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¡Viva la Revolución!: Cuba’s Revolution and Its Impact on Latin America’s Resistance Against Imperialism.

According to political scientist, Eric Selbin, in *Revolution, Rebellion, Resistance: The Power of Story,* stories do critical and necessary social work because they not only help account for puzzling, unexpected, dramatic, problematic, or exemplary events, but they also help confirm, redefine, or challenge social relations (See also Tilly, 2006: 93). Selbin explains that the latter is where resistance, rebellion and revolution come into play. Stories reflect the cultural values of their time and place as well as of those who tell them. In times of revolution, this battleground over stories bears stakes in defining self-determination and liberation.

In the reading *National Liberation and Culture*, Amilcar Cabral discusses “foreign domination”, and the ways in which these stories and the cultural lives of the dominated population are paralyzed. He mentions that in many cases foreign domination, whether imperialist or not, involves liquidating practically all the population of the dominated country, thereby eliminating the possibilities for cultural resistance. This usually implies genocide of the indigenous population and creates a void which empties foreign domination of its content and its object: the dominated people (Cabral, 1970).

The value of culture as an element of resistance to foreign domination, as Cabral puts it, lies in the fact that culture is the vigorous manifestation on the ideological or idealist plane of the physical and historical reality of the society that is dominated. Culture is simultaneously the fruit of a people’s history and a determinant of history, by the positive or negative influence which it exerts on the revolution of relationships between man and his environment, among men or groups of men within a society, as well as among different societies. Cabral explains that imperialist domination, by denying the historical development of the dominated people, also denies their cultural development. It is also understood why imperialist domination, like all other foreign domination, for its own security, requires cultural oppression and the attempt at direct or indirect liquidation of the essential elements of the culture of the dominated people.

This is the case of many Latin American countries such as Cuba and Venezuela. Countries whose revolutions had important consequences not only for their people, but also for other countries. Cuba is a country once ruled by Spanish settlers who forced thousands of Taino Arawak Indians to work mining gold and clearing land for agriculture, and who later brought African slaves to work in sugar plantations. Unlike other Spanish colonies who were becoming independent in the 1820’s, Cuba did not gain its independence until the last third of the century.

As a result of the Spanish-American War, control of Cuba passed from Spain to the United States on January 1, 1899, and it was governed by direct U.S. military administration until May 20, 1902. Cuba had many presidents in the following years. Gerardo Machado, a popular veteran of the independence war, became president of Cuba in 1924. He was supported by the army and the U.S. interests, which led him to institute a “repressive and bloody dictatorship.” Franklin D. Roosevelt convinced Machado to resign, and Carlos Manuel de Céspedes took his place. De Céspedes was quickly overthrown by a coup led by Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar, a sergeant who gained control of the army at the time of Machado’s downfall. He set aside the constitution and tried to bring about modest reforms, but critics feared that he was too closely allied to the U.S. He was overthrown after just a few months, and Ramón Grau San Martín took his place. Throughout this time Batista held real power through control over the army, thus Cuba was governed by a succession of puppet presidents until 1940. Fidel Castro led an armed revolt of around 160 people against the government of Fulgencio Batista which took place between 1953 and 1959. He had hoped that the attack would ignite a general uprising against Batista, but most of the attackers were killed and Castro and his brother Raúl were arrested and imprisoned. In 1955 the Castro brothers received amnesty and were released, whereupon Fidel went to Mexico, where he began organizing an invading force of Cuban exiles.

Accompanied by a band of 81 men, Castro landed in eastern Cuba on December 2, 1956, but most of the force was quickly killed or captured. Among the dozen men who escaped were the Castro brothers and Ernesto (“Che”) Guevara. This small band then began a guerrilla campaign against Batista, and years later it could match government troops in pitched battle and often faced them with superior equipment obtained from foreign sources. On December 27, 1958, a rebel force under Che Guevara captured an armored train filled with arms and ammunition that were desperately needed by government forces. After seeing this, Batista relinquished the presidency on January 1, 1959. He was replaced by a revolutionary government led by Fidel. This government changed along communist lines and became the Communist Party of Cuba in October 1965.

The success of the Cuban revolution, also in resisting U.S. economic and military pressures became exemplary and it encouraged revolutionaries throughout Latin America, many of which came to Cuba to train in guerrilla tactics. Several leaders of the Cuban revolution called for a “continental revolution” to liberate all of Latin America from imperialism and social injustice. Che Guevara became a major public advocate of this concept through his speeches and his read works such as *Guerrilla Warfare* (1960). The positive achievements and persistence of the Cuban revolution played an important role in inspiring Hugo Chávez’s revolutionary efforts in Venezuela. Chávez became president of Venezuela in 1998, pledging to bring about Bolivarian revolution to help the poor and to resist imperialism. Chávez was a well-documented admirer of Fidel Castro, and within a short period of time Venezuela was shipping oil to Cuba, and Cuba sent doctors, nurses, and teachers to Venezuela.

In his essay, *On Art and Revolution*, Che Guevara wrote that “There are no artists of great authority who also have great revolutionary authority. The members of the party must take this task in hand and seek the achievement of the main goal: to educate the people.” (Guevara, 1965) Che argued that the liberation of humankind is reached when work becomes a social duty carried out with complete satisfaction and sustained by a value system that contributes to the realization of conscious action in performing tasks. This could be achieved by systematic education, and perhaps the telling of stories that help people connect with their history and their culture. Here, Che also expresses the constant struggle between the values of the past and the attempt to construct an all-encompassing culture based on solidarity between people and real social justice, which was made more difficult, not only by the persistence of the past culture but also by dogmatic and authoritarian tendencies of “socialist realism” in socialist countries. The antidote was to defend the best and most unique aspects of Cuban culture, avoiding excesses, and by trying to construct a culture that would express the feelings of the majority without vulgarity and schemas. This is the perspective that has been maintained in the development of revolutionary culture in Cuba, and neither neoliberalism nor globalization has been able to impede the genuine process of popular culture. This is the expression of a truly socialist society.

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