans and revolutionary intellectuals of the sixties, Dalton argued that El Salvador needed to be liberated from its subjugation to the inequitable, corrupt, and bloodthirsty governments that had led it, from colonialism to the postcolonial period. While all these writers felt that armed struggle was the only means to achieve liberation, they had different reasons to make that claim. For Dalton a revolutionary had to take the same risks with weapons that a poet took with language, since both shared the same ethical responsibility. As the theoretical architect of *foquismo* and an advocate of guerrilla warfare, Ernesto Guevara believed that only an armed struggle would lead the masses to power. Indeed, Fanon's theory of violence was very influential on Guevara's thought.

This chapter looks at the deployment and interpretation of the ideological fantasies at play in the revolutionary process of the early 1960s, when the political foundations of the revolutionary movement were established. More specifically, I analyze the ideological legacy of the intellectual production of the 1960s—the first decade of the Cuban revolutionary period. The chapter deals with the ideas of novelty that arose to represent the new political ideology, as well as the cultural forms associated with it. It is important to note that revolutionary insurgence was postulated on its exceptionality. This originality was based on the concept of warfare and

on political improvisation. What made the revolution a unique event was that it had *not* followed a theoretical program, which is why it did not lend itself to easy systematization and codification. In a letter written in 1960 to Argentinian writer Ernesto Sábato, Guevara explained that, in Cuba, revolutionary theory was codified after the revolution's exploits, and not vice versa: "This Revolution is a genuinely improvised creation. We are thus also speaking with a new language, because we walk much faster than we think and structure our thoughts. We are in constant movement, whereas theory goes at a slower pace" (Guevara 2003, 269–70). This also means that the "new" was not easily identifiable. The desire to create and articulate the idea of novelty recurs in many of the essays from the sixties. The revolution was the culmination of the long-standing aspiration for political autonomy and independence. This meant that nationalism and patriotism became two key defining aspects of the "new." In that regard, the Cuban Revolution was no different from any other political project of national liberation, or process of decolonization, for that matter. The consequence was the renaissance of an epic memorialization of war and the representation of Cuba as a nation under siege. This idea permeated all cultural production in the revolution's early years. During this period, attacks by counterrevolutionary and U.S. forces justified for the revolutionaries a rhetoric of war and heroism. But as the years went by, the rebels who took power continued to cultivate the same imaginary of the Sierra Maestra. The tropes of heroism, sacrifice, war, and violence were the essential *topoi* of revolutionary rhetoric, and they became the values that every Cuban citizen needed to embrace.

Revolutionary subjectivity was characterized by the self-sacrificing attitude of the hero or guerrilla fighter. Many soldiers gave their lives for the country, and the government felt always indebted to them. In return for this sacrifice, other citizens also had the duty to sacrifice themselves for the nation: "Para ello, la Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas alza sus símbolos, que son los símbolos de todo el pueblo de Cuba: el estudio, el trabajo y el fusil [For this, the Union of Young Communists raises its symbols, which are those of the entire Cuban people: study, work, and the rifle]" (Guevara 2009, 353). Most importantly, armed struggle was justified as the only possible means that could lead to a revolutionary transformation and a just society. The rhetorical mirage that led to the legitimization of violence was articulated, I argue, through the sanctification and martyrdom of the revolutionary hero, who became the country's only possible political Messiah. One can observe this logic at play in Fidel Castro's thought and in Ernesto Guevara's works, both deeply rooted in Fanon's theories of decolonization. Fanon argued that the colonized had a legitimate reason to rise in arms against the colonizers' oppression. His arguments were decisive in the struggle for decolonization. He refuted Octave Mannoni's theory of the

colonized dependency complex, giving agency to colonized subjects with his arguments on racial difference (see Fanon 1963). Drawing on existentialism and his reading of Sartre, as Rojas rightly points out, he was also the first to articulate the dynamics of oppression and alienation in the colonial process. Did these theoretical premises establish the conditions of possibility for a new and radical way to conceive of liberation? I will address this question by looking at early revolutionary discourse, social poetry, and three key revolutionary works. First, I analyze Castro's justification of armed struggle in his self-defense narrative *La historia me absolverá* (*History Will Absolve Me*, 1954), and I analyze the logic of sacrifice by looking at Cintio Vitier's poems "Cruz" (Cross) and "Cara o cruz" (Head or Tails). Second, I consider the Guevarian theories of liberation and revolutionary subjectivity in *La guerra de guerrillas* (*Guerrilla Warfare*, 1961) and "El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba" ("Socialism and Man in Cuba," 1965). Among the numerous works about revolutionary heroism, I have chosen to look first at Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's earliest film, *Historias de la Revolución* (*Stories of the Revolution*, 1960), and then at Luis Rogelio Noguera's detective novel *Y si muero mañana* (*If I Die Tomorrow*, 1978). Noguera's novel, which is from a later period, shows that the representation of heroism and violence that dates back to the early sixties remained a key aspect of revolutionary subjectivity until the eighties. It is my contention that the rhetoric of violence was at the core of revolutionary discourse during the first revolutionary decade and that political change (or construction) was based on destruction. More important, this discourse radically laid the ideological foundations of subsequent Cuban revolutionary rhetoric. The dogmatism that constrained cultural production during the "five gray years" (*Quinquenio gris*,¹ 1971–76) was a direct consequence of these premises.

In addition to looking at the different articulations of the new ideology, I also examine the aesthetic debates surrounding it. More specifically, I study the debates around socialist realism, especially Mirta Aguirre's defense of it, as well as the conversationalist social poetry of the period. My argument is that—contrary to Guevara's claim—Cuba produced its own version of socialist realist literature and that the social strand of conversationalist poetry was a good example of this. As a matter of fact, I believe that Guevara's melancholic rendering of the New Man was also the model that inspired the heroic figures of these poems. Firmly anchored in the belief that form and content mirrored each other, materialist thinkers proposed socialist realism as the only form able to convey dialectical materialism. These aesthetic views emerged in opposition to idealism, the philosophy of the bourgeois representation of reality. This theoretical debate ultimately reintroduced the question of the national autonomy of the Cuban literary canon. In other words, at stake was the validity of the Western literary

tradition and its ability to convey an objective and truthful representation of reality. Once more, the question of aesthetics was a question of national identity, as it had been for the literary tradition of the Republic. Most important, however, were the ideological interpretations of the claims to truth of two philosophical traditions, materialism and idealism, and how they were used to justify modes of governance. Scholars have pointed to the dynamism and transparency of these public debates to argue that there was a space for political dissent and discussion.² Whereas these claims were certainly true, state apparatuses were already imposing a rigid hegemonic state discourse in the 1960s.

Divine and Ethical Violence

The 26th of July Movement (the rebel leaders) that brought down the Batista government conceived of revolution in an Arendtian sense, that is, as a new and radical political process leading to freedom.³ Here is how Fidel Castro defined it in his December 24, 1955, speech “¡Frente a todos!” (“Against All!”): “The Cuban people want more than a change of leadership. Cuba yearns for radical change in all fields of public and social life” (Castro 1972a, 78). More specifically, Castro laid out the uprising’s objectives in a speech that he delivered in his own defense while on trial for the first failed attack on the Moncada barracks in 1953,⁴ where he also defended his use of armed struggle. Most revolutions are associated with violence, but not all revolutions need be violent. For Cuban revolutionaries, however, revolution and armed struggle were inseparable concepts. Violence can only be instrumental if it is not an end in itself, and Cuban revolutionaries knew they had to justify their use of violence as a means to liberate the country. According to revolutionary discourse, the armed uprising was the last resort to fight Batista’s regime, but the repressive nature of Batista’s rule demanded and justified it.

The 26th of July Movement came together on the grounds of a common belief in revolutionary action. As a matter of fact, in a replica from *Bohemia*, where he addressed Ortodoxo party’s moderates, Fidel Castro argued that revolutionary action was not just an option, but rather a necessity: “El Movimiento Revolucionario 26 de Julio no constituye una tendencia dentro del partido: es el aparato revolucionario del chibatismo [The 26th of July Movement is not a tendency within the party: it is Chibatismo’s revolutionary apparatus]” (Castro 1972b, 87). Unlike *History Will Absolve Me*, however, this letter, as well as subsequent ones that were also published in *Bohemia* in 1956, did not make a direct apology for armed struggle. The message was very clear: the revolutionaries would not strike first, but they would not tolerate Batista’s repression either: “No amamos la fuerza; porque detestamos

la fuerza es por lo que no estamos dispuestos a que se nos gobierne por la fuerza. No amamos la violencia; porque detestamos la violencia no estamos dispuestos a seguir soportando la violencia que desde hace cuatro años se ejerce sobre la nación [We don't like violence: it is because we dislike violence that we won't put up with the repression that's been devastating the nation for four years]" (Castro 1972b, 91). Fidel Castro's nonviolence claims gave the 26th of July Movement the moral ground over the Batista regime's brutal treatment of political opponents, as well as a legitimate right to self-defense and the political legitimacy that his nascent movement needed. When Fidel Castro confronted the Batista regime directly, for example, as he did in his famous 1953 discourse *History Will Absolve Me*, he justified violence as a right to self-defense.

The advocacy of violence as a means to a just end is precisely the type of argumentation that Fidel Castro used in order to differentiate two types of violence: that of the Batista government, on the one hand, and that of the 26th of July Movement, on the other. Whereas the people had the right to rise in arms against the oppressive regime, Fidel Castro argued, the Batista government's use of force was arbitrary and unjustified. In Cuba, the attack on the Moncada barracks was Fidel Castro's first, albeit unsuccessful, armed action. Initially, he was condemned to twenty-seven years in prison, but he was then given the possibility of a trial. Being a lawyer, Castro decided to defend himself. He laid out the political goals of the insurrection and also deployed a defense of armed struggle in his speech *History Will Absolve Me*.⁵ One of the argumentative strategies of Castro's famous self-defense narrative was to assert that the assault of July 26, 1953, was a justified use of violent means to attain just ends: "¿Con qué derecho enviar a la cárcel a ciudadanos que vinieron a dar por el decoro de su patria su sangre y su vida? ¡Eso es monstruoso ante los ojos de la nación y los principios de la verdadera justicia! [By what right do you send to jail citizens who have just given, for the glory of their country, their blood and their lives? This is monstrosity before the eyes of the nation and before the principles of true justice!]" (Castro 1972c, 69). Castro accused his opponents of an unjust use of violence and, hence, of an unjust use of the law. In contrast, the 26th of July Movement's use of violence was just because it was founding a new law, a new type of legality. This strategy allowed Castro to argue that the ends to justify his means were just, a way of understanding violence that did not differ much from that of his opponent.

Once the rebels were in power, however, the use of violence became more difficult to justify. Yet, the government kept reinforcing the discourse of war. As Hugh Thomas points out, in 1961 Cuba was a militarized society full of aspiring soldiers (Thomas 1971, 1321). State rhetoric was influenced by Marxist ideas, but it also included a new doctrine: the worship of war-

fare. I take this argument farther and say that it used war, and especially its aestheticization, as the discursive core of revolutionary ideology. The aesthetic representation of violence was instrumental in creating popular support for the increasing militarization of society: it had to embody appeal, necessity, and above all, justice. This explains why, as Rojas eloquently puts it, revolutionary exploits were represented in a theatrical manner, and leaders were portrayed as religious saviors: “Las vidas ejemplares de la élite y el líder, como las de los santos del cristianismo, debían conformar la trama de una obra de teatro moralizante, que lograría la cohesión de la comunidad y, sobre todo, su involucramiento en la epopeya [As with Christian saints, the exemplary lives of the elite and the leader were represented in morality plays producing social cohesion, and above all, the people’s involvement in the epic]” (Rojas 2007, 44). Many of the revolutionary accounts given by Fidel Castro and Ernesto Guevara illustrate this idea. In “Episodes of the Cuban Revolutionary War”’s description of the final revolutionary battle in Santa Clara, for example, Guevara talks about the suffering of the soldiers when the leader dies. Surprisingly, however, the soldiers do not cry for the dead leader, instead, they suffer because they cannot take his place: “Era curioso ver a los curtidos y nobles guerreros, mostrando su juventud en el despecho de unas lágrimas, por no tener el honor de estar en el primer lugar de combate y de muerte [Every time one of its men died—and this happened during every combat—and a new candidate was accepted, those who were not chosen could not hide their disappointment nor hold back their tears]” (Guevara 1977b, 264 [1968, 252]). As this example shows, most dramatizations of the revolutionary epic foreground a heroic death, which promises at the same time to be the conquest of justice. The hero fights in the name of universal justice, and the closer he gets to violence, the faster he can approach justice.

Making reference to Benjamin’s concept of mythical violence, Rojas argues that these episodes have the “sentido mítico y teatral de la violencia y la moralización de la economía [mythical and theatrical sense of violence and the moralization of economy]” (Rojas 2007, 45). Yet, this violence was certainly not mythical; it was, rather, represented as a Benjaminian divine form of violence, and this also explains its religious connotations. For the sake of my argument, let me briefly elaborate on Benjamin’s well-known essay “Critique on Violence” and, most specifically, on the difference between mythical and divine violence. After analyzing the role of violence within legal theory, Benjamin abandons the secular domain to look at violence in the mythical and religious spheres. Mythical violence, according to him, works very much like legal violence in that every act of power to establish the law is in itself an act of violence (Benjamin 1986, 296). In this regard, legal or mythical violence operates in the same fashion

in democratic and nondemocratic regimes. Divine violence, however, is the opposite of mythical violence, because it destroys the law instead of founding it (Benjamin 1986, 297). Benjamin's discussion of divine violence is certainly the most metaphorical and complex fragment of the essay, among other things, because Benjamin refers to Talmudic law, and his example is underdeveloped and unclear. This being said, I think that it is a key passage to understand the question that Benjamin addresses: Is it possible to solve a conflict without resorting to violence? At the beginning of the essay, he partially responds to this question by invoking the power of language and communication, and most scholars have followed this interpretation. Yet, in my opinion, the more abstract and metaphorical response to his question is to be found in his discussion and critique of divine violence. As a matter of fact, divine violence can, according to Benjamin, put an end to mythical violence.

The understanding of this idea is crucial for my argument, because I contend that, in the name of divine violence, the state justified armed struggle, as a just means to attain ethical Justice. Unlike mythical violence, Benjamin argues in a rather poetic form, that divine violence destroys the law, that it expiates instead of demanding retribution, and that it is lethal without being bloody (Benjamin 1986, 297). Most importantly, his essay argues that only divine violence can be a just means to a just cause, because its goal is moral universal Justice, as opposed to legal justice. The relationship between the divine and universal Justice is key to understanding why Cuban revolutionary violence was divine and not mythical, and why revolutionary rhetoric was enunciated as a religious allegory. The religious undertones of revolutionary discourse were due to the understanding of armed struggle as ethical crusade. It was by appealing to a universal understanding of ethics that revolutionary rhetoric justified state violence. The implication was that the revolution would save people through armed struggle. Moreover, it also indicated that the state was acting in the fashion of the sovereign (understood as the monarchical figure endowed with godly powers). Thus, violence in the hands of the sovereign (qua divine violence) would be the means to eliminate the law (as a repressive instrument of power). In a way, this discourse was repeating the old patterns of the political theology of royal sovereignty. A state that justified violence in the name of Justice, as Fidel Castro did in *History Will Absolve Me*, acted like the sovereign endowed with the power to annihilate history and reconstruct it in the name of ethical Justice.

Understood in Benjaminian terms, this type of violence, far from representing a new, radical way of understanding governance, still followed the theological and metaphysical structure of sovereignty and divine violence. According to this logic, the revolutionaries were acting as Messiahs who

had the power to annihilate the past in order to create a new law. The revolutionary hero sacrificed his life to follow the unwritten laws of the Messiah (Benjamin 1986, 320). In other words, for Castro, guerrilla warfare was understood in its Clausewitzian rendition as a continuation of politics by other means. According to this logic, partisans (guerrilleros or irregular soldiers) were fighting for a political objective and to achieve Justice. In *History Will Absolve Me*, Fidel Castro used constitutional law from different centuries and countries to justify the right to rise up in arms against a tyranny. He famously finished his discourse with a defense of armed struggle articulated as a religious metaphor addressed to future generations: “Condenadme, no importa, la historia me absolverá [Condemn me, it doesn’t matter, history will absolve me]” (Castro 1972c, 71). That is, future generations would not condemn his sins (the use of force), because his cause was led by the moral imperative to attain universal Justice.

Violence and the Trope of Blood

As a result of the assimilation between violence and Justice, violence always had to be represented in an aesthetically pleasing form. The ethical purity of this type of violence demands that, unlike legal or mythical violence, sovereign or divine violence may always be represented as a bloodless action: especially because, as we perceive it in the cultural production of the sixties, a resurrection of sorts is always involved in the process of death. In the sixties, imageries about the telluric power of blood abounded in cultural production. In social poetry, Gutiérrez Alea’s film *Historias de la Revolución* (*Stories of the Revolution*), and Castro’s speech *History Will Absolve Me*, blood is the epic symbol of victory. José Baragaño’s poem “Himno a las milicias” (“Anthem of Militias”), for example, repeats this metaphor in an elegy where poetry, war, and the people are represented as a unity. The poem’s third stanza is a call to arms where blood symbolizes the people:

¡Milicianos del alba y de la sangre!
 Sin fuentes ni riberas
 Nuestro ojo ve la imagen abierta de las revoluciones
 Bajo un viento que quiere cantar
 Nadie sabe dónde se juntan esos ríos
 Nuestra sangre no se detiene
 Comunica a un nivel de libertad
 La creciente del pueblo
 En la estación profunda de la sangre.⁶

The reference to blood, especially in the first and last lines, is reminis-

cent of the Catholic representation of Christ's crucifixion. In particular, the words "en la estación profunda de la sangre" allude to his suffering in the cross (the Spanish *estación* can mean both "season" and "station," as in "stations of the Cross"). In the context of the poem, blood represents the soldiers, in the line "Nuestra sangre no se detiene." But in a different context, the same expression could refer to a group of people belonging to the same social class or ethnic group. Blood represents interrelated elements that always point to a sense of belonging and possession, which is related to the nationalistic nature of the revolutionary process. Étienne Balibar argues that for nationalism to be effective it needs to prove, for example, that there are no natural or hereditary differences among men who belong to the same nation. This results from the inherent impossibility of nationalism to be scientifically justified (Balibar 1998, 99–100). In this regard, the shedding of blood was the element literally uniting all Cubans as a nation. With the goal of producing an idea of nationhood, the revolution was represented as an old system of kinship in which what mattered was blood identity, and sacrifice was the rite of passage that created the mythology of Cubanness. This explains the symbolic importance of the concept of blood, and, in particular, its telluric aspect. Blood meant destruction, but its shedding also produced a cathartic sense of purification, and renewal. The shedding of blood was part of a ritual of passage into a decolonized imaginary space. I am using the concept of "decolonization" because the cultural production of this era reflected the desire to create a new voice divested of discursive and ideological elements from the past. In other words, the revolution was not only conceived of as a process of disrupting power and passing it from one hand to another. Guevara, like Fanon, knew how important it was to create a postcolonial subject and a nation-state, and blood symbolized the need to find commonality and pointed to the notion of "purity of blood": "Decolonization unifies that people by the radical decision to remove from it its heterogeneity, and by unifying it on a national, sometimes a racial, basis" (Fanon 1963 [1961], 46).

Blood's idealization, and the religious references of sacrifice, is precisely what we see in the cultural production of those years, specifically in Gutiérrez Alea's *Stories of the Revolution*. Unlike most of Gutiérrez Alea's films, which are characterized by an ironic look at revolutionary politics, his first film is a eulogy for the 1958 revolutionary war. It was the first feature film produced by the Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC) and a commemoration of the second anniversary of the Cuban Revolution. It was also one of the earliest examples of revolutionary film and as such featured actors who had been real combatants in the Sierra Maestra (Canel 1960). Revolutionary film or new Latin American Cinema originated as a film movement that opposed the main aesthetic goals of Hollywood film (i.e., entertainment and visual beauty) and supported the

pedagogic and political function of film to create social consciousness. *Stories of the Revolution* is a chronological recounting of the struggles that led to the revolution. Three distinct episodes evoke the early fifties' urban armed struggle, the Sierra Maestra insurrection, and the final taking of Santa Clara, the strategic bastion that led the rebels to eventual victory.

The film adheres to the neorealist aesthetics of the new Latin American film of the 1960s, and as such it proposes a transparency of the image and its unmediated impact on the viewer, which is why the film's narrative arc conforms to the conventions of mythical epic poems: it has heroes and despicable soldiers, it has sustained dramatic tension, and it has victories and defeats. *Stories of the Revolution* is certainly an action film, yet the most dramatic scenes in two of the vignettes do not feature crude, gruesome, or tragic representations of violence. In this regard, the film follows all the conventions of melodrama. It is a black and white film with stereotyped scenography, but most strikingly, although an action film, it also conveys sentimentality through its many close-ups and medium long shots. Death imagined as a necessary religious ritual points to this type of sentimentality. For example, the section depicting the assault on Santa Clara begins by showing the popular celebration after the surrender of Batista's National Guard. In these scenes, Teresa, the working-class hero's girlfriend, played by Miriam Gómez, suddenly discovers the death of her beloved, whose dead body evokes a crucified Christ, much like the iconic image of Ernesto Guevara taken after his death.



"*Historias de la Revolución* (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1960). Teresa's dead boyfriend.

The final close-up of the girlfriend's gaze even more clearly foregrounds the religious analogy. The take follows the slow transformation of her gaze until it finally acquires a martyr's quality. Silence plays a very important role. This halt in the narration gives the audience an opportunity to empathize with the character. It is also the moment to conquer popular taste. This is accomplished through a close-up showing Teresa's exaggerated feelings, as her hopelessness suddenly becomes strength and determination. After looking up to the sky, she looks forward again with a certain pride and honor, indicating the transformation of her identity.

Teresa is no longer in the background of the revolutionary insurrection; she has now become the last heroine of the uprising as she understands that, with his death, the hero has redeemed the community by attaining justice, and thus he has not been completely annihilated. Thus, in spite of the hero's death, as in melodrama, the film wraps up with a conventional happy ending. The woman's gaze encapsulates all the values of the revolutionary nation.

Sentimentality, more than any other factor, accounts for the representation of violence, which, far from being crude, gruesome, or tragic, is depicted as a ritualistic pantomime. There is another violent but bloodless scene in the film where death symbolizes rebirth rather than destruction. The second vignette reaches its climax with this scene, which lays out the strong symbolic power of sacrifice. The rebels are fighting Batista's troops in the Sierra Maestra. One of the younger soldiers lies on the floor, severely



"*Historias de la Revolución* (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1960). Teresa's close-up.



“Historias de la Revolución (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1960). Piece of bloody shirt.

wounded by the enemy. The rebel’s life is close to an end, and he is being watched by one of the older rebels. At one point, the older rebel kneels down and cuts a little piece of cloth from the young soldier’s shirt. The rebel takes the piece of cloth, which is red with blood, and buries it in the ground next to the prostrate soldier.



“Historias de la Revolución (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1960). Burying bloody shirt.

The rebel has no intention of burying the dying man because he is just one more expendable body. His importance diminishes until he finally disappears. But the blood signifies neither death nor the tragic loss of a life; it signifies, rather, a new beginning of life. The bloody cloth is planted in the ground, revealing the strong telluric character of the Schmittian partisan and the revolution. We find the same metaphor of the telluric force of violence represented in Peter Weiss's essay on Guevara, in which Weiss attributes to him the following remark: "The patch of earth that I water with my blood is the only piece of land that belongs to me [El pedazo de tierra que riego con mi sangre el único trozo de tierra que me pertenece]" (Weiss 1968, 83). The spilling of blood that gives birth to the nation also represents the purification of the revolutionary hero.

By eschewing gore and idealizing blood, these two scenes create an imaginary where violence is sanctioned by justice (an abstract type of legality that transcends institutionally sanctioned law). It is a violence exercised in the name of justice, understood as an abstract concept, and as such it can only be imposed by a higher power that has authority over positive law. Whereas institutional law seeks retribution (in the form of a violent act) for an offense committed against the written law, the revolutionary logic at play in the film shows that a violent act committed in the name of justice seeks rebirth. Precisely because there is no blood or gore in the scene, violence is not avenged legally or personally. Rather than focusing on the heroes' desire for vengeance against Batista's troops for killing their comrades, the narrative emphasizes the ritual of the burial of the dead. As such, the film idealizes revolutionary violence, because rather than being destructive, death symbolizes radical change and redemption. What do I mean by this formulation? As can be seen in the burial of the bloody shirt, annihilation does not necessarily imply absolute destruction. The destructive force in this case is actually transformative because, as Castro argues, it is a means to a just cause, and therefore it should not be legally punished. It is a violence committed in the name of justice, which is what Castro argues in *History Will Absolve Me*. This explains why this blood is not corporeal but rather ideal. Violence is represented as the redemptive power of justice. This is why there are so many religious allegories in the film, as well as in official rhetoric, and why the concept of sacrifice is so prevalent in both. In *Politics of Friendship*, Jacques Derrida comments on the wars waged with the new technologies: "To kill without bloodshed, with the help of new techniques, is perhaps already to accede to a world without war and without politics, to the inhumanity of a war without war" (Derrida 1997, 130). *Stories of the Revolution's* bloodless image of violence neutralizes the existence of politics and foreshadows the type of revolutionary ideology of proceeding decades. Violence without blood speaks of a particular political ideology that doesn't

define war as its goal. Yet, although war is not the aim of revolutionary politics, it always looms in the background as a real possibility.

Sacrifice and the Logic of Exchange and Heroism

Guerrilla warfare was one thing; institutionalized violence was another. What type of violence was culture promoting? Violence is the driving force of sacrifice, the act that dictates revolutionary rhetoric's spiritual nature. Revolutionary sacrifice has the same mythical qualities as its religious counterpart. Throughout the revolutionary period, sacrifice has always been a condition of possibility for revolutionary change. In Cuba, the notion of sacrifice has longstanding religious connotations. In general, sacrifice is understood as an offering that does not necessarily require blood. In early revolutionary rhetoric, however, sacrifice always involved the spilling of human blood and, ideally, the loss of human life. The sacrificial demand was inherently perverse, because its symbolic value increased with each new offering. But the idea of value in revolutionary rhetoric functions paradoxically. In sacrifice one gives something of a greater value to receive something of a lesser value or no value at all. In sixties poetry, however, sacrifice was both rewarded with immortality (as the warrior's apotheosis) and demanded by the revolution (as the collective duty of all members of society). Intellectuals must sacrifice their aesthetics, workers must do extra hours of volunteer work, and soldiers must give their lives. But the individual was not to be rewarded for these sacrifices, for they were made on the community's behalf. The same was true from a sociological perspective. The rhetoric of sacrifice sought to create a sense of identity and equality among the people. Sacrifice also became the homogenizing element of a period, which, according to Fernando Martínez Heredia, was an era of radical patriotism (Martínez Heredia 2007, 149). As Ernesto Guevara pointed out in "El socialismo," the goal of homogenization was to produce a society in which differences between the leader and the masses disappear⁷ (Guevara 2007 [1965], 5).

The following poems show how the trope of sacrifice becomes a homogenizing element of the revolutionary process. This idea is articulated in "Cruz" and "Cara o Cruz," two poems with religious undertones written by Catholic Origenista Cintio Vitier. These poems are dedicated to the sacrifices of a Guevarian hero. In "Cruz," the first poem, he is represented as an omnipresent and ever-agonizing figure for whom men sacrifice themselves: "Estás en el trabajo / en la atención, / en el juego de los niños. . . . En el esfuerzo de los hombres de buena voluntad"⁸ (Vitier 1976a, 81). The Christlike man is also the Guevarian New Man, which indicates that secularism and sacredness have become one: "Los que piensan en el prójimo / y lo ayudan y trabajan para él / son tus discípulos"⁹ (ibid., 82). "Cruz," is a

reinterpretation of Christ's crucifixion. Whereas the signifier "cruz" is a cross, "cara o cruz" is an idiomatic expression for calling "heads or tails" on a coin toss. This means that, as a signifier, "cruz" takes on a double meaning. It can refer to sacrifice, but it can also be the other side of the coin. What follows from this ambiguity is that "cruz," or sacrifice, can represent fate (of the soldier as a man) or salvation (of the soldier as a hero). But "cruz," like a coin, may also represent both at the same time, and thus neither of them in particular. This explains why, as a signifier, sacrifice does not point to either fate (secular) or salvation (sacred) but to both. The signified of destiny and salvation are as arbitrary and necessarily bound as those of tails and heads. Sacrifice is simultaneously fate and salvation. This means that any man can be a hero (a sacred figure), and thus that the sacred and the secular are one and the same.

Unlike a divine figure, however, the hero does not demand sacrifices, nor does he need to be recognized. He only asks for men's work and endurance. In Vitier's words, religious symbolism or idealism is replaced by the work of the people or materialism: "en el sudor, / en la ignorancia, / en el Olvido de Ti Mismo / que es la Materia de la Realidad"¹⁰ (Vitier 1976a, 82). The poem represents work as a material and tangible action, whereas Catholic rituals are only ideals. In "Cruz" it is clear that neither does God demand a sacrifice, nor do men ask for salvation: "In the efforts of men / of goodwill, / unaware of the treasure / that they bear to your breast" (ibid., 81). Paradoxically, the following verses show that the poet refers to the hero as a martyr: "del aire que te dan, del poco alivio / que traen sus manos rudas, ciegas, / al horror de tu agonía / que no acaba."¹¹ The hero does not demand recognition or sacrifice, but would men still be punished for their misdeeds? If sacrifice is no longer a ritual to venerate and recognize God's deeds, does that mean that the concept of sacrifice has been transformed? Since heroism has replaced religiosity, let us look farther into the representation of the hero's identity and its relationship to sacrifice.

In Vitier's "Camilo Cienfuegos," an excerpt of which serves as this chapter's epigraph, the hero has become the island and vice versa (Vitier 1976b, 78–79). The hero is the representation of a homogenous notion of the nation, but he is not given a voice. Instead, the poet speaks for him and reifies his identity. The soldier should be described as a political figure who becomes one with nature. The natural subjectivity bears a strong resemblance to José Martí's "natural man." By acting like the natural man, the soldier becomes unpredictable, organic, and part of a system that regulates itself. The natural, unlike the political or the cultural, is transcendental, which is why the hero is a sacred figure.

In "Cruz" and "Camilo Cienfuegos," nature is threatened with destruction because of the disappearance of Jesus Christ. It is no longer God who

runs nature. The order of the world is orchestrated, instead, by men and their work. The world follows a certain order due to the materiality of men's work, and the hero has taken Christ's place. The limit between the profane and the sacred has been breached, but the idea of the divine persists. We thought that all differences between men and divine figures had disappeared, but another sacred figure has taken God's place, and men are still under his aegis. As an ideal figure, however, he still has a presence in the world as the one who sacrificed himself for the revolution. As Vitier writes in "Cruz," "En verdad te gustaría, / mientras mueres, / que todo fuera muy bien hecho"¹² (Vitier 1976a, 81). Thus, his sacrifice is not seen as a gift. It had a purpose and was not in vain. The fact that sacrifice is still attached to the idea of purpose actually reestablishes anew the economy and logic of exchange, of a compensated heroism. Namely, if the deed has a goal, it is because this goal accomplishes something with value. In this case, an exchange as such does not take place, but because the logic of exchange still exists, this means that men's deeds must also have a purpose. Men's sacrifices must also have a purpose, but they cannot bear the trace of the "exchange." That is, the ideology of exchange is what rules, but out of ignorance or false consciousness, men conceive sacrifice as a gratuitous act, as "Cara o cruz" shows: "Los que piensan en el prójimo / y lo ayudan y trabajan para él / son tus discípulos: / no importa que lo ignoren"¹³ (Vitier 1976a, 82).

What are the implications of the sacrifice as an ideology of exchange? If we go back to the idea of nationhood, the purpose of sacrifice becomes even clearer. Men are united by the idea of a shared ethic. Social and economic heterogeneity, in the aftermath of the revolution, was a threat to nation building; it was erased by a common ethic beyond social, gender, ethnic, or economic differences. Precisely because of the ideology just described, sacrifices did not have the appearance of exchanges. As gifts they could be of different value, because they had no exchange value. They were not commodified by a society that would have to compensate citizens for their work. By establishing an apparent ethos of equality among people, sacrifice kept its ritualistic nature, and it also erased social difference. At the same time, however, the hero retained his status as both the common man and a divine figure. The meaning of sacrifice did not change since it signified salvation and fate, the biblical paradox. Sacrifice would not be compensated, but the logic of exchange remained. The discourse of sacrifice was thus articulated by two contradictory arguments. On the one hand, the redemptive Christian logic had disappeared, which meant that men did not need to atone for their sins. If sacrifice was not atonement (performance of a good deed to atone for a sin), then what was left was a type of sacrifice that was no longer religious. The notion of sacrifice thus took on the significance of the "good deed," an action whose goal was not salvation.

On the other hand, the divine figure was transformed but not eliminated, since the hero took the place of the Christian God. The divine therefore did not lose its transcendental nature, nor did the divine figure cease to be someone who had sacrificed himself through his willingness to die for the revolution. In other words, the logic of exchange had never disappeared, but it was ideologically hidden by the philosophy of the good deed. The soldier's representation as a hero and as a divine figure reintroduced the conceptual divide between the secular and the religious, and between the divine figure (the hero) and man (the masses). This idea also contradicted the representation of a classless society that both poems defend. These paradoxes were not only ideological; above all, they concealed a sense of dread. This fear was produced by the same idea that the poems vindicate: the threat of a classless society.

Out of Bondage and the New Consciousness

In advocating violence as the only means to freedom in the struggle for national liberation, the philosophy of the revolution was very much in line with state discourse and with other postcolonial thinkers, such as Fanon, who argued that the colonized had to fight the colonizers with the violence that the oppressors had instilled in them.¹⁴ Revolutionary leaders claimed that like other revolutions of national liberation, the Cuban Revolution was above all a process of decolonization, especially because it wanted to transform a double relation of dependency: the vertical, interdependent relationship between the oligarchy and popular classes within the country and a horizontal, interdependent relationship between third world countries and first world capitalism. As such, the goal of the revolution was to eliminate the economic, political, and cultural control of U.S. neocolonialism, and to put an end to Batista's brutal dictatorship. In the *Segunda declaración de La Habana* (*Second Havana Declaration*), Fidel Castro expresses these ideas with a Marxian vocabulary. He declares that the revolution's goal is to transform the motor of the capitalist class dominance: private property. He argues that the nineteenth-century bourgeois revolution built the new society over the ashes of the feudal order: "The bourgeoisie took political power and established on the ruins of feudal society its capitalist mode of production [L]a burguesía conquistó el poder político y estableció sobre las ruinas de la sociedad feudal su modo capitalista de producción" (Castro 2008, 244 [1962,13]). The bourgeois revolution did not eliminate the real causes of the old order: private property and class dominance. The Cuban Revolution, however, transformed the capitalist system with the destruction of its structural premises: "But Cuba rose up. Cuba was able to redeem itself from the bastard tutelage. Cuba broke the chains that tied its fortunes to

those of the imperial oppressor, redeemed its riches, reclaimed its culture, and unfurled its banner of Free Territory and People of the Americas [Pero Cuba se levantó, Cuba pudo redimirse a si misma del bastardo tutelaje. Cuba rompió las cadenas que ataban su suerte al imperio opresor, rescató sus riquezas, reivindicó su cultura, y desplegó su bandera soberana de Territorio y Pueblo Libre de América]” (2008, 242 [1962,12]). It was a violent revolution that sought the restoration and renaissance of the nation: “Revolution historically is like the doctor who assists at the birth of a new life. It does not needlessly use the tools of force, but will use them without hesitation whenever necessary to help the birth—a birth that brings to the enslaved and exploited masses the hope of a new and better life [La revolución es en la historia como el médico que asiste al nacimiento de una nueva vida. No usa sin necesidad los aparatos de fuerza, pero los usa sin vacilaciones cada vez que sea necesario para ayudar al parto. Parto que trae a las masas esclavizadas y explotadas la esperanza de una vida mejor]” (2008, 249 [1962, 17]). This was also Fanon’s idea of revolution: “National liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood to the people . . . decolonization is always a violent phenomenon [Libération nationale, renaissance nationale, restitution de la nation au peuple . . . la décolonisation est toujours un phénomène violent]” (Fanon 1963 [1961], 35 [2002, 39]). The logic of violence was precisely determined by two contradictory ideas. On the one hand, the idea of restoration; on the other hand, that of renaissance. The people had to reclaim their country that had been seized, yet at the same time they also had to rebuild it. In other words, the revolution was conceived as a process to seize the past in order to destroy it. That is, unlike the bourgeois revolution, these processes of decolonization sought to annihilate the ruins of the past: “The destruction of the colonial world is no more and no less than the abolition of one zone, its burial in the depths of the earth or its expulsion from the country [Détruire le monde colonial c’est ni plus ni moins abolir une zone, l’enfouir au plus profond du sol ou l’expulser du territoire]” (1963 [1961], 41 [2002, 44]). In Cuba’s case, it meant creating a new history that would represent revolution as the degree zero of history. It was not a mode to affirm the negation (destruction) and build from its ruins; it was a theological gesture of creation.

The concept of revolution as a process of annihilation was precisely what triggered the rhetorical emphasis on violence. Inspired by the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, Fanon argued that the colonized had to curse the colonialist with the language they had learned from him. The violence of colonization’s “civilizing” mission was now the asset of the colonized people. Guevara also believed that capitalism’s violence could only be fought with violence: “Violence is not the monopoly of the exploiters and as such the exploited can use it too, moreover, [they] ought to use it when the moment

arrives" (Guevara 1997 [1961], 74). In his well-known essay *Calibán: Apuntes sobre la cultura en nuestra América* (*Caliban: Notes on Culture in Our America*), Roberto Fernández Retamar reads Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as an allegory of colonial oppression. He interprets Caliban's education as the cultural imposition that resulted from the colonizer's civilizing mission in the Caribbean. Prospero imposes his culture and his language on Caliban, who realizes he can use the master's language to curse him back. Likewise, it can be argued that violence became the language of the colonized, because that is what they learned from their masters: "He of whom *they* have never stopped saying that the only language he understands is that of force, decides to give utterance by force [Lui à qui on n'a jamais cessé de dire qu'il ne comprenait que le langage de la force, décide de s'exprimer par la force]" (Fanon 1963 [1961], 84 [2002, 81]). Thus, they cursed their masters back with the use of violence and strove to take their place (Fanon 1963 [1961], 53). But in order to fight back, the colonized need to be aware of their own agency as subjects. This moment of self-recognition is key in Fanon's theory, and it can only happen through struggle. In other words, the colonized do not become subjects until they confront the master. Subjectivity or the possibility for emancipation only materializes through struggle. Hence, the struggle between colonized and colonizers was above all a battle for self-recognition. What is required, then, is to understand the ontological implications of this struggle for the colonized. Basing his approach on Alexandre Kojève's materialist reading of Hegel's dialectic, Fanon clearly reinterprets Hegel's ontological model of the self-recognition process by assimilating it to the process of decolonization. Hegel argues that self-consciousness only exists after the subject is acknowledged by the other (Hegel 1997 [1807], 105). In order to illustrate this idea and the dialectical power relations that take place in this process, he represents it allegorically as the relation between a master and a slave. This is precisely the model that inspires Fanon to understand the relationship between colonizers and colonized.

For Hegel, self-consciousness requires consciousness of the other's recognition of oneself. In other words, if I cannot recognize that the other is recognizing me, I cannot recognize my own existence. Negativity is key in the dialectical process, for only its sublation into positivity can bring about transformation and eventually freedom. In Hegel's allegory, the bondsman and the lord face each other in a struggle to death, as both try to attain self-consciousness. Since the moment of negativity is necessary for the completion of the dialectic, they can only attain self-sufficiency by dreadfully risking their own lives. The master wins the battle because he chooses to risk his life in spite of fear. He gets his self-recognition from the bondsman, who prefers to be objectified by the master and stay in fear. But