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Cuba's Use of Political Imagery in Creating Societal Gender Norms: 1940-1980

Matthew Wingfield

A Thesis Submitted to The Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Arts

Department of History

May 2020

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FACULTY COMMITTEE:

Committee Chair: William Van Norman

Committee Members: Kristen McCleary

Michael Gubser

**Dedication:**

To my Mother and Father for always supporting me. I could never have completed this project without your constant emotional support. Thank you for always believing in me and making me feel loved every single day.

### **Acknowledgments:**

I wish to thank my committee chair whose assistance was a milestone in the completion of this project. First a special thanks to my director Dr. William Van Norman, who's passion for his subject greatly influenced my own research.

I also wish to thank the members of my committee. Dr. Kristen McCleary, without her guidance and valuable advice this project would not have been completed. Dr. Michael Gubser, who taught me new ways of looking at historical problems and the importance of bringing in work from other fields of study.

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**Abstract:**

The gendering of Cuba began during the power imbalance during the colonial era. Gender is an important way in which the relationship of Cuba to Spain, to the United States, and of 1959 Cuban revolution has been expressed. However, the practice of the United States gendering Cuba became commonplace after the end of the Spanish-American War. During this period Cuba was often portrayed in US popular culture as a gendered Orientalized other in ways that reflect what scholar Edward Said defined as Orientalism elsewhere. Gender intersected with racial ideologies in many of these caricatures. Cuba was often portrayed as weak, feminine, and black, while the United States was often portrayed as a strong white male figure protecting the weak island of Cuba. Later these stereotyped images of Cuba would become so prevalent that Cubans themselves would begin to portray their home and culture in this manner.

This period of increased U.S. influence in Cuba led to an era of Cuba being taken advantage of and was accompanied by US-driven caricatures of the island vis-à-vis their self-image. Soon this view of the island made its way back to the Cubans themselves, and during the early 1940s, during the presidency of Fulgencio Batista which lasted from 1940-1944, these warped images of the island began to make its way into Cuban imagery promoting tourism to Americans.

## Introduction & General History:

In 1492 a young Italian explorer named Christopher Columbus set off on a venture of colonization funded by the royal family of the Kingdoms of Castile and Aragon. With funding for his voyage secured, Columbus set sail eastward bound on the Atlantic Ocean attempting to discover a new trade route to India. In the early weeks of October, Columbus landed on a small island in what is today known as the Bahamas. As the month of October progressed Columbus, decided to set sail again and in the final days of the month landed ashore the largest land mass in the Caribbean and claimed the island for the Kingdoms of Castile and Aragon. This island would become known as Cuba.<sup>1</sup>

The Spanish colonization of Cuba started an age of exploitation for the island. From 1492-1898 Cuba was controlled by various colonial powers and valued as a slave port as well as an economically productive agricultural colony. This colonial relationship, as intended, was highly beneficial to the European powers who reaped economic rewards from the island. While most of Latin America fought for independence from Spain between 1810 and 1820, Cuba was an exception. The creole leaders of the island were fearful of a repeat of the successful slave rebellion in Haiti, just next door, and thus opted for stability rather than independence until the mid-nineteenth century. As the late 1860s approached political leaders on the island became weary of continuing the economic policy of serving the Spanish Empire and rebellions began to break out calling for complete Cuban independence from colonial Spanish rule.<sup>2</sup> While calls for Cuban independence began appearing as early as the late 1860s, Cuba did not gain independence from Spain until nearly thirty years later in 1898 as a result of the final war for Cuban

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Keen and Keith Haynes, *A History of Latin America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2009), 59.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 217.

independence, known as the Spanish-American War in the United States.<sup>3</sup> However, the independence Cuba gained from the Spanish was quickly tarnished by a new world power threatening Cuban sovereignty. In the late 1890s the United States government intervened in the Cuban war and claimed the final defeat of the Spanish military on the Island of Cuba. The U.S. became a new colonizing power and began a complicated gender centered relationship between the island and the United States.

I argue that the gendering of Cuba began during the power imbalance during the colonial era. Gender is an important way in which the relationship of Cuba to Spain, to the United States, and of 1959 Cuban revolution has been expressed. However, the practice of the United States gendering Cuba became commonplace after the end of the Spanish-American War. During this period Cuba was often portrayed in US popular culture as a gendered Orientalized other in ways that reflect what scholar Edward Said defined as Orientalism elsewhere. This will be defined later in the introduction. Gender intersected with racial ideologies in many of these caricatures. Cuba was often portrayed as weak, feminine, and black, while the United States was often portrayed as a strong white male figure protecting the weak island of Cuba. Later these stereotyped images of Cuba would become so prevalent that Cubans themselves would begin to portray their home and culture in this manner.

This period of increased U.S. influence in Cuba led to an era of Cuba being taken advantage of and was accompanied by US-driven caricatures of the island vis-à-vis their self-image. Soon this view of the island made its way back to the Cubans themselves, and during the early 1940s, during the presidency of Fulgencio Batista which lasted from 1940-1944, these

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<sup>3</sup> Jules R. Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution: An Empire of Liberty in an Age of National Liberation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 142.



warped images of the island began to make its way into Cuban imagery promoting tourism to Americans.

In the mid 1950's Batista began to lose control over his firm grip of the island's political apparatus. Uprisings began to spring up in the mid-1950s that resulted in the successful ouster of the Batista regime by January 1<sup>st</sup> 1959 with the leading faction led by a young lawyer named Fidel Castro.<sup>4</sup> Castro would ultimately take the leading role in the new government and he would take a much different approach to how the island of Cuba would be portrayed in both domestic and international political posters. The objective of this thesis is to begin to fill a gap in the historiography defining the reasons for a distinct shift in message in the government funded poster campaigns between the Batista and Castro regimes. This research contributes to both the fields of Latin American and Women's Studies in its examination of political posters and how state expectations of gender roles and societal norms differed with changing regimes throughout the twentieth century of Cuban history.

### **Defining of Terms:**

This thesis draws significant amounts of evidence from political propaganda. Because the term propaganda can often be problematic, it is important to clearly define what exactly is being discussed when using the term. The term propaganda often contains a negative connotation in historical writing. Historically in the western world the term propaganda stays reserved for government campaigns originating in the socialist bloc.<sup>5</sup> While the primary sources employed as evidence in this paper are often political in nature, the posters are not exclusively socialist.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Cole, *The Encyclopedia of Propaganda*. (Armont, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998).

A source with a solid definition backed up by historical evidence is Stephen Velychenko's *Propaganda in Revolutionary Ukraine: Leaflets, Pamphlets, and Cartoons, 1917-1922*. In his first chapter, Velychenko defines the term propaganda and provides important historical context for when the term originated, and how scholars' understanding of the term changed over time.<sup>6</sup> He states "the word propaganda was coined in the 1600s and originally referred to organizations established by the Catholic Church...until the First World War there was little discussion of propaganda techniques or uses beyond the realm of advertising."<sup>7</sup>

Any discrepancy in the frequency of use of the term propaganda is purely coincidental, it is the opinion of this author that the term can easily be applied to the political poster campaigns of both Fulgencio Batista and Fidel Castro. In the subsequent chapters of this thesis, the term propaganda will be applied to the government poster campaigns regardless of where the message falls on the political spectrum.

Another important term that needs to be addressed is the concept of the Global South. This thesis argues that soon after the completion of the military phase of Fidel Castro's revolution, Cuba attempted to become the de facto leader of the region of the world that would become to be known as the Global South. The term Global South is the commonly agreed upon expression for countries with a history of being colonized by the western world. The term Global South is typically defined as low to middle income countries currently going through economic development. Another trait of the countries that make up the Global South is a shared history of

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<sup>6</sup> Stephen Velychenko, *Propaganda in Revolutionary Ukraine: Leaflets, Pamphlets, and Cartoons, 1917-1922*. (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 26.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 28. It is important to note that in the Spanish-speaking world the word propaganda is still used for advertising and general promotional materials.

experiencing colonization.<sup>8</sup> Scholars Juman Abujbara, Andrew Boyd, Dave Mitchell, and Marcel Taminato summarize this definition by stating “The Global South is not a place, but a way of talking about a diverse set of struggles: the uprising of the planet’s people against neoliberalist policies, at least, and against the capitalist system, at most.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Historiography of the Subject & Chapter Summaries**

The historiography on the Cuban Revolution is vast in terms of size and number of secondary sources available. The amount of monographs and scholarly articles that cover the general history of the Revolutionary Era numbers in the hundreds and it would be impossible to include all of these works as sources in this thesis. While there is a significant amount of work on the general historiography of Castro’s revolution, a less covered topic by scholars is the use of pictorial images in developing state discourse on gender roles in Cuba during the 60s and 70s.

The first chapter, The Virilization of the Cuban Image, introduces the idea of Cuba being gendered and feminized in posters and images starting with the late 1890s at the end of the Spanish-American War. This chapter makes the case that while Cuba had always been gendered and “Orientalized” there was a definite increase in the objectifying of the island during the 1900s when Cuba was under heavy American influence.

The chapter draws its argument from several important pieces of historiography. The first is a book by Louis A. Pérez, Jr. entitled *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and Imperial Ethos*. Pérez’s book examines how a distinct image of Cuba was created in the

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<sup>8</sup> Prashad, Vijay. "The Global South." In *Beautiful Rising: Creative Resistance From The Global South*, edited by Abujbara Juman, Boyd Andrew, Mitchell Dave, and Taminato Marcel, (New York; London: OR Books, 2017), 188.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 188.

American imagination. According to Pérez this image of Cuba was objectified and characterized in a way to portray the image of the island in submissive fashion.<sup>10</sup>

The author of this thesis takes Pérez's argument further by drawing in historical philosophers from other fields of study. Chapter one draws on the highly regarded work of Edward Said entitled *Orientalism*. *Said's work on how Western Cultures create an 'other' in cultures by labeling them as exotic and feminine influences this project by creating a means of analysis through which to analyze both American and Cuban posters* providing specific examples of graphic evidence such as posters and political cartoons, I take Pérez's argument and advance it by constructing the case that the United States was not only characterizing the island but in fact orientalizing it.<sup>11</sup>

"The Virilization of the Cuban Image" expands the historiography on political posters created during the years of Fulgencio Batista in the 1940s and 1950s. Chapter 1 reveals that Batista contributed to this Orientalized image of Cuba by producing political posters utilizing these metaphorical images of Cuba common in the American imagination. The end of the chapter considers the impact on the self-image of the island as a result of the Cuban government using these exaggerated and feminized images in order to boost tourism from the United States.

The second half of chapter one examines the rise of Fidel Castro to power in Cuba and how his government began to create a new masculine self-image of the island through the use of graphic images. The argument of part two of the chapter draws inspiration from a chapter in an edited volume entitled *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico*,

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<sup>10</sup> Louis A. Pérez, Jr. *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Edward W. Said *Orientalism*. (Brantford, Ont.: W. Ross MacDonald School, Resource Services Library, 2006).

1920-1940. Desmond Rochfort's chapter in *The Eagle and the Virgin* titled "The Sickle, The Serpent, and the Soil: History, Revolution, Nationhood, and Modernity in the Murals of Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros," Edited by well-known scholars Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis, the work discusses the uses of artwork and graphic images in the creation of national identity and historical memory of political and social revolutions.<sup>12</sup> While Rochfort's work is focused on Mexico, their argument is applicable to other parts of Latin America and the Caribbean. The author of this thesis uses Rochfort's methods to create the argument that Fidel Castro and his Revolutionary Government organizations attempted to create a distinct new masculine identity for the island of Cuba through the use of Revolutionary artwork.

As a result of the new masculine identity created through revolutionary artwork in Cuba in the 1960s and 1970s women were left out of the new image of the island; chapter two examines this new marginalization of Cuban women. There is consistent historical evidence that women participated in the first phase of the Cuban Revolution in both military and support roles.<sup>13</sup> Michelle Chase, in *Revolution Within the Revolution: Women and Gender Politics in Cuba, 1952-1962*, demonstrates throughout that women were not only auxiliaries but active participants in the Revolution.

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<sup>12</sup> Desmond Rochfort, "The Sickle, The Serpent, and the Soil: History, Revolution, Nationhood and Modernity in the Murals of Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros." *The Eagle and The Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, edited by Mary Kay Vaugh and Stephen Lewis (Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 23-43.

<sup>13</sup> Michelle Chase. *Revolution within the Revolution Women and Gender Politics in Cuba, 1952-1962*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 6.

In comparing Chase's monograph and with an examination of the artistic images contributing to the historical memory of Cuba's military revolution, it was evident there was a deficiency by the new government in how they represented women's involvement in the revolutionary period of Cuba's history. This gap inspired the research question for chapter two which asks, "If women were left out of the promotion of the Revolution's historical memory, how did Cuba in fact promote the role of women in the new society?"

The second chapter affirms that there was a peculiar characterization of women in revolutionary era Cuban political posters. I argue that this characterization becomes identified as the "Revolutionary Mother" archetype. In the second half of the chapter I investigate how Cuba in the 1960s and 1970s proceeded to internationalize this new image of the socialist woman through the use of political poster campaigns from organizations like the Organization for the Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Founded in 1966, the OSPAAAL quickly became one of the main international political organizations through which the Cuban government promoted both socialist and anti-imperialist viewpoints using political posters and social discourse publications like the *Tricontinental*.<sup>14</sup>

There are numerous academics who have done significant research on the Tricontinental Movement, several of whose work provides necessary context for chapter two of this thesis. The first scholar that must be mentioned is Anne Garland Mahler and her monograph entitled *From The Tricontinental To the Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity*. Mahler's book provides significant evidence of both the transnational and anti-imperialist nature of the political artwork and publications being produced by the OSPAAAL.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Anne Garland Mahler. *From the Tricontinental to the Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018) 27.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 27.

The work of historian Manuel Barcia also was vital in providing background knowledge and context for the Tricontinental movement. Barcia's article entitled "Locking Horns with the Northern Empire: Anti-American Imperialism at the Tricontinental Conference of 1966 in Havana" offered the story of how the first Tricontinental Conference came to be and the events that transpired shortly thereafter.<sup>16</sup> Both Mahler and Barcia's works were vital in understanding the inner-workings of the Tricontinental movement and the global outreach and influence the OSPAAAL created for the Revolutionary Cuban government.

The works of Mahler and Barcia also provide significant insight on how the OSPAAAL and Tricontinental movement effected international racial discourse within the Global South. While this topic is covered in great detail by these two scholars and several others, there is a clear gap in the historiography. The way to fill this gap was by borrowing methods and primary sources of both Mahler and Barcia and shifting the focus from ideas of race to how the Cuban government used Tricontinental materials to promote new concepts of gender throughout the Global South.

Chapter three, titled "How Cuban Women Broke State Expectations," transitions from centering on the artwork-based narrative of the first two chapters to a more thorough discussion of the actual situation of Cuban Women on the ground. The chapter asks what comprised the day-to-day experience of the average revolutionary Cuban woman's life. By exploring primary and secondary sources written by Cuban women during this period, we can see whether or not the state produced image of the role of women in Cuban society corresponded to their reality or not. Chapter three relies heavily on the gender theory of scholar Judith Butler to provide the

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<sup>16</sup> Manuel Barcia. "'Locking Horns with the Northern Empire': Anti-American Imperialism at the Tricontinental Conference of 1966 in Havana." *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 7, no. 3 (2009): 208–17

framework for proper gender analysis. She shows in *Gender Trouble* the proper paths of analysis to follow when constructing a gender centric history.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*. (New York, London: Routledge, 2006), 2-7.



## *Chapter I: The Virilization of the Cuban Image in Revolutionary Cuban Propaganda*

This chapter answers several related historical questions about the shift in propaganda between the Batista and Castro regimes. How did the United States create an image of Cuba that was viewed as exotic and feminine? How was this view furthered by the regime of Fulgencio Batista? How did the attempt to masculinize Cuba's image through propaganda by the new revolutionary regime cause women to be left out of the historical memory of the Cuban Revolution? How did this lead to a discrepancy between how revolutionary gender roles were promoted domestically and internationally by the revolutionary Cuban government? Through the analysis of pre/revolutionary propaganda produced by Cuba, as well as several secondary historiography sources this paper attempts to provide answers as well as context to these complicated questions.

### **Important Literature:**

One of the important concepts this chapter uses as historical analysis is the idea that the United States beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, 'orientalized' Cuba and the broader region of Latin America. This chapter draws heavily from *Orientalism* by Edward Said. Said's work focuses on how the Western world used the power dynamic between themselves and "The East" in order to be exploitive.<sup>18</sup> One of the ways "The West" accomplished this was through the exaggeration of the exoticness of the cultures of the East or "The Orient".<sup>19</sup> The result of this Orientalization manifested in imagery of Middle Eastern cultures in western art and literature that highlights and overemphasizes the exoticness and femininity of middle eastern cultures. In his introduction,

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<sup>18</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*. (Brantford, Ont.: W. Ross MacDonald School, Resource Services Library, 2006), 9-12.

<sup>19</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 9-12.

Said states “The Orient was almost a European invention and had been since antiquity ‘a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences.’”<sup>20</sup>

Examples of Orientalism in “Western Culture” can be seen in movies like the Disney film *Aladdin* where multiple aspects of different Middle Eastern cultures become blended into one that is romanticized to the point of inaccuracy. Said warns in his introduction that this creates power imbalances between cultures by playing up differences to the point where it becomes divisive.

Drawing from Said, I argue that the image of Cuba in the 1940s and 1950s was similarly an American invention. In Batista’s campaigns to promote the island through visual imagery we see the same misrepresentations of Cuban and Latin American culture that Said defined in his book *Orientalism*. However, Fulgencio Batista, did not create this feminized and gendered image of Cuba, he merely sustained it. The image itself rather was created over hundreds of years of U.S. dominant foreign policy and mischaracterizations in United States popular culture.

### **Historical Background:**

The gendering of Cuba, while prominent under the regime of Fulgencio Batista, existed long before the American backed leader took power. To find the start of other countries gendering the island of Cuba, one need to look no further than the colonial past of the island. Spain controlled Cuba, the largest island in the Caribbean, almost continually from 1511 until 1898. This was followed by a period dominated by the United States, first through occupation and then by the US maintaining varying degrees of influence over the island from until 1959.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 9.

<sup>21</sup> Keen and Haynes. *A History of Latin America*, 206.

Up until the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the island was primarily important to Spain as the key stop for the Spanish Treasure fleets to restock on supplies, be joined by armed escorts, and to make final preparations for the dangerous voyage across the Atlantic.<sup>22</sup>

The island experienced a commercial awakening in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and quickly became one of the largest producers of sugar cane in the Caribbean. Increased commercial importance coupled with mainland independence movements led to an increased Spanish military presence on the island during the nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> As the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century approached, other countries began to realize the strategic and economic importance of the island. This led to increased interest in the island by several nations with neo-imperialistic military aims. The Cuban rebellion for independence that began in 1895 ultimately led to intervention by the United States in what the U.S. would call the Spanish-American War.

The gendering of Cuba is directly related to a broader sense of imperial power held by the United States over Latin America during this period. In eyes of U.S. leaders, Cuba was an opportunity to assert its imperial power over an easy target. As early as the late 1800s Cuba was portrayed in the U.S. press in a distinctly gendered and feminine way.

The evidence of this lies in political actions implemented by the United States such as the Monroe Doctrine. While originally a passive doctrine, the Monroe Doctrine states that “the American continent, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by European

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 206-208.

powers.”<sup>24</sup> Discourse like this sends a clear message that the United States was intent on acting as an equally paternalistic and imperialistic power over Latin America.

Written in 1823, the Monroe Doctrine served as a cornerstone of United States-Latin America Relations for decades. Its policies of imperialism were taken to a new level in 1902 during the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt. The Roosevelt Corollary, an addition to the Monroe Doctrine, stated the United States reserved the right to intervene in Latin American affairs if they jeopardized United States interests. Furthermore, this policy provided the diplomatic framework to legitimize the Platt Amendment, an addition to the newly independent island of Cuba’s constitution stating the United States reserved the right to militarily intervene in the affairs of Cuba if the United States deemed it necessary.<sup>25</sup>

Policies like the Monroe Doctrine and the Platt amendment suggest the United States saw Cuba as a land of economic opportunity to benefit the United States. Imperialistic policies like this one create paternalistic relationships detrimental to smaller developing nations like Cuba.

But it was not just through diplomatic policies that countries like the United States showed their imperialistic and gendered view of Cuba. Many artists and musicians in the U.S. during this period of time purposefully portrayed Cuba and Latin America as whole in an unflattering light in expressions of popular culture such as cartoons and songs.

### **Creation of an Orientalized Cuba:**

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<sup>24</sup> “Monroe Doctrine (1823).” Our Documents - Monroe Doctrine (1823). Accessed March 17, 2020. <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=23#>.

<sup>25</sup> For Full text of the Roosevelt Corollary see U.S. Department of State. U.S. Department of State. Accessed March 17, 2020. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1899-1913/roosevelt-and-monroe-doctrine>.

The Orientalizing of the tropics can be seen often in political cartoons of the early 19th century dealing with the subject of Cuba. Often in these cartoons, artists personified the island of Cuba as a woman or with feminine characteristics. An excellent example of this can be seen in a political cartoon featured in Puck Magazine in the 1890s.<sup>26</sup> In this cartoon, Cuba is personified as a woman, cowering in fear under the protection of the symbol of American masculinity at the time, Uncle Sam, who is proudly hoisting the American flag protecting a damsel in distress. While this cartoon may seem like it represents the United States as a chivalrous hero defending the island of Cuba, the image is filled with overt orientalist themes suggesting the submission of Cuba to the United States. Cartoons portraying these ideals were incredibly common during the 19th century, and it could be argued that the repetitive association of Cuba with the feminine affected how artists on the island began to portray images and personifications of Cuba, which is evident in propaganda being produced in the early to the mid 20th century under the Batista regime.

Louis A. Pérez Jr in *Cuba in the American Imagination* shows how systemic these images were, referring to a cartoon from the New York Daily Tribune with the caption “All’s Well that ends well”. This image created in 1902, celebrates the creation of the Cuban Republic.<sup>27</sup> Depicted in the image is the silhouette of Uncle Sam and a woman intimately interlocked behind an umbrella. Upon closer inspection it becomes clear the woman is meant to symbolize the newly created country of Cuba, in the woman’s hand she is grasping a copy of the Platt Amendment.

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<sup>26</sup> Appendix 1.

<sup>27</sup> Appendix 2.

Pérez asserts the notion that the decision to depict Cuba as a woman was a metaphor for the national attitude towards Cuba and the broader Caribbean region as a whole. Pérez argues that the United States saw its actions towards and portrayals of Cuba as taking the moral high ground.<sup>28</sup> This is evident by the masculine way the United States portrays itself in these cartoons. Often portrayed as Uncle Sam acting in a chivalrous manner protecting the woman (Cuba) it is clear the United States genuinely thought they were completing a mission of goodwill on the island of Cuba. The masculine image of the United States versus the feminine image of Cuba is a distinct example of Said's *Orientalism*.

### **Posters of Pre-Revolutionary Cuba:**

The pre-revolutionary period of Cuba's history under the leadership of Fulgencio Batista was a paradoxical time when great economic development did not translate into income equality. This time in Cuba, between 1933 and 1959, was influenced by and at times under the leadership of Fulgencio Batista were filled with political turmoil and corruption. In the early 1940s under the leadership of Batista, Havana, Cuba's capital, was developed into a playground for wealthy North Americans. Havana attracted foreigners for its beaches, money-laundering, and gambling casinos, a kind of Las Vegas of the Caribbean where diplomats, foreign officials, Hollywood actors, and members of the mafia interacted. Some of them even controlled the primary source of income for Cuba, the tourism industry.<sup>29</sup> Criminals practicing fraudulent business practices were operating many hotels and casinos.<sup>30</sup> Cuban government policies allowed United States business

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<sup>28</sup> Pérez, Jr., *Cuba in the American Imagination*, 194.

<sup>29</sup> Jack Colhoun, "Seeds of Gangsterismo." In *Gangsterismo: The United States, Cuba and the Mafia, 1933 to 1966*, (New York; London: OR Books, 2013), 4-18.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-18.

interests to take advantage of the growing tourism industry on the island as a way to achieve Batista's goal of drawing US dollars to the island.

During the late 1940s, many propaganda posters portrayed Cuba as a tropical island paradise so vacationers from foreign countries with disposable income would come and spend their money on the island in one of its many famous hotels and casinos. There is historical evidence that these marketing tactics were highly successful. The photograph in Appendix 3 of an American overseas serves as documentation of how Cuba, during the early 1940s, was a playground for Americans to come and spend incredible amounts of money, while simultaneously finding ways to relieve stress in a tropical island vacation hotspot. The Ugly American is a common stereotype of American travelers going abroad and acting in an obnoxious manner and not respecting the culture or customs of the destination. Batista capitalized on this view of Americans by advertising the island of Cuba in ways Americans wanted to imagine it for themselves. The image in Appendix 4 is an excellent example of how the Batista regime advertised Cuba towards Americans and other foreigners. The poster created by the Cuban Tourism Commission, in the 1940s in Havana, was distributed internationally as an advertisement trying to boost tourism to the island.<sup>31</sup> This poster depicts the silhouette of a woman lying promiscuously on her front with her hair blowing in the wind as if she is sunbathing outside. Portrayed inside her profile is a tropical beach scene. The woman also has a 'sombrero' covering her buttocks as if to play up the exoticism factor of Cuban women. The

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<sup>31</sup> While these posters made in the mid to late 40s were not created by Batista, it is clear based on the iconography and general style, they were influenced by the posters made during the Batista presidency. The message of the posters made in the years after the Batista presidency remained largely the same as those original posters promoting the tourism industry in Cuba.

interesting thing to note is that while the discourse of these advertisements for Cuba during the 1940s seem like they were American views of Cuba, these posters originated in Havana.

The poster also is a clear example of Cuban tourist offices blending Latin American cultures into one, to erase differences for U.S. consumption. By portraying the typically Mexican sombrero as “Cuban” fashion, the Cuban Tourism Commission is relying on both the typical American’s love for the exotic and ignorance of the incredible diversity in Latin American fashion culture. This exaggerating of culture and blending of multiple cultures considered exotic are examples of Orientalism with regard to Latin America.

Another similar poster created by the Cuban Tourism Commission in 1949 entitled *Cuba: Holiday Isle of the Tropics*, shares similar tendencies.<sup>32</sup> This poster again depicts a woman, however this time she is in a traditional Cuban dress. Illustrated behind the woman are equatorially associated plants such as palm trees playing up the foreignness of the island. It is important to note that the woman in this poster is holding maracas and dancing as if to signify the familiar stereotypical spirit of island where people lived with no worries and every day is a party. The tagline of this poster *Cuba: Holiday Isle of the Tropics* combined with the depiction of the smiling, dancing woman presents the idea of a tropical paradise.

The decision to depict Cuba as a woman is an artistic theme which is nearly constant in the propaganda of the period aimed at promoting Cuban Tourism. While this image of Cuba was created by the United States much earlier, it was reinforced in this image through tourism campaign posters of the late 1940s. In the posters mentioned above, the CTC is visually referencing perceived orientalist views of the island.

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<sup>32</sup> See Appendix 5.



The international advertisements such as those discussed here used these preconceived notions that foreigners had about Cuba. By doing so, the Cuban government appeared to be submitting itself to the neo-imperial power of the United States for monetary gain. However, this depiction of the island paradise of Cuba was not necessarily accurate for all Cubans, which would soon become evident to all.

As the 1950s progressed, Fulgencio Batista maintained strong influence over the governmental body and his government became more and more corrupt and developed even closer ties to organized crime. With Batista in control and repressing his political opponents, he was able to openly accept bribes and cuts of the profits from American benefactors running the Cuban tourism industry in the early 1950s.<sup>33</sup>

The 1950s in Cuba were a time of deep income inequality. Many US and European business owners possessed virtual economic control of the tourism industry of the island. Despite the increase in tourism, the common Cuban did not see any economic improvements with many citizens in Cuba failing to see any boost to their quality of life from the tourism boom partially that was created, at least in part, by the feminization and promotion of the exotic in Cuba. Due to the growing amount of income inequality, many Cubans felt as if they were being taken advantage of by the United States and other foreign powers. Batista, who had forcibly seized control of the island was perfectly happy to be complicit in the proverbial selling of Cuba to foreign powers for a piece of the economic pie. However, this created increasingly large numbers of disgruntled workers who were upset over the lack of income equality and who began to form political movements to challenge Batista's rule over the island.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution*, 120.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 129.

The propaganda produced by the pro-U.S. government can tell us a lot about the foreign policy positions of Cuba in the years before the Revolution. Their themes of playing up the orientalist views of Cuba held by the United States government portrayed a weak foreign policy where Cuba was economically taken advantage of by the patriarchal United States of America and other European powers. Another piece of evidence strengthening this argument is a propaganda poster created by the Cuban Tourism Commission in the 1940s-1950s.<sup>35</sup> This poster depicts an exotically seductive Cuban woman dancer, with classically stereotypically dressed male dancers projected behind her. The tagline of this poster reads “Gay, Foreign, Nearby, Cuba.” The decision to project the romanticism of Cuba is a direct attempt by pre-revolutionary Cuba to play into the Orientalist ideas held by many Americans at the time. While not created during the period of Batista rule, this poster shows how Cuba had continued to use this feminized image of itself well through the 1940s after the presidency of Batista had ended.

### **The Cuban Revolution:**

With the growing rates of income inequality on the island, the average citizen in Cuba soon realized their dictator was allowing them to be taken advantage of in order to line his own pockets with cash. Corruption became evident. Shortly after this realization, a political uprising began to grow in Cuba. While there were acts of resistance as early as 1953, Fidel Castro did not complete his famous rebellion until January of 1959.<sup>36</sup>

With growing world tension over the threat of the global spread of Communism, the Cuban Revolution caused both significant anxiety and tension in the relationship between two

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<sup>35</sup> Appendix 6

<sup>36</sup> Aviva Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 31.

major world powers the United States and the Soviet Union. While originating as a nationalist revolution, Fidel Castro began accepting more and more socialist ideologies in the early 1960s.

Both the United States and the USSR had a distinct way of governing. The '60s and '70s were very much a time of attempted ideological spreading between these two distinct governmental styles, the United States' capitalist free market, and the Soviet Union's socialist communism. By starting a socialist revolution in the United States' back yard, Cuba was knowingly creating an adversary in the United States of America. The increased tension between Cuba and the United States was a direct rejection of Cuba's past relationship with the United States. With a new change of regime came a new way the island would carry itself on the world stage, Cuba, who had recently undergone a socialist revolution in 1959, surprised the world by beginning to attempt to export their revolution during this decade.<sup>37</sup>

With the ascension to power by Fidel Castro, the portrayal of the exotic beach paradise created by the propaganda team of Batista, and Cuba's being taken advantage of by the western bloc powers came to an abrupt end. During the '60s and '70s, the leadership of Revolutionary Cuba made it their mission to spread the new revolutionary ideals through any means it could. There was a key shift in how the Cuban government decided to promote its self-image in contrast to the way Batista chose to depict Cuba. As can be seen below, the new Cuban government rejected the orientalist views of the island which Batista had helped create, under the new government Cuba would use images of their revolutionaries to create a brand-new masculine image of Cuba.

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<sup>37</sup> Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 30.

However, in doing this, they may have left out a key component which helped them win their revolution, women. Chase states “contrary to popular assumptions, women participated in great numbers in the mass movement to oust Batista in the late 1950’s, especially in the urban centers.”<sup>38</sup> However when it came time to promote the Revolution through visual imagery it was often done in a very masculine way, heavily centered on the role of the bearded guerilla revolutionary.

The creation of a new image for Cuba was a direct rejection by the Castro regime of U.S. influence over the island. No longer would Cuba’s image be characterized through feminized images of exotic women on beaches. Beginning in the 1960s Castro began heavily promoting the role of the bearded revolutionary fighters who had fought alongside him in the Sierra Maestra mountains.<sup>39</sup> Scholar Lorraine Bayard de Volo weighs in on this topic in, “A Revolutionary in the Binary? Gender and the Oxymoron of Revolutionary War in Cuba and Nicaragua” where she states, “Feminist analyzations of Latin American Revolutions have gone far to document their shortcomings in achieving gender equality. However, these analyses tend not to incorporate the effect of militarization and violence on revolutionary shortcomings.”<sup>40</sup> Bayard de Volo’s idea that the militarization of Cuba prevented revolutionary shortcomings on the island serves as evidence that the Cuban national identity was largely based off of patriarchal military influences, this led to a distinct new masculine tone in the way Cuba promoted itself through political poster campaigns.

### **Cuba’s New Masculine Image in Domestic Political Campaigns:**

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<sup>38</sup> Michelle Chase, *Revolution within the Revolution*, 6.

<sup>39</sup>Lorraine Bayard De Volo. "A Revolution in the Binary? Gender and the Oxymoron of Revolutionary War in Cuba and Nicaragua." *Signs* 37, no. 2 (2012): 414-415.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 414.

By choosing to promote the military phase of the Cuban Revolution, Castro emphasized the virility of its leaders in an attempt to impose political order by creating a cult of personality surrounding Castro and other leaders, like Guevara. In fact, one of the main faces of the new Cuban identity was that of Guevara. Shortly after the Cuban Revolution was over both billboards and posters portraying Che Guevara's face sprang up all over Cuba.<sup>41</sup> David Kunzle discusses this phenomenon in his book entitled *Che Guevara Icon, Myth, Message*. Kunzle argues "In Cuba, the production of Che imagery quickly exceeded that for any other contemporary Cuban leader."<sup>42</sup> By using Bayard De Volo's line of thinking it becomes clear that this focus on promoting male military revolution leaders was a direct attempt at creating a new masculine national identity for Cuba after the first phase of the Revolution.

In *Cuba Between Reform and Revolution*, Pérez states "Revolutionaries were conscious of their role as liberators and they played the part with alacrity. They declined to shed the trappings of armed struggle, so that to be revolutionary was often as much a function of one's appearance as it was of one's politics. Beards, long hair, and olive fatigues assumed powerful symbolic value."<sup>43</sup> The author highlights the importance of the new masculine national identity of the bearded revolutionary to Cuba's self-image in the years following the military phase of Castro's Revolution.

In the early 1960s, this image of the fabled bearded revolutionary began to make its way into Cuban pop culture. An excellent resource which has just begun to be recently studied in a scholarly way is comic books/ graphic novels. These can be highly useful sources of propaganda

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<sup>41</sup> David Kunzle, *Che Guevara: Icon, Myth, and Message*. (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History), 1997, 22.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>43</sup> Louis A. Pérez *Cuba: between Reform and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) 237.

because often they are read by younger viewers whose minds are more easily susceptible to subliminal messaging which may be present in these comic books. An excellent example of this is a revolutionary comic book about Fidel Castro and his revolution. This source is significant because of the way it depicts Fidel's army. The book is divided into square pictures with text underneath.

These pictures graphically depict Fidel and the Cuban militants' struggle to overthrow Batista in 1959. In this graphic novel, many of the visual depiction squares exclusively show men as the ones who were fighting alongside Castro during his Revolution. There are only two scenes in the graphic novel which depict women fighters alongside the men during the revolution. Another interesting note is that in both of these scenes while the women are portrayed armed with rifles, they are not depicted as physically taking part in the fighting as male revolutionaries were in other stages in the book.<sup>44</sup> This is significant because the scenes depicting male fighters actively participating in the fighting portions of the revolution while simply showing women as armed but not fighting subliminally takes away from the significance women may have played in the militaristic aspect of the Cuban Revolution. This piece of evidence suggests the revolutionary Cuban government led by the pragmatic Fidel Castro was interested in promoting what can be referred to as a sense of Cuban manliness rather than supporting the ideals of equality and equity which was present in much of the political discourse being projected by the Cuban government.

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<sup>44</sup> Gerardo Castellanos, "Album de la Revolución Cubana." (Comic strip Havana: *Revista Cinegrafico*, 1960).

Comic books and graphic novels were not the only forms of domestic propaganda where this masculine projection of Cuban leaders was heavily promoted to the extent of practically erasing female revolutionaries from the historical memory. Just like other countries in Latin America who experienced revolution in the 20th century, most famously in Mexico, government-funded painted murals began to spring up across the island of Cuba shortly after the Revolution. These murals were often hand painted by famous artists across Cuba and commissioned by different organizations within the Revolutionary Cuban Government.

In the wake of the Mexican revolution and the work of the big three muralists (Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros), murals became embraced throughout the region as a form of public art that might introduce or inculcate a new political ideology onto an often-illiterate urban audience.<sup>45</sup> In *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico: 1920-1940*, scholars Mary Kay Vaughn and Stephen Lewis argue that murals are incredibly effective in building national identity and historical memory due to their reliance on recognizable popular symbols.<sup>46</sup> They are often placed in public spaces in major cities. This prime location of propaganda real estate ensures that the advertisement has the potential to be seen by as many people possible, frequently hundreds of thousands, sometimes millions of people. These murals were often substantial in size and extremely chromatic in order to draw attention to them. Often the Cuban government chose to paint them in high traffic areas such as walls or even billboards close to populated highways.

Many of the same ideals of the Cuban Revolution which were promoted by the international propaganda can be seen in this form of domestic propaganda as well. An excellent

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<sup>45</sup> Vaughn, and Lewis, *The Eagle and the Virgin*, 2-3.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

example of this can be seen in this mural in the middle of Cuba. (Appendix 7) The painting which can be seen below in the index, depicts Fidel Castro holding a rifle and pointing off into the distance as if to lead a vigorous charge of Cuban rebels. This pose is one often pictured in Cuban propaganda because it glorifies Castro as a military leader. This is significant because military prowess is often seen as a masculine trait, by projecting this through their internal propaganda, the Cuban Revolutionary Government is reinforcing these patriarchal gender roles to their population subliminally on a daily basis.

The copy of this mural reads “Patria O Muerte, Venceremos” [“Fatherland/Motherland or Death, We will be victorious!”] The use of the phrase ‘fatherland’ is a conscious choice by the revolutionary government to reject the feminization of Cuba which had been present during the long reign of Batista, and instead, promote Cuba as the ‘fatherland’ of revolution in the Global South. Another example of how Cuba promotes its masculine ideals of Cuban Revolutionaries can be seen this mural.<sup>47</sup> This mural depicts an image of Che Guevara, the revolutionary who led half of the Cuban rebels to capture the city of Santiago, playing an extremely vital role in the life of the revolution.

The revolutionary Cuban government through depicting the image of famous male revolutionary leaders such as Che Guevara and Fidel Castro in their propaganda have created a cult of personality surrounding these revolutionary figures. The Cuban government promoted the images of these fighters domestically through the use of billboards and internationally through propaganda materials such as posters and films. The continual depiction of these few as the prime leaders of the revolution, while not necessarily untrue, signifies an attempt by the government to make revolutionary leaders like Castro and Guevara the symbols of the new

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<sup>47</sup> Appendix 8



masculine national identity of Cuba. Many of these murals and other forms of propaganda are still around in the modern day.

### **Spreading Cuba's New Image on the International Stage:**

On January 1, 1959 Castro and his band of rebels completed a military takeover of the island of Cuba. A few years later the Cuban government began examining how it could potentially spread their revolutionary beliefs to the rest of the world. In 1966, the Tricontinental Conference was held in Havana, Cuba. The Conference had been organized by the OSPAA or the Organization for the Solidarity for the People of Africa and Asia.<sup>48</sup> This conference was designed to bring together left-leaning delegates from countries around the world including, Guinea, South Africa, Vietnam, North Korea, Syria, the Palestine Liberation Organization, Costa Rica, Cuba, and others. Before the conference, there had been much debate among the OSPAA members about whether or not to include Latin America in their organization. Ultimately, the delegates decided that Latin America would be allowed to join the OSPAA and the Organization for the Solidarity for the People of Africa, Asia, and Latin America was formed and heavily influenced by the Cuban Revolutionary Government.<sup>49</sup>

Shortly after the formation of the OSPAAAL the Tricontinental Conference was scheduled in Havana in 1966. The goals of the conference were to define the objectives of the OSPAAAL. The topics discussed at the Tricontinental Conference included whether or not to aid

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<sup>48</sup> Manuel Barcia. "'Locking Horns with the Northern Empire': Anti-American Imperialism at the Tricontinental Conference of 1966 in Havana." *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 7, no. 3 (2009): 208.

<sup>49</sup> Manuel Barcia. "'Locking Horns with the Northern Empire': Anti-American Imperialism at the Tricontinental Conference of 1966 in Havana." *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 7, no. 3 (2009): 208-212.

national liberation movements, opposition to apartheid policies in South Africa, suppression of foreign military bases, and others.<sup>50</sup>

Soon after the Tricontinental Conference concluded, the OSPAAAL, headquartered in Havana, created the Tricontinental publication. The publication known as the “Tricontinental” was a quarterly publication of the Cuban run OSPAAAL which was used to promote leftist ideals abroad. From its inception until the mid-1980s the Tricontinental produced brightly colored propaganda posters which were stuffed inside the Tricontinental magazines and sent overseas.

These posters were intended to promote the ideals of the revolutionary Cuban government to an international audience. Tricontinental posters were not meant to be posted around Cuba, (the way Cuba chose to promote their ideals domestically will be discussed later in depth) instead, the political posters were often stapled inside the magazines which bore the Tricontinental name and sent around the world to likeminded subscribers to the publication. Due to the poster’s global nature, the materials were often printed in various languages including Spanish, French, and Arabic. However, the most fundamental purpose of these political posters was to promote solidarity among the continents of Asia, Africa, and Latin America specifically in the means of social and economic development.<sup>51</sup>

All Tricontinental materials contained a statement in them authorizing any reproductions of the work, so the scope of how far these materials reached is virtually impossible to

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<sup>50</sup> Renata Keller, *Mexico’s Cold War: Cuba, The United States, and the Legacy of the Mexican Revolution*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015). 182.

<sup>51</sup> David Kunzle, *Che Guevara: Icon, Myth, and Message*. (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1997), 28.

determine.<sup>52</sup> However, at least domestically in Cuba, it can be assumed that the posters were an incredibly effective way for the Cuban government to promote their ideals due to the density of the population of city centers in which these materials would have been circulated. The posters also would have been an effective means of promoting solidarity with rebel fighter groups who may have been in agricultural areas without access to other forms of media or propaganda.

In addition, the OSPAAAL denounced imperialism, defined as actions taken by governments that the organization deemed as an act of racism or colonization. This view of the first world held by Castro and the revolutionary Cuban government led to a distinct shift in the rhetoric of how Cuba talked about itself and its perceived role in interacting with the First World as well as the Global South. Often the entity to take the majority of the Cuban blame for imperialistic actions was the United States who just 90 miles to the North. For years Fidel Castro, who came to power as a nationalist, saw Cuba being taken advantage of by the United States through the sugar and tourism industries, two of the leading economic producers in Cuba. Fidel Castro's government saw the United States as an imperialistic force trying to impose its will on Latin American countries. Much of this initial portrayal of the United States came from The United States' history of intervention in Latin America with events such as the 1954 CIA overthrowing of the newly democratically elected government in Guatemala and the 1961 attempted invasion of Cuba known as the Bay of Pigs Invasion.<sup>53</sup>

The international political posters coming out of Havana often depicted the United States' imperialist tendencies with symbols alluding to the United States such as the use of Uncle Sam, an Eagle, or even caricatures and portrayals of sitting United States Presidents. The posters

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<sup>52</sup> *Tricontinental* no. 83, 1982, 2.

<sup>53</sup> Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War*. (Chicago, University of Chicago University Press, 2015), 50.

subjects when involving the United States was often corruption of United States leaders or the imperialistic actions of the United States military which was known for its frequent interventions in foreign countries during the 1960s and 1970s. The Castro government's views on the United States can be seen in his speech denouncing United States aggression in 1961:

Only because it is a big country did the United States take the right to commit that series of brutalities against Cuba. How can the crooked politicians and the exploiters have more rights than the people? What right does a rich country have to impose its yoke on our people? Only because they have might and no scruples; they do not respect international rules. They should have been ashamed to be engaged in this battle of Goliath against David--and to lose it besides.”<sup>54</sup>

This is significant because this marks an apparent shift of view from Cuba being submissive to the United States to viewing themselves as a power with the potential to challenge them on the stage of global foreign policy.

The rhetoric by Castro in this speech explicitly compares Cuba to a male biblical figure who defeated one of the fiercest warriors of the time. This patriarchal discourse by Castro reinforces the manliness of the Cuban island and the Cuban self-image. Castro then goes on to explicitly compare the United States to imperialism when he states, “If imperialism acts with a maximum of responsibility it will bring about a war which it could survive only a relatively short time. As an economic way of life, it will have to disappear through historical laws. We do not wish it to commit suicide by attacking us. If they attack us, we would resist in an unbelievable

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<sup>54</sup> Fidel Castro, "Castro Denounces U.S. Aggression" (Speech, Havana, Cuba, 1961).  
<http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1961/19610423.html>

manner.”<sup>55</sup> This quote is significant because Fidel Castro explicitly named the United States as a force of imperialistic actions. This position would be promoted through Cuban propaganda posters both domestically and abroad.

### **View of Women in OSPAAAL Political Posters:**

The current historiography on the OSPAAAL and the Tricontinental movement is underdeveloped. Anne Garland Mahler, a scholar and professor at the University of Virginia, discusses discrepancies between the way Cuba promoted the ideal of racial solidarity domestically and abroad in her key work, *From the Tricontinental to The Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity*. According to Mahler the post-racial paradise that Cuba portrayed itself to be in its Tricontinentalism materials intended for distribution elsewhere did not match up with the situation of race in Cuba itself.<sup>56</sup> This led to the issue of race not being discussed as a significant issue in the propaganda posters meant for circulation in Cuba. What Mahler does not address is the apparent discrepancy between how the Cuban’s promoted gender in the historical memory of their revolution and how they encouraged gender roles of female revolutionaries abroad. On the international stage, Cuba utilized the OSPAAAL and the Tricontinental movement political posters to appeal to people of color going through the process of decolonization and others being affected by what the Cubans viewed as imperialistic actions against prosecuted groups of revolutionaries.

Often the Cubans were trying to spread a message of international solidarity through the use of this propaganda. This left-leaning organization promoted socialist ideals abroad through international print publications such as the Tricontinental. One of the significant points of

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<sup>55</sup> Castro, “U.S. Aggression”

<sup>56</sup> Mahler, *From The Tricontinental to the Global South*, 71-76.

interest of this publication was the posters tucked inside these the magazines. Due to the international distributional nature of these graphic works of art, their message was often published in different languages such as Spanish, French, English, and even Arabic.<sup>57</sup>

The primary purpose of these politically themed posters was to promote revolutionary ideals abroad and act as symbols of solidarity between Havana and the revolutionary movements of The Global South.<sup>58</sup> While the intention of the production and circulation of these politically themed posters was to promote a romanticized image of the island, they often painted unrealistic portrayals of revolutionary Cuba. These portrayals, while meant to inspire revolutionary movements throughout the world, created images parted from the reality of daily life. For example, the role of women in the revolution and in revolutionary movements abroad are portrayed in these posters significantly different. The lack of portrayal of female revolutionaries in the propaganda posters discussing the Cuban revolution itself suggests that revolutionary Cuba may not have yet become the land of gender equality it promoted itself to be on the international stage.

The OSPAAAL posters funded by the Cuban government in the decades during the Cold War had many themes. They often promoted revolution as a response to imperialism as well as promoting solidarity with minority groups and women during their struggle for equality in these nations which Cuba viewed to be plagued by colonialism. While the Cuban government used OSPAAAL posters to promote the role of women revolutionaries abroad, it often either left women out of the historical memory of Cuban Revolution or showed their contributions to the

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<sup>57</sup> Mahler, *From The Tricontinental to the Global South*, 71-76.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-76.

Revolution as a crucial supporting role of the larger struggle led by the men of Cuba. Examples of this discrepancy can be seen clearly in the posters produced for international distribution by the OSPAAAL.

An excellent example of how Cuban propaganda portrayed the representation of female fighters and female revolutionaries fighting for revolutions in other countries besides Cuba can be seen in an OSPAAAL poster entitled *El Salvador: Hacemos la Guerra para conquistar la Paz* (El Salvador: We Make War to Win Peace), illustrated by Rafael Enriquez Vega in 1984. This poster shows a female fighter gripping what appears to be an M-16 style rifle.<sup>59</sup> The woman is depicted holding the gun and smiling proudly, underneath reads the tagline in four different languages which states “we make war to win peace.” This tag line is particularly interesting because the phrase implies that the Cuban authors of this poster intended for the phrase to inspire, as well as give respect to the role of women taking first-hand military action against forces of imperialism.

It is important to note that while there are depictions of male fighters on other El Salvador themed posters originating from Havana there are no male revolutionaries on this particular poster. This is significant because it gives the female subversives of El Salvador an image to look up to without a male presence, empowering young women to rise up and fight against the forces of imperialism. Since the particular OSPAAAL poster in question originated in Cuba as a tool of international propaganda, it suggests that the Cuban government did realize the importance of promoting the role of women in the struggle against imperialism on the international stage.

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<sup>59</sup> Appendix 9

Further evidence of this can be seen in several of the posters produced by the OSPAAAL during the 1970s during the crisis in Angola. One particular poster created in 1976 by artist Rafael Morante depicts a woman looking at the audience while brandishing a rifle around her shoulder.<sup>60</sup> The tagline of this poster reads merely “Solidarity (with) Angola.” This poster depicting international solidarity with the nation of Angola is typical of the Cuban government’s international portrayal of conflicts in the continent of Africa. The case of Cuban propaganda surrounding the Angolan conflict is significant because Cuba had committed over 30,000 military troops to Angola a year before this particular poster was seen by nearly all of the third world.<sup>61</sup>

In the poster depicting the young woman with a rifle strapped to her back, the artist made the conscious choice to have the woman looking over her shoulder with a vulnerable yet determined look. This is significant because it causes the political message behind the poster to suggest that the woman, and by proxy women, revolutionaries needed help and solidarity with male fighters in order to be successful. This poster also had another political message, it suggested that the fighters of Angola needed the continued support not just from Cuba, but the rest of the global south as well. Propaganda being produced with implicit messages such as this were used by the Cuban government to help legitimize their reasons for being involved in militaristic actions halfway across the globe as well as the Cubans view of themselves as a big brother to other countries struggling for revolution.

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<sup>60</sup> Appendix 10

<sup>61</sup> Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 30.



There is a clear difference of purpose between the international posters depicting what Cuba viewed as the heroes of their revolution and the posters depicting revolutionaries from other countries. Posters produced by Cuba depicting their own revolution were meant to inspire new revolutions abroad and to reinforce the new masculine national identity of the island. The propaganda produced by Cuba during this period was also meant to repair their image which had been soiled by Batista in the years before the Cuban Revolution.

Rafael Enriquez' poster, entitled "Día del Guerrillo Heroico" ["Day of the Heroic Guerilla"] is an excellent resource in understanding how revolutionary Cuba chose to promote their ideals of the "Cuban revolutionary" abroad.<sup>62</sup> The poster itself depicts images of Cuban revolutionary leaders Guevara and Fidel Castro. This lack of female revolutionaries or even female protesters on the poster is substantial evidence that the Cubans wanted to promote a masculine image of the fabled guerilla fighter. This poster would have been sent around the world deliberately to try and restore the image of the feminized and exotic Cuba which had been created under the president Fulgencio Batista in the early 1940s. As discussed above the Cuban government continually used the images of revolutionary heroes such as Fidel Castro, and Che Guevara to try and give Cuba the picture of a strong male revolutionary presence in other countries eyes.

This is not to suggest that the Cuban government did not see a political purpose for depicting women revolutionaries. One of the most well-known series of posters created by the OSPAAAL and circulated globally through the Tricontinental Magazine were posters which meant to develop a sense of solidarity with nations battling imperialist or colonial powers. These posters often depicted both male and female revolutionaries fighting the struggles against

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<sup>62</sup> Appendix 11

imperialism. Since these posters primary purpose was to create an international call to action in order to assist these countries, it can be assumed that the Cuban government saw the primary purpose of depicting female revolutionaries not only to inspire women in these countries to continue to fight but also to create a sense of vulnerability surrounding the women fighters portrayed. An excellent example of this sort of propagandistic message is a poster depicting a young Angolan woman.

While the propaganda originating from the OSPAAAL promoted full participation from women revolutionaries on the international level, their rhetoric when discussing the Cuban Revolution itself was significantly more focused around the importance of the roles of male revolutionaries. Many of the posters produced by the OSPAAAL explaining the Cuban Revolution, focused primarily on preserving the historical memory of the Cuban Revolution. Often these propagandistic materials portrayed Cuban leaders such as Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Camilo Cienfuegos with an army of male fighters behind them.

Other sources of Cuban revolutionary propaganda contain this same discrepancy. One specific example is a poster which depicts Fidel Castro triumphantly raising a rifle as if to signify leading a military charge or celebrating a militaristic victory over the Batista regime. (Appendix 9) While the poster can be appreciated for its artistic value in its own right, to truly understand the political implications of the poster one must realize there is significant evidence which suggests the Cuban Revolution was not a purely male participated event.<sup>63</sup> The depiction of all male fighters suggests Cuba was trying to subliminally alter the historical importance of women

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<sup>63</sup> "Women and the Cuban Revolution" In *Voices of Resistance: Testimonies of Cuban and Chilean Women*, Judy Maloof ed., (University Press of Kentucky, 1999) 25.

participants in the revolution to the point of failing to promote their contribution to the revolution itself.

There is evidence that this discrepancy between the projections of male and female revolutionaries in OSPAAAL materials produced by Cuba continued well into the 1980s. While Cuba's portrayal of international revolutionaries became more feminine as more and more years passed from the Revolution's completion, their representation of Cuban revolutionaries in International propaganda continued to have a dominantly male presence. One poster as dated as late as 1981 depicts a male Cuban revolutionary fighter placed proudly in front of a waving Cuban flag.<sup>64</sup> The depiction of this fighter in front of the male flag with no female revolutionary counterpart beside him implies as late as the 1980s Cuba was still struggling with what can be called a masculinity crisis when it came to promoting their revolution and self-image on the international level.

This discrepancy between how male and female revolutionaries were remembered for their participation in the Cuban Revolution is not just present in political materials meant for the world stage. In fact, even in propaganda tools meant for domestic circulation around Cuba contain massive differences in the way women's roles were promoted throughout Cuba.

With the fall of the Batista regime in 1959, Cuba began down the path of transformation of how it promoted the country's image domestically as well as internationally. Through the use of propaganda materials created by different agencies such as the OSPAAAL and the Tricontinental, Cuba began to overcompensate the masculinity of their image in order to try and correct how they had been viewed during the past years during the Batista era. The

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<sup>64</sup> Appendix 12.

transformation from a submissive orientalist projection of itself to an internationalist power ready to take on imperialist countries on behalf of those who could not, signified a definite shift in how Cuba promoted itself and the image of the Cuban people to other countries. While its power weakened significantly after the end of the Cold War and fall of the Soviet Union, Cuba continues to project an internationalist attitude through their propaganda, something which would not have been seen in the orientalism ridden propaganda of Batista's Cuba. Unfortunately, much of Cuba's historical memory of its revolution still centers around the glorification of male heroes, while often the women who participated are just beginning to receive proper credit among the academic community.

*Chapter II: Revolutionary Mothers: Twentieth-century Cuban Propaganda's Attempt to Define  
The New Socialist Woman*

Vilma Espín did not know it at the time, but by participating in the Cuban Revolution, she was transforming how the role of women in socialist society would be viewed across the entirety of the Global South. Espín was one of several women who fought alongside the famed Cuban Revolutionary Fidel Castro in his successful attempt to oust the military dictator Fulgencio Batista in 1959.<sup>65</sup> In late August as Fidel Castro's forces descended from the Sierra Maestra mountains to start a dual-pronged attack on multiple fronts, Castro and his forces of both men and women met little significant resistance.<sup>66</sup>

With the completion of the first phase of the Cuban Revolution came a complete transformation in nearly every aspect of Cuban life. Included in this transformation were new expectations of how both men and women were expected to participate in society. The new societal role of men was clearly defined in communist literature such as *Socialism and Man In Cuba* by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara.<sup>67</sup> The role of women in society was much more ambiguous and was often created through propagandistic means. After the military phase of the revolution was completed, women who had fought alongside Castro's forces would be privy to new rhetoric regarding the role of socialist women in society.<sup>68</sup>

By analyzing the political posters being produced by the Cuban government, one begins to develop a sense of the rhetoric coming from the Cubans about how women should be viewed

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<sup>65</sup> Aviva Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, 30.

<sup>66</sup> For more on women's participation as revolutionaries see Michelle Chase, *Revolution Within the Revolution*.

<sup>67</sup> Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, *Socialism and Man in Cuba*, (Atlanta, Pathfinder Press 1965).

<sup>68</sup> This is a claim made from pictorial and circumstantial evidence in the nature of the propaganda.

in society. This culminated in the portrayal of women in a new archetype in Cuban propaganda, the Revolutionary Mother.<sup>69</sup> Many different branches of the Cuban government produced the propaganda that assisted with the development of the Revolutionary Mother style portrayal of women in Cuban propaganda, including Vilma Espín's Federation of Mujeres Cubanas or FMC.

The Revolutionary Mother was a characterization of women in domestic propaganda that centered around four different portrayals of women. The four essential traits of the Revolutionary Mother were the Mother, women as symbols of beauty, the worker, and the revolutionary. Sometimes Women were portrayed in all four roles sometimes only one, but together these new roles for socialist women being promoted by Cuban Propaganda made up the character of the Revolutionary Mother.

Political posters served a very important function in developing countries. Scholars like Gary Yanker tout the political poster as the most important means of political communication in developing countries. Yanker states that "In countries such as Red China and India, the poster is still very important and relied on. The high illiteracy rates put more stress, increasing the importance of this highly visual medium. The limited use of television in the Third World leaves the political poster in first place for political propaganda."<sup>70</sup> Many of the countries Cuba was communicating with via these international political posters contained similar situations to China and India explaining why sending political posters was such an effective form of communication.

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<sup>69</sup> This is a term I have coined based on the evidence. While there is no reference to this term in the secondary literature, the primary source evidence leads me to believe that it is an appropriate characterization of the portrayal of women in domestic and international propaganda produced in twentieth-century Cuba.

<sup>70</sup> Gary Yanker. "The Political Poster: A Worldwide Phenomenon." *World Affairs* 133, no. 3 (1970): 219.

Other scholars besides Yanker have noted the importance of the poster as a form of political communication as well. In his 1930s book entitled *Das Politische Plakat: Eine Psychologische Betrachtung* (The Political Poster: A Psychological Study) Erwin Schockel praises the political poster stating

“The Printed word can be avoided at the outset by all those who oppose the respective newspaper, book, or leaflet. The radio can be turned off; the political meeting does not have to be attended. Even demonstrations and marches do not have to be successful in spite of the general curiosity of human beings. The poster is unique. Only the blind, the bedridden, and prisoners are not reached by it. Every other man that goes out on the street cannot exclude himself from life around him. Thus, all come in contact with posters.”<sup>71</sup>

This chapter does not seek to uncover whether or not the narrative being produced by the domestic and international propaganda of Cuba correlates with the collective experience of women in revolutionary Cuba, but instead attempts to define the role of women the propaganda was seeking to create and to examine how Cuba spread these expectations of women across the Global South through international propaganda such as the Tricontinental Movement.

In the early years after the revolution, much of the propaganda being produced portrayed women as objects of beauty in an attempt to promote the femininity of socialist women. This stems from the cultural position of women as the homemaker before the Cuban Revolution.<sup>72</sup> One of the main reasons for this imagery of women in Cuba was the rampant homophobia that plagued the early years of the new Cuban state following the Revolution. Anyone suspected of participating in homosexual activity was subject to harsh punishments including being sent to a labor camp. Through their actions such as putting homosexuals into forced labor camps known

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<sup>71</sup> Schockel, Erwin. *Das Politische Plakat* (München: Eher, 1939), 150.

<sup>72</sup> For more on gender dynamics before the Revolution see Chase, *Revolution Within the Revolution*, 19-43.

as Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción or UMAP camps, the Cuban government suggests they believed homosexuality to be a choice.<sup>73</sup> One significant thing that resulted from this crackdown on homosexual activity was the encouragement of the portrayal of women as sexual objects of beauty in early-revolutionary Cuban propaganda. This response was due to the persistent idea that homosexual behavior was counterrevolutionary. As Lillian Guerra states these camps were "located in the isolated sugar hills of the Camagüey province, these camps imprisoned thousands of self-acknowledged, closeted and presumed homosexuals for up to three years without charge."<sup>74</sup>

Early revolutionary Cuba was a big supporter of the idea of the nuclear family. To the Cuban government, the nuclear family consisted of two heterosexual parents whose main priority was to birth and raise children. One reason the state viewed homosexuality as inherently counter-revolutionary was because of the inability of same-sex couples to conform to this nuclear family ideal and birth the next generation of socialist workers.<sup>75</sup>

As a result of years of vast influence by the Catholic Church, Pronatalism was embedded in the societal values of Cubans. This need for large families did not end after the Revolution, but rather an emphasis on childbearing and motherhood continued to be emphasized by the new government. In order to promote the want to start a family in both men and women, Cuba used visual imagery in political posters to play up Cuban women's beauty on the island. In this propaganda, Cuba was trying to emphasize the femininity and beauty of the socialist woman. A logical explanation for this is to inspire women to dress in ways which highlighted their beauty

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<sup>73</sup> Lillian Guerra, "Gender Policing, Homosexuality and the New Patriarchy of the Cuban Revolution, 1965–70." *Social History* 35, no. 3 (2010): 272.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 272.



and sexuality in order to try and inspire socialist men to want to start families with them in order to create the next generation of workers for the Cuban State.<sup>76</sup> This belief stems directly from Cuba's patriarchal past and by making a point to portray women as objects of beauty, the state was actively contributing to both the machismo and patriarchy which was revealed to define their new national identity in chapter 1. The evidence backing up this explanation can be seen in the vast emphasis the Revolutionary Cuban Government put on traditional family and societal values.

The promotion of socialist Cuban women's beauty was inherently homophobic in its intentions and meant to discourage people from engaging in what the state government viewed as counter-revolutionary behavior. As more and more years passed the Cuban government's attitude towards LGBTQ+ rights improved dramatically decriminalizing homosexual relations in 1979, and recently in March 2019 began the process of legalizing same-sex marriage through a family code amendment.<sup>77</sup> However, the legacy of Cuba's homophobia lives on in the historical memory of marginalized same-sex couples as well as the overemphasis on women as sexual objects of beauty in their propaganda.

As more years passed after the completion of first phase of Castro's Revolution, the portrayal of women in propaganda became more complex. Instead of merely being portrayed as symbols of beauty, women began to be portrayed as mothers. One of the most critical roles of women in Latin America has always been the mother. This role stems back from many generations of Catholic patriarchy and gender roles placing the women as the caretaker of the

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<sup>76</sup> Muriel Nazzari "The "Woman Question" in *Cuba: An Analysis of Material Constraints on Its Solution*," *Signs* 9, no. 2 (1983): 246-63.

<sup>77</sup> Ed Augustin, "Cuba's New Constitution Paves Way for Same Sex Marriage", *The Guardian*, July 2018.

home and as the mother.<sup>78</sup> In the Catholic faith, one of the most sacred symbols is the Virgin Mary who was the mother of Jesus Christ. Because of this women's roles as mothers has always been held in high regard in Latin America.<sup>79</sup> Even after the revolution, women faced seeing themselves portrayed in this role in aspects of everyday life such as these stamps produced by Revolutionary Cuba.<sup>80</sup> Images such as this reinforced the importance of motherhood among Cuban women and would have been commonplace in visual media such as stamps, posters, and films after the Cuban revolution.

In the new socialist state, women's role as mothers stayed relevant but changed purpose. It became less about honoring the example of the Virgin Mary and more about emphasizing socialist women as the caretakers of the next generation of workers. Socialism's emphasis on motherhood in the state was hardly a new belief. As far back as 1884, Friedrich Engels discusses the importance of motherhood to the socialist state in his book *The Origin of The Family, Private Property, and the State*.<sup>81</sup> The role of women as mother figures would have been especially important to an agricultural economy like Revolutionary Cuba who placed a considerable emphasis on state production quotas. By projecting the importance of women as mothers, Cuba was promoting the importance of raising the next generation of workers who would assist the state in meeting their quotas.

As more and more years passed since the Cuban Revolution's first phase, Cuba's idea of the new socialist woman turned less into a simple caretaker of the home and more into a

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<sup>78</sup> This is a common theme in gender histories of colonial Latin America such as K. O'Neill (2016). Religion and Gender in Latin America. In V. Garrard-Burnett, P. Freston, & S. Dove (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Religions in Latin America*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 525-546.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 525-530.

<sup>80</sup> Appendix 13

<sup>81</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, (London: Penguin publishing, 2018.)

revolutionary woman who was as beautiful as she was fierce. The new Cuban woman was comfortable raising a family, contributing towards the production of the state, and could even fight if necessary. The Cuban revolution changed the image of the woman as an object of the home to the Revolutionary Mother, a woman who was expected to be a part of the worldwide socialist revolution as well as a caretaker to the next generation of socialist leaders. An important process of this transformation was reinforcing women's new roles as contributors to the production of the state. However, deliberate attempts at defining women as an integral part of the workforce would not begin until 1966.

In the early 1960s, Fidel Castro and the new government took steps to define the new socialist woman. Castro made it clear that the role of women in the new socialist society would be a role of liberation, freeing them from the patriarchal household roles commonplace during the era of the Batista government. As scholar Muriel Nazzari states "as early as 1959 Fidel Castro spoke about the need to free women from domestic slavery so that they could participate widely in production to the benefit of women themselves and the Revolution."<sup>82</sup> One way they did this was by attempting to increase women's contribution of productivity to the state by attempting to integrate them into the working population. However, there were competing imperatives from different agencies and the attempt to raise female participation quickly took a backseat to the statewide goal of full male participation in the workforce.<sup>83</sup> As a result, the development of the ideal Cuban woman by the state was a slow process. While women's participation and expectation to contribute to the workforce eventually became an essential part of the Revolutionary Mother character being promoted, serious attempts at incorporating women

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<sup>82</sup> Muriel Nazzari "The Woman Question" 249.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 249.

into the workforce would not occur until after full male participation in the workforce had been achieved.<sup>84</sup>

Cuba saw its attempts at incorporating women into the workforce as liberating them from the patriarchal prison of the home. However, as Benigno E. Aguirre points, Castro's claims of liberating women often came with limited action. For example, women's participation in the state workforce only came when there was a need for additional labor as a result of left-over positions not filled by men.<sup>85</sup> These worker shortages were caused by government attempts at expanding both the agricultural and manufacturing capabilities of the island.<sup>86</sup> By focusing on male participation in the workforce over female participation, the Cuban government was reinforcing patriarchal gender roles rather than liberating women to participate fully in society in predefined positions in determined by the government.

The Revolutionary Cuban Government's first significant action towards liberating the women of Cuba was creating the *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas*, the Federation of Cuban Women, and appointing the well-known revolutionary, Vilma Espín, as President of the Organization.<sup>87</sup> Espín was revered for having been part of the inner circle of M26-7 and having fought alongside the Castro brothers. Women such as Vilma Espín played an incredibly important role in the Cuban Revolution. Not only did they fight beside male revolutionaries such as Fidel Castro, but they also supported urban revolutionaries and their activities by providing

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid 250.

<sup>85</sup> Benigno E. Aguirre. "Women in the Cuban Bureaucracies: 1968-1974." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 7, no. 1 (1976): 25.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>87</sup> Candace Johnson "Framing for Change: Social Policy, the State, and the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas." *Cuban Studies* 42, no. 1 (2011): 35-51. The Federación de Mujeres Cubanas hereafter referred to as FMC.

places to hide, spaces to meet and discuss political dissidence, and eat warm meals.<sup>88</sup> Because of women's participation in the Revolution, many women had expectations that they would be able to participate in the labor force. Women's revolutionary work was also the basis of FMC campaigns on behalf of women that was ultimately supported by the government. A large-scale propaganda campaign was launched by the government that began the process of redefining conceptions of women's roles and how they could participate in Cuban society.

In a poster created by the *Comisión de Orientación Revolucionaria* in 1971 the emphasis on the roles of women as socialist workers can be seen explicitly.<sup>89</sup> The poster depicts several Vietnamese women harvesting wheat intended for shipment to the state. While the subject of the poster being portrayed was Vietnamese women, the message surely was not lost on Cuban women who would have seen the poster. The image portraying women laboring for the state represented an expansion of ideal roles for their gender. Posters like this instructed the *Mujeres* that their roles as new socialist women would now include contributing to the state labor quota.

In the age before the internet and a period marked with state control of the media, propaganda was a fundamental form of communication between the state and its citizens. In addition to the poster depicting the new role of women as contributors of productivity to the state, it was also a way for the Cuban government to tell women that this role, while new to them, was commonplace in other socialist countries. Depicting Vietnamese women hard at work in agricultural fields told Cuban women that they were not alone in the struggle to redefine their roles in society in the age of socialism. This was a direct attempt at building international solidarity among socialist women. As Lillian Guerra has argued Cuban women were inspired to

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<sup>88</sup> Salim Lamrani, and Translated by Larry R. Oberg. "Women in Cuba: The Emancipatory Revolution." *International Journal of Cuban Studies* 8, no. 1 (2016): 111.

<sup>89</sup> Appendix 14

contribute to the productivity of the state because it, in turn, inspired socialist men to contribute even more so their male virility would not be called into question.<sup>90</sup> Others suggest the reason was to fill the gaps in the labor force which had not been able to be filled in after Cuba achieved full male participation in the workforce.

It was not only the propaganda being produced by government organizations that was promoting women's new role as a labor force. As mentioned above, Fidel Castro and the Cuban government founded the Federation of Cuban Women in 1960 with the intention that the organization would promote the rights of women in Cuba. Scholars have questioned the effectiveness of this organization in part because Fidel Castro appointed his sister-in-law, Vilma Espín as its leader. Espín had fought alongside Castro in the revolution, and in spite of the nepotism, she remained the president of the organization and a role model for Cuban women until she died in 2007.<sup>91</sup> During the period, the Federation of Cuban Women produced many different propaganda posters reinforcing the new socialist gender roles which had been created by the Cuban patriarchy. These posters often highlighted the same qualities of the new socialist woman discussed in official propaganda wings of the Cuban government such as the Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos.

The poster in Appendix 15 reflects much of the same propaganda produced by other wings of the Cuban government. The poster depicts a beautiful young Cuban woman contributing to the collective tobacco harvest. In contrast to the poster of Vietnamese women this representation of a young woman in full make-up while working in the fields presents a Cuban take on socialist gender roles. It also serves as evidence of the patriarchal influence in

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<sup>90</sup> Lillian Guerra, "Gender Policing, Homosexuality and the New Patriarchy of the Cuban Revolution", 272.

<sup>91</sup> Candace Johnson "Framing For Change", 39.

revolutionary Cuban artwork. It supports the argument that, starting in the mid 1960s, the new role of women was a form of double burden. On the one hand, the socialist woman was to consistently appear attractive in order to arouse the socialist man in order to conceive children, on the other hand, she should work hard to contribute to the productivity of the state.<sup>92</sup>

The promotion of enhanced sexuality takes on added significance when the origin of the poster is considered. The FMC created this poster under the leadership of Vilma Espín which calls into question the organization's commitment to women's equality. In addition, it reveals the machismo and patriarchal tendencies that were rampant in the new national identity of Cuba had seeped into women's organizations on the island. It is examples such as this that have led to critiques of Vilma Espín's leadership of the organization and that have characterized the FMC feminine rather than feminist.<sup>93</sup> The imagery, seen in Appendix 15, of women working in the Tobacco, a national symbol and significant export of Cuba not only encouraged rural women of Cuba to help increase state production but also reinforced the sense of national identity uniting rural Cubans around farming. The image created by the FMC of the woman outside of the home was meant to be liberating, but as scholars point out, the focus on women as objects of beauty was inherently patriarchal; This often-prevented true women's liberation from being achieved.<sup>94</sup>

In the mid-1960s following attempts by the government to increase agricultural production was a major urban campaign to incorporate women into the workforce. Once full workforce participation had been achieved for the male population, Cuban leaders turned their

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<sup>92</sup> Muriel Nazzari "The Woman Question", 247.

<sup>93</sup> Candace Johnson "Framing For Change", 38.

<sup>94</sup> Johanna I. Moya. Fábregas, "The Cuban Women's Revolutionary Experience: Patriarchal Culture and the State's Gender Ideology, 1950–1976." *Journal of Women's History* 22, no. 1 (2010): 61-84. doi:10.1353/jowh.0.0134.

attention to the difficult process of incorporating women into the urban workforce. Nevertheless, there were difficulties in accomplishing this goal. The Revolution was articulated as a women's revolution in which the government promoted the integration of female workers into urban factories. The collective experience of women was very different as their participation was constrained by several related factors. One factor that hindered the incorporation of women into the urban manufacturing industrial workforce was the lack of child care services in the early years of the revolution.<sup>95</sup> The combination of Cuba's emphasis on achieving full male participation in the workforce and women's lack of child care services made it incredibly difficult for women to achieve this image of the ideal socialist woman created by the Cuban state. This will be discussed further in chapter three.

Even with all of the factors prohibiting women's participation in the workforce in Revolutionary Cuba, the government continued to promote the role of women as workers and contributors to society and to economic production. An example of this is a poster celebrating international women's day created by the propaganda wing of the Cuban government known as the Department of Revolutionary Orientation.<sup>96</sup> As in previous examples, the poster depicts women as being fulfilling a traditional female role, in this case as a Mother, and in a Revolutionary role, contributing to the agricultural/urban production quotas. Propaganda such as this meant to inform women of the ever-expanding expectations of their roles in society by the socialist state.

The domestic propaganda produced by the Federation of Cuban Women, led by Vilma Espín, and other propaganda political agencies of the Cuban government shows a direct attempt

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<sup>95</sup> Muriel Nazzari "The Woman Question" 247.

<sup>96</sup> Appendix 16



by the Cuban state to create a new role in society for women. By analyzing the propaganda produced during the 1960s and 70s we can see that the archetype for the modern socialist woman, according to official rhetoric, was the Revolutionary Mother, equal parts fighter, mother, and contributor to the production of the state. In a poster created for the Second Congress of Women presented by the FMC, the new ways in which the socialist women should participate in society are represented.<sup>97</sup> On the upper right-hand side of the poster, women are depicted contributing to agricultural production for the state. This is similar to the examples mentioned above and also served several different purposes including, inspiring socialist men to be more productive, and showing how work, as Fidel Castro argued, can liberate women from the household. The crown jewel of this propaganda poster and what draws the viewer's eye to the center, however, is the culmination of all of the new roles for women, the depiction of the Revolutionary Mother. The iconography of the woman carrying her child, as well as a rifle, with the globe behind her instructs the public that the Revolutionary Mother was the epitome of the new socialist woman. This also foreshadowed the worldwide phenomenon of the socialist revolutionary mother that would be spread across the Global South.

Cuba's leaders achieved their aim in the newly expanded OSPAAAL as Cuba became the defacto leader of the Global South.<sup>98</sup> Fidel Castro envisioned Cuba as a leader for world revolution in states that were currently undergoing the process of decolonization.<sup>99</sup> Through the written publication known as the *Tricontinental*, Cuban editors were able to compile essays and other educational writings from leftist leaders and circulate these ideas to people all over the world. OSPAAAL published the *Tricontinental* for over twenty-five years until the collapse of

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<sup>97</sup> Appendix 17

<sup>98</sup> Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to The Global South*, 21-23.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-23.

the Soviet Union in 1991 caused dramatic economic hardship for the island of Cuba. Often included in these magazines were fold-out propaganda posters produced to promote anti-colonial and revolutionary ideas on an international level. Cuban leaders supported OSPAAAL financially and encouraged them to produce posters and other materials that communicated their own ideals to peoples and states going through the process of decolonization. The materials being produced by the OSPAAAL worked to build solidarity between Cuba and the decolonizing nations. These states would come to be known as the Global South.

The materials being produced by the OSPAAAL dealt with a variety of topics, but one of the most intriguing was the re-defining of women's traditional roles across the non-aligned Global South. The posters were particularly effective as they could visually represent the new definition of the new socialist woman and their portability facilitated spreading these ideas across the entirety of the Global South. The new socialist woman, according to Fidel Castro and discourse of the Cuban government, was a symbol of beauty, yet a model of efficiency, a loving matriarch and exemplary revolutionary fighter, the Revolutionary Mother.

Similar to the domestic situation in Cuba, the propaganda produced by the OSPAAAL promoted the role of women's capabilities both as mother figures and as fighters. An example of this circumstance can be seen in this poster.<sup>100</sup> OSPAAAL artists created the work during the 1960s depicting a group of African women as Revolutionary Mothers. In one arm they carry their children, but on their backs, they brandish rifles. This is a clear attempt by the Cubans to export their ideal of the role of the Revolutionary Mother across the global south.

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<sup>100</sup> Appendix 18

There are several implications of this propaganda due to its international nature. It has been well established in chapter one that Cuba faced a national identity crisis after the Revolution when it came to promoting the historical memory of their revolution. As a result, Cuban artwork chose to create an identity based off of the military success of the Cuban Revolution. This led to the development of a cult of personality surrounding revolutionary leaders like Castro and Guevara in Cuban artwork, causing womens participation in the military phase of the revolution to be all but lost in the historical memory. An excellent example of this is the vast number of billboard images that began to pop-up throughout Cuba promoting the ever-developing cult of personality centered around male revolutionary figures like Che Guevarra and Fidel Castro.<sup>101</sup>

As mentioned above, this explicitly caused a discrepancy in the way female participation in the Cuban Revolution was remembered in governmental imagery. Rather than promote how women had participated in the Revolution in the past, Cuban imagery instead focused on creating outlines for how women should participate in society in the present. Women weren't portrayed as participating in the military phase of the Revolution rather they were depicted in their new societal roles. On the other hand, Cuban artwork continuously promoted imagery of male revolutionaries in order to try and create a new national identity. This is significantly revealing of how Cubans used male revolutionary iconography to create both a gender and national identity in artwork.

The way women were promoted in Cuban artwork is also telling of the influence patriarchy and machismo still had on the island during the early phases of the Revolution. This is seen in the emphasis on womens beauty and their role as mothers in Cuban political posters.

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<sup>101</sup> Appendix 7 and Appendix 8

Often times in order to show the importance of women as mothers and childbearers artists directly drew separate images of women and children on the same poster. The women would not necessarily be depicted holding children, but by juxtaposing women and children, artists could show the importance of motherhood to women from an early age. An example of this artistry can be seen in the appendix.<sup>102</sup> This poster depicts a Namibian woman crying over her child depicted as a soldier in her tear. The purpose of this poster was intended to build solidarity among women in the Global South. However, these types of posters achieved more than this. The artist who created this poster uses imagery of the young women to reinforce the importance of motherhood among the women of the Global South.

Often socialist discourse implied the supporters of the revolution were a part of something bigger than themselves.<sup>103</sup> This rhetoric, along with the poster depicting the Namibian women crying over her son, the soldier, served to reinforce the importance of motherhood not as a unique experience but rather one shared among women in the Global South. When not depicted as mothers women were shown as active fighters standing up for revolutionary values. For instance, a poster that depicts a young Angolan woman carrying a rifle on her back.<sup>104</sup> This poster would have been specifically designed to inspire young African women to join the socialist cause and to stand in solidarity with women of other countries in the global south. The poster depicting the young woman as a fighter would have inspired women to join revolutionary movements by implying that it was a young woman's duty to take up arms and fight just as much as it was the duty of a man. The fact that the woman is pictured alone is also significantly

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<sup>102</sup> Appendix 19

<sup>103</sup> Fidel Castro, "Castro speaks to the citizens of Santiago." Santiago. 1959.  
<http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1961/19610423.html>

<sup>104</sup> Appendix 10

empowering to young women because it reinforces the new role of women as fighters who did not need men to participate in the revolutionary effort.

Africa was not the only place where Cuba attempted to promote these new ideals of the revolutionary mother. One can see similar attributes in a poster speaking to the struggle in El Salvador.<sup>105</sup> The El Salvador poster, similar to the Angola poster, shows a woman holding a rifle as if she is ready to take up arms against her capitalist oppressors. However, there is a crucial difference between this poster and the Angola poster. Notice how the woman in the El Salvador poster while she is holding a gun, she is smiling happily, and her hair is down. This reveals that artists are also placing importance on beauty and femininity as aspects of the revolutionary woman. This emphasis stands in contrast to the ways OSPAAAL portrayed male revolutionaries in its posters. In nearly all OSPAAAL produced posters of revolutionary men, the male figures were pictured either actively taking part in combat or having a fierce yet determined look on their faces. The posters of female revolutionaries were either depicted as vulnerable or as smiling to emphasize their femininity and as objects of beauty.

The choice to depict the woman as smiling and holding a rifle shows she is a revolutionary but at the same time emphasizes her as a figure of beauty and womanhood. This could well be another way to use females to entice socialist men to procreate and create children who would serve as the next generation of revolutionaries.<sup>106</sup> Thus this message could be delivered to women in the agricultural and industrial sector of the socialist state as well as to women fighting in decolonization struggles.

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<sup>105</sup> Appendix 10

<sup>106</sup> Johanna Fábregas "The Cuban Woman's Revolutionary Experience", 63.

The propaganda dealing with El Salvador would not only inspire women to fight, but it would have a dual purpose in reminding men why they chose to pick up their rifles. Picturing a beautiful woman holding a rifle would imply to young men, that they would have the opportunity to meet young female revolutionaries with whom they could start families and create a new life. Promoting women as both fighters and as symbols of beauty is a profoundly Cuban influenced approach to promoting the new socialist women's role in developing societies.

In the 1970s, Cuba also made it a priority to promote this new image of the revolutionary mother across the Caribbean. In a poster promoting solidarity with the people of Puerto Rico, a Caribbean island east of Cuba that is a United States territory, we again see women depicted as armed revolutionaries taking part in revolution.<sup>107</sup> While the majority of Tricontinental graphic artists designing these posters were male, this poster was created by a woman. In the poster Jane Norling, the artist, makes a point of drawing both the men and women who are armed together as revolutionary fighters as silhouettes. By not depicting any of the revolutionaries faces Norling rejects patriarchal influences of femininity and speaks to the commonly held value that socialist revolution was won not by the famous leaders but by faceless workers that made the collective decision to take up arms against their imperialist colonizers. While the truth may be that both leaders and the people play important roles in revolutionary actions; nevertheless, the intended purpose of this poster was to inspire not to inform. The facelessness of the women revolutionaries speaks to the idea that it was equally socialist women's duty as guerrilla revolutionaries to be just as comfortable fighting in the streets against oppressive powers as they were raising the next generation of workers or contributing to the economy.

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<sup>107</sup> Appendix 21.

There is visual evidence that Cuba's approach to defining the role of the new socialist woman was spreading due to the work and influence of the OSPAAAL and its publication the *Tricontinental*.<sup>108</sup> The 1980s poster created by the Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza or AMNLAE shows clear evidence of Tricontinental influence in its depiction of women. The AMNLAE was part of the Communist Sandinista network in Nicaragua and the propaganda they were producing, in this case, mirrors the discourse on the role of socialist women that OSPAAAL, and by extension their Cuban sponsor, was trying to export throughout the Global South. In the poster, we see the revolutionary mother archetype which had been consistently cultivated by OSPAAAL and the Cuban government. Depicted is a young beautiful Nicaraguan woman who is actively breastfeeding her child. Her actions and her smile reinforcing the idea of the importance of motherhood to the socialist woman in the Global South. Around her shoulder, she is carrying a rifle as if she is ready to set down her baby and actively defend the Socialist Revolution in Nicaragua.

This imagery is a example of the expectations of the Revolutionary Mother ideal and portrayal of women that originated in Cuban propaganda spread throughout Latin America. The *Tricontinental* was an important publication in Central America, as many of the propaganda posters produced for Central America, had a lasting impact. The poster reflects that influence, showing that organizations independent of the *Tricontinental* used a similar visual language with shared values in their representation of the new role of socialist women. This provides compelling evidence that Cuba was actively spreading the ideas of gender roles and expectations through the global South vis a vis OSPAAAL political posters.

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<sup>108</sup> Appendix 22

The evidence that allows us to assert that there was a conscious choice to promote women's roles as mothers in both Cuban and international global south society is seen in the posters themselves. In these posters while women were depicted often as both mothers and revolutionary fighters, the men were not given an equal depiction. It is clear from the Cuban perspective that there was more to women's role in society than simply as workers or fighters in the revolutionary army. Visualized in the posters is another role for women, the role of motherhood. While state expectations were high for women in the new society, Chapter three will analyze how well Cuban women met these expectations.



### *Chapter III: How Cuban Women Shook State Expectations*

The previous chapter discussed how the Revolutionary Cuban Government made a point during the years ensuing the military phase of the Cuban Revolution to try and redefine a new role for women in society. Throughout the Cold War era, by means of visual imagery, the Cuban State defined new expectations of womanhood in society by emphasizing the importance of motherhood and revolutionary zeal. This next chapter attempts to analyze how well women in Revolutionary Cuba lived up to these concepts of womanhood promoted by the government.

#### **Historical Background:**

Before the Cuban Revolution, during the regime of Fulgencio Batista, women's place was primarily in the home. There were little employment opportunities for women during the 1940s and 1950s and even fewer social programs dedicated to providing women with the tools they needed to get out of the home and into the workforce.<sup>109</sup>

After Fidel Castro came to power in 1960, the Revolution was famously touted as a "Revolution Within the Revolution" for women, meaning that full women's liberation was achieved as a result of the Revolution itself.<sup>110</sup> However the situation on the ground in Cuba during the 1960s-1980s was much more precarious than discussed in official state discourse outlets such as political poster campaigns. While many poster campaigns promoted a new role in society for women, it was clear that several large groups of the female population in Cuba were either left out of the discussion or actively targeted by the new revolutionary government. Cases

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<sup>109</sup> Salim Lamrani, and Translated by Larry R. Oberg. "Women in Cuba: The Emancipatory Revolution." *International Journal of Cuban Studies* 8, no. 1 (2016): 110.

<sup>110</sup> Michelle Chase, *Revolution within the Revolution*, 1.

of marginalization against women in Revolutionary Cuba can be broken down into two separate groups, sex workers and Afro-Cuban women which will be discussed later on in depth.

Part of defining the new identity of Cuban women was encouraging them to be active in their part in meeting production quotas for the state. As mentioned in chapter two, one of the ways this was done was through massive hiring of new laborers. Political poster campaigns portrayed women joining in the agricultural workforce alongside the men, while perhaps a small portion of women did become agricultural workers the majority became educators or healthcare workers.<sup>111</sup> This absorption of women into the workforce was a direct attempt at fulfilling a promise made to Cuban women in the early stages of the Revolution. Beginning in 1960, Fidel Castro opened up jobs to women that had previously been unthinkable for a woman to fill before the revolution.

However, in order to truly understand the impact of the Cuban Revolution on the lives of women, we must first discuss the quality of life for women in pre-revolutionary society, under the regime of Fulgencio Batista. The quality of and room for advancement in women's lives under the Batista regime was very much dictated by both economic and societal factors. In the 1950s it was mainly wealthy upper-class women who were able to participate in any significant form in society.<sup>112</sup> Before the Cuban Revolution only wealthy women were able to contribute to society because they could afford things like childcare and education.<sup>113</sup> The vast majority of lower class-Cuban women were confined to the home as mothers and homemakers.<sup>114</sup> Judy

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<sup>111</sup> Rebecca Herman, 2012. "An Army of Educators: Gender, Revolution and the Cuban Literacy Campaign of 1961." *Gender & History* 24 (1): 96.

<sup>112</sup> Judy Maloof, ed. "Women and the Cuban Revolution." In *Voices of Resistance: Testimonies of Cuban and Chilean Women*, 1st ed., (University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 27-28.

<sup>113</sup> Judy Maloof, ed. "Women and the Cuban Revolution", 27-28.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 27-28.

Maloof discusses this in her book entitled *Voices of Resistance: Testimonies of Cuban and Chilean Women*. She states that “in prerevolutionary Cuba, however, life for most women remained extremely difficult. For the majority of Cuban women who made up approximately 17 percent of the workforce there were limited employment opportunities.”<sup>115</sup> Other scholars such as Margaret Randall weigh in by emphasizing “seventy percent of these women worked as domestic servants, with accompanying long hours, oppressive conditions, lack of fringe benefits, and miserable pay.”<sup>116</sup>

When women were able to participate in the workforce it was largely done inside the home. For instance, Jean Stubbs tells the story of women who worked in the Tobacco industry in the 1940s and 1950s. According to Stubbs, when women participated in the agricultural tobacco industry in pre-revolutionary Cuba it was often as Tobacco strippers.<sup>117</sup> A Tobacco stripper is someone who strips the leaf from the plant. A significant portion of the employed female population in pre-revolutionary Cuba served as tobacco strippers as it was an occupation which could be done inside the home while maintaining a watchful eye on any children in the house.<sup>118</sup>

In today’s world the ability to work from home would seem like a benefit to most occupations, however this was primarily done out of necessity. Often times conditions were still very unsatisfactory. Being a tobacco stripper for the average pre-revolutionary Cuban woman involved long hours for miniscule pay.<sup>119</sup> However, these less than ideal working conditions

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 27-28.

<sup>116</sup> Margaret Randall, and Judy Janda. *Women in Cuba, Twenty Years Later*, (New York, NY: Smyrna Press, 1981), 25.

<sup>117</sup> Jean Stubbs, and Mary Turner. “Gender Constructs of Labour in Prerevolutionary Cuban Tobacco.” *Social & Economic Studies* 37, no. ½ (March 1988): 244-246.

<sup>118</sup> Jean Stubbs, and Mary Turner. “Gender Constructs of Labour in Prerevolutionary Cuban Tobacco,” 244-246.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 244-246.

were not unique to the agricultural industry but rather a reflection on the vast lack of economic infrastructure in place to benefit lower-class working Cubans in the pre-revolutionary era.

The other significant part of the female workforce during the Batista regime was made up of sex workers. In the 1940s and 1950s Cuba saw an intense rise in the number of women participating in sex work especially in urban centers including Havana. Often these prostitutes were trying to get business from wealthy U.S. businessmen who came to Havana to visit specifically for the abundance of casinos and sex workers in the city in the 40s and 50s.<sup>120</sup>

### **Creation of the FMC:**

In 1960, the lives of lower to middleclass Cuban women changed forever. With the military success of the Cuban Revolution by ousting Batista, came the opportunity to bring previously oppressed groups into the forefront of the Revolutionary coalition. One of the ways the Castro government did this was by creating the Federation of Cuban Women or FMC.<sup>121</sup>

The FMC was the primary organization fighting for womens rights in Cuba during the Revolutionary period and is still around to this day. In 1960 Fidel Castro appointed his sister in law Vilma Espín to lead the organization. Since its creation the organization has been incredibly popular and today there are over 4 million Cuban women registered as members of the organization.<sup>122</sup> The FMC's main purpose was to act as a liaison between the Cuban government

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<sup>120</sup> Judy Maloof, ed. "Women and the Cuban Revolution", 25.

<sup>121</sup> "Federación De Mujeres Cubanas." EcuRed. Accessed April 14, 2020. [https://www.ecured.cu/Federación\\_de\\_Mujeres\\_Cubanas](https://www.ecured.cu/Federación_de_Mujeres_Cubanas).

<sup>122</sup> "Federación De Mujeres Cubanas." EcuRed. Accessed April 14, 2020. [https://www.ecured.cu/Federación\\_de\\_Mujeres\\_Cubanas](https://www.ecured.cu/Federación_de_Mujeres_Cubanas).

and women in society, the organization focused on promoting the education of women and bringing women out of the home and into the workforce.<sup>123</sup>

The organization also made an attempt at involving women in the political process of fixing societal issues. For instance, Elayne Rapping in her journal entitled “Cuban Women” states “Every city block and rural area has its own Committee to Defend the Revolution (CDR) and Federation of Cuban Women (FMC). Both meet regularly to discuss the problems of their area.”<sup>124</sup> She continues “In an intricate and to us, unbelievably democratic and decentralized structure, decisions and discussions of important issues are communicated and amended upward and downward from the local block to the national communist party.”<sup>125</sup>

The FMC has been credited in fighting for many reforms directed at Cuban women. One excellent example is the strides women made in the field of education. In fact, Cuban women played a key role as educators during the literacy campaign of the 1960s in Cuba. Through preschool all the way to the collegiate level, women joined the revolutionary movement as teachers to educate the future generations to come. They were incredibly successful.<sup>126</sup> This campaign resulted in over 700,000 Cubans becoming literate in just twelve months, over half of whom were women. This 1961 campaign led to Cuba possessing one of the smallest illiteracy rates in the western hemisphere.<sup>127</sup> Literacy campaigns like the one in 1961 gave women the education needed to transform their lives. Until these campaigns’ women had largely remained uneducated and stagnant in their pre-revolutionary societal roles. By gaining an education,

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<sup>123</sup> “Federación De Mujeres Cubanas.” EcuRed. Accessed April 14, 2020.  
[https://www.ecured.cu/Federación\\_de\\_Mujeres\\_Cubanas](https://www.ecured.cu/Federación_de_Mujeres_Cubanas).

<sup>124</sup> Elayne Rapping, “Cuban Women.” *Off Our Backs* 10, no. 9 (1980): 7. Accessed April 3, 2020.

<sup>125</sup> Elayne Rapping, “Cuban Women.” 7.

<sup>126</sup> Rebecca Herman. 2012, “An Army of Educators: Gender, Revolution and the Cuban Literacy Campaign of 1961.” *Gender & History* 24 (1): 95.

<sup>127</sup> Rebecca Herman. 2012, “An Army of Educators.” 95.

employment opportunities opened up for women enabling them to play a more active role contributing to labor expectations of women in society.<sup>128</sup>

This vast success of the Cuban's literacy and education campaigns mostly led by women is significant because it is a distinct reversal of the prerevolutionary roles of women in Cuban society and of the Revolutionary Mother promoted through Cuban political posters as seen in chapter two. Rarely in political posters produced by Cuban organizations such as the ICAC or OSPAAAL do we see women portrayed as educators. Rather instead, women were often portrayed as working in the fields, being a mother, or participating in revolutionary life. This suggests two very important details. First, that while Cubans were incredibly proud of their literacy campaigns, it was not seen as a part of the newly created national identity like the military success of Castro's revolution was.<sup>129</sup> Second, the lack of iconography depicting women as educators suggests that the archetype of the Revolutionary Mother seen in chapter two is meant to be interpreted in a metaphorical sense rather than a literal depiction of a post-revolutionary woman in Cuban society.

Another significant reform enacted by the government focused on involving women in the workforce was the creation of nationalized child care centers giving women the ability to leave the home and enter the workforce without having to leave their children at home unsupervised.<sup>130</sup> This move was unprecedented in both Latin America and the Western Hemisphere. Before the Cuban Revolution, this type of social program was unheard of. Without

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<sup>128</sup> Rebecca Herman, 2012. "An Army of Educators", 95.

<sup>129</sup> K. Lynn Stoner, "Militant Heroines and the Consecration of the Patriarchal State: The Glorification of Loyalty, Combat, and National Suicide in the Making of Cuban National Identity." *Cuban Studies* 34, no. 1 (2003): 72.

<sup>130</sup> "Women and the Cuban Revolution: The Federation of Cuban Women." Cuba Platform. Accessed April 22, 2020. <https://cubaplatform.org/federation-cuban-women>.

childcare women were not able to leave the home because they were weighed down with the stress of raising children. When the Cuban government nationalized childcare in 1961 it allowed women to go to work confident that their children were taken care of during the day.

Moreover, the FMC helped secure the legalization of abortion in Cuba in 1965. This reform was part of a broader government wide focus on providing subsidized healthcare for the millions of Cubans on the island.<sup>131</sup> This attempt at providing healthcare to Cubans was incredibly successful and the Cuban healthcare system ended up training many healthcare workers from around the world to return to their home country and upgrade the healthcare systems there.<sup>132</sup> The decision to legalize abortion in Cuba was not only a healthcare victory for Cuban women but it was also a victory for the broader feminism movement in Cuba. As a result of the 1965 decision to legalize abortion in Cuba, women had autonomy over their own bodies including when making difficult healthcare decisions.

### **Unexpected Downsides to the FMC:**

It is undeniable the impact and influence the FMC has had on Cuban women's lives which is why it is significant to examine the logo the organization chose. Seen in Appendix 23 the logo of the FMC depicts a woman in a military style beret holding both a rifle and a small child, the epitome of the Revolutionary Mother. The choice to depict the woman holding both a rifle and a child emphasizes the state expected duality of the role of women in the revolutionary age. This logo was seen by millions of Cuban women every day reinforcing this quintessential

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<sup>131</sup> "Women and the Cuban Revolution: The Federation of Cuban Women." Cuba Platform. Accessed April 22, 2020. <https://cubaplatform.org/federation-cuban-women>.

<sup>132</sup> Sarah A Blue, "Cuban Medical Internationalism: Domestic and International Impacts." *Journal of Latin American Geography* 9, no. 1 (2010): 33.

new role of women in society. This image and the organization itself was meant to inspire women to take active roles in participating in revolutionary Cuban society.

The FMC spent considerable time and resources with pointed campaigns to get women into the workforce. However, it was not always in a positive manner. As mentioned above, women who did not conform to the state standard of what a socialist woman should act like were actively targeted by the organization. One of the ways this was done was by targeting both current and former sex workers by trying to “rehabilitate” them. Rachel Hynson wrote a provocative article discussing this contradiction stating, “during the first six years of the revolution, official discourse transitioned from viewing sex workers as victims to categorizing them as counterrevolutionaries.”<sup>133</sup> Hynson goes on to explain how this definition of what a sex worker was, became increasingly more fluid and ended up as a means of controlling women who did not conform to the societal sexuality norm. Hynson continues “Rather than seeking confirmation that women exchanged sex for money, reformers identified sex workers according to their attire, behavior, race, place of residence and sexual partners...the revolutionary campaign adopted a broad and flexible definition of *prostitute*. One that allowed the Cuban government to target the behavior of all women, not just those who identified as sex workers.”<sup>134</sup> This passage is significant for several reasons, first it serves as evidence that organizations such as the FMC were attempting to create a specific new image of how a woman should conduct herself in the new revolutionary society, an image that had no room for “counterrevolutionary” actions such as working as a prostitute or individuals exploring their own sexualities. If a woman

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<sup>133</sup> Rachel Hynson, ““Count, Capture, and Reeducate”: The Campaign to Rehabilitate Cuba's Female Sex Workers, 1959–1966.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 24, no. 1 (2015): 126.

<sup>134</sup> Rachel Hynson, ““Count, Capture, and Reeducate”, 126.



did not conform to state standards of sexuality norms, she could be actively targeted by the organizations meant to liberate women. Second, it reveals that while one of the main missions of the FMC was to include women in the workforce, not all sectors of the workforce were regarded in an equal manner. One of the first actions of Fidel Castro's appointed President in 1960, Manuel Urrutia closed both the casinos and brothels that had once served as the country's main reasons for drawing foreign money into the island. Hynson discusses this by saying "He sought to eliminate the vice associated with Cuba's past, but he neglected to account for the response of Havana's employees."<sup>135</sup>

Another important instance of marginalization against women in Cuba during the 60s can be seen in the lives of Afro-Cuban women. The newly created government, led by Fidel Castro, was very much attempting to create a new national identity of a post-racial and post-gender society. This resulted in claims and demonstrations against racism to be viewed as counter-revolutionary. This resulted in Castro and other top government officials dismissing claims of sexism and racism brought to their attention by Afro-Cuban activists.<sup>136</sup>

Castro and the Cuban government's focus on presenting a unified post-racial Cuba went so far as to censor artwork created by Afro-Cuban artists. This often-prevented Afro-Cuban artists from accurately portraying their experiences on the island. Sara Gomez, one of the few female directors at the National Cuban Film institute or ICAIC, fought against this censure. Gomez actively worked to produce films portraying blackness in post-revolutionary Cuba. Her radical defiance is significant because it came at a time when artistic organizations and film

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<sup>135</sup>Ibid., 131.

<sup>136</sup> Devyn Spence Benson, "Epilogue: A Revolution inside of the Revolution: Afro-Cuban Experiences after 1961." In *Antiracism in Cuba: The Unfinished Revolution*, . University of North Carolina Press, 2016. 233.

institute's official position was that blackness had ceased to exist after the Revolution took place.<sup>137</sup>

According to Haseenah Ebrahim the belief in post-racial unity in Cuban film originates from a very Marxian philosophy.<sup>138</sup> Well into the 1960s Cuba maintained the belief that the reasons for racism in the pre-revolutionary era was due to socio-economic class division.<sup>139</sup> As a result of the belief that racial issues in Cuba's past occurred as the result of socio-economic issues, the Cuban government believed these issues to be largely eradicated by the Revolution. The belief that Cuba's racial issues were a problem of the past led to the decision by the ICAIC, to only allow filmmakers to discuss racial issues as a problem of the past. As Ebrahim points out, this resulted in a significant number of films being produced that discussed slavery.<sup>140</sup> Gomez however was not content to let the story of Afro-Cuban life in Revolutionary Cuba go untold. Gomez insisted on creating films that depicted contemporary Afro-Cuban society. Devyn Spence Benson confirms this by stating "in doing so, Gomez built upon the work of previous Afro-Cuban activists and challenged notions of grateful, simplistic, revolutionary blackness seen in other aspects of popular culture while positioning black cultural practices as part of present-day Cuba, not the far-off past."<sup>141</sup>

Gomez is not alone in her work attempting to make the Afro-Cuban story mainstream in Cuba. Many of the problem's Afro-Cuban women faced during Gomez's career as a filmmaker

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>138</sup> Haseenah Ebrahim, "Sarita and the Revolution: Race and Cuban Cinema." *Revista Europea De Estudios Latinoamericanos Y Del Caribe / European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, no. 82 (2007): 107-18.

<sup>139</sup> Haseenah Ebrahim, "Sarita and the Revolution: Race and Cuban Cinema.", 107-18.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 107-18.

<sup>141</sup> Devyn Spence Benson, "Epilogue: A Revolution inside of the Revolution: Afro-Cuban Experiences after 1961.", 235.

are still prevalent in modern Cuban society. As the computer age came upon us Afro-Cuban activists branched out from artwork to other mediums of protesting, most importantly social media. Sandra Alvarez Ramirez, the founder of a blog entitled *Negracubana* serves as an example of how Afro-Cuban feminism activists have adapted to changing times in order to maintain a consistent message.<sup>142</sup> Ramirez's blog uses modern communication platforms to reach an international audience and bring pressure on the Cuban government to listen to Afro-Cuban activists from both the domestic and international spheres of influence.<sup>143</sup> Ramirez's blog also utilizes the advancements in technology for a much more grass-roots approach promoting Afro-Cuban feminism to individuals themselves, trying to create a societal shift to reject the sexism and racism Afro-Cuban women face on the island today rather than relying on the government for action.

Women like Gomez and Alvarez serve as living illustrations of how women in Cuba broke the metaphorical mold of their expected roles in Cuban society. From 1960 onward, Cuba had a very specific vision for how women should act in and contribute to society. While women's organizations such as the FMC created many opportunities and reforms for Cuban women during the Revolutionary Era, as time progressed it became increasingly clear that not all women possessed the same new opportunities and in fact some were actively targeted and repressed labeled counterrevolutionary by the very organizations meant to help them.

Historians debate why the FMC left so many holes in its support for Cuban Women. One reason in the forefront of the historiographical debate is the idea put forth by Johanna I. Moya Fabregas who argues that early on organizations like the FMC were still very much conceived in

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<sup>142</sup> Judith Sierra-Rivera. 2018. "Afro-Cuban Cyberfeminism: Love/Sexual Revolution in Sandra Álvarez Ramírez's Blogging." *Latin American Research Review* 53 (2): 332.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 332.

pre-revolutionary notions of womanhood and gender ideology.<sup>144</sup> This led to a large emphasis being placed on both participating in revolutionary activities like literacy campaigns, while still maintaining societal expectations of being a good wife, mother, and homemaker. If Fabregas is correct in her analysis, this accounts for the large emphasis of Cuban women being portrayed both as mothers and revolutionary participants in political posters created by the Castro regime.

The notions of womanhood that Fabregas alludes to in her paper are also a direct product of male gender norms and patriarchy in both pre and revolutionary Cuban society. One of these gender norms was called Machismo. Machismo can be traced in Spanish societies as far back as the colonial era.<sup>145</sup> Machismo has historically greatly influenced Cuban ideas of masculinity. Machismo manifests itself in ideas of Cuban masculinity through qualities such as Bravismo, over-confidence, and patriarchal gender roles in society often placing the woman as head of the house affairs while the man serves as the primary bread winner for the family. Patriarchal norms of how the genders interacted together in Cuba, such as Machismo, led to women being viewed as objects of beauty and in turn being objectified in society.<sup>146</sup>

Machismo was prevalent in Cuban society during the Revolution and was often reinforced through political posters and even popular culture such as the cinema. Emily J Kirk discusses how Machismo appeared in Cuban cinema and the significance of this in her article entitled “Setting the Agenda for Cuban Sexuality: The Role of Cuba’s Cenesex.”<sup>147</sup> According to Kirk, Machismo manifested in revolutionary-era Cuban cinema by reinforcing the concept of the

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<sup>144</sup> Johanna I. Moya Fábregas. “The Cuban Womans Revolutionary Experience: Patriarchal Culture and the States Gender Ideology, 1950–1976.” *Journal of Womens History* 22, no. 1 (2010): 61.

<sup>145</sup> Emily J Kirk, “Setting the Agenda for Cuban Sexuality: The Role of Cuba’s Cenesex.” *Canadian Journal of Latin American & Caribbean Studies (Canadian Association of Latin American & Caribbean Studies (CALACS))* 36, no. 72 (November 2011): 146.

<sup>146</sup> Kirk, “Setting the Agenda”, 147.

<sup>147</sup> Kirk, “Setting the Agenda”, 146.

“ideal” revolutionary.<sup>148</sup> The ideal revolutionary is seen in early-revolutionary Cuban cinema as a heterosexual man who embodied Cuban ideas of masculinity. As a result of men being consistently portrayed as heterosexual dominant figures, females in Cuban cinema were often mystified as objects of beauty and therefore women continued to be surrounded in a shroud of mystery as a result of their beauty. Due to the portrayal of men in Revolutionary Cuban cinema, old patriarchal gender roles influenced by machismo were not quick to dissipate on the island.

This objectification of women as a result of machismo made beauty an important part of women’s lives in Cuban society both before and during the Revolution. As a result, a woman’s beauty was seen as a correlation which determined her value as a wife and potential mother. During the Revolution the patriarchal influence of machismo maintained an emphasis on promoting women’s beauty as an aspect of motherhood, therefore during this era expectations of women maintaining their beauty as they joined the Revolutionary coalition became a key aspect of women’s “new” identity in Cuba.<sup>149</sup> By understanding how concepts of machismo and patriarchy have historically influenced gender roles in Cuba it becomes clear as to why both the government and society struggled to immediately accept women as full participants in the revolution.

### **Conclusion:**

As the Cuban Revolution progressed it became increasingly clear that the new government was trying to create a new masculine national identity for the island. Through the use of visual imagery and iconography of bearded revolutionaries, Cuba was rejecting the

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<sup>148</sup> Richard Basham, “Machismo.” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies* 1, no. 2, (1976): 127.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

feminized image that the United States and Fulgencio Batista had created in the 1940s. By celebrating the military success of Cuba's Revolution, the island was creating a national identity heavily influenced by both Machismo and the Patriarchy. This new national identity celebrated the Cuban Revolution in a way that heavily altered the historical memory of the event.

The abundances of male influences reveal telling evidence of how the patriarchy interpreted the role of women in the new society. This led to the key to women's 'liberation' being portrayed in the matriarchal role known as the Revolutionary Mother. This role, while disguised under the ruse of liberation was telling of how the Cuban state government valued women in society simply as tools of the revolution, rather than fighting for full women's equality. This idealized view of women seen in the Revolutionary Mother iconography created an unrealistic expectation for women on the island who did not conform to revolutionary standards of how women should dress and behave in public.

While the Castro government made strides in the way of creating opportunity for women to enter the workforce and join societal life in Cuba, his efforts did not reach all women. Women who were viewed as counter-revolutionary for wanting to profit off the shroud of mystery surrounding their sexuality, created by the government itself, were often actively targeted by the very organizations that were meant to be helping women achieve liberation. Women who were Afro-Cuban were also targeted by the Castro regime in ways that delegitimized their experiences on the island, causing their stories to go untold in official public discourse on gender roles in society.

The study of Cuba and gender has been well covered in the past by academics, however, there is still much more to be researched in how Cuba projected gender norms through visual imagery such as political posters. My hope for this thesis is that it begins a conversation among

scholars and that more academics begin to look into how governments promote gender roles in political posters. This topic has the potential to reveal significant amounts of data surrounding what socialist states make a priority in regard to both defining gender roles and creating national identities.

*Appendices*

## Appendix 1.



“Save Me From My Friends.” Cartoon. In *Puck Magazine*. September ed. Series 1898.



## Appendix 2.

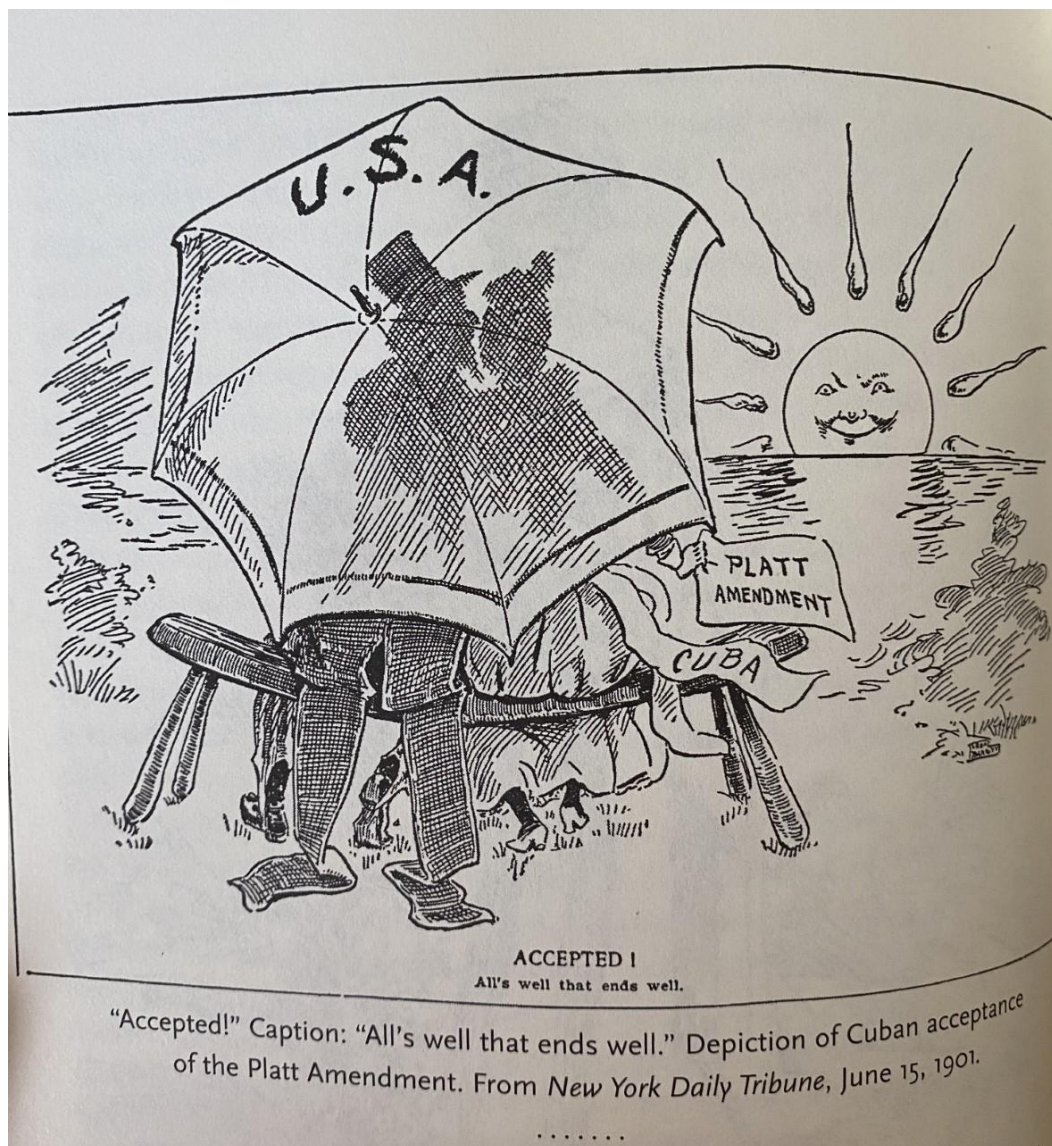


Photo taken from: Louis A. Pérez, Jr. *Cuba: between Reform and Revolution*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015, 237.

## Appendix 3



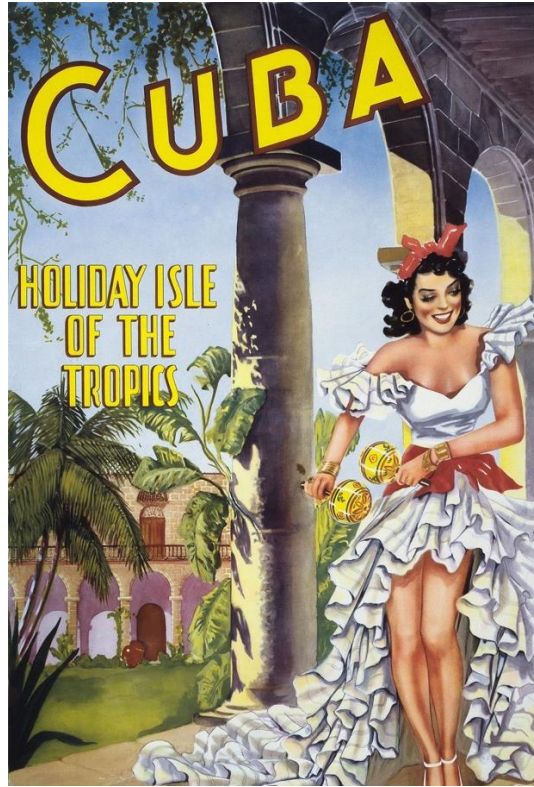
Arias, Constantino. *The Ugly American*. 1950. Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective, The Ohio State University, Columbus.

## Appendix 4



*Cuba Holiday isle of the tropics* // Seyler. Cuba, [Havana: Cuban Tourist Commission, 194]  
Poster. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2010647162/>.

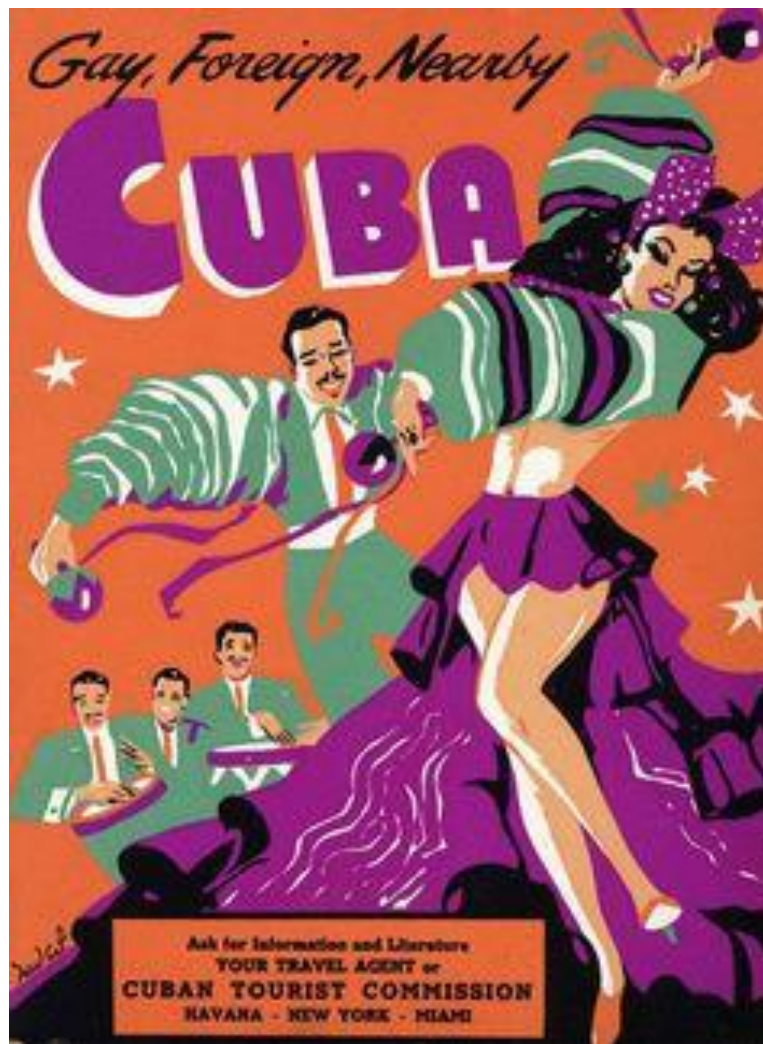
## Appendix 5



*Cuba, Holiday Isle of the Tropics.* Cuba, 1949. [Havana: Cuban Tourist Commission] Poster  
<https://www.loc.gov/item/2005691179/>.



## Appendix 6



*Gay, Foreign, Nearby, Cuba*. 1949. [Havana: Cuban Tourist Commission] Poster  
<https://www.loc.gov/item/2005691179/>.

## Appendix 7



[n.d.]. Mural: Patria o Muerte, Venceremos. Mural painting.  
[https://library.artstor.org/asset/ARTSTOR\\_103\\_41822003739859](https://library.artstor.org/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822003739859).

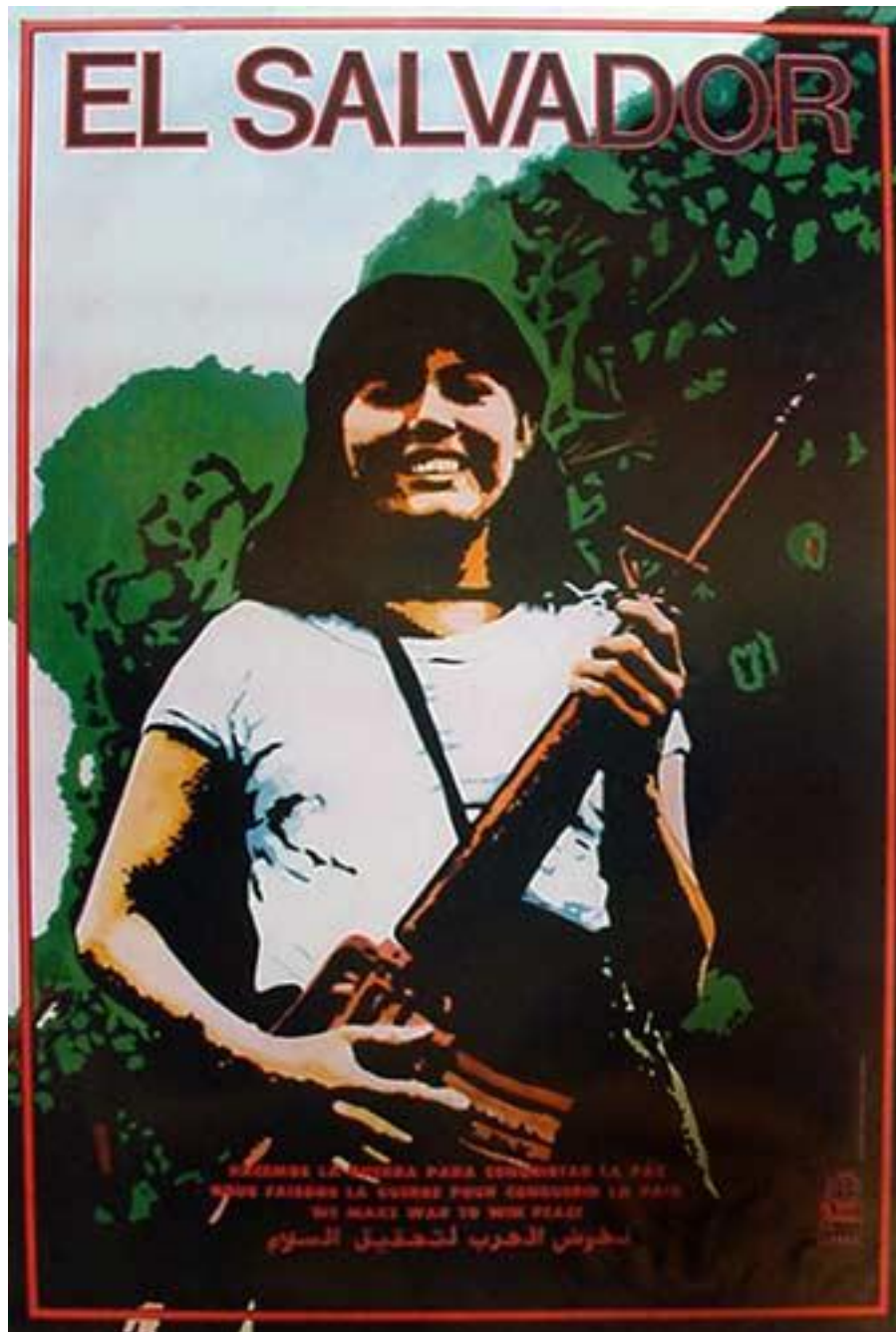


## Appendix 8



[n.d.]. Mural: Hasta la Victoria, Siempre Che. Mural painting.  
[https://library.artstor.org/asset/ARTSTOR\\_103\\_41822003739883](https://library.artstor.org/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822003739883).

## Appendix 9



Rafael Enriquez, *El Salvador: We make War to Win Peace*. 1984. OSPAAAL.

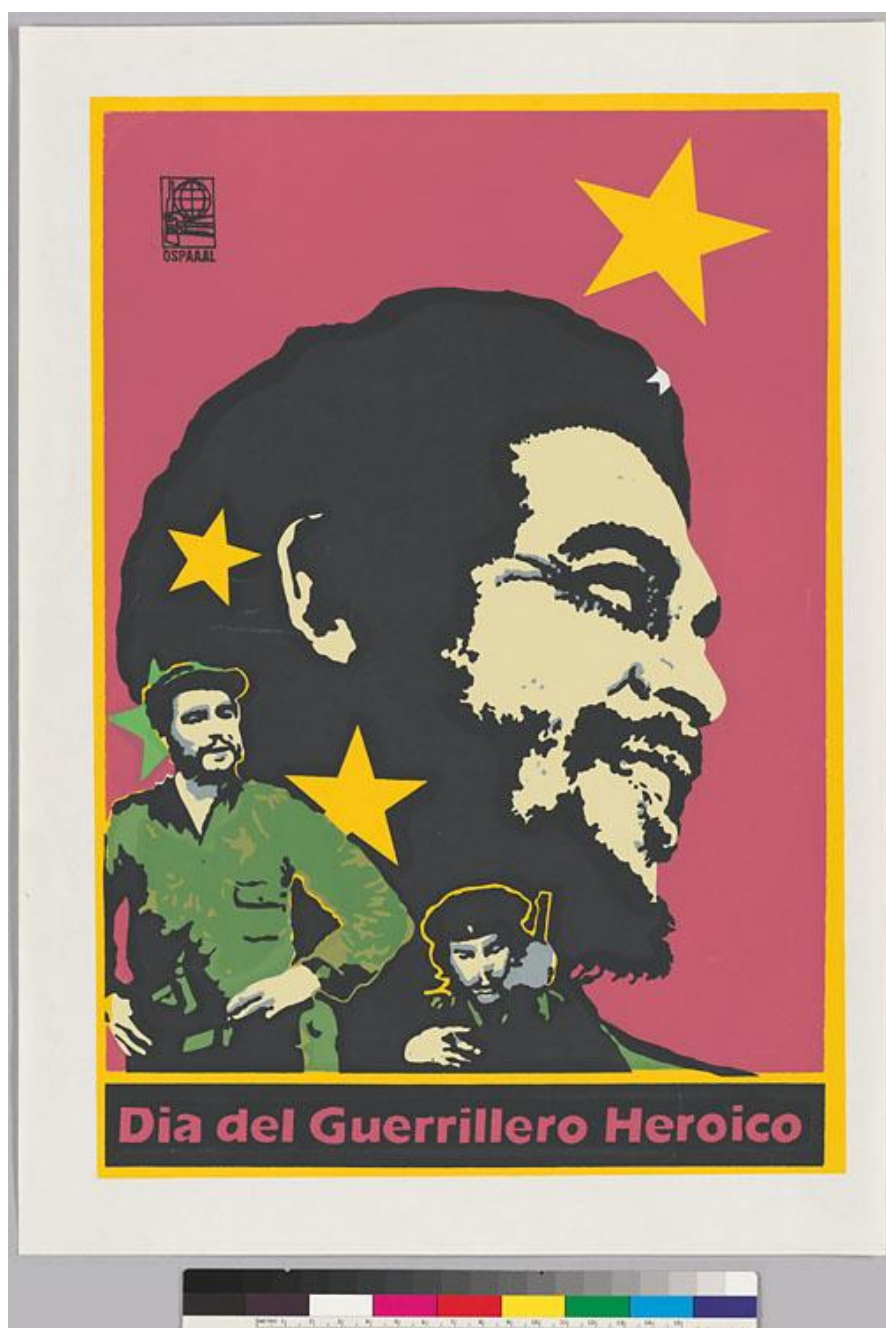


## Appendix 10



Rafael Morante, *Solidarity With Angola*. 1973. OSPAAAL.

## Appendix 11



Rafael Enriquez, *Dia del Guerrillero Heroico*. n.d. OSPAAAL.

## Appendix 12



Rafael Morante, *Giron* . 1981 OSPAAAL.

## Appendix 13



*Cuban Stamp highlighting a campaign to decrease infant mortality rates.  
(Stampworld.com)*

## Appendix 14



A propaganda poster promoting the incorporation of women into the work force. Cuba, Comisión de Orientación Revolucionaria, 1971. (Davidson and Craven)

## Appendix 15





## Appendix 16



A poster celebrating International Women's Day. Heriberto Echeverria, *International Women's Day*, EP, 1971. (Cushing)

## Appendix 17



A poster created by the FMC celebrating the second Congress of Women.  
"Cuban Socialist Posters from the 1970s"  
Exhibition. Accessed April 13, 2019.  
<http://www.nyartbeat.com/event/2017/6CFA>



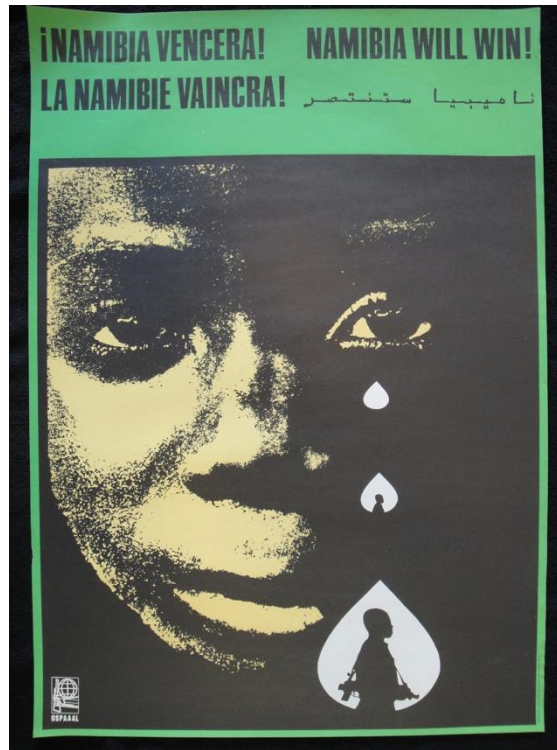
## Appendix 18



An OSPAAAL Poster depicting African  
Revolutionary Mothers.

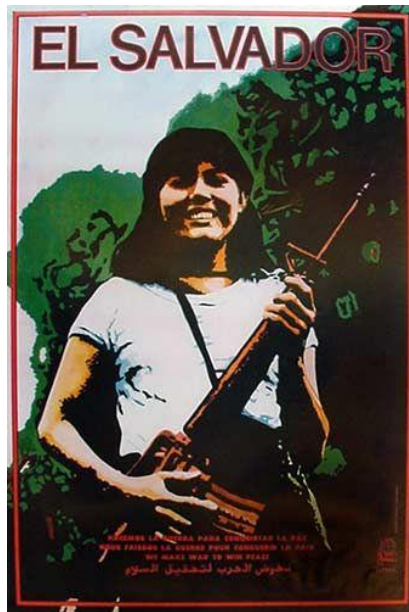
[www.OSPAAAL.com](http://www.OSPAAAL.com)

## Appendix 19



An OSPAAAL Poster depicting a  
Namibian Woman.  
[www. OSPAAAL.com](http://www.OSPAAAL.com)

## Appendix 20



OSPAAAL Poster depicting a woman from El Salvador.  
 Rafael Enriquez Vega, *El Salvador Hacemos la Guerra  
 para conquistar la paz*, 1984.  
 (Davidson and Craven)

## Appendix 21



A poster showing revolutionaries in Puerto Rico.  
 Jane Norling, *Day of World Solidarity with the  
 Struggle of the People of Puerto Rico*, 1973.  
 (Cushing)

## Appendix 22



A Nicaraguan poster showing how the Cuban image of the Revolutionary Mother has become a transnational phenomenon. Asociacion de Mujeres Nicaragüenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza, *Nicaragua Must Survive*, 1980s. (Davidson and Craven)

## Appendix 23



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