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Carlos Puebla and the People's History of the Cuban Revolution (1956-1980)

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**CARLOS PUEBLA AND THE PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE CUBAN
REVOLUTION**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The Department of History

by
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Abstract

The Cuban Revolution was one of the most important events in 20th century Latin American history. The unlikely success of revolutionary heroes such as Fidel Castro and Ernesto “Che” Guevara inspired not only similar movements throughout the region, but an entire generation of artists and musicians. One such artist was Cuban singer-songwriter Carlos Puebla. A long-time critic of Batista and his corrupt administration, Puebla set to music the ideals that the Revolution sought to build a new Cuba upon. In a country which most of the population was illiterate until 1961, the music of artists such as Puebla served as an invaluable vehicle for these new ideas. In addition, Puebla’s work served as a form of “people’s narration” of the Revolution, as the words and deeds of revolutionary heroes were set to music and lyrics. This paper seeks to place the music of Puebla as an important “document” within Cuban historiography, as it focuses on people’s feeling and thoughts, rather than cold, unbiased reporting from a newspaper.

Introduction:
Setting the Myth to Music

New Years' Day of 1959 was perhaps one of the most memorable New Years' in the lives of many Cubans. On the night before, strongman Fulgencio Batista got on a plane and fled to the Dominican Republic, where he sought refuge under the wing of another notorious Caribbean dictator, Rafael Trujillo. The Cuban Revolution, contrary to popular opinion in the West, was not initially a socialist revolution in terms of its ideological discourse. Fidel Castro, in his various speeches leading up to his famous voyage on the *Granma*, recalled the rhetoric of the heroes of the long struggle for Cuban independence from Spain, most notably the rhetoric of Cuba's national hero: poet and general José Martí. The end of Batista's dictatorship resulted, among many things, in a surge of inspiration for many Cuban composers, who wrote music extolling the values of the revolutionary movement and celebrating the end of the Batista government. And observing it all was a Cuban singer/songwriter named Carlos Puebla (1917-1980).

The triumph of the Revolution in 1959 inspired what is arguably one of Puebla's most popular tunes: "Y en eso llegó Fidel" ("And then Fidel arrived"), first sung in January 3rd, 1959.¹ In it, Puebla describes the corruption and injustice of the Batista regime. It is this song that perhaps best establishes Puebla's role as the "singer of the Revolution". This piece is

¹ Agenor Martí, "Cara a cara con Carlos Puebla." *Revista Cuba Internacional*, July: 58-60. Accessed 2017. 1982, p. 60

written as a *guaracha*, a genre that has its origins in the 19th century. According to Cuban music scholar Rafael Lam, the *guaracha* was:

from the beginning, the voice of the festive and satirical spirit of the people. It was linked with a *criollo*² catharsis, and also in the dissemination of nationalist ideas. The people used them to criticize the colonial governors in a comical tone.³

Puebla's choice of using the *guaracha* style can be therefore considered as a deliberate one, as it calls upon the historical essence and long tradition of this genre. The first stanza describes life in Cuba during the Batista regime, describing it as a corrupt one, more preoccupied with the material gain of Batista and his inner circle than with the welfare of the Cuban people:

Aquí pensaban seguir, ganando el ciento por ciento con casas de apartamentos y echar al pueblo a sufrir y seguir de modo cruel, contra el pueblo conspirando para seguirlo explotando y en eso llegó Fidel.⁴

Here they thought they could continue earning one hundred percent, with their apartment complexes, as they leave the people to suffer and cruelly continuing to conspire against the people to continue to exploit them, and then Fidel arrived.⁵

Puebla also recalls how the Batista regime attempted to delegitimize the struggles of the Revolution, painting its supporters as opportunistic scavengers:

² Term used by many Latin American scholars to describe the cultural production resulting from the mix of European, African and indigenous cultures throughout the region. I have decided to use the term without translation, to distinguish it with *creole*, a specific cultural expression from southern Louisiana.

³ Rafael Lam, *Esta es la música cubana*, ed. Ramón Rodríguez (La Habana: Editorial Adagio, 2007), 82.

⁴ Carlos Puebla, writer, "Y En Eso Llegó Fidel," recorded 1959, in *Carlos Puebla Y Sus Tradicionales*, Carlos Puebla Y Sus Tradicionales, 1959.

⁵ All translations are made by the author unless otherwise noted.

Aquí pensaban seguir diciendo que los rateros, forajidos bandoleros asolaban al país y seguir de modo cruel con la infamia por escudo difamando a los barbudos y en eso llegó Fidel⁶

Here they thought they could continue saying that the outlaws and bandits desolated the country, while cruelly continuing with infamy as a shield, defaming the *barbudos*⁷, and then Fidel arrived.

The main causes that led to the triumph of the Revolution can be traced back to the inauguration of the First Republic in 1902. At the turn of the century, Cuba's economy was based almost entirely on sugarcane production and susceptible to constant U. S. interference in its internal affairs. Although the policy of direct intervention was in theory abandoned after the abrogation of the Platt Amendment in 1934,⁸ the U. S. maintained a great deal of economic influence on the young republic. Prior to the 1952 coup led by army officer Fulgencio Batista, the Cuban Second Republic was characterized by political turmoil and instability, as the various political parties vied for power. Batista had served as president of Cuba from 1940-44 after ruling through the influence of the military.⁹ Upon running for President again in 1952 and facing certain electoral defeat, Batista ousted then President Carlos Prío Socarrás prior to the elections and installed himself as president with the backing of the military. With support of the U. S., Batista suspended the 1940 Constitution and violently quashed several student protests and uprisings. Amongst these uprisings was the now-legendary attack on the Moncada

⁶ Puebla, "Y En Eso Llegó Fidel"

⁷ Literally "bearded men", this term was first used to mock the rebels for keeping their beards long due to spending extended periods of time in the *Sierra Maestra*. The nickname stuck and was later appropriated by the revolutionaries.

⁸ Marifeli Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 40.

⁹ Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution*, 40.

barracks led by Fidel Castro on July 26th, 1953. Despite its immediate failure, Castro was able to leave Cuba and begin organizing support against Batista.

The Cuban Revolution was not just the work of a single, monolithic organization led by a triumvirate made up of the Castro brothers and Che Guevara. While Castro's 26th of July Movement (26-J) was certainly the largest, and most organized, the revolutionary forces were by no means homogenous. In addition to 26-J, there were two other major political organizations that played a major role in the revolutionary process. The March 13th Revolutionary Directory was a student organization that was the main fighting force in the Escambray Mountains. This movement was also known for various bombings directed towards high-ranking officers in Batista's army and police force in Havana, most notably an attempted assassination of Batista during an attack on the Presidential Palace in 1957.¹⁰ The other, substantially smaller group was the People's Socialist Party (PSP), a political party that had been outlawed by Batista. The first years of the triumph of the Revolution were characterized by a delicate balance of power between these and many other factions. This process would culminate in the founding of the Cuban Communist Party in 1965, which integrated the three movements mentioned previously. This process was not without its hiccups, as people deemed "problematic", including famous artists such as Silvio Rodríguez, were sent to labor camps known as UMAP.¹¹ The justification for these camps was the perceived need to "rehabilitate" certain sections of society deemed "unproductive". In response to the creation of these camps, the *Casa de las Américas*, a cultural organization founded in 1959, organized a series of concerts and other events to help support the work of musicians and give them a much needed platform from which they could showcase their talent and "productivity" and defend themselves against one of the Revolution's most tragic mistakes.

¹⁰ Robert Taber, *M-26: Biography of a Revolution* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1961), 122.

¹¹ "Military Units for Aid in Production".

Puebla's anthem intended to solidify Castro's historical significance in the long context of Cuban history and a long struggle for independence. This struggle began in 1868 with the *Grito de Yara*, when plantation owner Carlos Manuel de Céspedes freed his slaves and called on all Cubans to rise up against the Spanish.¹² Between 1868 and 1898, Cubans of all walks of life rose up against the Spanish and waged a long war for independence. From these constant struggles rose great leaders, such as Antonio Maceo and José Martí, whose statues and those of many others adorn the plazas of every major city in Cuba. This fight for independence reached a conclusion of sorts in 1898, with American forces landing in Cuba as part of the Spanish-American War. The U.S. did not recognize the Cubans as belligerents and, after they made peace with Spain, established a "protectorate"¹³ in Cuba, through the introduction of the Platt Amendment, which allowed for the American government to intervene in Cuban internal affairs if American interests were threatened. This period of Cuban history, from 1902 to 1959, would be known as the "pseudo-republic" in which, in Martí's words, "the colony lives on".¹⁴ This is a reference not to the First Republic itself, but rather to the perceived notions of European racial superiority that Martí felt lived on in Latin American intellectual circles. Central to the Ten Years War was the inclusion of all Cubans in the nation-building process. From the abolition of slavery in Cuba in 1886 to the active participation of Afro-Cubans in the war effort, most notably rebel General Antonio Maceo.

The refrain describes Castro as a liberator, bringing about the end of social and economic inequality and a new beginning for the people of Cuba. The overall theme of the piece is reminiscent of the work of medieval troubadours, in the manner in which Castro and his followers are portrayed as the living example of the values of the Revolution, similar to Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar as the pinnacle of knightly values in the famous 13th century Castilian

¹²Aviva Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution* (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing), 22.

¹³Chomsky, *History of the Cuban Revolution*, 24

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

epic poem “Cantar del mío Cid”. The last line of the refrain, “El Comandante arrived and put a stop to it”, further lionizes the figure of Castro, almost as a Cuban St. George, slaying the “dragon” that was the Batista regime. Puebla quickly became known as the “Singer of the Revolution,” as he set to music the values and ideals of the revolution. His work had become increasingly political in the late ‘50’s, transforming revolutionaries such as Fidel Castro and Ernesto Guevara into twentieth-century Cuban folk heroes in a manner similar to the troubadours of the Spanish tradition. This thesis looks at the work of Puebla and his role in the creation of the “myth” of the Cuban Revolution and related events such as the Bay of Pigs invasion.

Puebla helped create, and also in turn supported, the “myth” of the Cuban Revolution through music that expressed revolutionary ideology, but did so in musical idioms familiar to the Cuban people. He appealed to tradition in appealing for Cuban loyalties to their revolutionary heroes, such as Fidel Castro and the Argentine Ernesto “Che” Guevara. Puebla’s work shows his command of the richness and variety of Cuban musical forms, from sones and guajiras to boleros. Like many of his predecessors, Puebla most often performed in bodegas and other intimate venues, where the music was composed to be listened to, rather than danced to. Much of Puebla’s work can be construed as a “popular narration” of the Revolution and related events, due to the simplicity of his lyrics and his use of traditional Cuban musical forms. As the most recorded artist in Cuba, with over 50 LPs credited to him and his group called “Los Tradicionales”¹⁵, Puebla’s work covers a wide variety of topics. It is possible, to facilitate the study of such a broad body of work, to divide his work in several general categories: songs related to major figures in the Revolution such as Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Camilo Cienfuegos; works that narrate and celebrate important revolutionary reforms; important events

¹⁵ The Traditionals

in Cuban history after the triumph of the Revolution, such as the Bay of Pigs invasion; and songs which illustrate Puebla's often humorous views on international politics.

The 1959 Cuban Revolution was one of the major turning points of twentieth-century Latin American history. The unlikely success of Fidel Castro's guerrilla movement inspired many similar armed movements throughout Latin America, as a response to the United States' growing interventionism in the region. This political upheaval inspired a generation of musicians to give a musical voice to this regional movement. The Cuban Revolution needed myth on which to forge a new identity. Carlos Puebla was one of those who consciously sought set the myth to music.

Chapter One
Carlos Puebla and the *Nueva Trova*

Carlos Manuel Puebla was born on September 11, 1917 in Manzanillo, a city in the province of Granma, formerly part of Santiago, in eastern Cuba. His father was a mechanic, and his mother worked at home. From a young age, Puebla supported his family by working in various small jobs such as shoemaking, as did many musicians in Cuba both before and after the Revolution. Because of this, Puebla had no formal music training other than a correspondence course he acquired in his youth.¹⁶ Puebla was greatly influenced, both musically and politically, by the poet Manuel Navarro Luna, as well as his father, who was a *mambí*¹⁷ fighter at the turn of the century. In 1931, when radio first appeared in Manzanillo, Puebla began singing traditional music there. Puebla moved to Havana in 1952, where his work became increasingly political, in the wake of Batista's coup. The triumph of the Cuban Revolution gave Puebla the opportunity to study music formally.

The music of Carlos Puebla stands chronologically between the *vieja trova* and the *nueva trova*. The term *vieja trova*, or “old ballad” has its origins in the music of songwriters during the turn of the century. This music would often be performed in an informal setting by a small group of musicians, with an emphasis on the lyrics and the message of the song. *Vieja trova* would also be associated with mulatto or black poor urban workers. Related to this style

¹⁶ *Carlos Del Pueblo*, dir. Silvia Maria Gaura, prod. Graciela Cayro and Carmen Barrios, by María Angélica Gauna (Cuba: Televisión Cubana, 1989), documentary available on Youtube, January 7, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prDREJ2O498>.

¹⁷ Term used to denote guerrilla fighters in Cuba and the Philippines who fought against the Spanish at the turn of the century.

is the *filin* repertory of the 1950s, which was characterized by intimate, romantic pieces, fusing the Cuban *canCIÓN* and North American jazz. *Nueva trova*, or “new ballad”, results from a variety of outside influences, both musical and political. One such influence was the efforts of folklorists and musicians in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay. Composers such as Violeta Parra and Atahualpa Yupanquí championed the causes of the indigenous communities as well as important social issues. These composers incorporated indigenous instruments and styles in a genre known as *nueva canCIÓN*, in reaction to the onslaught of Western consumer culture that began after the Second World War. The break between this movement and *nueva trova* occurs when the latter, rather than rejecting Western influences outright, sought to combine them with the local traditional musical styles to create a cosmopolitan blend. Connected to this musical movement was a strong political current. Inspired by the Cuban Revolution, left-wing guerrilla movements sprang up throughout Central and South America, as well as the radicalization of independence movements in Puerto Rico and Jamaica. In Chile, the first socialist government in Latin America was democratically elected under Salvador Allende’s *Unidad Popular*. In many cases, the rise of these movements was opposed by right-wing dictatorships that rose in reaction to their growing popularity, as occurred in Allende’s Chile in 1973.

In the years prior to the Revolution, Cuba was home to a vibrant and lively music scene. The melting pot of various influences such as African and Spanish-derived folklore, American jazz, and light classical elements created a musical scene that was simultaneously exotic and familiar to Westerners.¹⁸ Music became one of the major draws for tourism, turning cities such as Havana into meccas of nightlife. In contrast to this economic growth for artists in urban centers musicians who lived and worked in the interior of the island had fewer opportunities to make money from their work. A direct corollary existed between a mistreatment of rural

¹⁸Robin D. Moore, *Music and Revolution: Cultural Change in Socialist Cuba* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 52.

workers and a lack of interest from club owners in their traditional musical forms¹⁹. In addition, the music business in Cuba was highly racialized, as Afro-Cuban performers and their music often faced discrimination from venue owners. However, these very venues served as an easy way for Cubans of color to overcome racial barriers, as they found in the field of entertainment an effective way to assert themselves.²⁰

It is impossible to discuss the music and tourism industries in Cuba before 1959 without looking at their ties with organized crime and the inherent corruption of the Batista regime. It is true that many cabarets and nightclubs which provided venues for many famous Cuban musicians also served as notorious hangouts for criminal elements, who also controlled a significant portion of the tourist industry in Havana and other cities, often with the implicit support of the Batista government. But as Cuba became more unstable as a result of revolutionary activities, the tourist industry, as well as the music industry, began to suffer a severe decline. As Batista increased censorship on public discourse and artistic expression, the government began facing increasing pushback from the public. Musicians such as Carlos Puebla and Ramón Veloz claimed to have been threatened by Batista's secret police for singing protest songs against the government.²¹ Musicians of all stripes and genres worked to support revolutionary activities such as those carried out by Castro's 26th of July Movement, either by joining them directly or by playing secret fundraising concerts.

During the period of unrest preceding Castro's seizure of power, many revolutionaries targeted nightclubs and cabarets, forcing many of them to shut down. These types of venues were targeted chiefly for two reasons. Firstly, these locales were often frequented by members of Batista's government, and were therefore a target for revolutionaries. A notable example of

¹⁹ Moore, *Music and Revolution*, 52.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

this was the assassination of Colonel Blanco Rico, Batista's chief intelligence officer, by members of the Revolutionary Directory (*Directorio Revolucionario*) at the Montmartre cabaret in October of 1956.²² Another reason for the targeting of nightclubs was their associations with the decadence of the Batista government and their American backers, illustrated by the bombing of the Tropicana nightclub by 26-J members on New Year's Eve of 1956.²³ Musicians such as Celia Cruz recorded songs in support of initiatives such as agrarian reform programs, one of the cornerstones of the Revolution. This musical fervour surrounding the events of the Revolution was also felt by musicians outside of Cuba. Notably among these was Daniel Santos, a Puerto Rican singer and long-time supporter of Castro's insurgents, who travelled to Cuba and performed there.²⁴ Another important group was the *Quinteto Rebelde* (Rebel Quintet), who integrated anti-Batista slogans in their music and would often play their music over loudspeakers in the front lines to demoralize their opponents.²⁵ The government began to sponsor mass music festivals, such as the First National Art Festival, as well as outdoor dance events, which coincided with the celebration of Carnival.²⁶

The historiography of Cuban music and its relationship with the Revolution, until fairly recently, has often been stuck in a "Cold War mentality", writing off the work of certain musicians such as Puebla as "propaganda". Recent scholarship, such as the work of Robin Moore, has moved away from this mentality and towards a less political analysis of these musicians. Moore in particular focuses his work on music institutions such as conservatories and unions of musicians, placing them at the center of revolutionary music production. Moore also places these institutions in turn at the center of a cultural transformation in Cuba, as more

²²Moore, *Music and Revolution*, 54.

²³Ibid.

²⁴ Helio Orovio, *Daniel Santos en su Habana*, ed. Margarita Urquiola Yanés (La Habana: Ediciones Extramuros, 2015), 5.

²⁵ Ricardo Martínez, "Quinteto Rebelde," *Revolución y Cultura*, January 1979.

²⁶Moore, *Music and Revolution*, 58.

musicians were able to make a living off their work, rather than having to rely on other jobs to supplement their income. Contemporary Cuban scholars such as Leonardo Acosta, Dulcila Cañizares and Alberto Faya focus their attention on the work of individual singer-songwriters such as Puebla and situate them within a long-lasting tradition of *trovadores* who wrote their music during the Cuban wars for independence from Spain, pointing them out as the “voice of the people”²⁷ in their desire to be free, whether from Spanish colonial rule or the rampant corruption of the Batista administration.

Perhaps one of the most important works of Cuban ethnomusicology is Alejo Carpentier’s *La música de Cuba* (The Music of Cuba). Although best known for his fiction writing and as one of the key figures of Magical Realism, his study of music was key to his writing process and style. Key to his study is his recognition of the important contributions that Afro-Cubans have made to the music of Cuba. This is most apparent in his chapter titled “Los Negros” (The Blacks), a chapter dedicated to the contributions of people of African descent to Latin American music. In it, he argues that a career as a musician was often the only way a Cuban of color could earn a somewhat decent living.²⁸ These statements were important at the time of their publication, as at that time, few Cuban scholars recognized this blending of cultures. This association of musicians with the marginalized and the poor is key in identifying musicians such as Puebla as members of the subaltern, members that can give “voice to the voiceless”.

The lyrics of the music studied here will be analysed through the ideological discourse analysis theory espoused by linguist Teun van Dijk. Van Dijk’s Discourse Ideology theory proposes that the political ideology of a group of people can best be analysed through their

²⁷ Dulcila Cañizares, "La Trova Tradicional Cubana," in *Panorama De La Música Popular Cubana*, comp. Radamés Giro (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1998), 269.

²⁸ Alejo Carpentier, *La Música En Cuba* (Mexico City: Fondo De Cultura Económica, 1946), 138.

discourse. This discourse can come in various forms, from speeches to music and other forms of written art. Key to van Dijk's work is the structures of discourse, which, in his view, can lead to a better understanding of social structures, as well as relationships between these structures. Ideologies, according to van Dijk, are not exclusive to social groups, but can also be attributed to individuals.²⁹ The study of the discourse of a social group, in van Dijk's view, gives it a meaning which allows for it to "speak for itself", as well as present the group's conflict with its opposition. Through the use of this methodology, works such as those of Carlos Puebla can be analysed not only through their artistic value, but as a manifestation of the author's ideology and belief system, as well as his perceived role within these structures.

²⁹ Teun A. Van Dijk, *Análisis Del Discurso Ideológico*, trans. Ramón Alvarado (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam, 2016).

Chapter Two

“*Hasta Siempre, Comandante*”: Puebla and Che—Creating a Revolutionary Icon

Perhaps one of Puebla’s most famous pieces is “*Hasta Siempre, Comandante*” (Farewell, Comandante). Written in 1965 in a “flood of inspiration”³⁰ after Castro’s broadcast of Che Guevara’s letter resigning from his positions in the Cuban government and leaving towards a then unknown location, “*Hasta Siempre, Comandante*” is written as a bolero, a genre that is often associated in Latin American culture with such complex emotions as unbridled passion, unrequited love, or agonizing heartbreak. The *bolero* is described by writer Jorge Luis Borges as “like the survival of the Greek tragedy in Latin America”.³¹ Although the hero in this piece faces a tragic end, it is not immediately apparent. The romantic overtones that the genre is associated with convey these feelings perhaps better than any other. In this piece, Puebla delivers an emotional farewell to Guevara, almost foreshadowing his fate. Puebla not only elevates the figure of Che Guevara to a larger-than-life status, but describes the sorrow of the Cuban people, who have adopted the Argentinian doctor and revolutionary as one of their own:

³⁰ *Carlos Del Pueblo*, dir. Silvia Maria Gaura, prod. Graciela Cayro and Carmen Barrios, by María Angélica Gauna (Cuba: Televisión Cubana, 1989), documentary available on Youtube, January 7, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prDREJ2O498>.

³¹ Adolfo González, *Magazine Dominical*, July 1986, cited in Rafael Lam, *Esta Es La Música Cubana*, ed. Ramón Rodríguez (La Habana: Editorial Adagio, 2007), 81.

Aquí se queda la clara, la entrañable transparencia de tu querida presencia, comandante Che Guevara.³²

Here lies the clear and intractable transparency of your beloved presence, Comandante Che Guevara.

The song's lyrics read as a kind of love letter to the revolutionary, describing the various stages of his relationship with the people of Cuba, beginning with how the relationship first started:

Aprendimos a quererte desde la histórica altura donde el sol de tu bravura le puso un cerco a la muerte.

We learned to love you from the historical heights, where the sun of your bravado put death under siege.

The "historical heights" that Puebla speaks of may refer to the Sierra Maestra, where Guevara made his name as a revolutionary and master of guerrilla warfare. As with Castro in "Y en eso llegó Fidel", Guevara is portrayed as a mighty folk hero, off to fight the monsters of imperialism wherever they reared their head:

Tu amor revolucionario te conduce a nueva empresa, donde esperan la firmeza de tu brazo libertario.³³

Your revolutionary love takes you to a new undertaking, where they await the strength of your liberating arm.

³² Carlos Puebla, writer, "Hasta Siempre, Comandante" recorded 1962, Carlos Puebla Y Sus Tradicionales, 1962.

³³ Puebla, "Hasta Siempre, Comandante"

These lines are filled with an almost Messianic tone, almost as a twentieth-century Moses, leading the oppressed peoples of the world to their liberation. The song ends with a very emotional moment, as the people, along with Fidel, bid a final farewell to “Che”:

Seguiremos adelante como junto a tí seguimos y con Fidel te decimos: “Hasta siempre Comandante.”³⁴

We will continue onwards, as we did with you, and with Fidel we tell you: “Farewell, Comandante.”

Castro fully supported Guevara’s efforts to export his revolutionary brand throughout the world, sending men and materials with him, first to the Congo, and then to Bolivia, where Guevara would meet his end. After a series of lengthy negotiations between the governments of Cuba and Bolivia, Guevara’s remains, alongside with the Cuban guerrilla fighters who followed him to Bolivia, would be returned to Cuba. Today, the remains of these men are interred near the city of Santa Clara, where Guevara led the decisive battle of the Cuban Revolution. The remains are kept with a great deal of reverence, comparable to any site of religious importance in the Holy Land.

One of the best known usages of this song was in a famous scene in Costa-Gavras’ “État de Siège” (State of Siege). This 1972 film looks at the conflict during this decade between the Uruguayan government and the Tupamaros, a left-wing urban guerilla, in the midst of a deep economic crisis. The scene takes place in a courtyard during a student protest that is being brutally repressed by the police. As students are arrested, Puebla’s “Hasta Siempre, Comandante” blares on speakers placed throughout the courtyard. As the police take down one

³⁴ Puebla, "Hasta Siempre, Comandante"

loudspeaker, another one turns on, playing the same tune.³⁵ Puebla himself stated that he enjoyed the use of his song in the movie, particularly the way it was used to enhance the scene, rather than “just filler”.³⁶ What characterizes these pieces is Puebla’s positioning as the voice of the people, a people who sing the praises of these revolutionary heroes, making them larger than life.

While “Hasta siempre, Comandante” played an important part in the creation of Che’s image as a revolutionary icon in Latin America, it was Alberto Korda’s photograph of the guerrilla leader titled “Guerrillero Heroico”³⁷ that cemented this status in the non-Spanish speaking world. This image was taken on March 5, 1960, during a memorial service for the victims of an explosion on the French freighter *La Coubre* in the port of Havana. The image shows Che as a stoic, defiant figure. As with Puebla’s piece, the Korda photograph emphasizes an unblemished portrait of Che. However, this flawless portrayal is expressed quite differently, not merely in terms of the medium, but in the overall tone of the piece. While “Guerrillero Heroico” shows a strong, “masculine” Che, Puebla’s “Hasta siempre, Comandante” provides a more romantic and vulnerable image, yet perhaps even less accessible due to a slightly more ethereal, incorporeal portrait. This is due not only to the nature of the medium, but also due to the romantic, longing tone that the piece takes. Both pieces have made significant contributions to the creation of the “myth” of Che Guevara, a myth that has transcended both space and time, as to this day, the stoic image of the “Guerrillero Heroico” continues to inspire revolutionaries throughout the world.

³⁵ *État De Siège*, dir. Konstantinos Gavras, prod. Jacques Henri Barratier and León Sanz, by Franco Solinas and Konstantinos Gavras, perf. Yves Montand, Renato Salvatori, O.E. Hasse, and Jacques Weber (France: Cinema 5 Distributing, 1972), DVD.

³⁶ Gauna, *Carlos Del Pueblo*

³⁷ “Heroic Guerilla Fighter”

As with any revolutionary movement, the Cuban Revolution sought to transform Cuban society and culture. Central to this transformation was the concept of “*conciencia*”,³⁸ a term used by the Castro government to exemplify “proper revolutionary values”, such as selflessness, sacrifice, and loyalty. These values echoed the Marxist worldview that sees history as a “transformation of human nature”.³⁹ To achieve this, according to Marx, it is the responsibility of any revolutionary government to re-educate its population to instill these values and do away with the “rampant greed” that characterizes capitalism. These values would be promoted through the thorough transformation of economic institutions. Later Marxist thinkers such as Vladimir I. Lenin rejected this passive view and argued for the transformation of society through the work of “professional revolutionaries.” These radical intellectuals, Lenin stated, had to seize control of all forms of publication and media to create “systematic, persistent, and regular propaganda.” These leaders would then be charged with the transformation of culture, doing away with pre-revolutionary traditions and building a new, Communist culture.

Among the most outspoken Marxist thinkers regarding the role of art in the revolutionary process was Argentine Ernesto Guevara, better known as his *nom de guerre* “Che”. Averse to the Soviet realist style, he insisted on the elevation of traditional Cuban music styles to make the ideals of the Revolution more accessible to ordinary Cubans. An example of this debate is found in a letter written by Che Guevara in 1965 that was later titled “Man and Socialism in Cuba”. In it, Guevara discusses a number of theoretical topics concerning the course of the Revolution and its role in the creation of a “new man”. When writing about art,

³⁸ This term translates directly to “conscience”, but like some scholars (see Julie Marie Bunck, *Fidel Castro and the Quest for a Revolutionary Culture in Cuba*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press. 1994, p. 5), I have decided to leave it untranslated, as its usage in this context does not follow the usual translation.

³⁹ Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, trans. International Publishers (New York: International Publishers, 1963), 207.

he argues against the “frozen forms of socialist realism”,⁴⁰ while arguing against the rejection of modern artistic forms, defining these forms as those that originate after the middle of the 19th century. Guevara believed that such radical limitations “put a straitjacket on the artistic expression of the man that is born and built today”.⁴¹ Guevara goes on to state that “revolutionaries will come that will sing the song of the new man with the people’s authentic voice.”

Guevara’s vision of the power of music to influence the construction of revolutionary ideology illustrates the complex legacy of the Cuban Revolution and its policies towards music and musicians. In the first months of 1959, revolutionaries targeted venues such as casinos and nightclubs because of their association with the “decadence” of the Batista regime. This association was extended to nearly all forms of dance music and was deemed “antiquated” and “inappropriate” to a society that was reinventing itself. Policy makers in charge of culture decided to promote music that extolled the concept of “*conciencia*”, which often included musicians like Puebla who composed “protest music” in support of the revolution. Despite this preference, the revolutionary government was wary of over-regulating dance music due to its overwhelming popularity among ordinary Cubans.

⁴⁰Ernesto Guevara, "El Hombre Y El Socialismo En Cuba," in *Documentos De La Revolución Cubana: 1965*, ed. José Bell, Delia Luisa López, and Tania Caram (La Habana: Editorial De Ciencias Sociales, 2013), 431.

⁴¹ Guevara, "El Hombre Y El Socialismo En Cuba", 431.

Chapter Three

“Por allí Vinieron”: Puebla, the Bay of Pigs, and Creating a Revolutionary Society

Amongst Cuban artists and intellectuals, there were several events during the first years of the Revolution which greatly affected the island and inspired its artists. The first of these was the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, when CIA-trained mercenaries attempted to overthrow the revolutionary government. This event was immortalized in several compositions, such as Carlos Puebla’s *Por allí vinieron* and Silvio Rodríguez’s *Playa Girón*. Despite the failure of the invasion, other mercenary groups continued their attacks on Cuba, a period known in Cuban history as the *Lucha contra bandidos* (Struggle against Bandits). The Vietnam War was also closely followed by Cubans, as they viewed the American government’s escalating involvement as a violation of Vietnamese sovereignty and an example of American imperialism. This struggle against imperialism was a key aspect of Cuban foreign policy during 1965 and 1966. Perhaps the event that most affected the Cuban musical scene was the killing of Chilean songwriter Víctor Jara at the hands of the military junta led by Augusto Pinochet who in 1973 overthrew the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende. Cuban artists and writers saw Jara as a martyr in the fight against the “fascist junta”⁴² of Pinochet and American imperialism in the region.

Some of Puebla’s work focuses on a narration of important events in the history of the revolution. An example of this is “Por allí vinieron” (They came from over there), which talks

⁴² Movimiento de la Nueva Trova, “Declaración del Movimiento de la Nueva Trova por la muerte de Víctor Jara a manos de la junta facista en Chile,” in *Documentos 1972-1973* (1973).

of the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. Puebla describes the invaders as members of the old landowning class, as “mercenaries” and “murderous counterrevolutionaries”:

No vino ni un proletario, no vino ni un campesino. Vinieron los asesinos
contrarrevolucionarios.⁴³

Not one proletariat came, not one peasant came, instead came the counterrevolutionary
murderers.

He also mocks the failed invasion and the participants, describing them at the end of the song in rather unflattering terms:

¡Quedaron que daba pena! Sin moral y sin destino, quedaron como cochinos listos para
Nochebuena.⁴⁴

They were in a pitiful state! Without morale or destination, they ended up like pigs
ready for Christmas Eve.

He also notes the lack of “proletariats” and peasants in the invasion force, implying that the attack was not supported by the “people” of Cuba. The Bay of Pigs would also be remembered in other of Puebla’s works, such as “Remember Playa Girón” and “Esperando la invasion” (Waiting for the Invasion). These pieces illustrate a sense of a conscience regarding the “collective memory” surrounding these events, events that would shape the future of Cuba for many years. In setting these narratives to song, Puebla immortalizes the brave deeds of the people of Cuba as a whole, rather than a single individual.

In his work, Puebla echoes Cuba’s long history of struggle against American influence and imperialism. This struggle was pointed out by Cuban patriot José Martí in an essay titled

⁴³ Carlos Puebla, writer, "Por Allí Vinieron," recorded 1977, in *Cuba Sí, Yanquis No*, Carlos Puebla Y Sus Tradicionales, 1977, vinyl recording

⁴⁴Puebla, "Por Allí Vinieron"

“Nuestra América” (“Our America”), written in 1891. Before this, Simón Bolívar would write “The United States ... seems destined by Providence to plague America with torments in the name of freedom”.⁴⁵ In this essay, Martí warns of “our formidable neighbour”, referring to the United States, as American politicians set their expansionist sights on Cuba and Puerto Rico. To challenge the American threat, Martí argued, Latin America must reject its European origins and embrace those that have been exploited by the colonial system, the opposite, in Martí’s view, of what occurred in the United States after its independence from Britain.⁴⁶ Despite this wariness, Cuba and the U. S. enjoyed close economic and cultural ties. It is these cultural ties that, some scholars argue, did not end with the Revolution and Cuba’s diplomatic outreach towards the Soviet Union.

Other works look at the various reforms instituted by the government after the triumph of the Revolution. Works in this vein by Puebla date from the Batista period during the early 1950s, when he first formed *Los Tradicionales*. Puebla’s later work in this vein moved from witty, satirical criticism of the Batista regime to a celebration of Castro’s many reforms during the first few years after the triumph of the Revolution. An example of this is “La Reforma Urbana” (Urban Reform), in which Puebla describes the LRU⁴⁷ (Urban Reform Act) and its effects on Cuban society. This law made it illegal for Cubans to enter housing lease contracts and granted ownership of many urban housing projects to their tenants. This story is told not through the eyes of ordinary Cubans, but rather through satirizing those who rented, as expressed in the chorus:

⁴⁵ Simón Bolívar, *Selected Writings of Bolívar*, ed. Harold A. Bierck, comp. Vicente Lecuna, trans. Lewis Bertrand (New York: Colonial Press, 1951), 732.

⁴⁶ Aviva Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution* (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing), 23.

⁴⁷ *Ley de Reforma Urbana*

¡A trabajar, camina a trabajar! Suda la camisa, camina a trabajar.⁴⁸

Off to work, off to work! Get sweat on your shirt, off to work!

This song is one of those in which Puebla best exemplifies Marxist values regarding labor as well as his characteristic wit. Puebla identifies the renters as members of the old bourgeoisie, who lived off the labor of the working class:

Ya no hay más preocupación cuando llega el día primero, y mi verdugo el casero, que busque otra ocupación⁴⁹

There is no longer worry when the first day arrives (of the month), let my executioner, the landlord, find another line of work.

In this piece, Puebla challenges these people to go and find “honest work”, hence the use of the phrase “get sweat on your shirt”. The use of this imagery mirrors in many ways the biblical phrase “from the sweat of your brow”, used when Adam, and by extension humanity, is made to work the land in order to eat after expulsion from Paradise.

Another government initiative that Puebla celebrates in his work is the massive education initiatives sponsored by the revolutionary government in the early years of the revolution. During the revolution, guerrilla fighters also began a campaign of educating the rural poor of Cuba in the areas they occupied. This practice was in line with those of many popular armed movements in the 20th century, notably during the Spanish Civil War. These educators would continue their work after 1959, immortalized in Puebla’s work “El Son de la Alfabetización” (The Literacy Son). The chorus serves as a call to for all Cubans to educate themselves: “Let no one be without learning”. The verses extoll the revolutionary values of

⁴⁸ Carlos Puebla, writer, "La Reforma Urbana," recorded 1961, in *Perlas Cubanas: Carlos Puebla 1961*, Carlos Puebla Y Sus Tradicionales.

⁴⁹ Puebla, "La Reforma Urbana"

education, presenting them as a patriotic duty for every citizen, equating it to their military duties of “defending the revolution”:

El patriota siempre en vela cumple su deber civil: ayuda con el fusil y también desde la escuela.⁵⁰

The ever vigilant patriot fulfills his civil duty. He helps with his rifle, and from school.

In an effort to organize a mutual support system and a platform for the exchange of musical ideas for both established and new artists, *nueva trova* musicians organized in a state-sponsored union known as the *Movimiento de la Nueva Trova*, founded in 1972 in Puebla’s hometown of Manzanillo. One of the key tenants of the MNT was summarized in a phrase coined by Fidel Castro: “There can be no aesthetic value without human values”. In the MNT’s view, their music had to reject the “frivolity” of contemporary, “commercial”, musical forms and adopt a style that reflected the new realities of ordinary Cubans. This attitude was reflected in their rulebook, which called for their members to reflect the values of the Revolution, not only in their work, but in their manner of dress and behaviour towards their audience. Key to the movement and its members was the idea of making music for the awakening of the revolutionary consciousness of their audiences not only in Cuba, but throughout the world. Another objective of the MNT was to present musicians as an important and productive part of the Revolution, as ambassadors both to the people of Cuba and abroad.

The study of the intersection between art and politics is an interesting way to fully understand the growth in the popularity and influence of political and social movements. Art, particularly music, can serve as a “popular narration” of specific historical events, presenting the “people’s” version of historical events. Many works that analyze these relationships often look at the totalitarian regimes of the 1930s and ‘40’s in Europe, such as Nazi Germany, Fascist

⁵⁰ Puebla, "La Reforma Urbana"

Italy, and the Soviet Union. An example of such scholarly work is Harvey Sachs' *Music in Fascist Italy*, which studies the relationship between the Mussolini government and various musical institutions such as conservatories and opera houses in Italy. Sachs studies this relationship through a variety of interviews with Italian composers, music critics, and conductors. Sachs observes that the state-run opera houses, for instance, became a stage for "prestigious showcases of power", a phenomenon that, in his view, continues to this day⁵¹. Sachs presents in his work a musical apparatus beset by excessive bureaucracy and immobility in its creative structures, a situation he believes is characteristic of all state-sponsored musical institutions.⁵²

Another important work in the study of the intersection of art and politics is Jeffery Herf's *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*. In this work, Herf looks at what he describes as the "paradox of reactionary modernism",⁵³ a phrase used by Herf to describe the Nazis' simultaneous rejection of the Enlightenment and embrace of modern technology. Herf argues that this paradox is at the center of Nazi ideology from its beginnings to Germany's final defeat in the Second World War. Although Herf does not touch on art or music directly, his views on the role of technology in the development of this "reactionary modernism" can draw some parallels with the role of technology in the Cuban Revolution and its influence on culture. As a pioneer of radio entertainment in Cuba, the work of Carlos Puebla can be also looked at as revolutionary not only in its content, but in its methods of dissemination.

In his later work, Puebla would use his music as a vehicle to comment on international politics, using his characteristic wit and wide range of emotions in his song writing. He also

⁵¹ Harvey Sachs, *Music in Fascist Italy* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), 242.

⁵² Sachs, *Music in Fascist Italy*, 242.

⁵³ Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), 1.

wrote songs about other revolutionary movements and events throughout the world, such as the military coup in Chile which resulted in the death of president Salvador Allende, the Angolan civil war, and the assassination of Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba. Examples of this work includes “Elegía a Salvador Allende” (Eulogy for Salvador Allende), “La Gran Carrera” (The Great Race), and “Son a Lumumba” (Son to Lumumba). Perhaps his most effective work in this vein was “Yankis Go Home”, in which he denounces US imperialism throughout the world.

Many scholars have written extensively about the role of music in the development of a “Soviet” culture in Russia from the triumph of the Bolsheviks in 1917. These scholars tend to look at the relationship between musicians and the Soviet state, not only in terms of material support, but also in terms of the ideological debates surrounding the role of music and musicians in the new state. One such author is Amy Nelson, who in *Music and the Revolution: Musicians and Power in Early Soviet Russia* centers this discussion between two important camps, those who championed “contemporary” music and those who proposed the development of a “proletarian musical culture”.⁵⁴ Nelson focuses less on institutions such as conservatories and opera houses and more on the work and feelings of various Soviet composers. This discussion is not unique to the Soviet Union, and is in fact part of an ongoing tradition of fierce debate amongst Marxist thinkers regarding the role of the arts in any revolutionary process.

Central to the discussion of any musical expression is its role in the creation of community, whether it be a physical, local community or what Benedict Anderson refers to as an “imagined community”, one that goes beyond national borders. Puebla, in songs such as “Yankis Go Home” helped forge an international revolutionary community embattled by

⁵⁴ Amy Nelson, *Music for the Revolution: Musicians and Power in Early Soviet Russia* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 10.

American imperialism and the encroachment of capitalism. An example of this aspect of Puebla's work is one that touches on one of the prickliest topics regarding the U.S. relations with Latin America: the Organization of American States (OEA). Throughout its history, many Latin American leaders have criticized the OAS due in part to American heavy-handedness within the organization, notably with Cuba's expulsion from the organization in 1962 due to its "ideological incompatibilities" with those of the OAS. To this day, the OAS has been criticized by many Latin American leaders due to the organization being used by the U.S. as a tool for maintaining its economic hegemony over the region. Venezuela's recent decision to leave the OAS is a testament to this feeling within Latin America. The piece in question, titled "La OEA es cosa de risa" (The OAS is a laughingstock), illustrates Puebla's contempt for the organization, in the context of Cuba's expulsion. Using his characteristic wit, Puebla satirizes the U. S. for its apparent "fear" of Cuba and what it represents:

Yo estoy acá en mi rincón, preguntándome hace rato ¿cómo es posible que al gato le meta miedo el ratón?⁵⁵

I've been here in my corner, wondering for a while now, "How is it possible that the cat is afraid of the mouse?"

For Puebla, the Revolution represents a break with American imperialism, believing that the U. S. is afraid that other countries may follow its example, hence Cuba's expulsion.

Puebla's criticism of American imperialism goes beyond the scope of Cuba and Latin America in general, as has been mentioned. One of his most creative examples of this trend is his piece titled "David y Goliat" (David and Goliath). In this piece, Puebla looks at the Vietnam War by comparing the two countries, using the biblical story of David and Goliath as a reference point, as seen in the title. America is seen as a giant, a heartless bully with many

⁵⁵ Carlos Puebla, "La OEA Es Cosa De Risa," Carlos Puebla Y Sus Tradicionales.

weapons at its disposal, while Vietnam is portrayed as small and defenceless, but with a great heart:

Los yanquis son grandullones, parecidos a gigantes. Algunos como elefantes, pero no tienen corazones. Los vietnamitas son pequeñitos, son pequeñitos, sí. Pero con unos corazones así de grandes, así. Así de grandes, así.⁵⁶

The Yankees⁵⁷ are massive. They look like giants, some like elephants. But they have no hearts. The Vietnamese are tiny, but their hearts are huge.

This point is further emphasized in the rhythms of the chorus, with the verse “The Vietnamese are tiny” sung in a slight staccato to emphasize how small they are, while a more legato style is used when referring to the greatness of their hearts, lengthening the phrase and adding to the musical image. These works illustrate the role that musicians like Puebla saw themselves as playing, to echo the internationalist message of the Revolution to any who would listen. The work of Puebla and other musicians show that Cuba was not as isolated as many contemporaries and future scholars would present it to be.

Other scholars have studied music and revolutionary movements in Latin America, specifically Central America. Fred Judson’s essay “Central American Revolutionary Music” is a prime example of the study of music and its relation to political discourse. Judson’s essay studies the intersections between music, musicians, and revolutionary processes in Central America during the ‘70’s and ‘80’s. Judson suggests in his study that

an expanded and undogmatic, culturally infused Marxist worldview is appropriate when appreciating Central American revolutionary music as social discourse. Such a

⁵⁶ Carlos Puebla, "David Y Goliath," recorded 1977, in *Vietnam Canta a Cuba. Cuba Canta a Vietnam*, Carlos Puebla Y Sus Tradicionales.

⁵⁷ A term used in many parts of Latin America, particularly Cuba and Puerto Rico, to refer to Americans.

worldview situates the music in the structural political economies of uneven and dependent capitalist (mal) development, with their attendant social stresses, their undemocratic, authoritarian, and repressive political regimes of accumulation, and with their fragmenting of (however unequal or unjust) cultures of consent consensus and legitimation.⁵⁸

The close-knit relationship between the revolutionary movements in Central America that Judson studies and the ideals of the Cuban Revolution, with their common themes of land reform, social justice, and a rejection of U. S. interventionism, provide an important framework for the study of music and its role in social and political movements. It is this emphasis on music as social discourse that is central to understanding the impact of Carlos Puebla and his music on the discourse of the Revolution and its relation to both the people of Cuba and abroad.

⁵⁸Fred Judson, "Central American Revolutionary Music," in *Music and Marx: Ideas, Practice, Politics*, ed. Regula Burckhardt Qureshi (New York: Routledge, 2002), 231.

Conclusions

What can we learn from the life and work of Carlos Puebla? The lengthy career of Puebla and his role as a “cultural diplomat” for the Revolution is an interesting example of the various intersections between politics and music. Despite his use of traditionally Cuban musical styles, his message was able to reach a broad audience eager to learn more about the Cuban Revolution and its ideals. His work also served to cement men such as Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, Camilo Cienfuegos, and others’ status as folk heroes not just to the Cuban people, but oppressed peoples throughout the world. One of the most important aspects of Puebla’s development as the “voice of the Revolution” was how the rest of the world viewed the events of the Revolution. Puebla was not alone in creating the “myth” of the Revolution. One such “myth-maker” was American journalist Herbert L. Matthews, who travelled to the *sierra* in February of 1957. His interview and article on Castro and his guerrilla campaign made the front page of the *New York Times*, and put Castro into American living rooms.⁵⁹ This presentation of the Rebel Army as liberating heroes fighting a corrupt government, despite that government’s close ties to the U. S., was instrumental in the international community’s perception of the events of the Revolution.

Antonio Gramsci originated the term “subaltern” to describe a social or cultural group that finds itself in a position of political, social, and cultural subordination to another, dominant group. Gayatri C. Spivak expands upon this concept in her essay titled “Can the Subaltern Speak?” In it, Spivak argues that the interests of the subaltern are not guaranteed by historical

⁵⁹ Chomsky, *History of the Cuban Revolution*, 40.

or structural conditions of political representations.⁶⁰ This subordinate relationship, in Spivak's view, extends to the study of history, which before the 1970s was limited to the studies of the histories of the dominant social group, as opposed to the history of ordinary people, particularly those who had been historically marginalized. The history of the marginalized, in Spivak's view, is written from the perspective of the dominant social group. Carlos Puebla, as the self-proclaimed "voice of the Revolution," claims to give voice to the subaltern, in this case, the Cuban people, throughout its revolutionary process.

As Puebla began to echo the positions and ideologies of the revolutionary state in Cuba, could the subaltern nature of Puebla's work be called into question? There are at least two counterpoints to this. First of all, as we will see, Puebla, throughout his musical career, continued to self-identify with the working classes which, he believed, had now become the state. Puebla's view of a coherent proletariat identification with the state is reflected both in his lyrics, and the musical genres he chooses to write his music in. And second, if one begins to study the relations between states through the dialectics of subaltern and dominant groups, as with individuals and social classes, one can identify revolutionary Cuba as a "subaltern State". In this "subaltern state" of revolutionary Cuba, in theory, such power relations do not exist due to an "abolition of class structures", in addition to its exclusion from the international community for refusing to submit to American domination, an exclusion that continues to be imposed to this day.

Another important aspect to consider is the effect the triumph of Castro's uprising had on left-wing movements throughout not only Latin America, but throughout the post-colonial

⁶⁰ Gayatri C. Spivak, "¿Puede Hablar El Sujeto Subalterno?" *Orbis Tertius* 3, no. 6 (1988): http://www.memoria.fahce.unlp.edu.ar/art_revistas/pr.2732/pr.2732.pdf.

world. As mentioned before, the Cuban Revolution inspired a series of similar movements throughout the region, seeing in Cuba a manual on resisting American imperialism.

In various interviews, Puebla is described as the “voice of the Revolution”, a title that Puebla embraced throughout his lengthy career. Puebla describes his work as “musical journalism” in that he sang “about the life of my people, their joys and their triumphs.” Throughout his career, like many musicians in Cuba, Puebla toured Europe, Africa, and Latin America, often at the behest of the Cuban government, engaging in a form of “cultural diplomacy”. What set Puebla’s work apart and what made him so popular was the way his music relayed to the audience the ideals and events of the Revolution. Puebla was also a staunch defender of “traditional” Cuban music, stating that “We must go back to what is ours, what is Cuban, what’s born within us, in our blood, that can’t be taken from us.” This emphasis on a more traditional style is reflective of what Soviet music theorists would deem “proletarian musical culture”.⁶¹

Through an analysis of Puebla’s work using van Dijk’s theory, we can better understand his role as the “voice of the Revolution”. In his work, Puebla uses traditional Cuban musical forms to denounce imperialism and praise the leading figures of the Revolution, from its leaders to the ordinary people of Cuba in their continued fight for Cuban sovereignty and the betterment of their society. In this way, “the people” fulfil a decisive role in the history of the Revolution in Puebla’s work. In pieces such as “*Son de la alfabetización*”, these ordinary people are lionized and made an important factor in the revolutionary process. Even in those pieces that exalt leaders such as Castro and Che Guevara, the narrator in the piece is most often

⁶¹ Nelson, *Music for the Revolution*, 10.

the people, as Puebla praises the revolutionary leaders not through his voice, but through that of the people of Cuba.

Puebla's background places him as a member of what Gramsci and Spivak would call the "subaltern" and his work reflects a desire to tell the story of the Cuban Revolution, not through the news cables of Washington, London, or Moscow, but through the self-described "voice of the people". The importance of Puebla's work when considered as a historical document cannot be understated, as not only does his work narrate important events in the Revolution, but also expositions Puebla's thoughts and feelings on the events mentioned. Another important aspect to be explored is the previously mentioned idea of the "subaltern state". As mentioned in the introduction, the idea of revolutionary Cuba as a "subaltern state" can be seen both as the new social structures within Cuba produced by the Revolution and its marginalized status within the international community, a product of the American blockade imposed on the island.

Music, when written in a narrative sense, can be as useful as an archival material in that music, like all forms of art, captures the thoughts and feelings of a group of people. While news cables, from both inside Cuba and from Washington and Moscow presented the facts of the events of the triumph of the Revolution, it was artists like Puebla who captured the mood of the people, their thoughts, their feelings, and their hopes and desires. As the Revolution progressed, particularly in the years before Cuba was declared "free of illiteracy", musicians like Puebla carried the message of the Revolution throughout all of Cuba and Latin America, to a people who was just beginning to, in Martí's words, be "cultured, in order to be free".

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