Introduction

Socialist Morality, the Nuclear Family, and State Labor

In October 1961, six months after the Cuban Revolution had adopted socialism and defeated the US-supported invasion at the Bay of Pigs (Playa Girón), rumors were circulating amongst Cuban families that the new government was planning to terminate parental rights. On their fifth birthdays, one rumor went, children would be placed in communist indoctrination centers – meaning the government would have the authority to guide the nurturance and education of all Cuban youth.[1] In the face of predictable parental unease, Minister of Justice Alfredo Yabur Maluf – who was then overseeing the campaign to register undocumented children – gave an interview to the magazine *Verde Olivo* in which he refuted these rumors. Not only did the government have no plans to sever ties between parents and children, he insisted, but the state had in fact the opposite goal: "Unlike the lifestyle imposed by the capitalist regimes," Yabur maintained, "the socialist State and the popular democracies place real emphasis on strengthening the family."[2] Nevertheless, thousands of Cuban parents remained alarmed at what seems to have been an unfounded suggestion that the government would deny them custodial rights over their children. Over a two-year span from 1960 to 1962, in a clandestine mass exodus known as Operation Peter Pan, more than

[1] Anita Casavantes Bradford, *The Revolution Is for the Children: The Politics of Childhood in Havana and Miami, 1959–1962* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 109.

[2] Quoted in "La patria potestad: Dos opiniones y un comentario," *Verde Olivo*, October 1, 1961, 27. All translations are my own unless otherwise specified.

14,000 sons and daughters ages 6 to 18 would be sent by their parents to perceived safety in the United States.[3]

Operation Peter Pan and the official and civilian discourse around parental rights in early revolutionary Cuba exemplify a much larger discursive battle at work through the first decade of the Cuban Revolution, one that has largely been ignored by both official and scholarly history. Contrary to the view – long advanced by the Cuban government and historians of the Revolution – that the revolutionary state achieved social change from above with limited repression or duress; I demonstrate that the Cuban government, beginning in 1959, engaged in a program of intense social engineering through which it implemented several projects to (re)define the nuclear family and position this model as an apparatus through which citizens could be organized to serve the state. Among those reforms were campaigns to control women's biological reproduction, promote marriage, end prostitution, and compel men into state-sanctioned employment. But with the exception of the campaign against female prostitution, the Revolution's grand narrative has omitted reference to these projects. Subsequent government silence about these early laws and policies is likely a response to the long-term *ineffectiveness* of the programs themselves as well as the resistance of ordinary Cubans to the norms advocated by the Revolution. When we uncover the layers of this historical palimpsest, we can see both the revolutionary government's early and steady push toward authoritarianism *and* its persistent consolidation of a moral paradigm premised on a glorified – and curiously Eurocentric – model of the nuclear family.[4] I refer to this ideal, which coalesced in late 1961, as the New Family: a familial unit led by a male head of household who worked outside the home in a state-approved job and resided with his legal wife who deferred to the state control over the regulation of her reproduction *and* any (paid or unpaid) labor outside the home.

[3] For more on Operation Peter Pan, see Casavantes Bradford, *For the Children,* 92–147; Yvonne M. Conde, *Operation Pedro Pan: The Untold Exodus of 14,048 Cuban Children* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

[4] Building on the pioneering work of Lois M. Smith and Alfred Padula, historians have recently begun to explore the importance of family to both the Revolution's consolidation of power and counterrevolutionaries' politics of resistance in the early 1960s. See, for example, Casavantes Bradford, *For the Children*, 92–120; Michelle Chase, *Revolution within the Revolution: Women and Gender Politics in Cuba, 1952–1962* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 170–208; Lois M. Smith and Alfred Padula, *Sex and Revolution: Women in Socialist Cuba* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 144–167.

Indeed, the ideal of the New Family and its associated liberal – rather than radical – values are on display throughout the rest of Minister Yabur's comments to *Verde Olivo*. Yabur defined these values *in opposition to* those found under capitalism; he classified strong Cuban, socialist families and selves as superior to those found under capitalism on the grounds that socialist families were committed to legal marriage and motherhood rather than indulging in non-marital partnerships and contraception: "While extramarital unions abound in capitalist societies," he opined, "marriage is encouraged in socialist society. While anticonceptive methods are usually employed in capitalist society, even to the point of criminality, motherhood is encouraged in socialist society." Yabur added that, under socialism, parents were more socially responsible than their capitalist counterparts, obligated by the government to assume responsibility for the children who "wandered the streets fueling vice and delinquency."[5] Yabur's remarks to *Verde Olivo* stand as evidence of revolutionary leadership's liberal view – pervasive at the time but little recognized by scholars to date – that all Cubans should be absorbed into a nuclear family, for their own good and to advance the goals of the Revolution. Leadership did not always identify the consolidation of the Cuban family as the explicit goal of the reforms, but as anthropologist Elise Andaya has observed, it nonetheless "upheld the heterosexual, nuclear, and legally sanctioned family – associated with the white bourgeoisie – as the ideal socialist family form and the basis for the construction of the new national society."[6] Following historian Michelle Chase's chapter on the anxieties engendered by the Revolution's early efforts to reform the family, this book argues that undergirding many of the Revolution's policies in the 1960s and beyond was a belief in the essentialized, two-parent family – a structure that leadership viewed as natural, both before and after Prime Minister Fidel Castro announced the new "socialist character" of the Revolution.[7] The construction and support of this family

[5] Quoted in "La patria potestad: Dos opiniones y un comentario," *Verde Olivo*, October 1, 1961, 27.

[6] Elise Andaya, *Conceiving Cuba: Reproduction, Women, and the State in the Post-Soviet Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 34.

[7] Since the 1970s, scholars have debated whether the family was prioritized or ignored by the Cuban revolutionary government, but their conversation has primarily centered on the 1970s and the 1975 Family Code. For a discussion of the family as an institution in socialist countries, with an emphasis on the policies of 1970s Cuba, see Jafari S. Allen, *¡Venceremos? The Erotics of Black Self-Making in Cuba* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 100–128; Laura Gotkowitz and Richard Turits, "Socialist Morality: Sexual

form, while varying in definition over time, transcended changing politics and ideology and served as one of the foundations on which the state built its evolving conception of revolutionary morality.[8]

The Revolution's celebration of the monogamous, nuclear family was no mere continuation of a past, republican project. While revolutionary policies were certainly mimetic of those overseen by prior governments, the new projects were far greater in scope than their predecessors. And, significantly, they occurred at precisely the moment when social and economic reforms began to blur the boundaries between public and private life. Economic and social changes did normalize *some* new forms of family and labor (e.g., long-distance relationships when laboring in service to the state and women's increased mobilization outside the home), but the Revolution implemented other policies that – often unconsciously – reinforced the type of family long essentialized by white elites. When answering the question of who was permitted to be a citizen, revolutionary authorities relied on traditional notions of masculinity and femininity and demonstrated that citizenship was to be defined by Eurocentric standards of family and labor.

The patriarchal family formalized by law and lauded by white elites was *not* reflective of the family structures that emerged out of Africa and that people of African descent often practiced in the African diaspora, including Cuba, where prohibitive marriage policies and financial impediments also disincentivized poor Hispanic whites from formalizing nuclear family structures. Indeed, kinship or "what man *does* with these basic facts of life – mating, gestation, parenthood, socialization, siblingship,

Preference, Family, and State Intervention in Cuba," *Socialism and Democracy* 6 (Spring/Summer 1988): 7–29; Carrie Hamilton, *Sexual Revolutions in Cuba: Passion, Politics, and Memory* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 1–50; Maxine Molyneux, "Socialist Societies Old and New: Progress towards Women's Emancipation?" *Feminist Review* 8 (Summer 1981): 1–34; Virginia Olesen, "Context and Posture: Notes on Socio-Cultural Aspects of Women's Roles and Family Policy in Contemporary Cuba," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 33, no. 3 (August 1971): 552–553; Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution,* 144–167.

[8] Some scholars of Cuba have challenged the persistent notion that gender politics completely transformed after 1958 and have asserted that – rather than experiencing a complete rupture – some patriarchal gender norms and sexual practices continued well into the revolutionary period. See, for example, Lorraine Bayard de Volo, *Women and the Cuban Insurrection: How Gender Shaped Castro's Victory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 235–245; Nadine T. Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance: Interracial Couples in Contemporary Cuba* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010); Hamilton, *Sexual Revolutions in Cuba*; Johanna I. Moya-Fábregas, "The Cuban Woman's Revolutionary Experience: Patriarchal Culture and the State's Gender Ideology, 1950–1976," *Journal of Women's History* 22, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 61–84.

etc." – resisted uniformity within this colony-turned-Republic.[9] Not only did Afro-Cubans establish familial ties driven by the traumas of slavery (e.g., ritual kinship between erstwhile shipmates), so too did they reproduce families reminiscent of the predominantly West African kinship networks from which they were forcibly removed.[10] To take an example, within the Yoruba family, power has not historically derived from the hierarchy of gender but from the hierarchy of age, and a man has not been the default head of household.[11] At the same time, the strength of African familial institutions has not inevitably correlated with the permanence of marriage. Indeed, throughout precolonial (and colonial) Africa, particularly in sub-Saharan regions, it was common for couples to practice polygyny and for family members to live with extended family in households that could include cousins, in-laws, and grandparents.[12] Because of this expansiveness of family ties, the end of a marriage through death or divorce did not always threaten the economic or social stability of the family unit, as it did in European countries. While we should not imply direct causality between African and diasporic cultural practices, we see related family forms and practices in Cuba, where female-headed, extended-family households predominated in black and *mulato* (of mixed black and white ancestry) communities in the form of consensual unions, particularly by the nineteenth century.[13] At the same time, poor whites also commonly participated in extra-legal unions, as the legalization of

[9] Robin Fox, *Kinship and Marriage: An Anthropological Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 30. Italics in the original. See also Lewis Henry Morgan, *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

[10] Manuel Barcia, *West African Warfare in Bahia and Cuba: Soldier Slaves in the Atlantic World, 1807–1844* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 66.

[11] Olanrewaju Abdul Shitta-Bey, "The Family as Basis of Social Order: Insights from the Yoruba Traditional Culture," *International Letters of Social and Humanities Sciences* 23 (March 2014): 82.

[12] Emily Burrill, *States of Marriage: Gender, Justice, and Rights in Colonial Mali* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2015), 32, 88; Hanan G. Jacoby, "The Economics of Polygyny in Sub-Saharan Africa: Female Productivity and the Demand for Wives in Côte d'Ivoire," *Journal of Political Economy* 103, no. 5 (1995): 938–971; Emily Lynn Osborn, *Our New Husbands Are Here: Households, Gender, and Politics in a West African State from the Slave Trade to Colonial Rule* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011), 5.

[13] Alejandro de la Fuente, "Race and Inequality in Cuba, 1899–1981," *Journal of Contemporary History* 30 (1995): 144–147; Verena Martínez-Alier, *Marriage, Class, and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba: A Study of Racial Attitudes and Sexual Values in a Slave Society* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 124–130; Karen Y. Morrison, *Cuba's Racial Crucible: The Sexual Economy of Social Identities, 1750–2000* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 89–93; Helen Safa, "The Matrifocal Family and

marriage was costly, and the property and inheritance rights guaranteed through legal marriage meant little to those without land, regardless of their racial or ethnic identity.[14] While restrictive marriage policies during the nineteenth century contributed to the legal marginalization of blacks and *mulatos*, the promotion of formal marriage in the republican and revolutionary eras continued the advancement of European patriarchal conceptions of respectability and gender, for, in the words of historian Joanna Swanger, "if women entered the wage-labor force, it meant that they were not feminine enough to be provided for and that their male relatives were not masculine enough to provide."[15]

As demonstrated in subsequent chapters, state claims to the family – specifically of women's labor and who could benefit from it – took several forms in the early years of the Revolution, including state projects to: (a) control women's biological reproduction – which I use in reference to any practice that promoted, prevented, sustained, or ended pregnancy – by bringing contraceptives, abortion, and childbirth under the purview of state physicians (Chapter 1); (b) capture women's labor within nuclear family households by pushing couples to formalize monogamous partnerships, register their children, and live together as two-parent families under one roof (Chapter 2); (c) control women's sexual labor,- specifically by preventing women from achieving economic autonomy via prostitution (Chapter 3); and (d) seize the profits of women's labor for the state (via their male partners) – rather than permitting men to use women's wages as a substitute for their own earnings (Chapter 4).

EARLY STATE FORMATION: RESTRICTING CITIZENSHIP AND CLAIMING LABOR

Yabur's October 1961 comments to *Verde Olivo* came nearly three years after the 26th of July Movement (M-26-7), a rebel group led by Fidel Castro, had consolidated its power and gained legitimacy after years of protests followed by civil war. After the M-26-7's failed attack on the Moncada military barracks in 1953 until the success of the Revolution in 1959, thousands of disaffected women and men joined one of three

Patriarchal Ideology in Cuba and the Caribbean," *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 10, no. 2 (2005): 322.

[14] Safa, "The Matrifocal Family," 322.

[15] Morrison, *Cuba's Racial Crucible*, 89–94; Joanna Swanger, *Rebel Lands of Cuba: The Campesino Struggles of Oriente and Escambray, 1934–1974* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), xxi.

primary rebel groups and fought to overthrow Fulgencio Batista, who had reassumed power through a military coup in 1952. Batista's government was itself an outgrowth of the instability that had followed the US occupation of Cuba (1898–1902) and subsequent US interventions, which had cemented alliances between US governments and Cuban politicians, to the dismay of Cuban citizens committed to political sovereignty. Indeed, decades of instability and corruption under the Republic (1902–1958), Batista's suspension of the 1940 Constitution, and worsening financial instability in the 1950s had left many Cubans desiring a government willing to enact social and economic change.[16] However, it was not inevitable that the M-26-7 assume Batista's discarded mantle of leadership. In 1959, Fidel relied on discursive strategies to condemn claims to authority made by the Revolutionary Directorate, a student-led rebel group that had also fought against Batista; and Fidel mobilized military force to combat counterrevolutionaries, including former members of the Revolutionary Directorate, who waged war against the new government until 1965.[17]

Although the M-26-7 coalesced around vaguely defined ideals of social justice and economic sovereignty – and was driven by a hope of securing national redemption – the new revolutionary government was in its early years distinguished most by "transitory political forms" and a lack of institutionalized government structure, which permitted adaptability *and* growing bureaucratization.[18] Political scientist James Malloy has maintained that there is "little evidence" that the M-26-7 began the movement with "a plan for the future other than a firm commitment to overhaul Cuban society drastically and to eliminate the abuses of the past."[19] For example, feminist scholar Nicola Murray writes that "the Rebels came to power without any clear policies aimed at changing the position of women."[20]

[16] Louis A. Pérez Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 288–303; Julia E. Sweig, *Inside the Cuban Revolution: Fidel Castro and the Urban Underground* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 1–11.

[17] Carollee Bengelsdorf, *The Problem of Democracy in Cuba: Between Vision and Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 5; Lillian Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959–1971* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 182–183.

[18] Bengelsdorf, *The Problem of Democracy*, 67.

[19] James Malloy, "Generation of Political Support and Allocation of Costs," in *Revolutionary Change in Cuba*, ed. Carmelo Mesa-Lago (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971), 30.

[20] Nicola Murray, "Socialism and Feminism: Women and the Cuban Revolution, Part I," *Feminist Review* 2 (1979): 63.

"But if this ambiguity was a cause of potential weakness," argues historian Louis A. Pérez Jr., "it was also the source of actual strength, for it permitted improvisation in response to rapidly changing circumstances."[21] The M-26-7 was not hindered by the absence of a formalized state structure, and it authorized an estimated 1,500 laws during its first nine months in power, including reforms to the educational, agricultural, and health care sectors.[22] When putting these goals into practice, revolutionary leadership sought not just to interrupt the country's reliance on the United States but also to curtail disparities between rural and urban economies and therefore bypass the exploitation of peasants that had occurred under industrialization in both socialist and capitalist countries. Minister of Defense Raúl Castro later argued that these old socio-economic conditions prevented leadership from implementing new governing institutions, including avenues for formal democratic participation, as the new structures would collapse in the face of continued class struggle.[23] For their part, the many citizens who rallied behind the M-26-7 willingly abandoned their rights to electoral democracy, a relinquishment believed necessary for Cubans to secure free health care, education for all, and basic commodities.[24] Of course, this renunciation of rights also left room for leadership to consolidate a startling level of control over Cubans' bodies and lives within a matter of months. The success of the M-26-7, and guerrilla commander Ernesto (Che) Guevera's call to overthrow imperialism and transform society worldwide, captured the imagination of leftists around the world who saw Cuba as a model for anti-imperial, anti-colonial resistance. But the hagiographic narrative of Revolution did not always cohere with the coercive policies advanced by the new Cuban government and the experiences and counter-narratives of ordinary citizens.

By the end of 1959, it was clear that – whatever political goals the new government may espouse – there would be little space for competing agendas. Throughout 1960 and into 1961, revolutionary leadership and its supporters advanced a series of increasingly radical policies, establishing programs that went beyond promoting social and political values to the reification of a new moral system. As historian Anita Casavantes Bradford has observed, "The Revolution was not only a political and social process but an exclusive moral paradigm."[25] In the process of consolidating power, the government responded to threats both on and off the island. These

[21] Pérez, *Between Reform and Revolution*, 314.
[22] Ibid., 319–321.
[23] Bengelsdorf, *The Problem of Democracy*, 71.
[24] Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 9.
[25] Casavantes Bradford, *For the Children*, 64–65, 90.

included protests by urban women against food scarcity and price gouging, unsympathetic rulings by members of the judiciary, and resistance from anti-communists and counterrevolutionaries at home and abroad. Counterrevolutionaries and foreign stakeholders alike opposed the nationalization of private land and investments.[26] The former staged acts of sabotage and in Cuba between 1959 and 1965, while the US government leveled sanctions against the country – including the beginning of the trade embargo (1960) and the start of travel restrictions (1961).[27] In April 1961, following the United States' failed attack on the Bay of Pigs and Fidel's official adoption of socialism, it was clear that Cubans' good standing with the government was premised on showing support for the Revolution. By this time, "the constant, direct, nonvoting participation of the people in government programs" and events became the sole political process through which citizens could demonstrate allegiance to the Revolution.[28] Conversely, the absence of active engagement in these mass mobilizations began to be read as opposition to the new government.

To compound matters, an increasing number of once-banal crimes were now reclassified by the state as *political* crimes. Offenses ranging from the mismanagement of public funds, to arson against agriculture, to attacks with bombs were all categorized as counterrevolutionary offences by late 1961 – and perpetrators could be subject to the death penalty.[29] In the early months of the Revolution, the government had asserted its right to try and execute without due process the security officers who had worked under Batista; but before long, it began to increasingly employ coercion, surveillance, and repression against *all* Cubans.[30] Repressive

[26] Claes Brundenius, *Revolutionary Cuba: The Challenge of Economic Growth with Equity* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), 44; Chase, *Revolution within the Revolution*, 135–169; Swanger, *Rebel Lands of Cuba,* 215–225.

[27] Lars Schoultz, *The Infernal Little Cuban Republic: The United States and the Cuban Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 200, 203.

[28] Benigno E. Aguirre, "The Conventionalization of Collective Behavior," in *Cuban Communism, 1959–2003,* 11th ed., eds. Irving Louis Horowitz and Jaime Suchlicki (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 242. See also Richard Fagen, *The Transformation of Political Culture in Cuba* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1969), 7; Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 169.

[29] Adèle G. van der Plas, *Revolution and Criminal Justice: The Cuban Experiment, 1959–1983*, trans. Peter Mason (Amsterdam: CEDLA, 1987), 20–24. Of course, the category of "counterrevolutionary" was a broad one, and Jorge Domínguez writes that the "government had full discretion to define what was 'counterrevolutionary.'" Domínguez, *Cuba: Order and Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 251.

[30] Michelle Chase, "The Trials: Violence and Justice in the Aftermath of the Cuban Revolution," in *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during*

measures intensified just before the Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961 and the foundation of the Ministry of the Interior (MININT) just two months later.[31] I argue that by the second half of 1961, individuals' revolutionary citizenship was measured by two unforgiving metrics – productivity and economic utility – within an openly defined socialist system.

The new government's increased scrutiny of individual labor practices, which attended its formal espousal of socialism, corresponded with an economic downturn in 1962 that gave rise to a new commitment to economic production over consumption. According to revolutionary leadership, the shift in focus from consumption to production necessitated a new *conciencia* among the people – an unselfish adherence to the values and expectations of the Revolution. This *conciencia* was exemplified in the person of the New Man, a paragon of socialist values whose lack of interest in personal gain and commitment to the good of society would be mobilized in the rapid construction of communism.[32] Of course, the gendering of the Revolution's new citizen as masculine was no accident, as it manifested the government's presumption that men were the standard for citizenship; this assumption, as we will see, limited revolutionary leadership's ability to effect radical social change. The new *conciencia* took on ever greater importance when food shortages in urban areas began to threaten the government's earlier promise of prosperity for all, prompting leaders to advance new visions of virtue through austerity.[33] As discussed in subsequent chapters, two measures introduced in 1962 – food rationing and labor cards – provided concrete opportunities for citizens to demonstrate their *conciencia* and for the government to demand proof of a fixed home address and formal employment. Ration cards (*libretas*), first issued in March 1962, entitled Cubans to basic food and household items at subsidized prices; meanwhile, the introduction of mandatory labor cards in July of the same year ostensibly ensured that Cubans could retire on time and with the proper pension.[34] And although

Latin America's Cold War, eds. Greg Grandin and Gilbert M. Joseph (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 163–198.

[31] Pedro Marqués de Armas, *Ciencia y poder en Cuba: Racismo, homophobia, nacion, 1790–1970* (Madrid: Editorial Verbum, 2014), 172; Abel Sierra Madero, "'El trabajo os hará hombres': Masculinización nacional, trabajo forzado y control social en Cuba durante los años sesenta," *Cuban Studies* 44 (2016): 314.

[32] Julie Marie Bunck, *Fidel Castro and the Quest for a Revolutionary Culture in Cuba* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 4.

[33] Chase, *Revolution within the Revolution,* 135–169.

[34] "Carnet del trabajador," *Revolución*, July 18, 1962, 1, 4; *Gaceta Oficial de la República de Cuba*, March 13, 1962, 3124–3125.