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Performance and Revolution

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8 May 2021

Cuba’s Revolution: A Romance Between Liberation and Self

 My essay in response to the Cuban Revolution’s revolutionary impact represents the many themes discussed in our class this semester. This essay addresses themes of coming together through culture (Cabral), people working outside a system of power to enact change (Guevara), revolution being often romanticized (both within and from external sources), and the idea of change 'by all means necessary': in other words, the armed struggle (Cabral). In revising, I decided to focus on these themes through Hannah Arendt’s analysis in her book *On Revolution*, which can be applied to the revolutionary thinkers of the Cuban Revolution in their specific proposals for achieving revolution: political upheavals aimed at securing liberty and most importantly, freedom.

 Unlike other revolutions, Cuba has had a unique impact on the modern revolutionary culture stemming from the 20th century. Within the Cuban revolution, the armed struggle for national liberation is evident as the people chose to struggle unlike the romanticized versions of revolution, and inspired revolutionary culture in its ability to look achievable. The new revolutionary culture of Cuba highlights Amilcar Cabral’s ideas of national liberation and artistic methods from Augusto Boal which emulate other revolutionary figures like Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. The ideas of revolution forge as the theme of Cuba’s revolution is working inside and out the system through self realization and embodying the revolutionary spirit through romanticization and indoctrination.

The Cuban revolution emulated the idea of romanticization of revolution while it was occuring. Other revolutions such as the French or Mexican revolution were commonly romanticized after the fact in film, movies, song, or other art forms. However, Cuba’s revolution was romanticized as it was occurring, by other wealthier countries. Eric Selbin explains how Cuba’s revolution emulated a culture of romanticization, “Cuba seemed to suggest as never before that any determined body of people willing to engage in the struggle, make the sacrifices, and take the risks could make revolution” (Selbin 134). Cuba’s romanticization was happening concurrently with the revolution, and more directly, since the people of the revolution made it look easy. Cuban revolutionaries also embodied the revolutionary spirit contributing to the image of ideal change for freedom. The image of revolutionary spirit and romanticization gaining more followers in revolutionary acts is connected to Arendt’s ideas. “However, once the revolutions had begun to run their course, and long before those who were involved in them could know whether their enterprise would end in victory or disaster, the novelty of the story and the innermost meaning of its plot became manifest to actors and spectators alike.” (Arendt 28). The Cuban revolution did exactly that as Selbin explained the inspiration it had for other countries looking for revolution in its simplicity.

 Amilcar Cabral explains the breakdown of the armed struggle in the fight for national liberation and the ways of which culture is usurped, and can be maintained or reclaimed through involvement of political forces, the petite bourgeoisie, and other social strata. Liberation movements basing its action in popular culture, no matter the diversity levels of culture, is one of Cabral’s ideas seen in the Cuban revolution. By instilling the concept of people revolutionizing themselves, it inspired others by how embodying and indulging in the struggle would lead to revolution. The Cuban revolution also follows Cabral’s idea of involving people of all social strata classes as they sent doctors, construction workers, nurses, and all others to contribute to revolutionary ideals. This further supports ideas from Cabral such as the petite bourgeoisie know people better through interaction and understand realities more than the further upper classes who are alienated from culture. As Cabral also mentioned, there are ways for successfully achieving revolution which is reinstated by Cuban revolutionary leader Che Guevara.

Che Guevara’s teachings take up the theme of change by all means necessary in his writings of indoctrination for the revolution. Che Guevara’s essay *On Art and Revolution* provides instructions for ways of achieving and forming revolutionary troops. Che Guevara follows Cabral’s principle, “The need for such an analysis of cultural values becomes more acute when, in order to face colonial violence, the liberation movement must mobilize and organize the people, under the direction of a strong and disciplined political organization, in order to resort to violence in the cause of freedom—the armed struggle for national liberation.” Guevara calls for change by all means necessary: the armed struggle. In achieving this principle, Che Guevara calls for indoctrination and the use of propaganda both inside and out political forces. Propaganda prepared within the military zone relates to Cabral’s principle of carrying out the moral social aspects of liberation.

Meeting revolution inside and outside a political organization directly correlates to the definitions of revolution brought up by Hannah Arendt. In achieving liberation and freedom, freedom is the participation in public affairs, free speech, thought, association, and assembly. Che Guevara calls for the use of the radio, with words increasing the need for liberation among petite bourgeoisie and peasants by the fundamental principle of popular propaganda: truth. In creating consciousness of greater national problems can it help further unification and inducing self induced revolution. In using platforms such as the radio, includes the participation in assembly, free thought, and public affairs as mentioned by Arendt. Che Guevara’s essay as a whole correlates with the structural changes needed within a system such as schools to forge revolution. Che Guevara also calls for indoctrination schools, which require reading as well, “Further reading will follow as a vocation; the surrounding circumstances will awaken new desires for understanding in the soldiers” (Guevara 203). It is proven that reading is an important aspect of being a self induced revolutionary, as told by Fidel Casto’s former teacher in *Fidel Castro: The Untold Story.* His professor recalls how Castro was brilliant and he would read, memorizing pages at a time. In using art forms, and educating, the people of the Cuban revolution instilled the right to build a new world, and construction of a new society, and reclaiming culture and reaffirming Cabral’s idea “people free from foreign domination will be free culturally if negating harmful influence of subjection to foreign culture.” The people of the Cuban revolution do just that, Eric Selbin explains in his book, when they start to negate the influences of the United States and France by deciding to reclaim their language and de-americanize their Spanish.

In these practices of merging art forms and revolution, can we see ideas form and theatrics of propaganda providing a new way of “revolution”. Use of the radio and other methods of unification for self awareness in ability to revolutionize is a primary component in Augusto Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed.* Augusto’s idea of the First Stage: Knowing the Body indicates the same self awareness needed as Che Guevara’s essay. Creating consciousness of greater national problems is achieved in the first stage, “The exercises of this first stage are designed to “undo” the muscular structure of the participants. That is, to take them apart to study and analyze them. Not to weaken or destroy them, but to raise them to the same level of consciousness. If one is able, in this way, to disjoint one’s own muscular structures, one will surely be able to assemble structures characteristic of other professions and social classes; that is, one will be able to physically “interpret” characters different from oneself.” (Boal 128). These ideas connect directly to Cabral’s influence and that of the theme of self realization of one’s role in the Cuban revolution. Augusto Boal and Che Guevara’s forging of consciousness with revolution for self realization connects to the theme of revolutionary spirit discussed in the class over the semester.

It is evident that Cuba forged its own revolutionary culture by instilling the ways of national liberation through methods like that of Augusto Boal, encouraged by revolutionary leaders like Che Guevara. In recognizing the alienation of culture, and lack thereof with or without indoctrination, coordinating two propagandas helps create unification for people to be self sufficient and become aware of their capabilities and role in the revolution. Cuba’s ability to make revolution look accessible to all ties into Boal’s self awareness to take on other roles. Arendt’s ideas of revolution forge with Che Guevara’s in finding freedom inside and outside the system, adding romanticization. My analysis shines light on what we think the definition of a revolution is: A dynamic power change where some parts of revolution are performative, large, visible, some parts of revolution are smaller power changes, apparent in every day actions. Smaller changes, such as gaining consciousness of issues is one example, and performative, larger changes include the indoctrination of Che Guevara, and use of propaganda through media, and the armed struggle. It is seen possible to create liberation by use of art increasing the need for liberation among petite bourgeoisie and peasants. (Below is my essay photo)



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