

INTRODUCTION

IN APRIL 1959, DURING HIS FIRST TRIP TO THE UNITED STATES after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro spent several days at Princeton University. His visit was organized by the American Whig-Cliosophic Society and the Woodrow Wilson School's Special Program in American Civilization. These groups had learned of Castro's trip to Washington, which had been sponsored by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, and with the encouragement of Roland T. Ely, a scholar of the Cuban sugar industry, they invited Castro to deliver a keynote address on April 20 for a seminar entitled, "The United States and the Revolutionary Spirit."¹ Another celebrated speaker during the seminar was Princeton professor Hannah Arendt, who was doubtless also in attendance for Castro's address that evening.²

Castro, who at the time held the post of Cuban prime minister, began his speech by clarifying that he was neither a theorist nor a historian of revolutions. As he reminded his audience, his knowledge of revolutions came rather from his engagement with a revolution that had taken place in a small Caribbean nation close to the United States. In his view, the Cuban Revolution had debunked several myths propagated by the Latin American Right: that a

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revolution was impossible if the people were hungry, and that a revolution could never defeat a professional army equipped with modern weapons. In keeping with the seminar's predominant perspective, Castro described himself as a product more of the 1776 American Revolution than of either the 1789 French Revolution or the 1917 Russian Revolution, insofar as the last two upheavals had been driven by "force" and "terror" wielded by minorities.³ As he put it, the groups that took power in France and Russia "used force and terror to form a new terror."

During his address, Castro situated his ideology well within the scope of a democratic American humanism shared by the United States and Latin America. The two regions, despite their cultural specificities, did not constitute "different people," he assured his audience.⁴ He also declared that elections would soon be held in Cuba and that political parties would also be formed, although first it was necessary to implement a social transformation in order to eradicate unemployment and illiteracy and to construct schools and hospitals. The United States could assist in this social development of Cuba by implementing friendly policies and by rejecting any fear of communism, since an authentic social revolution on the island would make democracy a "real" process and ward off the communist danger: "I advise you not to worry about Communism in Cuba. When our goals are won, Communism will be dead."⁵ At the conclusion of his remarks, Castro invited his young American audience to visit Cuba, and—implicitly—to become involved in the revolutionary spirit that was propelling social change on an island that the United States had first intervened in, and had then neocolonized and modernized, during the first half of the twentieth century.

Castro's message was received enthusiastically by his audience of university students, members of a generation that was becoming aware both of the imperial role played by their country during the Cold War, particularly in the Third World, and of the civil rights disparities that cut through American society itself. However, as easily as the Cuban Revolution entered the social imaginary of this young, pacifist, libertarian, anticolonial, and antiprejudice generation, that revolution also generated fierce ideological and geopolitical disputes between 1959 and 1971.

This book explores these debates over the Cuban Revolution during the 1960s, particularly those centered on the New York public sphere and intellectual field. That decade and this city constituted a microcosm of activity whose resonance was felt around the globe. New York in the 1960s was the moment and the place for progressive movements of all kinds: artistic vanguards, women's liberation, sexual liberation, civil rights, and opposition to the Vietnam War. But these movements and struggles were also privileged scenarios for the emergence and circulation of debates over the ideological identity of Cuban socialism—its truths and its errors, its coincidences and divergences from the Soviet model, its lessons for the Western Left—as well as for the articulation of critiques of US government policy toward Cuba.

The energy of the New York debates over the Cuban Revolution can be explained in part by the close economic, political, and cultural ties that came to be established between the Cuban island and the United States during the first half of the twentieth century. One result of that historical process, as Louis A. Pérez Jr. and other historians have demonstrated, is that when the revolution broke out, most prominent New York media organizations, such as the *New York Times* and NBC, already had bureaus and correspondents in Havana whose reporting had made the island a central topic of these organizations' Latin American coverage.⁶ In New York, with its strong liberal and socialist traditions, the Cuban Revolution was discussed as nowhere else, just as the Mexican Revolution and the Spanish Civil War had energized the city's public discourse decades before.

This book examines the practices of New York intellectuals who took public positions in the Cuba debate and wrote books or essays on the Cuban experience, including Waldo Frank, Carleton Beals, C. Wright Mills, Allen Ginsberg, Amiri Baraka, Susan Sontag, Norman Mailer, Irving Howe, Paul Sweezy, Leo Huberman, Paul Baran, Eldridge Cleaver, Stokely Carmichael, José Yglesias, and Elizabeth Sutherland Martínez. It also reexamines publications such as the *Monthly Review*, *Kulchur*, and *Pa'Lante*, as well as cultural and political movements such as the Beat Generation and the Black Panthers. By means of this review of diverse social and

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political actors, ideologies, and aesthetics, the study seeks to map the ways in which Cuba was represented by the New York Left.

Plurality had long been a distinctive trait of New York's intellectual map. In the debate over the Cuban Revolution, this plurality was not merely ideological or political but was also characterized and sustained by the dissimilar identities of the subjects who participated in the debate: beat writers, hippies, Jews, blacks, Hispanics, academics, writers, and activists.⁷ Veterans of the Rooseveltian Left, such as Frank and Beals, did not see the revolution as it was perceived by young liberals like Mills or Mailer, or by young socialists like Sweezy and Baran. Even within the same currents of sympathy and solidarity with the Cuban project, different inflections and priorities can be detected, whether in the Hispanic Left of Martínez and Yglesias or the Afro-American Left of Cleaver and Carmichael.

In few cities on the planet was such a plurality of discourses on Cuban socialism generated. Echoes of the polemic were heard in Havana. For example, *Pensamiento Crítico*, the Cuban journal most clearly identified with critical Marxism and opposition to Marxist-Leninist hegemony of Soviet inspiration, devoted a special issue to intellectuals associated with the Black Panthers. New York's critical debates on the Cuban Revolution naturally had few effects, or only adverse effects, on Washington's policies toward the Caribbean and Latin America. In fact, for all their intellectual and moral richness, the debates in question were viewed with disfavor by all the powers involved in the Cuban conflict. During the 1960s, New York once again functioned like an island in the middle of the Atlantic currents, this time those of the Cold War.

The topic of this book is one that has been previously treated from a number of perspectives. Many of the protagonists of this period of New York intellectual history wrote memoirs and testimonies of their involvement in the debates over Cuba, and many intellectuals and academics have sought to provide a general reconstruction of that archive. The polarization generated by the revolutionary event itself, in the context of the Cold War, has often been transferred to their analyses. Two emblematic examples of this ideological polarization are the chapter devoted to Cuba in

Paul Hollander's classic *Political Pilgrims* (1981) and Kepa Artaraz's more recent study, *Cuba and Western Intellectuals since 1959* (2009). Whereas Hollander portrays the intellectuals of the New York Left as "pilgrims" enchanted by their faith in an exotic revolution, Artaraz, from the other ideological extreme, mostly stresses the political consonance between Cuban socialism and the Western New Left.⁸

Classic studies of the Marxist Left in the United States, such as Paul Buhle's *Marxism in the United States* (1987), have attributed little importance to the debates over the Cuban Revolution during the 1960s, even when these studies acknowledge—following Fredric Jameson—that one of the New Left's principal intuitions was its conviction that capitalism threatened to absorb two fields, or dimensions, that had hitherto remained beyond its scope: the unconscious and the Third World.⁹ The importance that Buhle attributes to the African American Left in the history of US Marxism would be difficult to ascertain without citing the support that many US black leaders expressed for the Cuban Revolution as a landmark moment of Third World decolonization.¹⁰ Although more recent analyses such as Razmig Keucheyan's *The Left Hemisphere* (2013) attribute a more central role to the debates over Cuban socialism, they tend to inscribe those debates in a broader, transnational contextualization of the New Left's relation to the Third World, which includes decolonizing processes in North Africa, Vietnam, Egypt, India, and, of course, Latin American guerrilla movements.¹¹

Without dismissing the contributions of such studies, this book seeks to explore the interplay of tensions and sympathies that were generated in the relation between the New Left and the Cuban Revolution. It is clear that New York intellectuals participated in the widespread enthusiasm generated in New York public opinion immediately following Castro's January 1959 triumph, but not all of these intellectuals supported the socialist radicalization of Cuban society that was subsequently introduced over the course of the 1960s. In fact, many intellectuals who defended the socialist transition earlier in the decade later distanced themselves from it when they perceived the effects on Cuba's economy, politics, and culture of the regime's alliance with the Soviet Union and the

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island's reproduction of the institutions and styles of Eastern European socialism.

TRANSLATION AND UTOPIA, BOUNDARIES AND EMPIRE

The study of the debate over the Cuban Revolution in New York during the 1960s must consider the politics of the translation of Latin American experience that emerged from the public sphere of this Western cultural metropolis. Since the sixteenth century, translation has served as a constitutive cultural practice for Atlantic intellectual history. Historians, anthropologists, and literary scholars—working particularly from postcolonial perspectives—such as Mary Louise Pratt, Laura Lomas, Douglas Robinson, Robert Stam, and Ella Shohat, have situated translation at the very center of the historical confrontations and contacts among the cultures of Europe, United States, and Latin America, and have highlighted the importance to the process of modernity of this intercrossing of mutual representations between different languages and cultures.¹²

In the case of the Cuban Revolution, what was subject to translation was not just a culture but also a political project that unfolded in the midst of Cold War ideological tensions. Just as the Mexican Revolution earlier in the century had impacted the US-Mexican border culturally and politically—as Claudio Lomnitz and other scholars have demonstrated—Cuban socialism likewise challenged the US public sphere as an American domestic dilemma, particularly due to the Soviet presence that accompanied the revolution over the course of the 1960s.¹³ It was imperative for New York intellectuals and politicians to take a public stance on Cuban communism at the time, insofar as the very identity of the United States in a bipolar world was at stake.

Like Mexico, the Caribbean islands have always comprised a border zone delineated by Atlantic imperial dynamics. Since the 1898 consolidation of US hemispheric hegemony, the Hispanic Caribbean was fully integrated within the new world power's southern border. In the Cuban intellectual tradition itself, the nation's borderland status generated prominent reflections in the

work of José Martí, Enrique José Varona, Fernando Ortiz, and, especially, Jorge Mañach, who devoted an entire study to the topic: *Teoría de la frontera* (1961).¹⁴

The Cuban Revolution and its accelerated communist radicalization only served to reinforce the island's emplacement within a US border region. However, the translation of the Cuban revolutionary experience in the work of New York intellectuals in fact downplayed Cuba's status as a border community. Both those who defended and those who rejected communism in the Caribbean treated the revolution as a US domestic drama, a fact all the more striking given that the drama in question constituted the very definition of an international and transnational event, as a crucial episode of the global transformation symbolized by the construction of the Berlin Wall. The clash between defenders and critics of Cuban communism in New York reflected the struggle between two notions of universalism: on the one hand, that of democracy and the philosophy of human rights, as articulated by Lynn Hunt and Samuel Moyn, and on the other, that of communism and "proletarian internationalism," as characterized by David Priestland and Archie Brown.¹⁵

New York intellectuals' portrayal of Cuba as a utopia, along with the stereotypes inherent to such a representation, was generated both by those who celebrated the revolution's turn toward communism and by those who called for the construction of a model democracy in the Caribbean. On the left, this American translation of utopia did not merely seek to express support for the concrete policies of the Cuban experiment or for the Latin American and Caribbean movements that it inspired; rather, and more fundamentally, it also sought to reinforce reformist or anti-system currents among young New York intellectuals themselves. For these leftist currents, the Cuban Revolution symbolized something quite different from the Soviet Union or any of the communisms of Eastern Europe.

Some of the movements studied in this book, such as the Black Panthers or the League of Militant Poets, appropriated the Cuban example as a genuine referent for the revolution that the African American and Hispanic Left sought to promote within the United

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States. However, these appropriations, just like the extensive critiques of Cuban communism articulated by New York Marxists, social democrats, and liberals, were not lacking in a strong factor of ideological distancing that highlighted the significant contextual differences between the United States and Cuba. Within the New York Left's discourse of solidarity with the revolution, an imperial, even colonial, perspective frequently emerged, one that viewed radicalism and violence as components of Caribbean culture.

Although the New York debates over the Cuban Revolution reflected Cold War ideological polarization, these debates were far from constituting a simple binarism. There were not two, but many, positions on Cuba held by the members of the New York Left. This plurality reflected not only the heterogeneity of the New York intellectual field itself, but also the changing, and at times experimental, nature of Cuban socialism during its first decade. The Cuban revolutions interpellated by the New York public sphere were multiple because multiple Cuban revolutions were taking place on the island.

Waldo Frank's humanist Cuban revolution was different from C. Wright Mills's Marxist revolution and Carleton Beals's populist revolution. The pro-Soviet, Maoist, and Guevarist socialisms debated in the *Village Voice* or *Monthly Review* were each different modalities of Cuban socialism and for Cuban socialism. The planned economy and bureaucratic, one-party regime perfectly immersed in the field of the "real socialism" of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, as criticized by Hannah Arendt, was not the same as the anticolonial and nationalist revolution attuned with African decolonization or Latin American anti-imperialism, as celebrated by Frantz Fanon.¹⁶ The plurality of New York's public sphere reproduced the very diversity and experimental character of Cuban socialism itself prior to its Soviet institutionalization during the 1970s.

However, New York—and to a lesser extent other Western cultural capitals, such as Paris, Madrid, Mexico City, or Buenos Aires—supplied the theoretical debate and public clash of ideas and opinions that was often lacking in the Cuban Revolution. Although the revolution's early years were marked by openness and vibrancy in the public sphere, starting already in 1961 the island's ideological debate and intellectual field came increasingly under

state control and centralization. As a transnational phenomenon, the Cuban Revolution can therefore only be fully understood by examining its resonances in other Western cultural capitals where understandings of the revolution, as well as the ideas and politics of the Cold War, were so often put into circulation. In a forthcoming work, Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori call for writing global intellectual histories that look beyond the “diffusion of ideas” framed by relations between cosmopolitan centers and peripheries and to instead put greater focus on networks of exchange and “intermediation,” borrowing methods and models from other areas of global history such as cross-cultural trade in order to conceptualize the circulation of ideas in a similar fashion.¹⁷ In this sense, one could say that New York served as a privileged hub of intermediation in the circulation of ideas about, and representations of, the Cuban Revolution.

INTELLECTUALS, PUBLICATIONS, MOVEMENTS, AND POLEMICS

The purpose of this book, once again, is to reconstruct the discussion about Cuba in the public sphere of New York and its surroundings. Toward that end, I have focused on personalities such as Waldo Frank, C. Wright Mills, and Carleton Beals, three rather different Americanist intellectuals: a writer, an academic, and a journalist, all of whom wrote articles and books on Cuba during the 1950s and 1960s. But I am also interested in publications during the period, such as the *New York Times*, the *Village Voice*, *Monthly Review*, *Dissent*, *Kulchur*, and *Pa’Lante*, as well as leftist movements such as the Beat Generation, the Black Panthers, and the League of Militant Poets. My reading of these public interventions on the part of very different actors, publications, and movements seeks to capture the debates and clashes of vision over the Cuban Revolution, understanding the latter as a transnational phenomenon.

Chapter 1, “Hipsters and Apparatchiks,” describes the editorial evolution of the *New York Times* and the *Village Voice* vis-à-vis

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the Cuban experience during the sixties. Numerous correspondents and editorial writers of the *Times* were intensively involved in covering the Cuban Revolution, such as Ruby Hart Phillips, Herbert Matthews, and Tad Szulc, all of whom evolved from initially enthusiastic or romantic perceptions of the anti-Batistan epic to more critical positions toward the island's communist radicalization, a shift that reflected the anticommunist mentality of the Cold War. In contrast to the *Times*, the *Village Voice* did not demonstrate great interest in the first—democratic and liberal—phase of the revolution, but it began to express solidarity with the island in the middle of the 1960s in opposition to Washington's policies toward Cuba. The *Voice's* identification with the figure of Ernesto "Che" Guevara is a particularly good example of the assimilation of a Latin American hero by New Left culture in New York.

Chapter 2, "Naming the Hurricane," is devoted to the writer Waldo Frank and his relation to Cuba. In 1959 Frank, together with Carleton Beals, was one of the American writers most deeply engaged with Latin America. Since the 1920s he had traveled through Mexico, Argentina, Peru, and Cuba, and had befriended important Latin American intellectual figures such as Jorge Luis Borges, the sisters Silvina and Victoria Ocampo, José Carlos Mariátegui, José Vasconcelos, Alfonso Reyes, Juan Marinello, and Jorge Mañach. When the Cuban Revolution triumphed, Frank viewed it as a confirmation of his Americanist ideas and proceeded to travel to Havana as a member of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee organized by Robert Taber. In 1959 the Cuban government contracted Frank to write a book about the revolution from his Judeo-Christian humanist viewpoint. The book, entitled *Cuba: Prophetic Island* (1961), appeared just as Marxist socialism was declared on the island. Frank opposed this shift; some of his criticisms of the radicalization of Cuba were not well received in Havana, and the book was never published on the island.

One of the groups most resolutely supportive of the Cuban Revolution's 1961 communist turn was that of the Marxists associated with *Monthly Review* magazine, which is a topic I focus on in chapter 3, "Socialists in Manhattan." Paul Sweezy, Leo Huberman, and Paul Baran placed Cuba at the center of the magazine's

coverage from 1961 to 1969. These Marxists' view of the island evolved with the changing economic policies of the revolutionary government and with conflicts between different models of industrialization and agrarian development. If at the beginning of the sixties Sweezy and Huberman sympathized with the adoption of a planned economic system integrated into the socialist camp, as seen in their work *Cuba: Anatomy of a Revolution* (1961), by the end of that decade, as reflected in their second book, entitled *Socialism in Cuba* (1969), they would no longer hide their criticisms of the growing bureaucratization of Cuban socialism, which they attributed to Soviet influence.

Chapter 4, "The Cultural Apparatus of the Empire," is devoted to the figure of Columbia University sociologist C. Wright Mills. When the Cuban Revolution triumphed in January 1959, Mills was increasingly interested in two related themes: Latin America—and Third World countries in general—and the public engagement of the leftist intellectual. Both themes placed him at the center of the Cuban debate in New York during the early 1960s. Like Frank, Beals, Sweezy, and Huberman, Mills traveled to Havana and wrote a book about the island: *Listen, Yankee: The Revolution in Cuba* (1960). Like Frank's *Cuba: Prophetic Island* (1960), Mills's book was published in the midst of the revolutionary government's communist evolution, which forced the author to confront reality in the face of his insistence that the Cuban leaders were not communists. Unlike Frank and the majority of liberal intellectuals in New York, Mills defended the right of the Cuban people to adopt the socialist path.

The Cuban Revolution was also a topic and motive of cultural representation for the writers of the Beat Generation and particularly for Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg also traveled to Havana and was interested in Castro and Guevara's visits to New York. Like other beat poets and narrators, Ginsberg opposed the US government's hostile policies toward the island and identified with the bearded Sierra Madre revolutionaries, whom he saw as similar to counter-cultural subjects in the United States. However, after seeing the revolution's adoption of homophobic and repressive policies toward libertarian youth during his 1965 trip to the island, he assumed a

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critical stance toward the Cuban regime that he would maintain for the rest of his life. Chapter 5, “Moons of the Revolution,” examines the history of this disenchantment.

Chapter 6, “Negroes with Guns,” discusses the complex relations between intellectuals of the Black Panther movement and the Cuban Revolution. I begin by focusing on an antecedent figure of this movement, Robert F. Williams, author of *Negroes with Guns* (1962), one of the first texts to assimilate the experience of Guevara’s guerrilla theory for the African American Left. I then gloss the ideas of Eldridge Cleaver, Stokely Carmichael, and other Black Panther leaders with respect to the Cuban Revolution and its socialism. Just as the Cuban Revolution’s policies against homosexuality and drugs distanced certain members of the Beat Generation from the island’s experience, Cuban socialism’s egalitarian racial strategy, with its threats to an autonomous ethical sociability, generated tensions between the Black Panthers and the Cuban regime.

Chapter 7, “The League of Militant Poets,” focuses on one of the most interesting and least well-known phenomena of the New York public sphere during the 1960s: the crystallization of a Hispanic intellectual initiative that sympathized with the revolutions and socialisms of Latin America. This ephemeral movement named itself “The League of Militant Poets,” was led by writers and poets José Yglesias and Elizabeth Sutherland Martínez, and was organized around underground publications such as *Kulchur* and *Pa’Lante*. These magazines featured translations of Cuban writers and debates over the ideology and cultural politics of the revolution during the 1960s. As reflected in these publications, Yglesias and Martínez underwent an evolution in their perceptions of the island. Like Sweezy and Huberman, they began to criticize the Sovietization of Cuban socialism between the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s.

Chapter 8, “The Skin of Socialism,” deals with the figure of veteran journalist Carleton Beals. Like Waldo Frank, Beals was a Latin Americanist traveler who had journeyed through Mexico, Guatemala, Cuba, and Peru, and since the 1920s had written books devoted to each of these countries. When the Cuban Revolution

broke out in 1957, Beals began to write about the island for the *Nation*, serving as one of the journalists who covered Castro's arrival in Havana. However, Beals, who turned down the presidency of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, early on began to publish criticisms of the revolutionary state's political organization and the leaders of its revolution. In contrast to that of other American liberals, his disappointment with Cuba was not so much a result of the island's communist turn, which he likewise disapproved of, but was due to the Cuban regime's abandonment of what he called the Latin American "revolutionary zeitgeist," an ideological lineage he identified as beginning with the Mexican Revolution.

As can be seen, each of these chapters tells a story of promise and disappointment, of enthusiasm and disenchantment, that is characteristic of the modern exercise of criticism in public life. However, I do not seek to narrate this sequence as a linear account of the displacement of identification with estrangement. Rather, I am interested in capturing the back-and-forth, even the coexistence, between these two attitudes. The Cuban Revolution, like every transnational experience, was lived by New York intellectuals as a phenomenon proper to the public sphere of New York. Those who became involved in the debate over the future of socialism in the Caribbean did so as actors and protagonists of that history without questioning the right they had to accompany or abandon it.

MICROCOSMS OF THE LEFT

As Thomas Bender has observed, the intensity of New York intellectual life since the end of the nineteenth century was the result of clear demographic and institutional factors in the city, particularly the ethnic heterogeneity of its cosmopolitan population and its concentration of universities, theaters, museums, newspapers, journals, and cultural associations of all kinds.¹⁸ New York's formidable network of transition and mobility turned it into one of the capitals of the Western avant-garde from the 1920s onward. In addition to the city's intellectual cosmopolitanism and cultural diversity, the rise of the worker movement, which was particularly

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strong in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and other cities of the North Atlantic seaboard, contributed another element of dynamism to New York intellectual life.

The New York press, which had served as the sounding board for national public opinion since the Spanish-American War, was instrumental in publicizing the socialist campaigns of Chicago railroad union leader Eugene V. Debs during the first decades of the twentieth century, and this coverage energized discussions of socialism in the city.¹⁹ Debates broke out in New York newspapers and universities over whether the Social Democratic Party founded by Debs was appropriate in a nation like the United States. A substantial contribution to this discussion was the essay *Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?* (1906) by German economist and sociologist Werner Sombart. Initially published in a German social sciences journal, Sombart's essay was soon translated to English and subsequently generated a wide variety of reactions in the United States. Drawing on data showing the underperformance of the Socialist Party in the presidential elections of 1900 and 1904, and the gubernatorial elections for the same period in Alabama, Colorado, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Texas, Illinois, and New York, Sombart concluded that socialism in the United States was simply not a competitive political option.²⁰ American electoral support for democratic socialism in the early years of the twentieth century had not surpassed the demographic volume of German democratic socialism in the 1870s.

Following the triumph of the October Revolution in Russia and the split between the democratic socialist Left and the communist Left in the United States and other Western nations, Sombart's thesis was increasingly put into question. During the 1920s, communism in the United States expanded with the radicalization of democratic socialism, a process in which leaders such as John Reed, Charles Ruthenberg, and James P. Cannon played a fundamental role. As studied by Moshik Temkin, the massive public demonstrations in support of anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two Italian immigrants accused of theft and murder in Boston, served as effective proof of the influence of socialism in the United States.²¹

As in most of the Western cultural capitals, the spread of socialist ideas in New York diverged into Stalinist and anti-Stalinist currents following Lenin's death. By the middle of the 1930s, the city's socialists were divided in their responses to the Moscow Trials and Stalin's consolidation of power. In a city where radical modernists, internationalist Jews, orthodox Marxists, and communist dissidents proliferated, it was inevitable that publications such as the *New Masses* and the *Partisan Review* would appear, and these organs of opinion contributed to the polarization of the ideological field of the Left.²² Stalinist and Trotskyist associations and parties abounded in that field, with figures such as Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos, Eugene O'Neill, and William Carlos Williams supporting the *New Masses* and Hannah Arendt, George Orwell, T. S. Eliot, and Lionel Trilling identifying with the *Partisan Review*.

The *Partisan Review* soon established itself as the principal medium of the anti-Stalinist flank of the New York Left. As Alexander Bloom, Neil Jumonville, and Terry A. Cooney have shown, during the pre- and post-World War II period, this journal, which was founded by William Phillips, Philip Rahv, and Sender Garlin, became the central platform for a critical socialism that rapidly devolved into liberal anticommunism.²³ The evolution of intellectuals such as Sidney Hook, Dwight Macdonald, Harold Rosenberg, or Norman Podhoretz is highly indicative of the ideological shifts that were provoked by McCarthyism and the Cold War.²⁴

Even as these intellectuals shifted toward liberal anti-communism—which would become an outright conservatism with the intensification of the Cold War in the 1960s—another sector of the New York Left continued to be receptive to what Cooney has referred to as the “appeal of Marxism,” opening itself to the language and values of beats, hippies, and other counter-culture currents.²⁵ This bifurcation of the New York Left during the Cold War is exemplified, on the one hand, by Irving Kristol and Norman Podhoretz, who followed the drift toward conservatism, and, on the other, by Harvey Swados and Irving Howe, two of the principal defenders of the possibility of democratic socialism in the United States.²⁶

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Howe and Swados serve as ideal figures for reconstructing both the radicalization of American liberalism during the Cold War and its tensions with the New Left. Howe and Swados were members of the generation that had founded the journal *Dissent* during the middle of the fifties, thereby preserving the legacy of the *Partisan Review*, and over the following decade these two figures upheld and defended *Dissent's* socialist orientation against the anticommunist turn taken by *Commentary* (under Podhoretz's leadership) and by other New York publications. The importance of literature in both the writings of Howe, who was always interested in literary criticism, and Swados, author of various novels and collections of stories, was a clear sign of the teachings and influence of Lionel Trilling, a fundamental referent of the articulation between literature and politics espoused by the *Partisan Review*.

In key studies such as *Politics and the Novel* (1957) or *A World More Attractive: A View of Modern Literature* (1963), Howe proposed reading politics in places where it tended to be hidden: the plots and characters of great modern novels. In his view, politics was “survival” in Stendhal, “salvation” in Dostoyevsky, “order” and “anarchy” in Conrad, “doubt” in Turgenev, and “vocation” in James.²⁷ Already in these studies, Howe lamented the exceptionalism and isolation of the great American literary tradition represented by such figures as Hawthorne, Emerson, Whitman, and James, and called for American writers to become more involved in the ideological debates of the postwar period that were being led by European authors such as Malraux, Silone, Koestler, and Orwell.²⁸

Howe and Swados both ascribed to the notion that American writers should intervene in public opinion as intellectuals and debate the dilemmas of democracy, communism, and fascism.²⁹ In *The Decline of the New* (1970), a collection of essays he had written for various New York publications during the 1960s, Howe characterized the New York intellectual field as a microcosm of Jews, European immigrants, Afro-Americans, and Hispanics, who debated the great themes of communism, fascism, colonization, and racism out of their predominant affinity with the critique of totalitarianism and their readings of the anti-utopian fictions of Zamiatin, Orwell, Huxley, and others.³⁰ Just as Trilling's example

inspired his defense of the critic who reads literature while at the same time issuing opinions on politics, that of Edmund Wilson bolstered his call to preserve the Marxist and socialist referent in the discourse of opposition to totalitarianism.

Like Howe, Harvey Swados also traced the parallel paths of literature and politics. Together with his works of fiction—his novels *False Coin* (1959) and *The Will* (1963), and his perhaps greater achievement, the collection of stories *Nights in the Gardens of Brooklyn* (1960), whose title echoed Spanish composer Manuel de Falla's famous orchestral work, *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*—Swados also wrote a series of essays and articles, collected in *A Radical's America* (1963) and *A Radical at Large* (1968), in which he positioned himself as an adherent of the New Left. Without abandoning his social-democratic perspective, Swados, like Howe, reclaimed the term “radicalism” for himself, but against his friend C. Wright Mills, he openly questioned the alignment with the Soviet Union of Third World nationalist movements such as the Cuban Revolution.

During the sixties, Howe produced a number of essay collections through which he sought to condense the global and domestic view of American social democracy. The essays that he selected for *The Radical Papers* (1966), *The Radical Imagination* (1967), *A Dissenter's Guide to Foreign Policy* (1968), and *Poverty: Views from the Left* (1968), written by such authors as Michael Harrington, Daniel Bell, Michael Walzer, Harvey Swados, and Howe himself, most of which had originally appeared in *Dissent*, critically analyzed topics such as poverty in the South, the civil rights movement, the corporatization of capitalism, US interventionism during the Cold War, China under Mao, Indonesia under Sukarno, Algeria under Ben Bella, Egypt under Nasser, decolonization processes in the Third World, and, of course, the Vietnam War.³¹

Despite the intensity of the debate over Cuba in the New York public sphere of the 1960s, Cuban socialism constituted only a secondary topic in most of the essays in Howe's anthologies. One writer, Walter Laquer, referred to “Castro's type of socialism” as a political regime different from the decolonizing nationalisms of Africa and Asia; another, Richard Lowenthal, commented on

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Havana's gravitation toward the Chinese model after the missile crisis; and Robert L. Heilbroner criticized the US trade embargo against the island and affirmed the social policies of the revolution while questioning the ideological difference between the Martí-inspired Castro of 1959 and the pro-Soviet Castro of 1962.³²

Although it represented only a minor topic in these anthologies, the Cuban question was nonetheless central to the public positioning of Howe, Swados, and many of the writers they published. In *The Radical Imagination* (1967), for example, Howe and Swados's approach to this question could be seen as emblematic for the New York Left of the 1960s. The New Left that *Dissent* sought to defend—as indicated by Michael Harrington in the journal's introductory text—had been shaped during the historical cycle between McCarthyism in the 1950s and the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War protests of the 1960s. But this New Left also identified with Albert Camus's denunciation of twentieth-century totalitarianisms, both fascist and communist; with the critique of “socialist realism” as the aesthetic canon of real socialism; and with the defense of dissident writers and politicians in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.³³

Howe identified the existence of diverse “styles” within the New Left. Some of these styles were closely aligned, such as opposition to the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, and support for African and Asian decolonization—Marshall Sahlins and Joseph Buttinger covered the last eloquently in *The Radical Imagination*.³⁴ However, in his view, the rejection of war should not imply an acritical stance toward the adoption of totalitarian regimes in Vietnam or Cuba. Lewis Coser introduced this delicate argumentation in an essay that identified three alternatives for the newly decolonized nations of the Third World: totalitarianism, authoritarianism, and democracy—the last, of course, being the model he favored.³⁵

Howe's identification of the “styles” of the New Left was even more explicit in his praise, on the one hand, for Frantz Fanon's North African nationalism (as presented in *The Wretched of the Earth* [1961]), and his questioning of the Cuban Revolution's turn toward communism, on the other.³⁶ Howe observed curious

connections between Fanon and Trotsky, identifying the former with the heterodoxy and revisionism he admired in Polish Marxists such as Leszek Kolakowski and Yugoslavian Marxists such as Milivan Djilas.³⁷ US policy toward the Cuban Revolution was “unjustifiably hostile,” he asserted, but the Cuban government’s “suppression of democratic rights” could not be supported.³⁸

INTERSECTING SOCIALISMS

Alan M. Wald has asserted that this double critique on the part of public intellectuals who ascribed to radicalism, such as Irving Howe and Harvey Swados, led to the “cul-de-sac of social democracy” in the United States.³⁹ Cold War polarization during the 1960s left very little room for an anti-Stalinist socialism in the United States, and a powerful current of the radical Left was unwilling to weaken its solidarity with Third World nations by criticizing their lack of freedoms or their adoption of authoritarian or totalitarian regimes. Following the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the “thaw” initiated by Nikita Khrushchev from Moscow, anti-Stalinism seemed to waver even in certain liberal circles of the New York Left.

The clash between these two branches of American socialism can be traced through the relation between Harvey Swados, Irving Howe, and C. Wright Mills. The three intellectuals had been friends in New York during the 1950s and had combatted McCarthyism in their work for various publications in the city. When the divergence of what Howe had referred to as New Left “styles” took place at the beginning of the sixties, Howe, Swados, and Mills clashed over the Soviet Union and the Cuban Revolution. In the spring of 1959, Howe published a critical review in *Dissent* of Mills’s book *The Causes of World War Three*, asserting that Mills’s focus on Cold War bipolarism comprised an acritical acceptance of the communist organization of societies as an alternative to Western democracy.⁴⁰

The debate between these two socialists grew bitter, adopting the binary antagonism of the Cold War itself: Mills accused Howe

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of defending the “socialism of Washington” and Howe responded by labeling Mills a “Stalinist.”⁴¹ The same tension resurfaced the following year with the publication of Mills’s *Listen, Yankee: The Revolution in Cuba*, in which the author affirmed his solidarity with the Cuban Revolution. It was not Howe but Swados who would mark his distance from Mills in a “Personal Memoir” written for *Dissent* after Mills’s death in 1963. In the piece, Swados acknowledged the value of the intellectual work of the author of *The Power Elite* but lamented his excessive enthusiasm for the Cuban regime.⁴²

According to Howe and Swados, recognizing the right to independence of Vietnam, Cuba, and other Third World nations, and publically objecting to the imperial policies of the United States and the European powers, need not preclude a critique of political authoritarianism in those Third World nations. This nuance was the key factor differentiating the radicalism favored by social democracy from the radicalism that was fully espoused by the New Left and that Mills embodied. The complexity in question did not result in an “ambiguous legacy” for social democracy, as Wald argues, nor does it prevent one from reconstructing the points of ideological convergence that the two radicalisms shared despite their differences.⁴³

Strictly speaking, the background of those differences had nothing to do with Vietnam or Cuba but rather with the Soviet Union and the socialist camp. Mills in the United States, like Jean Paul Sartre in France, was attempting to open a breach in liberal public opinion by insisting on recognition for the real existence of the Soviet bloc. Mills was not a Stalinist, of course—Howe himself knew this—but he differed from the democratic socialists in his defense of a Marxism and a socialism that more resolutely opposed US global hegemony. As Stanley Aronowitz has shown, this critique of Washington’s global imperialism—which drew that critique toward accepting an equivalent role for the Soviet Union—came out of an apparent rejection of the social structures of power in the United States.⁴⁴

By contrast, the American social democrats were linked to a global political network that, in tandem with or as a consequence

of its demands for a parliamentary—and eventually executive—space in Western democracies, sought to position itself against the Soviet Union and real socialism. A reconstruction of the debates over Cuba that took place between 1959 and 1963 in the Socialist International, of which the Socialist Party of America and the Independent Socialist League were members (the latter was led by Max Shachtman and its adherents included Irving Howe, Michael Harrington, Dwight Macdonald, and other public intellectuals in New York), allows for a more accurate assessment of the positioning of Western social democracy vis-à-vis the Cuban question.⁴⁵

Throughout 1959, the Socialist International was only minimally interested in Cuba, with its members more focused on China, Algeria, the Congo, or the problems of real socialism in Eastern Europe. The political identity of democratic socialism in the postwar period had been shaped at the intersection of antifascism, opposition to McCarthyism, sympathy for dissident movements in Eastern Europe, and the rejection of Soviet hegemony, which had been put to the test by the USSR's 1956 invasion of Hungary. Until early 1961, when the United States and Cuba broke off relations and the Bay of Pigs invasion took place, the Cuban Revolution was perceived by the social democrats as a nationalist movement not much different from Argentine Peronism or Mexican Cardenism.

In the *Socialist International Information* bulletin of April 29, 1961, the principal European socialist parties declared their opposition to the communist radicalization of the Cuban revolutionaries, but also repudiated Washington's hostile policies against the island, which, during that spring, did not discount the possibility of a military invasion.⁴⁶ The social democrats believed that international opposition to Cuba's transformation into a Soviet satellite was as popular in the West as disapproval of an American attack on the island. "Violence generates violence," stated the European parties, declaring that US intervention in the Caribbean, at a moment when Nasser had just nationalized the Suez Canal and a number of former colonies in Asia and Africa had declared their independence, would not favor the cause of a "free world."⁴⁷

This perception of the Cuban problem in the spring of 1961 was shared not only by social democrats in the United States, Great

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Britain, France, and Germany, but also by the Austrians, the Swiss, the Norwegians, the Italians, the Dutch, and the Finns. A communiqué issued by the National Action Committee of the US Socialist Party clearly rejected Washington's support for the Bay of Pigs invasion even while recognizing that the invasion had been an "indirect" one, backing an armed opposition that was no longer in support of the ancien régime of Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the writers declared, criticism of Washington's Cuba policies was not incompatible with disapproval of the Cuban leadership's totalitarian shift:

In saying this, we do not endorse the Castro regime. On the contrary, we have become increasingly alarmed at the anti-democratic acts of the Castro Government, particularly the repression of free speech, the political execution, and the destruction of an independent labour movement. We further note the growing evidence of greater Cuban Communist influence in the government, and we deplore it. One can no longer exclude the possibility that Cuba may become a "people's democracy," communist style.⁴⁹

Curiously, one of the few social democratic pronouncements in favor of the Bay of Pigs invasion came from Indian socialist A. D. Gorwala. Insisting that the Cuban exiles were neither fascists nor Batistans but "revolutionary democrats," he argued that Washington's intervention was justified given the increase of Soviet Union control over the Cuban economy since the middle of 1960.⁵⁰ Gorwala, a critic of Nehru, lamented that Western democratic socialism would be so condescending toward Third World governments that they would ally themselves with the Soviet bloc.

When the Socialist International once again took up the Cuban question in the fall of 1962, the position of the Western center-left was consistent with the line it had followed since the Bay of Pigs invasion. As British Labour Party leader Hugh Gaitskell would declare in the House of Commons on October 30 of that year, the international community no longer doubted that Cuba had joined the Soviet bloc.⁵¹ In the face of a situation like the missile crisis, social democrats applauded the negotiations between Kennedy and

Khrushchev. When those negotiations resulted in a preservation of world peace and US agreement not to invade Cuba, the democratic socialists felt that their position had won, although they did not discount the possibility that the Cuban leadership might decide to gravitate toward China out of a sense of betrayal by Moscow.⁵²

A careful examination of the treatment of the Cuban topic among US socialists at the beginning of 1960 shows that the positions of democratic socialism and the Kennedy administration were not assimilable, as Mills argued during the period and as dozens of historians have repeated since that time. In contrast with Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.'s effort to justify an invasion of Cuba in the spring of 1961 in his celebrated *White Cuban Paper*, the social democrats were consistently opposed to Washington's aggressive policies toward Havana.⁵³ They agreed with Mills and the Marxists of the *Monthly Review*—Paul Sweezy, Leo Huberman, J. P. Morray, and others—that cautious diplomacy would help to forestall a rigid accord between the Soviets and the Cubans, but they disagreed with the notion that public opposition to Cuban communism should form part of intellectual commitment on the left.

While recognizing that anti-Castro opposition was neither “fascist” nor “Batistan,” the social democrats did not subscribe to the notion of the “revolution betrayed” that was being argued by Schlesinger and echoed by other intellectuals, including Waldo Frank and Carleton Beals, who participated in the debate over Cuba in New York. Due to their contact with Trotskyism, Shachtman and the democratic socialists were more identified with Morray's thesis of a “second revolution,” which argued that the abandonment of the first “humanist” phase of the Cuban Revolution had accelerated the process of equality and social justice but at the same time had introduced totalitarian elements, such as control over the press, centralization of worker unions, the illegality of opposition, and the dependency of judicial power.⁵⁴

The Bay of Pigs invasion, despite its scandalous failure and Havana's subsequent accelerated alignment with the Soviet Union, complicated relations with the island for US supporters of the Cuban Revolution. Many intellectuals who had defended the Cuban process as “humanistic” and not totalitarian found

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themselves questioning their views as reports emerged detailing the Castro government's growing economic, political, and military collaboration with the Kremlin. Even Ernest Hemingway, a writer much beloved by the Cuban leadership, found it difficult to maintain his Cuban residence in the Finca Vigía and his friendship with Castro.⁵⁵

COUNTERCULTURE AND DECOLONIZATION

In his essay *El puño invisible* (The Invisible Fist, 2011), Colombian scholar Carlos Granés expresses surprise that the Cuban Revolution became a key point of reference for young New York liberals who combatted American conservatism during the 1960s. Granés wonders how vanguard figures like Norman Mailer and Susan Sontag, fervent defenders of sexual liberation and critics of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy, ever came to support a political regime like Cuba's, which, from the beginning of the 1960s, exhibited notable institutional and ideological coincidences with the Soviet Union and the real socialism of Eastern Europe.⁵⁶

Explanations for this paradox would need to be sought in Mailer's and Sontag's writings on the Cuban experience. Two texts that serve as bookends for viewpoints on Cuba in New York public opinion during the 1960s—Mailer's "Open Letter to JFK and Fidel Castro" (1961), published in the *Village Voice*, and Sontag's "Some Thoughts on the Right Way (for Us) to Love the Cuban Revolution" (1969), published in *Ramparts*—hold the keys for comprehending the complex relation between the New York New Left and Cuban socialism, a relation that over the span of a single decade oscillated between a sense of the promise Cuba represented for leftist libertarianism and the sense of disenchantment that resulted from Havana's alignment with Moscow.

That oscillation, it must be said, revealed all of its possibilities from the very start. For example, just days after the Bay of Pigs invasion, Mailer wrote his letter to Castro and Kennedy out of a conviction that the two leaders personified the arrival to power of a new generation that could and should find new rules of coexistence

for the opposed ideologies of the Cold War. Both leaders, Mailer believed, heralded a “new spirit” in America, one that would leave behind both tropical dictatorships like Batista’s and the “tyrannies” (Mailer’s term) of public opinion such as McCarthyism.⁵⁷

As recalled by Mailer’s biographer Hillary Mills, the first version of Mailer’s letter to Castro is dated November 1960, a moment when the communist radicalization of the Cuban Revolution had not yet been confirmed.⁵⁸ After the Bay of Pigs, however, Mailer still believed an understanding between Kennedy and Castro was possible, based on the generational identity he attributed to both political leaders. Mailer, the sociologist of “The White Negro,” hipsters, and beatniks; the defender of homosexuality and women’s liberation; and the critic of the Vietnam War and Protestant and Catholic conservatism, did not take the communism of the Cuban revolutionaries seriously.⁵⁹

Just as Mailer’s knowledge of the CIA’s involvement in the military plot against the Cuban Revolution (events he would portray thirty years later in *Harlot’s Ghost* [1991]) did not alter his admiration for Kennedy (as evidenced in *An American Dream* [1965]), the totalitarian elements of the Cuban regime likewise did not diminish his admiration for Castro.⁶⁰ An explanation for this behavior can perhaps be found in a passage of Mailer’s account of the 1968 Democratic and Republican conventions in Chicago and Miami. Curiously, he mentions Cuba in this account, not in relation to anticommunist exile groups in Miami that were involved in Nixon’s campaign but in his description of the radical and pacifist leftists who protested the National Democratic Convention in Chicago.

Mailer observed that just as the young protesters in Chicago—“modern minds,” he called them—rejected “the anally compulsive oppressions of Russian communism (as much as they detested the anally retentive ideologies of the corporation),” they also paid homage to Guevara, Mao, Tito, and the leaders of the Prague Spring, who were also communists.⁶¹ This radicalism on the left, Mailer believed, rejected the institutional paths of democratic or even socialist liberalism to instead join a more amorphous and heterogeneous current, one whose spaces of sociability would need to be located in the bohemian sectors of the student and counterculture

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movements. The leftist-libertarian counterculture, Mailer observed, lived out its cosmopolitan credo as much in yoga sessions as in campaigns of solidarity with Third World decolonizers.

This link between counterculture and decolonization is evident in Susan Sontag's piece for *Ramparts*, which was published in April 1969 and written after a two-week sojourn in Havana.⁶² Although Sontag was not unaware of the introduction of Stalinist discourses and practices in Cuban socialism—which included the establishment of the UMAP labor camps (Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción [Military Units to Aid Production]), the expulsion of Allen Ginsberg from the island, the persecution of homosexuals, and attacks on dissident writers such as poet Heberto Padilla—she firmly believed that the Cuban leaders would correct these errors. It could not be any other way, according to Sontag, because the Cuban Revolution was obliged to produce a socialism different from the Soviet model. A socialism created in an underdeveloped and colonial nation of the Caribbean, she seemed to think, could not be anything but an authentic socialism.

The liberation-seeking bohemian counterculture, whether in New York, Paris, Madrid, or San Francisco, adopted Cuba as one more icon of the aesthetic of authenticity. Freedom from sexual and moral strictures—which in Sontag's case constituted a personal epic as much as a hermeneutical premise, as evident from the diaries of her youth and her theoretical essays, such as *Against Interpretation* (1966)—was attributed to Havana unquestioningly. It mattered little to this cultural vanguard that homophobia, censorship, and other forms of cultural dogmatism in Cuba during the early 1960s were signaling the reconfiguration of a new moral code, one that would turn out to be as, or more, conservative than the Catholic or liberal codes destroyed by the revolutionary government.

In her diaries of 1960, written just as the Cuban Revolution was coming to power on the island, Sontag reflected on her readings of C. Wright Mills and Hans Gerth's anthology *From Max Weber*, speculated on the relation between totalitarianism and the imposition of the Cyrillic alphabet by Stalin and Lenin, and defended the correspondence of sexual liberation with political democracy.⁶³ Already in *Against Interpretation*, she would cast the search for

authenticity as a rejection of interpretive “philistinism” and advocate a conception of the avant-garde as the abandonment of hermeneutics and theory in favor of an “erotics of art.”⁶⁴ It is clear that this erotics was what Sontag was looking for in Cuba: an intellectual repurposing of the tourist’s role that might reconcile her with the existence of an autochthonous social process.

Sontag’s experience was hardly the most intense version of the experience of the Cuban Revolution on the part of the New York leftist intelligentsia. CBS correspondent Robert Taber became so involved in the revolutionary cause that he sided with the Cuban militias during the Bay of Pigs invasion; beat writer Allen Ginsberg was expelled from the island due to his support for the young leftist libertarian writers of the *El Puente* press; black leader Robert F. Williams, after a sojourn in Havana, went off to Mao’s China in search of possible interlocutions between the US civil rights movement and the anticolonial nationalism of Asia and Africa; Hispanic activist and anthropologist Elizabeth Sutherland Martínez spent months researching the construction of a socialist utopia on the Isle of Pines off southwest Cuba; and so on. All of these figures lived an experience of countercultural radicalization that led them to a commitment with a process of socialist decolonization in the Caribbean.

Nonetheless, nearly all of these adventures that began with identification ended in disenchantment or criticism. For example, Taber, who produced the enthusiastic report *Rebels of the Sierra Maestra* for CBS, who authored an apology for the revolutionary epic *M-26: Biography of a Revolution* (1961), and who once claimed that “history would record the battles of the Zapata Swamp as the Waterloo of US imperial power,” later came to question the Cuban government’s support for guerrilla movements and Latin American civil wars in the 1970s and 1980s.⁶⁵

Martínez, for her part, spent months researching the youth communities of the Isle of Pines in her project to portray Latin America’s “youngest revolution.” Nonetheless, her work came to pose a threat to the Western Left’s acritical solidarity with Cuban socialism when she divulged such problems as racism, machismo, homophobia, the establishment of agriculture labor camps for the

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internment of “antisocial” elements (UMAPs), and the censorship of writers and published works such as José Lezama Lima’s novel *Paradiso*.⁶⁶ Martínez was also conscious that the touristic discourse of Cuba’s neocolonial past, which had been determined by dependency on the United States, was now undergoing an oppositional reconstruction with the encouragement of a new socialist and revolutionary tourism.

The critical spirit of New York’s bohemian vanguard manifested itself in the limited experiences of these young intellectuals who traveled to the island with the desire to live and document utopia. The gesture of joining the Caribbean epic was a clear sign of commitment to the decolonizing project promised by the Cuban Revolution and other Third World nationalisms during the Cold War years. However, the leftist libertarianism of the bohemian counter-culture and New Leftist intellectual life in general clashed with the transfer of the institutions and ideas of real Eastern European socialism to the Cuban context. Most members of the New York Left were reluctant to endorse this ideological transfer and were unwilling to support Cuba’s decolonization if it involved the naturalization of Marxist-Leninist dogma on the island.

This book seeks to tell the story of this commitment and of this discounter. Just as important as reconstructing the factors that led many intellectuals of the New York New Left to identify with the Cuban Revolution is the task of locating the moment when that identification was sundered by dissidence and criticism. Ciphred in the dialogues and tensions between the New York Left and Cuban socialism during the 1960s are the possibilities of the cultural vanguard circuit between Havana and Manhattan that sought to challenge the asphyxiating polarization of the Cold War.