



UiT The Arctic University of Norway

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**An exploration of nationalist narratives and poetic agency on the road across
Cuba**

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Abstract

This master's thesis investigates the role of language and expression in normalizing structural violence in Cuba and the capacity of poets to change these structures. Cuba's nationalist narratives are examined from the top-down, while the capacity of Cuban poets to lead social change and political transition is explored from the bottom-up. Fieldwork for data collection took place in May and June 2019, through the means of a 1100-kilometer bicycle tour across Cuba. During this time, interviews were conducted with members of Cuba's cultural institutions and artistic community. In addition to interviews, secondary data consisting of documents, speeches, poetry, and artwork, are analyzed within a theoretical framework built on narrative theory and also, hermeneutics, as stories are interpreted through processes of comprehension and appropriation. Additionally, critical discourse analysis is employed as this research explores the power of language and expression within Cuba's political and social contexts. The first part of data analysis investigates the ways in which nationalist narratives form notions of identity and cultural memory. This leads into an exploration of how narratives are used to legitimize Fidel Castro's illiberal regime, by consolidating its representations of history, heroes and martyrs, and hate speech. The second chapter of data analysis examines the role of Cuban writers, as intellectuals working from the bottom-up within the framework of a repressive emic environment, that defines their challenges and opportunities today. Furthermore, the agency of Cuban writers and the social influence of their artistic expression, are analyzed through the activity of three poets: Heberto Padilla, Carilda Oliver Labra, and Nicolás Guillén. Also, the investigation of two cultural institutions, the Union of Cuban writers and artists (UNEAC) and the youth organization, *Asociación Hermanos Saíz* (AHS), both fundamental spaces of artistic production, will illustrate where and how the potential for individual agency manifests itself in Cuban communities. The significance of language and expression, utilized to further an illiberal regime, yet fundamental to the influential creation of Cuban poets, will unveil the spaces in which these forces meet from above and below. For it is in these spaces, that an understanding of everyday conflict through structural violence, and a progression towards peace, may be explored.

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1. Introduction

1.1.1 The threat of lead

After a sweltering bike ride, seventy-five kilometers in the summer blaze, I pulled into Ciego de Ávila, Cuba, where I found the national cultural organization, UNEAC: *La Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba* (the Union of Cuban Writers and Artists) standing prominently in the city center. After stashing my bicycle upon which all my belongings were loaded in saddlebags and a much-needed shower, I walked over to UNEAC in search of interviews with a writer, programmer, director, or anyone who happened to be available. Waiting in the lobby, I met an old Cuban actor who took me into the open gallery one room over, to eagerly discuss his cultural community there in Ciego de Ávila. We walked across the room to a where a certain painting of a pencil stood out amongst the others.¹ It was the upper half of a yellow pencil pointed upwards. But rising from the wood, in place of a tip of pointed lead, was a hooded black figure with a gun slung across his chest. The danger of the weapon and the figure holding it, is represented by the lead which poses as formidable a threat in a pencil, as in a bullet. The threat of lead presents a power, not only in the violence of arms and their destruction, but, also in the non-violent act of writing and its creation. Language and expression function to create meaning and reconstruct memory, to shape the identity of a nation and its culture, and to influence social change and political transition. And so, the stories which narrate Cuba's national history and affirm the power of its regime, meet with the potential of poetic dissension as it influences the public opinion of Cuban communities. Thus, the forces of language and expression emerge entangled within Cuba's cultural and political spaces, where ideas are disseminated, and structures of conflict are consolidated or challenged.

1.1.2 Motivation

When contemplating a research project set within the context of Cuba, the notions of a colorful culture were complimented by the prospect of understanding the country beyond the limits

¹ See Appendix A

of its capital city, Havana. Thus, a bicycle tour was envisioned from the eastern city of Santiago de Cuba back to Havana, laying a route of over 1100 kilometers across the country.² To understand Cuba through a lens beyond that of the typical tourist or researcher, the adventure aspect of travel by bicycle provided a deeper motivation to embark on the journey. And so followed the bike tour, the results of which are embodied in the work of this thesis, as well as the encounters of the road.

Having developed an Americanized perspective of our Cuban neighbors, I was interested in discovering for myself how the reality would compare with my prior conceptions. The idea of discovering a place frozen in the past, in some ways proved true in the cowboy culture of the small sugar farm towns. Having learned the history of Cuba's famous revolutionaries, such as that of Che and his motorcycle trip across South America (which I found reminiscent of my own mobilization in discovering Cuba), I was motivated to discover how their nationalistic ideals would be manifested in the everyday Cuban communities.

Discovering the capacity of language and poetic expression for Cubans was furthered by my own interest and work in poetry. Furthermore, I believe that the cultural exchange of verses that took place along the way between Cuban poets and myself enhanced the quality of the interactions and even of some interviews themselves, during data collection. Although much can be lost in translation when it comes to poetry, the act of sharing itself builds up a collective spirit. By approaching the research project with the motivation to learn, share, and discover from a bicycle, it allowed for a deeper level of access which will be explained later from a methodological perspective. Overall, the mobility of a bicycle tour alongside the motivating intentions of the project, were able to flow into this thesis, following the guidance of my research questions and research gap.

1.2.1 Research questions and research gap

Both of the research questions of this thesis revolve around the nature of language and expression. The first question asks: *how do nationalist narratives function to justify and consolidate structural violence in Cuba from the top-down?* The second question focuses on an opposing perspective, asking: *what capacity do Cuban poets have for creating social change and*

² See Appendix B

political transition from the bottom-up within Cuba's illiberal regime? By exploring both a top-down and bottom-up dynamic, the research gap will delve into the space where these forces meet.

Existing academic literature has explored the development of Cuban culture, its socialist politics, and its numerous cases of human rights abuses. This preexisting literature will be reviewed in relation to the data being analyzed while also providing a contextual framework. Authors such as Antony Kapcia, a Cuban historian, have traced the cultural life of Cuba which will help to ground the background of both Cuban politics and culture. Furthermore, the words and actions of Fidel Castro's administration have been reviewed by academics and journalists, and two distinct perspectives have emerged. The internal Cuban perspective is one which has vilified Western imperialism and praises its own regime, while the external perspective of the international community has focused a critical eye on the actions of a socialist regime and its totalitarian leadership. Cases of Cuban dissension against this regime, have been reviewed and revisited by international scholars, while other social justice issues have been investigated within this context. This thesis will focus the agency of poets to dissent through their artistic expression, (rather than focusing on the content of specific work), in order to understand the spaces of cultural operation and opportunity for a Cuban poet, as well as their influential role in society. By placing their bottom-up capacity in opposition to the top-down pressures of nationalist narratives, this research will investigate a research gap in which the forces of language and expression are explored in relation to peace and conflict transformation.

1.2.2 Structure

This thesis will first introduce a background on Cuba's politics and culture within a set time frame, in order to limit the focus of the Cuban context and various topics, discourse, movements, and so on, as they relate to my investigation. Next, in the second chapter, I will explain the methodology of this thesis and the underlying implications of access and reflexivity in my position as an American, studying in Norway, and crossing Cuba by bicycle. I also address my approach to data collection and analysis, while taking both the foreseen and unforeseen limitations into account. In the third chapter, I develop a theoretical and conceptual framework. Starting with narrative theory, from its features and differing approaches, I will move into hermeneutics to understand the role of comprehension and appropriation in how narratives are interpreted. Then I move into critical discourse analysis, which while used as a method of data

analysis, I will start by conceptualizing. This will be done because the concept of discourse relates to the overarching conclusions my research seeks to explore, in how the powers of language, discourse, and expression create notions of not only knowledge, but truth. I will also conceptualize “cultural memory” and “structural violence,” which will frame the way nationalist narratives are remembered and the state of everyday conflict they consolidate in Cuban communities under the nation’s illiberal regime. Data analysis will take place in the next two chapters, the first examining the top-down nature of nationalist narratives as they impose structural violence. I explore the formation of identity, looking at the discourse of “Revolution” in Cuba, followed by the narratives of its national heroes and martyrs. Hate speech and “othering” will be analyzed in the end of this chapter in relation to how nationalist narratives justify structural violence in Cuba and consolidate its continuity. In the fifth chapter, data analysis will look at the capacity of Cuban writers, to explore an opposing dynamic of language and expression, from the bottom-up. The role of writers and their influence in Cuban communities, will ground the potential of poetic dissension and the strategic intentions behind Cuba’s repressive policies. An understanding of the cultural spaces in which Cuban poets operate will unveil the role of repression and assimilation within these spaces, as well as the alternative of exile. I will examine the capacity of three Cuban poets operating within the environment of Castro’s regime, starting with Heberto Padilla, whose dissension and arrest set the tone for the political management of poetic expression. Then I will look the agency of two other poets and their influence, in Carilda Oliver Labra’s drive for gender equality and in Nicolás Guillén’s leadership of the movement for racial equality. To ground this sense of agency in the opportunity for artistic creation in Cuba today, I will next analyze two of Cuba’s leading cultural organizations. By looking at both the national hegemon of cultural production, UNEAC, and the youth organization, *Asociación Hermanos Saíz* (AHS), I will draw connections between the economic opportunities with which an individual may overcome structural violence in Cuba, and the potential to create an artistic work that could influence or transform it. Finally, having delved deep into the intricate ways that the forces of language and expression can meet, or rather, collide, with one another from both the top-down and the bottom-up, I will summarize my conclusions as to what this struggle means for Cuba, in terms of peace and conflict transformation.

1.3.1 Political background: Time frame

My research will focus primarily on the time frame between the present day and the Cuban Revolution, an event which has significantly shaped the timeline that followed, as well as today's Cuba. The Cuban Revolution was an armed campaign led by Fidel Castro Ruz, which culminated in 1959, with the overthrow of dictator Fulgencio Batista.³ The installation of the revolutionary Castro regime would endure for decades despite the turbulent times and trials which history would present. Some of these moments are easily termed and identified and will recirculate in the following chapters. One example is the "Mariel boatlift," when in an attempt to alleviate dissension and tension, Fidel declared Cubans free to emigrate.⁴ The result was the mass exodus of 125,000 Cubans from the port of Mariel to the United States in 1980, most of whom would never return.⁵ Another, in fact one of the most, important events during this time frame was the fall of communism in the East, which led to the "special period" of the 1990s—a time when "economic hardship and uncertainty" were particularly threatening for the Castro regime.⁶

Furthermore, the authenticity and meaning of the Revolution as well as the ideals of the Castro regime, relate to a history charged with anti-colonialist sentiments. Therefore, insights into Cuba's appropriation of its pre-Castro past will be considered as well, through the rhetoric of nationalist narratives and figures, such as the great Cuban poet and liberator, José Martí. This can be identified as Cuba's historical struggle for independence from Spanish rule reverberates into the discourse of Cuban opposition against the United States and capitalism, as "Western imperialism." While an awareness of this past is necessary for understanding the post-Revolution time frame, this research will focus within the limits of the years from 1959 onwards, in order to manage a feasible scope of research. The political developments established during the Castro regime from the moment control of Cuba was taken, set the stage for understanding the current political climate in Cuba, which can be defined by the major development of its new constitution in 2019.

³ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "Cuban Revolution," in *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., February 24, 2020). <https://www.britannica.com/event/Cuban-Revolution>.

⁴ The Economist, "Wages of Mariel," *The Economist* (London) July 21st, 2016.

⁵ Economist, "Wages of Mariel."

⁶ Mauricio Castro, "Revolutionary Ideology and the Special Period in Cuban History," *Reviews in American History* 46, 1 (2018): 156, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1353/rah.2018.0024>.

1.3.2 2019 Constitutional reform

This past year, 2019, was marked by the drafting and approval of a new constitution in Cuba, which replaces the Cold War era constitution of 1976.⁷ Some of its noteworthy developments include a recognition of private property and foreign investment, in addition to limiting presidential term-length.⁸ Furthermore, certain citizen's protections are strengthened through its changes, including guarantees of gender rights and the forbiddance of discrimination based on sexual orientation.⁹ Yet the inclusion of these progressive reforms is nevertheless dependent on the continuity of "the Communist Party as the country's guiding force" and on its exclusivity, as Cuba's sole political party.¹⁰ There was little opposition to the referendum as 87 percent of the high Cuban turnout voted (at their first opportunity in 43 years) in favor of the new Constitution this past February 2019.¹¹ While this overwhelming voter approval is representative of the people's desire for change, the rhetoric of their support for the new constitution is being used to simultaneously legitimize the new presidency of Miguel Díaz Canel.

The timing of this constitutional reform can be understood in correlation with the transition of political power from president Raúl Castro to his personally selected successor, Miguel Díaz-Canel, in 2018.¹² While conducting fieldwork, I found posters promoting the Constitutional Reform hanging in windows and on walls across the country, still fresh with the emboldened phrase: "*The constitution of a country is the voice of the people.*"¹³ The image featured on these posters shows Raúl Castro smiling and supporting the raised arm of Miguel Díaz-Canel beside him. These major political changes are being methodically merged with the support of the Cuban people who look towards a horizon of brighter economic prospects. Yet amidst these positive changes, the referendum presents not only the fortification of Cuba's one-party socialist system, but also distinct restrictions to expression, such as that of Decree 349.

⁷ "Cuba's New Constitution, Explained," WOLA: Advocacy for Human Rights in the Americas, April 10th 2019, accessed March 9th, 2020, 2020, <https://www.wola.org/analysis/cubas-new-constitution-explained/>.

⁸ Castro, "Cuba's New Constitution, Explained."

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Nelson Acosta and Mark Frank Sarah Marsh, *Cuban lawmakers approve new constitution which heads to referendum* (Reuters, December 22, 2018), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cuba-constitution/cuban-lawmakers-approve-new-constitution-which-heads-to-referendum-idUSKCN1OL0OF>.

¹¹ Castro, "Cuba's New Constitution, Explained."

¹² "Cuba's Raúl Castro hands over power to Miguel Díaz-Canel," BBC NEWS, April 19th 2018, accessed March 9th, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-43823287>.

¹³ Original text in Spanish: "*La constitución de un país es la voz del pueblo.*" Translated by Sergio Ryan.

1.3.3 Decree 349

Decree 349 set into law the prohibition of all artists “from operating in public or private spheres without prior approval by the Ministry of Culture,” without which may have their events shut down, their materials confiscated, and also face substantial fines.¹⁴ Following the arrests and detentions of Cuban artists protesting the decree, the government clarified that it is meant to target any obscene or vulgar expressions that could potentially harm ethical or cultural values.¹⁵

Nevertheless, the Americas Director at Amnesty International, Erika Guevara Rosas, has stated that “(a)s far back as the 1980s, Amnesty International has documented the harassment and arbitrary detention of independent artists in Cuba simply for peacefully expressing their opinions through art.”¹⁶ While Decree 349 does not present any distinct changes in Cuba’s preexisting restrictive position on free expression, it bodes an ominous atmosphere for the future through its updated legal framework of control and censorship. While the months and years ahead will reveal the impact on artists who work and create under fear of reprisal, the context of Cuba’s cultural background will help in understanding the spaces in which these artists operate today, where Cuban culture and a revolutionary regime overlap.

1.4.1 Cultural background: 1961 Literacy Campaign

The momentous event of the Cuban Revolution shaped both the spaces and the ways in which meaning would be made understandable and even imposed in the years that followed, through cultural movements such as the Literacy Campaign of 1961.¹⁷ American anthropologist Clifford Geertz defined culture as “a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men (and women) communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.”¹⁸ Cuba’s pre-Revolutionary history is ripe with meaningful conceptions that would be inherited into Cuban culture and the Revolution itself, in attitudes protesting imperialism and promoting independence and nationalism. However, it was shortly after 1959, that “the Revolution took culture ‘to the people’ in a process of conscious

¹⁴ "Cuba: New administration’s Decree 349 is a dystopian prospect for Cuba’s artists," Amnesty International, August 24th 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/08/cuba-new-administrations-decree-349-is-a-dystopian-prospect-for-cubas-artists/>.

¹⁵ International, "Cuba: New administration’s Decree 349 is a dystopian prospect for Cuba’s artists."

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "Clifford Geertz," in *Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.* (October 26, 2019). <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Clifford-Geertz>.

¹⁸ Britannica, "Clifford Geertz."

democratization.”¹⁹ A progression of cultural growth can be seen during the following years that that was both systematic and successful, as shown in the Literacy Campaign in 1961. During this transformative, participatory movement, thousands of young Cubans were enrolled as educators to bring literacy and its life-changing empowerment from urban areas, to the thousands of Cubans in the rural countryside.²⁰ Raising the literacy rate of Cuba to a remarkable 96 percent, the country raised flags which proclaimed the words “Territory Free of Illiteracy,” as it celebrated “the eradication of four and a half centuries of ignorance.”²¹ Through the Literacy Campaign, cultural communities which had been historically marginalized were now included as readers and audience members in what professor and Cuban historian, Antoni Kapcia, terms a “cultural revolution.”²²

1.4.2 A cultural revolution

The cultural developments that followed the installation of the Castro regime, present a “cultural revolution,” not as a fixed event, but rather as a progression of artistic awakening. Following the Revolution, Congress declared Cuba’s post-1961 cultural policy, “emphasizing more firmly that art in Cuba should be judged on its political worth – as a ‘weapon of the Revolution...against the penetration of the enemy.’”²³ Driving by political motivation, Cuba’s cultural revolution resounded with a “massification or popularization of culture,” as seen by the socially inclusive programs initiated from above by Cuba’s new leaders.²⁴ In Fidel’s pamphlet *Palabras a los Intelectuales* (‘Words to the Intellectuals’), he states: “(t)his economic and social Revolution must inevitably produce a cultural revolution in turn in our country.”²⁵ Thus, culture was taken to the people following a Literacy Campaign, “which empowered thousands of new readers and legitimized reading and writing as never before.”²⁶ Another long-term enterprise

¹⁹ Antoni Kapcia, *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2005), 22.

²⁰ Kapcia, *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture*, 119-20.

²¹ Abel Prieto, "Cuba's National Literacy Campaign," *Journal of Reading* 25, 3 (1981): 221, www.jstor.org/stable/40029025.

²² Kapcia, *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture*, 147.

²³ "Paths of Culture in Cuba," *Political Editions (Editora Política)* (Havana) 1971, 12. Quoted in Kapcia, *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture*, 154.

²⁴ Kapcia, *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture*, 153.

²⁵ Fidel Castro Ruz, *Palabras a los Intelectuales (Words to Intellectuals)*, (Havana: National Cultural Council, 1961), <http://blogs.law.columbia.edu/uprising1313/fidel-castro-palabras-a-los-intelectuales-words-to-the-intellectuals/?cn-reloaded=1&cn-reloaded=1>.

²⁶ Kapcia, *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture*, 135.

which complemented the goals and shared in the beneficial effects of Literacy Campaign, was the movement of the *instructores de arte* (art teachers).²⁷

1.4.3 The “*instructores de arte*” movement

The *instructores de arte* movement, initiated alongside the Literacy Campaign, was founded on the idea of creating a network of art schools across Cuba, beginning with the intensive training of instructors in 1961, who would already be teaching by 1963.²⁸ The cultural and social significance of the enterprise is recognized by Antoni Kapcia, who states: “the movement popularized culture in more effective ways than decrees or reforms, culturally empowering those hitherto lacking any opportunity to develop an artistic talent, and becoming an explicitly participatory experience, bridging the potential divide between the personal and the collective.”²⁹ The movement showed a rich context of social inclusion within the broadening cultural spaces of Cuba. These spaces are ripe for research, as the legacy of these social programs can be recognized from urban to rural areas. As the long-term goals of the *instructores de arte* movement reflect a widening of Cuba’s cultural community, Kapcia identifies that “a real revolution was taking place involving consumers in the processes of cultural *production*.”³⁰ Both the cultural elite and the rural population, the young and the old—all of Cuba, was wrapped up in the educational fervor of cultural growth, as a national imperative. The new regime’s push for “a culture developed *by* the people,” would inevitably redefine this cultural revolution on the local level, as the boundaries containing the Cuban cultural community blew wide open, encompassing the nation as never before.³¹

1.4.4.1 The local level: “*aficionados*”

While the directives from the Castro administration imposed cultural growth from above, a participatory approach produced a rich capacity for creative production at the local level. While this capacity would fluctuate in relation to political developments over the decades, it can be recognized that immediately following the Revolution, “in the 1960s, regardless of political

²⁷ Ibid, 135.

²⁸ Ibid, 135.

²⁹ Ibid, 135.

³⁰ Ibid, 136.

³¹ Ibid, 147.

pressures and supposed ‘hard lines,’ the whole exciting and destabilizing process of dynamic social change and political interaction generated a context for cultural creativity to flourish.”³² Amidst the liberating possibilities of prospering cultural education, a new wave of individual agency for local Cubans as both producers and consumers of art, crested new heights.

A principal example can be seen in the *movimiento de artistas aficionados* (‘movement of amateur artists’). It emerged in 1969, “initially an informal and loose ‘movement,’ without headquarters, definition or system, but with an evident and real existence and clear organic roots, whose heyday (with an estimated million *aficionados*) was yet to come.”³³ Whereas the movement of *instructores de arte* brought art down to the people from the state level, the *movimiento de artistas aficionados* sought to raise the people up to art from the community level. Within these differing dynamics of cultural democratization, common ground was found “by fusing the ‘people’s art’ and acknowledging it, rather than ignoring it or trying to formalize it.”³⁴ As the effects of the cultural revolution on individual agency were recognized by the Cuban state, so were the needs for institutionalized spaces which would accommodate and encourage this creativity, while at the same time, regulate it.

1.4.4.2 “Casas de Cultura”

In 1978, required institutions known as *Casas de Cultura* (Culture Houses) were established in every Cuban municipality (along with a library and a museum), in which a meeting space opened for both the upper and lower circuits of popular culture.³⁵ The opening of the *Casas de Cultura* represented a culmination of the cultural revolution, as the cultural and political elite’s belief in “the liberating possibilities of education” was now being realized by the rising community of local artists and writers, as creators.³⁶ The *Casas* (many of which still exist today) presented an institutionalized space for the growing creative capacity in local Cuban communities, as individuals took advantage of the opportunity to produce and associate with one another. Nevertheless, the relationship between this blooming bottom-up agency and the top-down

³² Ibid, 155.

³³ Ibid, 147.

³⁴ Ibid, 198.

³⁵ Ibid, 156, 213.

³⁶ Ibid, 214.

movements which gave birth to it, has been historically bound from the moment of the Cuban Revolution by the regime itself.

While the local level was embracing the movement of *aficionados* and the spaces of the *Casas*, testing their newfound creative agency was consistently overshadowed by certain limitations of expression. From the departure point of 1959, the Cuban state took up a cultural gate-keeping role which allowed “little space or inclination for any real cultural opposition to operate”³⁷ Following these restrictions, Cuba on one hand saw a cultural conformity driven by a resigned caution, while on the other, a willing breach of artistic boundaries which presented a creative threat to social and political rules.³⁸

1.4.5 Creative freedom in today’s Cuba

The struggle between the regulations of the state-driven cultural revolution and its liberating local agency, is written in a history wrought with artistic emigration and exile, in response to repression. Throughout the time frame following the Revolution, the international headlines which have followed Cuba’s restrictive policies on artistic expression, tell tales of hunger strikes, imprisonments, and human rights abuses. The words of Guevara-Rosas of Amnesty International, last August of 2019, highlight the continuity of unjust policies, stating: “For decades, Cuba has stifled freedom of expression and assembly by locking up people for their beliefs and opposition to the government. Over the years, the names of Cuba’s prisoners of conscience have changed, but the state’s tactics have stayed almost exactly the same.”³⁹

Yet despite Cuba’s enduring restrictions on expression, its institutionalized creative spaces hold the same importance today as the historical legacy of the movements which paved the way for their existence. The hegemon of Cuban culture can be recognized as the Union of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC), whose events and cultural community connect the municipalities across Cuba with Havana. While belonging to UNEAC as an artist or writer is an exclusive privilege for “professionals,” their coordination with the broader community can be seen in regular events which collaborate with the *Casas*, in addition to their bond with their youth partner,

³⁷ Ibid, 167.

³⁸ Ibid, 167.

³⁹ "Cuba: Amnesty International names five new prisoners of conscience," Amnesty International, August 26th 2019, accessed March 15th 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/08/cuba-cinco-nuevos-presos-de-conciencia/>.

Asociación Hermanos Saíz (AHS). For today's youth, belonging to Cuba's cultural community holds meaning in its economic opportunities, as well as in its creative agency for change. As local initiatives of writers and artists attempt to realize their creative agency, the potential of art and writing to drive social change and political transition, seeps through the cultural spaces of Cuba. It is into these spaces that this research will delve—where the Cuban cultural community of today faces suppression by the same state institutions which gave birth to them.

2. Methodology

2.1.1 Access

My research and access to interviews was facilitated through the unique, premeditated means of traveling by bicycle, as I traversed Cuba following a week of data collection and networking in Havana. Due to visa restrictions, my fieldwork was limited to a single month which presented the dilemma of whether to base the research solely in the setting of Havana or to broaden the field of data outside of the capital. Taking on Cuba for a research project presented a fresh context, in the sense that I had no prior network of contacts and informants. Thus, I sought a means of access that would aid in my positionality. In the setting of Cuba, where tourism runs rampant, the emic perspective of Cubans towards a foreigner is naturally to regard them as a tourist. This can be perceived in different ways, such as in the warmth of hospitable culture towards an outsider, or in the case of a tourist, to be seen as a potential source of financial opportunity. Also, in a broader sense, tourists may be regarded with a sort of indifference as their regularity positions them into becoming part of a day-to-day backdrop for Cubans. Traveling by bicycle, I was able to combine the fieldwork of a researcher with the travel experience of not only tourism, but also adventure. This put me in a position that I felt contributed to a warm reception of amiability from locals who would approach curious and eager to interact.

Along this route of travel and data collection, I was able to gain access into other cities and areas off of the beaten path that are much more difficult for tourists to reach in Cuba, but which are still significant places in Cuba's cultural community. By moving from place to place and following the cultural networks from city to city, I was also able to gather insights into the ways in which different organizations coordinate their operations together. Logistically, the distance

between cities typically ranged from fifty to eighty kilometers. Thus, averaging a few hours each day on the bicycle between cities, mornings or evenings were reserved for setting up and carrying out interviews. A week in Havana allowed me to make connections with individuals from the central hubs of the organizations of UNEAC and AHS. Through information and tips gained during interviews in Havana, I was able to map out potential interviewees and places throughout Cuba along the route from Santiago de Cuba back to Havana.

During the three weeks following my time in Havana, the bicycle played a meaningful role as a sort of gatekeeper. A bicycle tour in itself signifies traveling with a bicycle loaded with packs called “panniers,” mounted beside the wheels. Its unusual appearance worked frequently in my favor as it attracted attention for more immediate encounters with locals and thereby opened up more possibilities to connect with Cubans. This can be understood in that the bicycle as a gatekeeper can quickly create an opportunity for conversation between an outsider and insider. Possibly the very image of myself as a young man on a bicycle wearing a helmet, can be considered to have been an aid in building trust and also facilitating interviews. Having bike toured abroad in the past, this was something I foresaw as being a beneficial asset to accessing the foreign setting of Cuba.

The fact that I was traveling by bicycle also affected the way I was received when arranging and carrying out interviews with the directors, presidents, artists, and other staff of the formal organizations with whom I connected. Learning that I was not simply coming from Havana to ask questions, but was seeing the country of Cuba place by place, garnered what felt like a sense of respect, trust, or at least amiability from interview participants, which I believe also contributed greatly to the depth and validity of the data I gathered.

2.2.1 Reflexivity

Reflexivity on my position as a researcher in the setting of Cuba is complexified by my nationality as an American, which I was concerned would present a problem in my access and reception during interviews. Furthermore, I conducted the bike tour accompanied by a friend who is an American anthropology student, although Italian by nationality. This, however, helped in addressing any potential safety concerns of carrying out the research, by traveling with another person. At first, I simply presented myself as a Norwegian student and my friend as an Italian student during interviews. We soon discovered however, that when introducing ourselves as

Americans, the response was often amiable and almost always accompanied by something along the lines of “I have a brother/sister/cousin who lives in Florida.” In these responses, I was able to perceive the lasting impact which Cuban emigration has had on families, communities, and culture.

The implications of this impact presented another dimension which challenged my conceptions of reflexivity. Coming from United States, a place where so many Cubans not only have family and friends living, but may also desire to be themselves, had the potential to create a sort of power structure. The position of privilege, opportunity, and wealth which the West represents, may have formed a dimension which could shape both the responses to my questions and the interpretation of my own answers. However, during the most formal interviews with presidents and directors, they seemed self-assured in the sense that they were not concerned with this potentiality, perhaps because they themselves were settled into the security of having established professional positions. Yet, with budding artists and writers, I found myself more consciously aware of positionality in our dialogue.

Another layer of reflexivity which I had not accounted for prior to entering the field, were the potential effects of having other Cubans in the room during an interview, as opposed to a private one-on-one scenario. I found that certain, more private interviews held an honest comfortability in the sharing of thoughts on the Cuban state or potentially sensitive topics. These were oftentimes more condemning, though not always, whereas in a public, open setting, I considered whether the other ears in the room listening would affect these outspoken responses. While I applied that consideration to more critical questions, I could also see its effect clearly in a wider social context. An example of this would be a question presented to a prominent figure from an organization regarding their role or the institution itself, in front of the other members who became a sort of audience during the interview. The heads of these organizations, when accompanied by coworkers and other members, seemed to be put on a stage as they were expected to give a thorough, honest presentation of the professional operation. Therefore, not only myself as the immediate listener, but the presence of other Cubans, also influenced the words of the interviewee.⁴⁰ I found this very beneficial when trying to understand the intricacies of these organizations as part of the Cuban system, from my perspective as an outsider looking in.

⁴⁰ Jane Elliot, "Narrative and New Developments in the Social Sciences," in *Using Narrative in Social Research. Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2005), 10-11.

The notions of mobility also became an apparent, recurring theme throughout the journey. Being an American, living and studying in Norway, the layers of my own mobility were amplified by the act of biking across Cuba and therefore, being in a state of movement during my fieldwork. The historical development of emigration from Cuba, primarily to the United States, held a strong significance in how mobility is regarded in Cuba, which I became aware of throughout the tour. It could be felt within the communities as many Cubans still desire to emigrate, while for some, staying in Cuba was a conscious decision. However, for almost everyone, there permeated the feeling of having had someone close leave their home or community, without the intention or perhaps the possibility, of ever returning. These reflections on mobility were also prompted by the nature of movement within Cuba, as from my own position as a traveler, I was quickly confused by the question of which Cubans have the ability to travel in their own country.

The rooms we stayed in which Cubans rent out of their homes for tourists, known as “*casas particulares*” are marked by a symbol resembling a blue eye. Across the country, each of these rooms are strikingly similar in the way they are designed, down to the small breakfasts they offer. Intermingled with the “blue eye” homes, are other homes with a “red eye,” that are designated to be only for national Cuban citizens, as they are taxed in the national currency rather than the tourist currency. Yet, as we pulled into each new town and would share our recent experiences with locals, we found that many of them had never visited their neighboring town. Although from my perspective the towns were only a small distance apart from each other, many Cubans said they simply never had the chance to go there. The cost of travel was often cited as a reason, however the contradiction between this reality and the homes marked by the “red eye” which we passed along the way, caused a confusion as we struggled to grasp which Cubans have the opportunity and ability to travel. The complexities of poverty and class structures in this socialist country continued to make an impression on us along the way, as we traveled through cultural hubs of urban areas and the rural spaces in between, where the sugar farms and cowboys of national Cuban tradition still reign. The relationship of the reality for those living in these places to the nationalist narratives which have shaped their histories will be investigated through the data which was collected.

2.3.1 Data collection

My primary source of data collection in regard to bottom-up poetic capacity were semi-structured interviews conducted throughout early May to early June 2019. My interview guide consisted of different conversation topics such as cultural spaces, artistic production, Cuban identity, and so on. To account for ethical considerations, I oriented these topics around social and cultural ideas, rather than topics that may have been politically sensitive. However, the informal structure of my interviews allowed room for the emergence of political ideas if they should arise, which was oftentimes the case.

In order to avoid the difficulties of trying to measure the concepts of artistic effectivity, impact, and success, I will instead focus on the creative efforts and opportunities of poets to influence social change or political transitions. This will be accomplished by operationalizing meaning through the ways in which meaning is constructed and interpreted. Additionally, the structures that oppose this agency and the meanings created by nationalist narratives will be likewise operationalized in relation to structural violence. Secondary data and documents regarding Cuban nationalism, such as speeches from Fidel Castro, will complement the representations of nationalism that revealed themselves along the road. These data include billboards, news articles, posters, monuments, museum exhibitions, and so on. Throughout the bike tour, I found that my own reflections on nationalist narratives as I encountered them and processed their meanings, in addition to understanding them through the interpretation of local Cubans, helped to shape the conclusions I draw during data analysis.

2.3.2 Data analysis

I utilize a qualitative research strategy in the analysis of my data, which is split into two chapters, numbers four and five, each focusing on their respective research question. My unit of data analysis is that of social phenomena ranging from individual capacity to community identity. Furthermore, my unit of observation is at the level of community groups and cultural organizations, in which these phenomena can be explored as cultural spaces. The purpose of my data analysis is to *explore* the processes of nationalism and their effects on identity and cultural memory, as will be seen in chapter four. Furthermore, *exploring* the spaces in which poetic agency operates, will drive the purpose of data analysis in chapter five. Within both chapters of data analysis, I keep consistent ontological and epistemological positions.

The ontological position of my research is that of a constructionist reality. This means that the specific version of the social reality which I present, is one in which “social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors.”⁴¹ By taking this position, I can analyze the effects of meaning construction from the starting point of the state down to the community level. Furthermore, I am able to draw conclusions as to the Cuban capacity to create and disseminate meaning from the bottom-up.

The epistemological position of my research is interpretivist, thus attempting to “grasp the subjective meaning of social action”⁴² This paradigm allows me to consider not only my own subjective “etic” role as an outsider in data collection and analysis, but also that of the “emic” insider, through *Verstehen*.⁴³ This signifies looking at the context of Cuba through the local’s own historical and social perspective of their lived experiences.⁴⁴ Therefore, I will utilize an interpretivist framework which employs *Verstehen* alongside, although distinct from, my own subjective understanding. This epistemological positioning will allow me to draw reliable and valid conclusions supported by the trustworthiness and authenticity which a framework sensitive to both insider and outsider perspectives, exemplifies.⁴⁵ This interpretivist position is relevant to my research as I explore the significance of how meaning is interpreted for identity and agency, and what this means in terms of peace or conflict.

During the process of data analysis, I draw other sources of secondary data, such as documents and speeches, into my investigation through the process of triangulation. By employing multiple sources of data in my research, the confidence of my findings is strengthened as I am also able to account for gaps in data collected during interviews. Nevertheless, various limitations arose which impacted the collection and analysis of my data.

⁴¹ Alan Bryman, "Social research strategies: quantitative research and qualitative research," in *Social Research Methods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 29.

⁴² Bryman, "Social research strategies: quantitative research and qualitative research," 26.

⁴³ Inge Hutter Monique Hennink, Ajay Bailey, "The nature of qualitative research," in *Qualitative Research Methods* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2011), 17-19.

⁴⁴ Liz Spencer Rachel Ormston, Matt Barnard and Dawn Snape, "The Foundations of Qualitative Research," in *Qualitative Research Practice*, ed. Jane Lewis Jane Ritchie, Carol McNaughton Nicholls, and Rachel Ormston (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2003), 11-12.

⁴⁵ Bryman, "The nature of qualitative research," 384.

2.4.1 Limitations

As my period of data collection during fieldwork was limited to one month, I sought to utilize the time as efficiently as possible, although various limitations foreseen and unforeseen, presented themselves. The first limitation I recognized during my first interview, was a realization of my own positionality within the setting and dynamic of an interview, through interpersonal reflexivity.⁴⁶ I felt conscious of the fact that I had spent less than all of forty-eight hours in Cuba and I was already in a sort of position where I was asking questions and expecting answers. Regardless of the rapport I built with my interviewee, I felt that this positionality assumed a certain sense of expectation for information, an academic arrogance, which I sought to avoid. The bicycle tour helped facilitate this self-limitation by breaking the ice and any veiled preconceptions, as riding across the country added a layer of positionality in that I was not only seeking answers for research purposes, but also discovering the country through adventure.

The sense of urgency in having to bike to the next destination each day, at times proved problematic for arranging interviews on the day of arrival or the morning of departure. Yet at other times, this urgency also proved helpful, when individuals made special allowances for an interview, to account for my brief time frame of availability. However, timing proved a limitation when I sought to conduct interviews with professors and students at the University of Havana. In the month of May, I discovered that exams were underway and so I found the door closed on one of my sample sets for fieldwork during that period, as I had hoped to interview several students and professors.

Some of the data I had hoped to collect, such as dissenting poetry representing values of political transition and social change, proved to be challenging and beyond my ability. While my literature review and background reading suggest that this writing is nevertheless being and has been produced, everything from arrests to human rights abuses can be considered potential deterrents which limited my access to this data. To address this issue, I was instead able to investigate the social and cultural spaces themselves in which these works may be produced. Also, I found and used cases of socially and politically active writers whose work was very impressionable, challenging social issues such as gender and racial inequality, while maintaining adherence to the values of the Cuban state.

⁴⁶ Monique Hennink, "The nature of qualitative research," 19-20.

Another expected limitation was language and the process of translation. While I consider myself fluent in Spanish, I am not a native speaker and therefore, the potential for miscommunication or misinterpretation must be taken into account. Nevertheless, during the processes of transcription and translation, I sought to maintain a rigorously consistent standard of translation. This being said, background noise also affected data interpretation during interviews. Overall, throughout the data collection, processing, and analysis phases, these limitations presented themselves in various ways. To compensate for these challenges, I structured my research methodology in relation to theory, as it guides the conclusions drawn from my data through the appropriate lenses of analysis, the first of which is narrative theory.

3. Theory

3.1.1 Narrative theory and features

Narrative theory will be employed in this research, in order to understand the effects that stories have had on shaping Cuban communities. The use of narrative theory will involve a consideration of nationalist identity production through top-down narratives and the ways in which they are reproduced and appropriated within communities. This also signifies an analysis of the ways in which Cubans respond and react to stories through their own expressions of identity, relationships, and emotions.⁴⁷ Therefore, through narrative analysis, light may be shed on “the potential of stories to give meaning to people’s lives.”⁴⁸

As narratives function to make sense of the world, individuals order and orient their own perspectives as well as the life events written into the collective history of their communities.⁴⁹ This orientation will aid in positioning the different perspectives in context, when drawing conclusions towards the spaces in which they converge. As “qualitative research focuses on how people or groups of people can have (somewhat) different ways of looking at reality,” I will seek

⁴⁷ Paula Roberts and Leslie Woods Helena Priest, "An overview of three different approaches to the interpretation of qualitative data. Part 1: theoretical issues," *Nurse Researcher* 10, 1 (2002): 38.

⁴⁸ C. Emdem, "Theoretical perspectives on narrative inquiry," *Collegian* 5, 2 (1998). Quoted in Helena Priest, "An overview of three different approaches to the interpretation of qualitative data. Part 1: theoretical issues," 38.

⁴⁹ J. McLeod, *Narrative and Psychotherapy* (London: Sage, 1997). Quoted in Helena Priest, "An overview of three different approaches to the interpretation of qualitative data. Part 1: theoretical issues," 38.

to unpack the intricacies of the conflicts created by these differences through narrative theory.⁵⁰ This will provide not only a broad picture of the Cuban context, but also insights into the individual complexities underlying it, as narratives integrate and summarize key information in a comprehensible manner.⁵¹

Narratives can be defined as “discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offer insights about the world and/or people’s experiences of it.”⁵² I will investigate narratives in accordance with the features that I find relevant to my research. One feature of narratives is *social context*, meaning the spaces in which they are communicated both within the communities of Cuba and also to myself looking in as an outsider.⁵³ These spaces cover not only social networks, but are also communication through cultural outlets. The meaning I will seek to explore will be founded not only on what is included in discourses, but also on what is omitted from them, and the intentions behind both.

The second feature of narratives is *temporality*, the historical implications of which provide significance to the conclusions of my research, both now and looking ahead. While stories contain a beginning, middle, and end, their continuous interpretation of the past affects the present and future. Lastly, I will unpack the third feature of narratives, that of *meaning*. Drawing from their chronological nature, narratives are imbued with meaning as beginnings and endings are imposed onto interrelated events and experiences.⁵⁴ Thus, as these three features are closely interrelated, narrative theory will examine and draw connections between them in relation to which of its approaches is employed.

3.1.2 Narrative theory approaches

Different approaches in analyzing narrative theory will be combined in order to understand varying dynamics of theme, structure, and interaction. I will use certain approaches in relevance

⁵⁰ E. Ockleford B. Hancock, and K. Windridge, *An introduction to qualitative research* (Nottingham: Trent focus group, 1998). Quoted in Yong Nie, "Combining Narrative Analysis, Grounded Theory and Qualitative Data Analysis Software to Develop a Case Study Research," *Journal of Management Research* 9, 2 (2017): 54.

⁵¹ Nie, "Combining Narrative Analysis, Grounded Theory and Qualitative Data Analysis Software to Develop a Case Study Research," 56.

⁵² L. P. Hinchman and S.K. Hinchman, "Introduction," in *Memory, Identity, Community: The Idea of Narrative in the Human Sciences*, ed. L.P. Hinchman and S. K. Hinchman (New York: State University of New York, 1997), xvi. Quoted in Elliot, "Narrative and New Developments in the Social Sciences," 3.

⁵³ Elliot, "Narrative and New Developments in the Social Sciences," 10-11.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 11-12.

to the ideas I seek to draw from various stories. A *structural analysis* approach to narratives reveals insights into their development, from their orientation and complications, to their practical devices.⁵⁵ These structural devices hold particular significance when interpreting the intentions behind a narrative's production and the tools of its creation. Through this process, narratives are "deconstructed, restructured, and analyzed, which results in explanations in terms of conceptual codes."⁵⁶ An example of structural analysis that will be examined is that of intention, which may reveal politically motivated sentiments of persuasion and thereby expose propaganda.

Another approach is that of *interactional analysis* which emphasizes the processes of co-creation taking place between the storyteller and audience.⁵⁷ This may be examined in the "dialogic process between the researcher and the interviewees."⁵⁸ An example of this can be seen during my fieldwork as many of the individuals whom I interviewed are positioned as audience members to nationalist narratives. Furthermore, by communicating their views and stories to me, I the researcher then become an audience member as well. The interactional positioning of audience members may vary if they are presupposed during the interaction of storytelling.⁵⁹ As this positioning affects both the content of the stories being told and the way they are interpreted, considerations of reflexivity will be necessary in understanding the perspectives and themes that emerge.

Lastly, the approach of *thematic analysis*, addressing the content of a narrative, will aid in a broader understanding of common "thematic elements across participants and incidents."⁶⁰ The Cuban Revolution will provide a central theme for thematic analysis when considering the narratives which create and reflect the cultural memory of the event and the effects of its legacy. As themes and content are essential to the ways in which narratives are understood, their hermeneutics will be theoretically evaluated as stories are comprehended and appropriated by audiences.⁶¹

⁵⁵Björn Blom and Lennart Nygren, "Analysing written narratives: considerations on the 'code-totality problems'," *Nordic Journal of Social Research* 1 (2010): 31.

⁵⁶ Nygren, "Analysing written narratives: considerations on the 'code-totality problems'," 31.

⁵⁷ Nie, "Combining Narrative Analysis, Grounded Theory and Qualitative Data Analysis Software to Develop a Case Study Research," 57.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 57.

⁵⁹ Elliot, "Narrative and New Developments in the Social Sciences," 11-12.

⁶⁰ Nie, "Combining Narrative Analysis, Grounded Theory and Qualitative Data Analysis Software to Develop a Case Study Research," 56.

⁶¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences*, ed. John B. Thompson, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1981), 185.

3.2.1 Hermeneutics: Comprehension

Following the ideas of French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur on *hermeneutics*, the theoretical sphere of interpretation, another dimension of examination will provide an understanding of how narratives are comprehended and appropriated.⁶² This can be grasped as “(t)o understand is not to project oneself into the text but to expose oneself to it; it is to receive a self enlarged by the appropriation of the proposed worlds which interpretation unfolds.”⁶³ The coherency of narratives, whether understood through verbal discourse or text, presents differing horizons of meaning which can be grasped through the process of comprehension.⁶⁴ The importance of comprehending meaning can be seen in the attitudes and perceptions of collective Cuban identities as they reflect both political and social aspects. The role of Cuban identity in relation to peace and conflict studies can be examined in the context of how an individual’s sense of agency and belonging are shaped, challenged, or constrained. The various layers that influence an individual’s agency from the bottom-up, reflect political, economic, and social aspects, which are specific and unique to the case of Cuba. Thus, an interpretive analysis of the ways in which Cubans comprehend differing narratives will provide insights as to which meanings are being appropriated.

3.2.2 Appropriation

Appropriation is a “cognitive” end product of analysis, therefore not of the text or discourse itself, but rather “a process in somebody’s mind.”⁶⁵ As an event in itself through the act of interpretation, appropriation can be further conceptually defined as “the actualization of meaning as addressed to someone.”⁶⁶ When conducting data analysis, the degree of my own appropriation could be deeper than the person I am interviewing, who for example, interprets the same narrative on what can be considered a surface level.⁶⁷ As each individual approaches a narrative with a subjective predisposition, it can be recognized that between different readers, “the degree of appropriation will consequently vary.”⁶⁸ While appropriation is relative to each individual,

⁶² Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences*.

⁶³ Ibid, 94.

⁶⁴ Nygren, "Analysing written narratives: considerations on the 'code-totality problems'," 32.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 40.

⁶⁶ Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences*, 185.

⁶⁷ Nygren, "Analysing written narratives: considerations on the 'code-totality problems'," 32-33.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 32.

collective appropriation often takes place as well through various levels of social interaction. I will seek to identify common threads or gaps between these degrees of appropriation within the Cuban context in pursuit of conclusions as to the effects of narratives on individuals and their communities. The importance of these conclusions on appropriation can be weighed as “future possibilities only emerge when someone has absorbed the comprehension and has become affected by it cognitively and often emotionally.”⁶⁹ Thus, through a consideration of hermeneutics, it can be understood how the process of interpretation leads to the actualization of understanding. As interpretation shapes individual and collective thoughts, decisions, and actions, I will seek to examine these processes as developments towards peace or conflict in Cuban society. Furthermore, I will look at language as the building block of my theoretical framework as “(t)he first ‘locality which hermeneutics undertakes to lay bare is certainly language.’”⁷⁰

3.3.1 Critical discourse analysis

A critical analysis of the meanings produced in data through both talk and text, will furthermore engage the theoretical approach of critical discourse analysis (CDA). This approach will illuminate the significance behind the language which framed and fueled the Cuban Revolution, from the words of Fidel Castro to the social reproductions of national discourses. Through CDA, I will explore “the social and political context of discourse, based on the notion that language is not only conditioned by these contexts, but itself helps to constitute them.”⁷¹ To understand the social inequalities of Cuba’s reality today, the political processes and events which have shaped these conditions will be examined through the rhetoric which frames and legitimizes them.

Data which relates to “the relationship between discourse, domination, and dissent” will be dealt with through critical discourse analysis.⁷² The relevance of CDA to the processing of my data can be recognized as my research delves into the struggle of language between the Cuban state’s dominant nationalist narratives and the potential for writers and poets to dissent. The field

⁶⁹ Ibid, 32.

⁷⁰ Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences*, 44.

⁷¹ N. Fairclough & R. Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis," in *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*, ed. T. van Dijk (London: Sage, 1997), 258. Quoted in Fran Tonkiss, "Discourse Analysis," in *Researching Society and Culture*, ed. Clive Seale (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2012), 407-08.

⁷² Teun A. Van Dijk, "Critical Discourse Analysis," in *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, ed. Heidi E. Hamilton Deborah Tannen, and Deborah Schiffrin, Blackwell Handbooks in Linguistics (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2018), 479.

of analysis will include the discourse of Cuban institutions and media, in addition to the discourse of members from Cuban communities and social groups, who were interviewed during data collection. The dynamic layers relating language from the top-down to the bottom-up, are opportune for analysis through CDA, as this approach “is especially interested in the critical study of power abuse – and its resistance.”⁷³ Next, a conceptual understanding of language in how it is “crucial to the ways that power is reproduced, legitimated and exercised within social relations and institutions,” will provide the foundation for critical discourse analysis.⁷⁴

3.3.2 Conceptualizing the power of language

Following the ideas of French thinker Michel Foucault, the conceptualization of language as a power resource will underline the employment of both CDA and narrative theory, in addition to shedding light on the interpretation and production of stories.⁷⁵ Power can be seen as “both a productive and a constraining force” in its active creation of our social world.⁷⁶ This can be understood in terms of language, as power shapes the way the world “can be talked about,” while at the same time “ruling out alternative ways of being and talking.”⁷⁷ I will examine the discursive power of inclusion or exclusion within both historical and current narratives as top-down socially constructive practices. Within a society such as Cuba’s, where only certain stories are socially and politically acceptable, the power of language is ripe for analysis.

The social effects of language can be understood as it marks out a distinct field of knowledge, by including or excluding certain claims or facts.⁷⁸ Furthermore, language confers membership through communication and bestows authority on distinct speakers and statements.⁷⁹ The discourses reflecting and reproducing these effects in Cuban society, relate heavily to its political history. I will explore how the knowledge of Cuba’s past is charged with significance for perceptions of identity and community through the language that is used to narrate its history. By considering *Verstehen* in relation to language, I will seek understand the emic Cuban perspective

⁷³ Dijk, "Critical Discourse Analysis," 478.

⁷⁴ Tonkiss, "Discourse Analysis," 408.

⁷⁵ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 119. Quoted in Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, "The field of discourse analysis," in *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2002), 13-14.

⁷⁶ Phillips, "The field of discourse analysis," 14.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 14.

⁷⁸ Tonkiss, "Discourse Analysis," 408.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 408.

by “using their own words and concepts.”⁸⁰ An example of this which I will explore later on, is the use of the term “Revolution” and the social realities manifested by its rhetoric, in addition to the varying perspectives regarding its validity. While it exists as a historical event fixed in time, its narratives are being created and accessed continuously. The weight of a single term on a society, such as “Revolution,” demonstrates how “language works to organize fields of knowledge and practice.”⁸¹ And so, what is known or believed to be *true* in Cuba, has extensive effects on the social constructs of Cuban identities, communities, and everyday life.

3.3.3 Language as knowledge and truth

As individuals distinguish statements as either true or false and organize their lives around those beliefs, the power imbued in knowledge is revealed through language. For Foucault, “(e)ach society has its régime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true.”⁸² Therefore, as the truth is told, comprehended, and appropriated through language, it produces effects that resonate across political, social, and economic platforms. By conceptualizing the power of language, its knowledge production can be understood in terms of what is *known* in Cuba. By looking within this setting at what is accepted as true or false, I will ground my research as an outsider, with an internal perspective of understanding. In this way, I may analyze narratives through an emic lens to investigate local Cuban capacity in relation to local Cuban subjectivity. The importance of this can be understood as “language constructs one’s subjectivity in ways that are historically and locally specific,” rather than as a “result of one’s individuality.”⁸³ The implications of contextual subjectivity resound in Dorothy Smith’s claim that “(t)he only way of knowing a socially constructed world is knowing it from within.”⁸⁴ Therefore, in comprehending the power of language, a consideration of truth can be explored in any given setting. As an analyst, I will “work with what has actually been said or written” in order to identify “the social consequences of different discursive representations of reality.”⁸⁵ These consequences derive from the evidence that just as language is shaped by specific

⁸⁰ Monique Hennink, "The nature of qualitative research," 17-18.

⁸¹ Tonkiss, "Discourse Analysis," 406.

⁸² Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, 131.

⁸³ Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, "Writing: A Method of Inquiry," in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc., 2005), 961.

⁸⁴ Dorothy E. Smith, "Women's Perspective as a Radical Critique of Sociology," *Sociological Inquiry* 44, 1 (1974).

⁸⁵ Phillips, "The field of discourse analysis," 21.

social contexts, so are its meaningful truths. My research seeks to explore an individual's capacity to influence those truths. In consideration of the fact that "(w)hat something means to individuals is dependent on the discourses available to them," I will examine how individuals are able to create meaning through their own creative discourses, such as that of poetry.⁸⁶

3.3.4 Creation through language

The power of language can also be recognized in its ability to create both "a particular view of reality and of the Self."⁸⁷ Beyond a mere channel to communicate information, language also functions as "a 'machine' that generates, and as a result constitutes, the social world."⁸⁸ Therefore, language will be used as the site from which the construction of identity, the establishment of fact, and the formation and reproduction of meaning in Cuban society, will be examined.⁸⁹ By actively functioning as a constitutive force, language "does not 'reflect' social reality but rather produces meaning and creates social reality."⁹⁰ This holds implications for both the creation of Cuban nationalism as well as the potential for the Cuban people to impact social change or challenge political transition. What this means for peace and conflict transformation can be explored as different discourses "are engaged in a constant struggle with one another to achieve hegemony, that is, to fix the meanings of language in their own way."⁹¹ While social reality is shaped by dominant perspectives, the capacity for others to challenge and change that reality can be evaluated within the realms they meet, such as that of creative expression.

3.3.5 The capacity of expression

Alongside language, I will also consider the capacity of expression from a bottom-up perspective. Within the Cuban cultural community, the complexities surrounding who gets to express which ideas, raise questions I will seek to investigate in regard to artistic agency. Whether Cuban poets and writers can employ language as a tool to achieve positive change within their social reality, depends heavily on the spaces in which they operate. I will turn the focus from the content of language to the methods and means behind the artistic act of writing itself. I will thereby

⁸⁶ Pierre, "Writing: A Method of Inquiry," 961.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 960.

⁸⁸ Phillips, "The field of discourse analysis," 9.

⁸⁹ Tonkiss, "Discourse Analysis," 406.

⁹⁰ Pierre, "Writing: A Method of Inquiry," 961.

⁹¹ Phillips, "The field of discourse analysis," 7.

account for the limitation of the difficulties in collecting artistic expressions with dissenting language, and the political sensitivity of doing so, in consideration of ethics. The data gathered during my fieldwork is centered around two institutional spaces of expression. One is a youth association of writers and artists, *Asociación Hermanos Saíz (AHS)*, and the other is the Union of Cuban writers and artists (UNEAC). Through interviews with individuals at varying levels within the centers of these organizations spread across Cuba, I will analyze the capacity of artistic expression on the local level. This will provide a contrast to the meanings produced by the nationalistic expressions created by the Cuban state through monuments, symbols, heroic images, and so on. In order to comprehend the significance surrounding meaning production from above and below, the concept of cultural memory will function as a springboard for discussing the relationship of time to both language and expression.

3.4.1 Conceptualizing cultural memory

The concept of cultural memory is essential to understanding the ways in which a remembered past may continuously affect the way of life in communities. Culture itself can be defined as “a subjective category of meanings contained in people’s minds” or as “patterns of publicly available symbols objectified in society.”⁹² While these two conceptual views of culture are distinct, a connection can be drawn through the process by which a memory that is publicly represented, can reach a state of meaning which is collectively remembered. It is when memories are “actualized by individuals,” who themselves are “members of a community of remembrance,” that public notions of the past impact societies.⁹³

The relationship between an individual and the collective in terms of memory, reflects implications for an identity and sense of belonging, which is based on historical consciousness. As social groups form and cohere through associations, such as those of collective memories, the act of remembering demonstrates “a realization of belonging, even a social obligation.”⁹⁴ This will be explored as what is remembered today about the Cuban Revolution for example, produces meaning for what it is to be a Cuban living in within a Cuban community. In this case, a historical

⁹² Jeffrey K. Olick, "Collective Memory: The Two Cultures," *Sociological Theory* 17, 3 (1999): 336. Quoted in Astrid Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008a), 4-5.

⁹³ Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction," 5.

⁹⁴ Jan Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 114.

consciousness of remembrance is complexified by realities such as poverty and the many after-effects of Cuban emigration, which still continue to resonate in the communities left behind. Thus, in order to understand the Cuban identity of both the individual and the collective today, a look back on the past is necessary in terms of not simply what has occurred, but more importantly, how it has been remembered.

Instead of referring to historical consciousness as merely a “knowledge of the past,” but rather as “memory,” the past is instead expressed in terms of identity.⁹⁵ This can be understood as memory reflects a process of not only remembering, but also of forgetting.⁹⁶ Through memory, identity is formed within a temporal frame of the past, whereas knowledge can be considered as distinct information, without form.⁹⁷ A notion which reflects the scope of time and memory that will be developed during data analysis, is how the continuous reproduction of Cuban nationalism creates a selective memory of the past, in accordance with the knowledge and needs of the present.⁹⁸ This notion gains further clarity in consideration of two dynamic processes that relate the reproduction of remembered events across time, known as “premediation” and “remediation.”⁹⁹

3.4.2 Remediation and premediation

As memorable events are continuously represented over and over again through different forms of media, their meanings relate to their re-representations just as much, if not more, than their actual occurrence. Astrid Erll explains this process through the term “remediation,” as: “(w)hat is known about a war, a revolution, or any other event which has been turned into a site of memory...seems to refer not so much to what one might cautiously call the ‘actual events,’ but instead to a canon of existent medial constructions, to the narratives and images circulating in a media culture.”¹⁰⁰ Through the framework of remediation, the Cuban Revolution for example, may be examined through not only the semantics of its cultural memory, but also through its representations as they thoroughly permeate Cuban society. Taking remediation into account

⁹⁵ Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," 113.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 113.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 113.

⁹⁸ Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction," 5.

⁹⁹ Astrid Erll, "Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008b), 392-95.

¹⁰⁰ Erll, "Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory," 392.

during data analysis will illuminate an exploration of the different modes of remembering, through the various media in which rhetorical patterns of collective memory are established.¹⁰¹

Furthermore, the function of re-representation in remembering the past also holds meaning for the future, through another process termed by Erll as “premediation.”¹⁰² Erll establishes the role of premediation around “the fact that existent media which circulate in a given society provide schemata for future experience and its representation.”¹⁰³ As Cuba’s media presents a restrictive and exclusive space for what is allowed to circulate, its schemata of representation holds a rigid allowance for premediation. Therefore, the absence of free expression may be evaluated in how policies restrictively shape the “cultural processes of looking, naming, and narrating” through the process of premediation, which in itself acts as both a starting point and an effect.¹⁰⁴

As the past becomes intelligible through premediation and remediation, these processes can be seen to simultaneously “endow medial representations with the aura of authenticity” while decisively “stabilizing the memory of historical events” across time.¹⁰⁵ Through data analysis, not only will the creation of past representations be explored, but also their reception as interpreted by Cuban interview participants. While the processes of media representation provide the potential for memory-making, whether the memories themselves will actually be realized, depends on their reception by an audience.¹⁰⁶ The meanings underlying memory-making are only realized when an audience engages with a form of media as being representative of their cultural memory and their perceptions of the past.¹⁰⁷ What this means for Cuba’s cultural memory, can be seen in the media representations of a historical consciousness that have saturated the everyday cultural spaces where this engagement and reception takes place. As part of a collective phenomenon, “the patterns derived from the media cultures we live in, especially (albeit often unintentionally) from fictions, ...shape our idea of reality and our memories.”¹⁰⁸ And so, through the conceptualization of cultural memory, the relationship between Cuba’s remembered past and its present realities will frame the context of conflict in Cuba. Also essential to establishing this framework for data

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 392.

¹⁰² Ibid, 392-95.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 392.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 393.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 395.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 395.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 395.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 397.

analysis, is the concept of “structural violence,” which will shed light on the complexities of conflict in Cuba, and in turn, the potential for future peace.

3.5.1 Conceptualizing structural violence

Structural violence was first termed by Norwegian peace scholar, Johan Galtung, in 1969, to describe social injustices as violent phenomena built into and perpetuated by the very structures of society.¹⁰⁹ In Cuba, structural violence is manifested not only through blatant human rights abuses of the state regime, but also through the conditions of economic inequality and poverty in which its people must live. The resulting reality is a society where the everyday struggles such as hunger, poverty, and prostitution are rampant, all amidst the backdrop of a decrepit infrastructure. As structural violence becomes part of everyday life, it “naturalizes” these problems until they are taken for granted.¹¹⁰ In Cuba, the social and political origins of structural violence, as well as its accountability, are complexified rather than erased, by both history and consciousness.¹¹¹

Anthropologist Paul Farmer describes the systematic oppression of structural violence in terms of the consciousness which recognizes it, while also exploring the role of the vulnerable and marginalized who suffer within a dominant social order.¹¹² A recognition of Cuba’s economic problems is universal, although the internal and external perspectives on who is responsible for them, differ greatly. Farmer describes how the “social machinery” of structural violence perpetuated through oppression, “is the result of many conditions, not the least of which reside in consciousness.”¹¹³ Historical memory of the economic issues in Cuba revolve around the installation of communism, an awareness of its failure, and the reasonings for it, which range from the fall of the Soviet Union to the pressures of the US embargo.

¹⁰⁹ Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6, 3 (1969): 171, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/422690>.

¹¹⁰ Nancy Scheper-Hughes, "Dangerous and endangered youth: social structures and determinants of violence," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, no. 1036 (2004): 13, <https://doi.org/10.1196/annals.1330.002>.

¹¹¹ Scheper-Hughes, "Dangerous and endangered youth: social structures and determinants of violence."

¹¹² Paul Farmer, "An Anthropology of Structural Violence," *Current Anthropology* Vol. 45, no. 3 (2004): 307, The University of Chicago Press on behalf of Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/382250>.

¹¹³ Farmer, "An Anthropology of Structural Violence," 307.

3.5.2 Accountability in Cuba and the US embargo

The question of accountability for structural violence in Cuba lays responsibility on one hand, to the innate deficiencies of a communist system from which Cuba refuses to turn (this being the external, Western perspective). On the other hand, a historical consciousness within Cuba instead lays the blame for its troubles on the relentless imperialistic tendencies of the West, primarily, those of the United States. The US embargo on Cuba, whose sanctions have persisted for over half a century, has been denounced by Cuba as well as by the international community.¹¹⁴ Due to the severity of the embargo, its negative impact on human rights and its hindrance to development must be taken into account, especially when the people who suffer the most from it, are those of the vulnerable and marginalized Cuban population. The role of national narratives which criticize the embargo and Western imposition will be analyzed in the way they are interpreted, as they create both inclusion and exclusion within Cuban communities, and thereby, notions of the “Cuban identity” itself. Another example which will be developed is the way narratives condemning the embargo manufacture a perception of the US as an “other” to effective result, such as the creation of political stability among the people during the difficult times of “special period” in the 90s. Despite the criticism which has condemned the US embargo for decades, the failure of a communist system in Cuba must be acknowledged not only historically and ideologically, but as a reality of the present day if any progress forward is to be made. Furthermore, “(t)he imposition of the embargo does not exempt the Cuban government from its obligations to respect, protect and fulfill human rights.”¹¹⁵

3.5.3 An “illiberal” regime

The conceptualization of a structural violence which manifests itself in Cuba’s human rights abuses, will be formulated around the rhetoric which categorizes the Cuban regime as “illiberal.” While this term presents an external perspective and a challenging tone towards the international legitimacy of the Cuban political system, it can also be understood through Cuba’s own political positioning. While the discourse within Cuba steers away from the unflattering terminology of “illiberal,” Cuba’s emphatic presentation of itself as a socialist regime, is

¹¹⁴ Amnesty International, *The US Embargo Against Cuba: Its Impact on Economic and Social Rights* (London: Amnesty International Publications, 2009), 5.

¹¹⁵ International, *The US Embargo Against Cuba: Its Impact on Economic and Social Rights*, 6.

underlined by the fact that it is essentially *not* a liberal democracy. I will therefore refer to Cuba's "illiberal" regime throughout as an objective recognition of its structure of governance. That Cuba bases such strong national pride in its socialism, reflects the historical legacy of a revolutionary regime determined to maintain its political structure, despite the inequalities and social injustices it incurs.

Thus, accountability for structural violence is complexified by layers of oppression from the United States and Cuba, both of whose top-down policies manifest themselves in the suffering taking place at the local level in Cuban communities. The distribution of responsibility and blame to both nations can be understood as: "(t)he embargo has helped to undermine the enjoyment of key civil and political rights in Cuba by fueling a climate in which fundamental rights such as freedom of association, expression and assembly are routinely denied."¹¹⁶ While the detrimental effects of Cuba's illiberal regime will be the focus of analysis in consideration of structural violence, so the role of the United States will also be brought into focus by Cuban voices during interviews, as well as by the nationalist narratives which denounce Western imperialism.

Through a conceptualization of structural violence, the systems of oppression that demand its acceptance and an adherence to the everyday realities of social inequality, may be analyzed. This will be revealed in the next chapter in data regarding nationalist narratives and discourses, as they shape a Cuban identity which weighs heavy under the pressures of structural violence.

4. Data analysis: Nationalist narratives and structural violence

4.1.1 National identity

An introduction to national identity provides a foundation for data analysis regarding nationalist narratives, as they construct notions of what it means to be authentically "Cuban." Fundamental to any national identity is the notion of a collective membership, "since 'national identity' presupposes feelings of pride in belonging, and commitment and participation in social and cultural practices."¹¹⁷ The notions of membership and belonging are developed by Benedict

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 6.

¹¹⁷ C. de la Torre, "Conciencia de *mismisidad*: identidad y cultura cubana," *Temas*, No. 2, no. abril-junio (1995): 112. Quoted in Kapcia, *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture*, 6.

Anderson who argues that the nation itself is “an imagined political community.”¹¹⁸ He claims that the political myth of a nation only becomes a viable reality, “if enough members of a given ‘nation’ believe in its existence.”¹¹⁹ Thus, through collective membership, or at least a self-confident perception of it, a nation asserts and realizes its authenticity, despite its fictitious foundations. As national identity finds definition through the notion of belonging, it transcends its fundamental essence as “an artificial construct, an ‘invented tradition,’ i.e. ‘a set of practices... of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetitions which automatically implies continuity with the past.’”¹²⁰

As national identity is founded on shared notions of the past, the heritage of a collective history holds meaning in the way it is remembered. The heritage of the Cuban nation is one that has been shaped by a history of foreign occupation and a struggle for sovereignty. This legacy is recognized by Cuban historian Louis A. Pérez Jr. who highlights that “(n)o Latin American country in the nineteenth century experienced wars of independence of longer duration or greater destruction than Cuba.”¹²¹ It is within the framework of this turbulent history that, according to Pérez, “(t)he meaning of Cuban—what constituted *lo Cubano*—drew upon circumstances of adversity, on profoundly impressive human energies, over the course of years of struggle and sacrifice, decade after decade, the way a people learn to cope and make do during long times of misfortune.”¹²² While the events which constitute this history are written into Cuba’s past, the way they are remembered, their sense of meaning and thus, a national identity, are manifested in culture. Therefore, “if we are to trace the evolution of a Cuban national identity, we have to identify and understand the underlying processes of cultural national identification, without which the identity lacks a context.”¹²³

¹¹⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), 6.

¹¹⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Quoted in Kapcia, *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture*, 7.

¹²⁰E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1. Quoted in Kapcia, *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture*, 6.

¹²¹ Louis A. Pérez Jr., *The Structure of Cuban History: Meanings and Purpose of the Past* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 3. muse.jhu.edu/book/24987.

¹²² Jr., *The Structure of Cuban History: Meanings and Purpose of the Past*, 3.

¹²³ Kapcia, *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture*, 18.

4.1.2 Cuba's cultural identity

What it means to be Cuban is framed through “culture,” which, having the ability to create and remember, births a context for identity formation. A starting point for forming notions of the self, can be recognized within Cuba's history, which “forged the cultural determinants by which Cubans arrived at a sense of themselves and by which successive generations of Cubans were socialized into the meaning of nationality.”¹²⁴ As the meaning of a Cuban cultural identity is developed and reproduced by diverse forms of expression, it presents a continuous process of reassertion, of being challenged or accepted, within different domains of creation.

In a similar way to the formation of national identity, cultural identity also connects the individual to a greater sense of community. A shared perception of self is revealed in cultural identity as “a collective way of being or a collective way of recreating (in all senses).”¹²⁵ This signifies a notion of culture being generated by culture itself, and furthermore experienced through a fusion of “confidence, self-identification, and participation.”¹²⁶ As an individual perceives his or herself as an active member of a group, a dynamic process of identity formation is revealed as a collective phenomenon. The recognition of self on a community level reveals that cultural identity is “never just a matter of ownership, of borrowing and lending...but rather of appropriations, common experiences, and inter-dependencies of all kinds.”¹²⁷ As events are experienced and shared, their meanings created and recreated, the formation of cultural identity inevitably takes place in relation to time and therefore, memory.

The temporal dimension of a national past relating into the present and anticipating the future, can be recognized in a “collective fulfillment” of historical legacy, as well as a “cognizance of the past as a source of consciousness of Cuban.”¹²⁸ Therefore, memory also serves the function of passing the Cuban identity down from one generation to the next. An essential way in which this process takes place is through storytelling and narratives. In the case of Cuba, the impact of stories on shaping identity can be seen in the top-down interaction of the regime to its audience: the Cuban people as well as the world beyond. The starting point of the regime's power, the

¹²⁴ Jr., *The Structure of Cuban History: Meanings and Purpose of the Past*, 3.

¹²⁵ Kapcia, *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture*, 211.

¹²⁶ Kapcia, *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture*, 18-19, 212.

¹²⁷ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1993), 261-62. Quoted in Kapcia, *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture*.

¹²⁸ Jr., *The Structure of Cuban History: Meanings and Purpose of the Past*, 2.

Revolution, presents a political and cultural discourse which not only describes the national Cuban identity, but constitutes it.

4.2.1 Identity and the Revolution

As the Cuban Revolution marked a major milestone in Cuba's political history, what the "Revolution" meant, would play a pivotal role in shaping Cuba's new national identity. Finally realizing its destiny and all of the promised hopes of the past, a sense of collective fulfillment took hold of the popular imagination.¹²⁹ Pérez Jr. state that "(a)t the core of the revolution's mystique was the claim to national fulfillment, of having realized the historic project of (a) nation from which the meaning of nationality had formed."¹³⁰ What the following three decades would make clear was "that the old search for national identity had become increasingly identified with something called 'the Revolution.'" ¹³¹ As an event, the Revolution affirmed the historic aspirations of a "Cuba for Cubans."¹³² However, sustaining the revolutionary regime meant not only preserving the Cuban nation's sovereignty, but also, its socialist structure.

The post-1990 period presented an ideological reassessment which arose "from an awareness that, to preserve the Revolution at a time of challenge and globalization, building a sense of national identity was essential."¹³³ The fall of the Soviet Union presented a critical challenge to the national politicism of a Cuban identity which should glow with pride in its socialist structure. Antony Kapcia highlights the historical evolution which connects these events and concepts, stating that "forty-five years of Revolution have, in one sense, been a process of definition, fusing 'nation' and 'socialism' in a new identity."¹³⁴ One of the ways that this fusion has taken place is through the language of nationalist narratives, in their use and abuse of the term "Revolution."

4.2.2 The discourse of "Revolution"

The Castro regime has subjected the term "Revolution" to such an extensive array of contexts beyond the actual event of the Cuban Revolution itself, that it now contains a much wider

¹²⁹ Ibid, 237.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 237.

¹³¹ Kapcia, *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture*, 125.

¹³² Jr., *The Structure of Cuban History: Meanings and Purpose of the Past*, 237.

¹³³ Kapcia, *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture*, 196.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 5.

interpretation of meaning. In terms of cultural memory, the process of “remediation” can be recognized here, as the discourse of “Revolution” has been tirelessly used again and again. Through remediation, its meaning has been stretched to such an extent that it no longer refers solely to the Revolution as an event, but rather to its perpetual re-representations in the media and other cultural spaces.¹³⁵ A critical perspective on the political agenda underlying the rhetoric of “Revolution,” finds a fundamental association with the top-down narratives that impose their meanings on Cuban society.

Most commonly used is the phrase “*Viva la Revolución*” (“Long live the Revolution”), the words of which permeate the cultural environment of Cuba. Within these words, the Revolution has lived as much more than a political event, as it denotes a mindset, a way of being, and an identity. As it relates Cuba’s anti-colonial legacy to the overthrow of Batista’s dictatorship, the remembered history of “Revolution” finds life and breath in Cuban society and most emphatically, in its politics. Cuban journalist and novelist, Lisandro Otero, recognizes the problem in this excessive relation stating “(m)any believe that rhetoric and ceremony should be reformed in order to distance official comportment from a historicism that has reached a saturation point.”¹³⁶ Through the overuse of “Revolution” for political purposes, its meaning has been stretched into an ideology which fuels national pride and belonging, and which also contains the power to mobilize.

One example which highlights the mobilizing effects of language, is in the rhetoric of a working ethic for the greater good, established early on in the spirit of communism. In 1970, Castro initiated the *Gran Zafra* (great harvest) with the goal of producing ten million tons of sugar to stimulate the newly constructed communist economy.¹³⁷ One million workers were motivated to participate, to give up their Sundays and holidays, in what would be “the largest mobilization in Cuba’s history.”¹³⁸ While the harvest fell short of its mark, even causing more harm than good as production in other sectors consequently decreased, this event exemplified the successful incentive to mobilize through the spirit of “Revolution.”¹³⁹ The call to action that was produced through the words “*la Zafra es Revolución*” (“the Harvest is Revolution”), can still be found painted on the sun-faded billboards of Cuba’s sugar-town countryside. Looking beyond the

¹³⁵ Erll, "Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory," 392.

¹³⁶ Lisandro Otero, *La utopía cubana desde adentro: ¿A dónde va Cuba hoy?* (Mexico: Siglo XXI Editores, 1993). Quoted in Jr., *The Structure of Cuban History: Meanings and Purpose of the Past*, 236.

¹³⁷ Terry Karl, "Work Incentives in Cuba," *Latin American Perspectives* Vol. 2, 4, no. 7 (1975): 34.

¹³⁸ Karl, "Work Incentives in Cuba," 34.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, 34-35.

historical development of the term, the effects of the pervasive rhetoric of “Revolution” can be comprehended in today’s Cuba. Next, I will analyze my own experience as a researcher encountering, interpreting, and appropriating “Revolution,” a term which holds so much divergent meanings, that it seems to lose sight of its true actuality.

4.2.3 An etic experience of “Revolution”

When analyzing the nationalist language of “Revolution,” I inevitably find myself drawing reflections back on my own experiences, in how I interpreted and appropriated its pervasive discourse as an outsider. Traveling by bicycle through Cuba, it became clear how a communist structure could operate in a nation spatially structured not only by mountains and coastline, but also by endless swaths of sugarcane fields, which the towns and cities are oriented around. In these vast expanses where the “Great Harvest” once took place, reminders of the Revolution’s ability to mobilize are marked by its declaration of “Revolution,” applied to a multitude of contexts beyond the “Great Harvest.” In some city outskirts, we came upon several different factories which had signs posted, proclaiming the words “*Trabajar es Revolución*” (“To work is Revolution”) beside pictures of the Castro brothers. Furthermore, in the focal point of Havana, its popular spaces present the nationalistic fusion of the Cuban flag, the regime, and “Revolution.” While the “Museum of the Revolution” boasts a historical exposition of the actual events from a fundamentally Cuban perspective, the “Plaza of the Revolution” also presents a city-space devoted to its legacy. As the language of “Revolution” seemed to appear at each turn, so thoroughly overused, it was not long before my friend and I adopted the term into our own discourse.

As we cycled west from Santiago de Cuba, finding both the rural and urban spaces to be saturated with the language of “Revolution,” we quickly appropriated our own sense of meaning to the term. For us, “Revolution” became a sort of adjective, meant to describe something as “tough” or “broken.” For example, on the outskirts of Santa Clara, an old tire lying in some tall grass was filled with five or six abandoned puppies. We imagined taking one along for the rest of the trip in the handlebar bag of my bicycle, as its adoption would be undoubtedly, very “Revolution.” Another time, when our stomachs were suffering the trials of having drunk the unfiltered water of the countryside, we hitchhiked some kilometers in one of the *camiones* (trucks), which so often would pass us hauling groups of Cubans, who found it to be the most efficient form of transportation. Riding down the highway in the back of one *camión* along with its other cargo,

we realized we were sitting on bound cardboard boxes covered with the warning signs and symbols of dynamite: “DANGER EXPLOSIVES.” As the *camión* bounced violently through rotted holes in the asphalt, rattling both us and the boxes in back, we could only shake our heads at the “Revolution” of the situation. Furthermore, throughout the trip, as we passed Soviet-style blocks of collective housing, abandoned and deteriorating— “Revolution.”

Reflecting back on our own misuse of the term, it demonstrates how we, as outsiders, interpreted the pervasive rhetoric of “Revolution” and appropriated it ourselves. By attaching our own connotations of meaning to the term, we were able to create a structure of personal discourse that denoted an adjective, to describe some situation or thing, independent of the meaning which the term actually refers to: the event of the Cuban Revolution. Yet, conceptualizing the Revolution into a deviating array of meanings is not unique to us. It is something the Castro regime has done extensively to establish a stronghold of national and cultural identity. One of the most exemplary conceptualizations of the term can be evaluated in the words of Fidel himself.

4.2.4 Fidel’s concept of “Revolution”

In the *Plaza de la Revolución* of Havana on the 1st of May 2000, Fidel Castro gave a speech in which he expresses his concept of “Revolution,” stating:

"Revolution is having a sense of the historic moment; it is changing everything that must be changed; it is full equality and freedom; it is being treated and treating others like human beings; it is emancipating ourselves on our own and through our own efforts; it is challenging powerful dominant forces in and beyond the social and national arena; it is defending the values in which we believe at the price of any sacrifice; it is modesty, selflessness, altruism, solidarity, and heroism; it is fighting with courage, intelligence and realism; it is never lying or violating ethical principles; it is a profound conviction that there is no power in the world that can crush the power of truth and ideas. Revolution is unity; it is independence, it is struggling for our dreams of justice for Cuba and for the world, which is the foundation of our patriotism, our socialism, and our internationalism."¹⁴⁰

These words, spoken on International Workers’ Day, address the Cuban audience with a discourse in which the concept of “Revolution” is defined with a wealth of meanings. From the starting

¹⁴⁰ Fidel Castro Ruz, "Fidel’s concept of Revolution," news release, December 5, 2016, 2000, <http://en.granma.cu/hasta-la-victoria-siempre/2016-12-05/fidels-concept-of-revolution>. (Fidel Castro Ruz’s speech on May 1st, 2000 in *la Plaza de la Revolución* translated by Granma online newspaper, Havana, CU).

point of “the historic moment,” Fidel endows the term with direction, virtue, ideology, and nationalism.¹⁴¹ The political purpose of this speech can be critically analyzed as it frames notions of “equality and freedom” and other esteemed values, all in a state of action: “changing...emancipating...challenging...defending...fighting (and)...struggling.”¹⁴² The structure of this discourse presents the “Revolution” as an active and dynamic process, rather than as a stagnant memory of the past. Fidel also frames notions of belonging and community: “selflessness, altruism, solidarity, (and)...unity,” which contain a sense of collectivity and confidence in a national Cuban identity.¹⁴³ Furthermore, in describing “Revolution” as “defending the values we believe at the price of any sacrifice,” he presents a justification for what is lacking, missing, or withheld in Cuba.¹⁴⁴ While this “sacrifice” is open to interpretation, to an audience of Cubans, as well as an outsider looking in, unfortunate images of hunger, poverty, and underdevelopment, come all too easily to mind. When contemplating this present reality and the fate of Cuba’s future, the significance of Cuba’s past holds deep roots in which this patriotic language describing Cuba’s struggle for independence as “Revolution,” find nourishment. One national figure who bridges this gap between the historicism of Cuba’s anti-colonial fight, with the narratives of the Castro regime, is José Martí, whose omnipresence in Cuba frequently accompanies the discourse of “Revolution.”

4.3.1.1 Heroes and martyrs: José Martí

When delving into the nationalist narratives of Castro’s revolutionary regime, a rich context can be found in their reflection of the historical role of José Martí, the Cuban poet and patriot “who became the symbol of Cuba’s struggle for independence from Spain.”¹⁴⁵ In both the words and actions of José Martí, “(h)is dedication to the goal of Cuban freedom” can be recognized, as it in fact resonated across Latin America.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, his patriotic verses manifested themselves in reality, when Martí died fighting on Cuban soil on May 19th, 1895, as a martyr whose life and death truly “unified the movement for Cuban independence.”¹⁴⁷ The image

¹⁴¹ Ruz, "Fidel's concept of Revolution."

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "José Martí," in *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., January 24, 2020). <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jose-Martí>.

¹⁴⁶ Britannica, "José Martí."

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

of José Martí can be found all throughout Cuba, represented by statues, pasted on billboards, painted in artwork and murals, and so on. Likewise, the lines of his poetry are expressed in an abundance of Cuban spaces, reflecting the sense of his cultural, historic, and political importance. While the intention behind Martí's ideas reflects a patriotic resistance of Spanish colonialism, his expression and legacy can be found written deep into the narratives of Castro's regime and its "Revolution." Though these narratives draw on the heroism and martyrdom of Martí, they present a tactical political reconstruction, based on falsification and distortion, to adapt Martí's story into an opposition of US imperialism and a support of Cuban socialism.¹⁴⁸

4.3.1.2 Reconstructing Martí's message

The use of Martí's verses, to send a message beyond what were his original intentions as an author, can be recognized in the narratives of the Cuban Revolution. They are founded on the glorification of Martí's legacy and martyrdom as an essential part of the Cuban national identity. However, beneath this nationalistic appeal, the political goal of implanting socialism has been driven through a "traditional patriotic fervor centered on Mart(i)." ¹⁴⁹ Cuban scholar Carlos Ripoll describes Castro's tactics, stating "the simplest and preferred way to show Mart(i) as a forerunner of the current regime has been to take out of context and to overemphasize chosen strains of his thought."¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, Ripoll identifies this abuse of Martí's ideological values stating: "the fact is that Mart(i) fervently defended freedom and the democratic process."¹⁵¹ Despite these contradictions, the Revolutionary regime has embarked on the "urgent task to link Mart(i) and Castro in the public mind."¹⁵²

Within cultural spaces and through collective memory, the relation of Martí to Castro was perpetuated by the sentiment of a timeless struggle for freedom, finally realized in the Cuban Revolution. The verses of nationalist poet Nicolás Guillén proclaim this association, as he writes in one poem, "Martí promised it to you / and Fidel fulfilled it for you."¹⁵³ Additionally, in another poem, he relates this myth which constructs José Martí as Cuba's prophet, and Fidel Castro, as its

¹⁴⁸ Carlos Ripoll, "Jose Marti: Inside the Monster and the Marxist Interpretation of Cuban History," *World Affairs* Vol. 140, 3 (1978), Sage Publications, Inc., <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20671733>.

¹⁴⁹ Ripoll, "Jose Marti: Inside the Monster and the Marxist Interpretation of Cuban History," 217.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 219.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 227.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, 219.

¹⁵³ Nicolás Guillén, "Se acabó," in *Obra poética, 1958-1977*, ed. Angel I. Augier (Havana: 1985). Quoted in Jr., *The Structure of Cuban History: Meanings and Purpose of the Past*, 240.

savior. Guillén writes: “Martí wanted Free Cuba / And Fidel said: ‘It is!’ ”¹⁵⁴ Through the relation of Cuba’s past to its present, Cuba’s cultural memory has been not only affected, but also, shaped. The process of “premediation” can be seen in this relation of remembering, as “depictions of earlier, yet somehow comparable events shape our understanding of later events.”¹⁵⁵ The recirculation of a historical schemata, starting with Martí’s heroism and martyrdom, has framed a social and political experience of Cuba that follows the thematic representation of “continuity” itself.¹⁵⁶

4.3.1.3 “Continuity”

The consolidation of Cuba’s anti-colonial narratives into those of the Revolutionary regime, presents the notion of “continuity” as an ideology for Cubans to rally around. Louis Pérez Jr. identifies the basis for this claiming of the past, stating that “the triumph of the revolution signified more than a seizure of power: it implied too an appropriation of history.”¹⁵⁷ The historic past, so prevalent in the minds and memory of the Cuban collective, presented a basis for which trust in the new regime could be legitimized. Pérez Jr. describes this process of legitimation, in which the time frame of the revolutionary struggle is stretched and reframed around Cuba’s anti-colonial past, stating:

“(t)he claim of the revolution as continuity and consummation gained discursive ascendancy in an all-encompassing historical construct of *cien años de lucha*: one hundred years of struggle. The narrative of the revolution as culmination of *cien años de lucha* did indeed purport to fashion a new founding narrative, with 1959 consecrated as the realization of the historic project of nation.”¹⁵⁸

Through the notion of a continuity which weaves Martí’s story into the Revolution’s narrative, the formation a national Cuban identity can be recognized. The association of identity and continuity in today’s Cuba, is best exemplified by the discourse of Cuba’s new president, Miguel Díaz-Canel.

¹⁵⁴ Guillén, "Son del bloqueo." Quoted in Jr., *The Structure of Cuban History: Meanings and Purpose of the Past*, 240.

¹⁵⁵ Erll, "Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory," 392-93.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 392.

¹⁵⁷ Jr., *The Structure of Cuban History: Meanings and Purpose of the Past*, 238.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 239.

Taking power in 2018, Díaz-Canel opened a twitter account and since then, his posts can be found regularly accompanied by the hashtag “*#SomosContinuidad*” (We are continuity).¹⁵⁹ Through social media, Díaz-Canel has been able to associate postings of current events with memories of the past. This association takes place under the banner of “continuity” applied to the collective Cuban identity of “we.” Opening his account today, on March 27th, 2020, I find thirteen postings of his since just yesterday, containing the label of “*#SomosContinuidad*.”¹⁶⁰ The abundance of “continuity” in his discursive and thematic representations have therefore, functioned to cement nationalist narratives into Cuban cultural memory.

Furthermore, the implications of Cuban “continuity” presents a bleaker picture in terms of human rights. Caribbean researcher Louise Tillotson investigates the question: “what is ‘continuity’ for human rights in Cuba? It’s confrontation and often detention or job loss, rather than dialogue, for anyone who challenges the state’s system. It’s people imprisoned solely for the peaceful exercise of his (or her) right to freedom of expression.”¹⁶¹ And so, through these top-down processes, we find Cuba’s history drawn into a schemata of revolutionary reconstruction, which in turn sets the stage for human rights in Cuban, or a lack thereof. Essential to these processes, is the Cuban audience, who remembers and appropriates the stories of Cuba’s heroes and martyrs. The audience’s active role of interpretation can be exemplified by the remediation of Ernesto “Che” Guevara’s revolutionary image.

4.3.2 The image of “Che”

Ernesto “Che” Guevara, who led the Cuban Revolution alongside Castro and would later die a martyr fighting for the same ideals in Bolivia, is recognized today by a symbolic image of him gazing nobly up into the distance.¹⁶² The image is from a photograph taken during a funeral procession, after a French boat carrying ammunition from Belgium unexpectedly exploded in Havana’s harbor.¹⁶³ While this image presents a clear nationalist narrative within Cuba, a

¹⁵⁹ Louise Tillotson, “‘We are continuity’: What the president’s hashtag tells us about human rights in Cuba today,” 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/08/we-are-continuity-what-the-presidents-hashtag-tells-us-about-human-rights-in-cuba-today/>.

¹⁶⁰ Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermudez, Twitter, March 26-27th, 2020, 2020.

¹⁶¹ Tillotson, “‘We are continuity’: What the president’s hashtag tells us about human rights in Cuba today.”

¹⁶² Andrew Annandale Sinclair, “Che Guevara,” in *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., September 27, 2019). <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Che-Guevara>.

¹⁶³ Kai Christiansen Emmanuel Amara, and Florian Dedio, “Making Heroes,” in *The Cuba Libre Story*, ed. Kai Christiansen Emmanuel Amara, and Florian Dedio (France, Germany: Netflix, 8 December 2016 (USA) 2016).

contradictory appropriation from its audience can also be found, not in its meaning, but rather in its utility. From the resting place of Che in Santa Clara, across all the cultural spaces of Cuba, his martyrdom has firmly cemented his memory as a nationalist hero, representative of the integrity and dignity of the socialist Cuban identity which is epitomized in his image. At the same time, tourist shops across the country, and in fact across the world, present a different reality in the use of his image. This can be understood as the sale of t-shirts and all types of different tourist memorabilia with Che's face, represent the market on which so many of the Cuban people sustain their livelihoods today. This tourist market and its capitalist nature, catering in Cuba to a bourgeois class of foreign consumers, represents all of the ideals which Che, a fundamental socialist, opposed. Thus, a contradiction is presented as Che's image of Cuban liberation cycles through the foreign capitalist market which he objected, and on which so many Cubans are now dependent. This demonstrates the conflicting nature of Cuba's economic reality and the nationalist legacy of its socialist identity.

Furthermore, the pervasive dissemination of Che's image is encouraged by the Cuban regime, as its fame perpetuates his heroism and martyrdom as an unforgettable truth for the people to remember as a part of their national past, and as an irreproachable symbol of their identity. On this note, the nationalist narratives of two other famous revolutionary leaders, Camilo Cienfuegos and Huber Matos, reflect a necessary counterpoint to balance the creation of heroes in Cuba's history, that being, the creation of villains.

4.3.3 Cienfuegos and Matos: the disappearing "soft-line"

As the fates of two leaders from the Cuban Revolution are intertwined, the narratives by which their stories are retold, present a strategic political structure in their difference. Fidel's *comandante*, Huber Matos, was the one who led the march on Santiago de Cuba at Castro's side, while the other, Camilo Cienfuegos, would later be named head of Cuba's revolutionary army, after taking Havana alongside Che.¹⁶⁴

Both Huber Matos and Camilo Cienfuegos presented a "soft-line" of revolutionary thinking, in comparison to the radical idealism of Che and the Castros. This "soft-line" can be defined by its acknowledgment of Cuba's historical struggle and its comprehension of the

¹⁶⁴ Emmanuel Amara, "Making Heroes."

necessity for Cuban liberation from foreign powers, as well as domestic dictators. Achieving sovereignty in Cuba was fundamental to the Revolution as the leading narrative which in fact drove the event. However, the new regime quickly took on a new sense of spirit after gaining power, in their communist vision for Cuba's future, a direction which did not align with the views of most "soft-line" revolutionaries.

Fidel was quick to appoint his brother Raúl and Che as ministers with considerable power, yet their strong communist beliefs did not mesh with ideals of Cienfuegos and Matos.¹⁶⁵ Both "soft-liners" were extremely famous in Cuba for the roles they played during the Revolution, Cienfuegos in particular, whose "popularity among the people was so great...that it obscured Fidel Castro's."¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, both "were vocal about their dislike of Fidel's policies," as Cienfuegos "vehemently opposed Raúl and the Cuban government's leftist drift," and Matos "even went so far as to tender his resignation to Castro."¹⁶⁷ Unwilling to accept the loss of his *comandante* Matos, Castro sent none other than Cienfuegos himself to arrest him for treason.¹⁶⁸ After making the arrest on October 28th, 1959, during his flight back to Havana, Cienfuegos' plane "disappeared in mid-flight, in clear weather, and with no distress signals," while no remains of the crash or his body would ever be found.¹⁶⁹ And so, the threat of two "soft-line" rivals to the regime were removed on the same day, while the legacy of their fates present such opposing narratives, that they can be understood to balance out one another.

In the main exhibition at Havana's *Museo de la Revolución*, a small but centrally placed placard describes the role played by Huber Matos, explicitly labeling him as a "traitor," accusing him of "sedition," and describing the justice carried out by his twenty-year prison sentence. Cienfuegos, on the other hand, is as beloved as ever within Cuban nationalism, which remembers his unfortunate death as a tragic "accident." In Havana's *Plaza de la Revolución*, the massive steel monuments on the sides of three buildings depict the faces of three Cuban heroes: Fidel Castro, Ernesto Che Guevara, and Camilo Cienfuegos. Within the images and narratives of these Cuban heroes, a justification has been written deep into Cuba's history for the structural violence perpetuated by its illiberal regime.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

4.4.1 Structural violence: “othering”

Cuba’s nationalist narratives, founded on a historical legacy of national heroes, are further consolidated by the creation and reproduction of a collective hatred towards the oppressive “other,” such as colonial Spain or the interventionist United States. It is through this process of “othering” that the Cuban regime legitimizes itself, despite the structural violence it perpetuates. By constructing a dire reality, ripe with social injustices which the Cuban people must accept and endure, an “us vs. them” mentality nourishes the justification of this reality. By pitting nationalism against an external enemy, the identity of the Cuban people is incontrovertibly intertwined with the Cuban regime. The words of novelist Umberto Eco describing anti-Semitic “othering” in nineteenth-century Europe, highlight the horrors of this process:

“We need an enemy to give people hope...National identity is the last bastion of the dispossessed. But the meaning of identity is now based on hatred, on hatred for those who are not the same. Hatred has to be cultivated as a civic passion. The enemy is the friend of the people. You always want someone to hate in order to feel justified in your own misery.”¹⁷⁰

Hate speech of the “other” presents a top-down, political discourse, laden with power as it reminds Cubans of the value of their socialist nation, through a unifying hatred of the capitalist West. Internal protest is also curbed by “othering,” as “(t)he Cuban authorities portray non-violent political dissidents and human rights activists as foreign sympathizers supporting US policy against Cuba.”¹⁷¹ Therefore, the Cuban regime is able to both curb protest and justify social injustice, through a discourse of unifying hatred against the incessant imposition of United States on Cuban sovereignty.

4.4.2 Hate speech

The semiotics of nationalist hate speech is revealed in monuments, flags, billboards, news articles and other “things,” which carry the capacity to make meaning through memory. This can be understood as “(t)hings do not ‘have’ a memory of their own, but they may remind us, (and)

¹⁷⁰ Umberto Eco, *The Prague Cemetery*, trans. Richard Dixon (Dublin: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011), 342.

¹⁷¹ International, *The US Embargo Against Cuba: Its Impact on Economic and Social Rights*, 6.

may trigger our memory.”¹⁷² In Cuba, reminders can be found everywhere which reflect and thereby reconstruct, an “us vs. them” mentality. Rolling into the city of Cienfuegos on our bicycles, a billboard depicts a big, brown fist with the bold letters “CUBA” forming its wrist and forearm. The massive fist is striking an image of America’s national figure, “Uncle Sam,” who is crumbling under the blow. The word “*BLOQUEO*” (Blockade), is breaking down as well, as the letters shape the outline of Uncle Sam’s body. For the Cubans who exit and re-enter Cienfuegos regularly, this billboard serves as a daily reminder of Cuba’s “triumph” over the spiteful blockade on which it lays the blame for its economic failures. While this presents an exaggeration of clear anti-capitalist propaganda, it is nevertheless founded on the truth of Cuba’s struggle against the oppression of the United States. Thus, it carries a meaning, backed by a memory on which to base its discursive representation and fuel its power to resist its enemy. As the narratives of hate speech are developed within the framework of cultural memory, so they require “institutions of preservation and re-embodiment,” which can be found in everyday Cuban life, by an act as simple as passing a billboard or even opening the daily newspaper.¹⁷³

Relaxing after a hot ride into the small town of Bayamo, I opened the Thursday issue of the national newspaper, “*Granma*” (named after the boat that landed in Cuba carrying Fidel and his small band of revolutionaries).¹⁷⁴ In the world news section, an article titled “The United States and its glass ceiling” displays a map with a subsection of North America, divided into three different colorations between the US, Mexico, and an third area defined as “lost Mexican territories” within the US.¹⁷⁵ The article highlights the historical development of “expansionist intentions” by the United States, along with data figures measuring the size of the territorial space unlawfully taken from Mexico and the economic worth of this space, describing the important natural resources contained in those territories.¹⁷⁶ In its conclusion, it relates this US-Mexican expansionism to the context of Cuba, by referring to the Helms-Burton Act, which consolidated the United States’ economic sanctions against Cuba.¹⁷⁷ It is described in the article’s final words

¹⁷² Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," 111.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 111.

¹⁷⁴ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "Granma," in *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., August 17, 2017). <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Granma-Cuban-newspaper>.

¹⁷⁵ Oscar Sánchez Serra, "Estados Unidos y su tejado de vidrio," *Granma* (Havana) May 16th, 2019, Mundo. All quotations from this article were translated by Sergio Ryan.

¹⁷⁶ Serra, "Estados Unidos y su tejado de vidrio."

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

as “a flagrant violation of international rights and an unacceptable aggression on the self-determination of the peoples of the world.”¹⁷⁸

The cultural memory produced by the Cuban regime’s hate speech in its discourse and documentation, is intended to be widely accessed, readily interpreted, and comprehended with a weight of meaning. As Cubans go about their daily life, simple, habitual acts engage them with these abundant narratives of hate speech. The frequency of this interaction serves to almost seamlessly appropriate the meanings of the narratives and thereby, normalize the structural violence of an illiberal regime, by weighing it against the dangers of the truly malevolent oppressor. Through nationalist narratives, a justification for any sense of social injustice is established through a nationalist fervor of a collective history, identity, and an outspoken hatred of Western imperialism, as the “other.”

4.4.3 Nationalist narratives as a justification

The structural violence perpetuated by the Castro regime, seeks justification through memorable nationalist narratives which, by defining Cuban identity, attach various expectations for the Cuban people. By perpetuating a hate-based “us vs. them” mentality, a boundary-line of belonging is formed to create collectivity within, and a sense of separation without. Narratives of hate speech and othering have firmly established an enemy as a threat to the regime and the dignity of a Cuban identity, as defined by the legacy of idealized heroes and martyrs. The collective cultural memory of Cuba’s history has been told and reproduced to such an extent, that today’s Cuban identity finds definition through various expectations of remembrance. These expectations include praise for Cuba’s heroes, a reverence for its hard-fought sovereignty, and a hatred of those who oppose it. However, another unspoken expectation has written its meaning into nationalist narratives, epitomized best as simply the acceptance of life in an illiberal regime. This expectation falls on the shoulders of every Cuban, demanding them to make necessary sacrifices in support of the regime, and meanwhile, endure their suffering.

As the dissemination of nationalist narratives function to define Cuban identity, they relate what is known as true or false, from the top-down. The power of truth can be recognized as the Cuban people orient their lives around the meanings of their nation’s stories and therefore, submit

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

to daily struggles. Waiting in line to receive inadequate food rations can be seen as one of the many consequences of the collective acceptance of a socialist reality. And so, the rampant economic and social inequality of today's Cuba reflects a state of conflict amidst the structural violence that endures, through the "continuity" of Cuba's nationalist narratives.

4.4.4 The continuity of conflict

Structural violence in Cuba represents a state of continuous conflict, which adheres to the narratives that call on the Cuban people to accept their reality, their struggle, and their identity, with a nationalist pride. While the Cuban Revolution brought power to the new regime, it did not bring peace. This can be understood in that while the event itself was a victory over Batista's dictatorship, the external oppressor of Cuba's sovereignty, the United States, still cast a persistent shadow from afar and from within, having deeply rooted itself in the island's territory of Guantanamo. From the failed invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in 1961 to the installation of an enduring embargo, Cuba's relations with the United States have been wrought with imposition and pressure.¹⁷⁹ This presents a unique reality for Cuban nationalist narratives as they tell a story of neither total victory, nor total defeat, as the fight continues. While nationalist narratives of victory "can slide into a triumphalism" so those of defeat, may kindle "a desire to redress a grievance...entrapping people in a spiral of hostility."¹⁸⁰ Cuba's narrative of "continuity" instead presents an lasting state of conflict against the enduring oppression of foreign states, while idealizing the values and dignity of what it means to be revolutionary Cuban, as fundamental to their fight.

The goal of true liberation would be a state of lasting peace for a Cuba which benefits from mutually benevolent international relations and in turn, nourishes social justice within its communities. In consideration of how progression towards that goal can be made, data relating to the role of the Cuban people and their capacity for creating social change and political transition from the bottom-up, will be analyzed next. For "within this tired system, 'continuity' is also brave independent journalists and human rights activists taking risks, getting arrested, and daring to look

¹⁷⁹ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "Bay of Pigs invasion," in *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., February 04, 2020). <https://www.britannica.com/event/Bay-of-Pigs-invasion>.

¹⁸⁰ Jonathan Glover, "Nations, Identity, and Conflict," in *The Morality of Nationalism*, ed. Robert McKim and Jeff McMahan (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 24.

through the cold divides of political ideology to think about alternatives and change.”¹⁸¹ For the Cuban people, the role of intellectuals has been critical within the post-Revolution time frame, as many of them have been expected to sacrifice the very thing that gives them agency: their creative expression.

5. The bottom-up capacity of Cuban writers

5.1.1 The role of intellectuals: Cuban writers

Intellectuals, and writers in particular, hold an influential place in Cuban society as their creative efforts present an individual’s ability to translate ideas into reality from the bottom-up, with something as simple as a pencil. The artistic ability of musicians, artists, and writers, to produce and disseminate ideas among a community, allows them to achieve status and respect, even adoration, as intellectuals within the cultural spaces of their community. Furthermore, intellectuals have the ability to communicate messages and create coded meanings, as their position and profession provides them with the “necessary space and forms (to operate) in ways less immediately comprehensible to the authorities.”¹⁸²

For Cuban writers, their profession has historically tasked them with the preservation of cultural memory, as specialists with a significant sense of agency, who carry messages and meanings across time.¹⁸³ Through writing, a cultural audience is engaged with themes that it seeks to make sense of, by relating them to its present reality and shared history. Thus, literature “gives us the illusion of glimpsing the past...and is—often at the same time—a major medium of critical reflection upon these very processes of representation.”¹⁸⁴ The capacity of poetry to represent and relate meanings and thereby, communicate messages in ways that may be both explicit or subtle, demonstrates the potential ability of poetic dissension through the fundamental nature of its artistic function.

¹⁸¹ Tillotson, “‘We are continuity’: What the president’s hashtag tells us about human rights in Cuba today.”

¹⁸² Kapcia, *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture*, 8.

¹⁸³ Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory,” 114-15.

¹⁸⁴ Erll, “Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory,” 391.

5.1.2 The agency of poetic dissension

The agency of a poet to dissent is revealed by the nature of artistic expression, which in Cuba, seeks to resist the same powers that limit it. Paul Farmer relates the notion of resistance to structural violence, in that “the degree to which agency is constrained is correlated inversely, if not always neatly, with the ability to resist marginalization and other forms of oppression.”¹⁸⁵ Cuba’s legacy of poetic resistance dates back to José Martí, whose anti-colonial verses proved the influential power of language and are revered today by the Cuban government and its people, as verses of Cuban dignity and truth. Furthermore, as “writing always implies the danger of dissemination,” the wide cultural space of Cuba’s “readers” built by the revolutionary regime’s cultural campaigns, in turn holds the danger of poetic dissension against the regime.¹⁸⁶ In comparison to other art forms, poetry requires the least amount of materials to produce, this being one of the most major difficulties facing Cuban artists today, despite their “hunger to do many things.”¹⁸⁷ In addition, poetry can be quickly and easily consumed by an audience, while also evoking a response that may be highly emotional or sensory, and thereby, leave a lasting impression. As it delves into various themes of life, poetry creates a sense of “liberation” in the revelation of truth.¹⁸⁸ It connects the fundamental themes of experience from the social and political realm, to love, religion, and other topics that hold influence in their relatability to the world that is a poet’s audience.¹⁸⁹ Thus, the role of a poet in Cuba’s cultural community presents a significant position for driving “bottom-up” change, as their expressions hold great sway over the minds of his or her compatriots, and also, a great danger to an oppressive regime.

For Cuba’s political elite, the community of artists and intellectuals in Cuba have been historically mistrusted “as a seedbed of potential dissent.”¹⁹⁰ And so, the authority of the Cuba’s revolutionary regime cast its own expectations for the role of its intellectuals. From the moment Fidel Castro took power, “(t)he general aim was to rewrite Cuban history and culture from a popular, socialist point of view,” and therefore, “(t)he role of the intellectual was to eliminate alienation and further the Revolution.”¹⁹¹ In fact, Castro even went so far as to define the

¹⁸⁵ Farmer, "An Anthropology of Structural Violence," 307.

¹⁸⁶ Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," 115.

¹⁸⁷ Interviews I and F

¹⁸⁸ Interview F

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Kapcia, *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture*, 157.

¹⁹¹ Catherine Davies, "Contexts: Women Writers in Post-revolutionary Cuba, 1959-92," in *A Place in the Sun: Women Writers in Twentieth-century Cuba* (London & New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd, 1997), 118.

expectation for intellectuals himself, in a speech of which still resonates in Cuba's policies on creative expression today.¹⁹²

5.1.3 Fidel Castro's "Words to the Intellectuals"

In 1961, artists and writers gathered in the "National Library José Martí," to hear Fidel Castro give a famous speech in which he defined the cultural politics of the Revolution.¹⁹³ Castro acknowledged "the problem of freedom of expression for writers and artists," recognizing that a "fear has been stirred up here that the Revolution could stifle that freedom, (and) whether the Revolution is going to smother the creative spirit of writers and artists."¹⁹⁴ Within the existing academic literature which has unpacked this speech, two diverging perspectives emerge, both of which culminate around the speech's most conclusive statement: "within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing."¹⁹⁵

The first perspective revolves around the establishment of an institutionalized censorship and its legitimization. Those Cuban artists and writers who feared the worst, took note that before speaking, Castro "removed his pistol from its holster and laid it on the table in front of him."¹⁹⁶ The authoritative power exercised by Cuba's new leader set the expectation for Cuba's intellectuals to operate with a creative discourse that is limited by the confines of the Revolution. The second perspective, finds "an essentially inclusive and affirmative vision" to the speech, in that "as long as they did not knowingly work to damage the Revolution or the people, artists and intellectuals were at liberty to find their own ways of contributing to the collective national project."¹⁹⁷ The same participatory spirit that was driving Cuba's cultural Revolution, as exemplified by the 1961 Literacy Campaign, gave Castro the opportunity to frame the role of intellectuals under the banner of national unity.

¹⁹² Nicole Trián, "How the world's left loved and loathed Fidel Castro," *France 24* November 11th, 2016, <https://www.france24.com/en/20161126-how-worlds-left-love-loath-fidel-castro-cuba-france-writers-philosophers-sartre>.

¹⁹³ Alessandro Fornazzari Desiderio Navarro, and Desiderio Navarro, "In Media Res Publicas: On Intellectuals and Social Criticism in the Cuban Public Sphere," *boundary 2* 29, no. 3 (2002): 188, <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/3415>.

¹⁹⁴ Ruz, *Palabras a los Intelectuales (Words to Intellectuals)*.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Robert E. Quirk, *Fidel Castro* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993), 383. Quoted in Fernando Delgado, "The Rhetoric of Fidel Castro: Ideographs in the Service of Revolutionaries," *Howard Journal of Communication* 10, 1 (1999): 6-7, <https://doi.org/10.1080/106461799246861>.

¹⁹⁷ Par Kumaraswami, "Cultural Policy and Cultural Politics in Revolutionary Cuba: Re-reading the Palabras a los intelectuales (Words to the Intellectuals)," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* Vol. 28, no. 4 (2009): 540.

Castro's *Palabras*, spoken at a moment when the nation was experiencing significant new developments, seem to echo into the current context of Cuba's changing nation, in its new constitution and the limitations defined by Decree 349. Following the historical development of these limitations, how intellectuals operate within their emic environment of restrictive agency, is complexified by notions of assimilation or the alternative path of exile.

5.2.1 The emic environment: Discursive knowledge

The emic environment wrought with structural violence in Cuba, places pressure on the individual agency of its writers who seek out spaces to operate. While some have conformed and assimilated in response to repressive cultural policies, others have chosen to pursue exile. The framework of these policies exposes a distinct field of discursive knowledge in which certain facts or claims have been excluded, as the Castro regime has worked tirelessly to shape public perceptions of truth.¹⁹⁸ A European ex-pat living in a rural area with her Cuban husband, describes how "the people have no idea what is really happening, about what Castro is really doing."¹⁹⁹ She recognizes how limited the emic perspective on the Cuban regime has become, as the people hear only one side of the story their whole lives, and so, that story is what they believe.²⁰⁰ She raises the question of how to inform people about the broader picture and perspectives, as well as her own frustrations in finding the means of unveiling to her community the truth of things, beyond that enclosed within the bubble of the regime.

For Cuban writers, the exclusive field of discursive knowledge parallels the constricting expectations of their social role as intellectuals. However, it also poses an opportunity for the application of their agency as "(i)ndividual creative acts cumulatively establish restructured orders of discourse."²⁰¹ The capacity of an individual to disseminate ideas has led intellectuals to be recognized by the Cuban regime as a threat, to which the response has been to coercively limit their field of discourse. The suppression of bottom-up agency through discourse, functions as "even in those (discursive analytical) approaches in which the subject's agency and role in social change are brought to the foreground, discourses are seen as the frameworks that limit the subject's

¹⁹⁸ Tonkiss, "Discourse Analysis," 408.

¹⁹⁹ Interview J

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (London: Longman, 1989), 172. Quoted in Phillips, "The field of discourse analysis," 17.

scope for action and possibilities for innovation.”²⁰² One of the most strategic processes employed by the Cuban regime has been that of “channeling” the discourse of protest.

5.2.2 “Channeling”

One major tactic employed by the Cuban regime, in order to manage public participation, while at the same time, curb dissension, has been a systematic process of “channeling.” Marie Laure Geoffray, a French social researcher, finds that through a strategic allowance of some forms of protest, rather than full censorship, the Cuban regime does not merely suppress dissension, but instead, renders it invisible.²⁰³ By allowing and even promoting social change on only the issues which the regime sees as non-threatening, it has been able to disconnect social pressures from political change. Thus, “the Cuban government has managed to prevent a more unified contentious movement from emerging,” as discontent has been channeled towards issues thought to be “safe” enough for discussion, such as race, gender, sexuality, and religion.²⁰⁴ This being said, within these “safe” issues, the capacity of Cuban writers to influence social change through their work has been formidable, by poets such as Carilda Oliver Labra and Nicolás Guillén, whose effects will be later analyzed. Furthermore, maintaining a strategic allowance of “safe” issues and changes, has helped to promote a positive image of Cuban legitimacy, in contrast to the criticism it faces from the international community regarding rampant human rights abuses.

To this end, Geoffray illustrates that “when opportunities are created for the formulation of political claims, they generally remain anchored at the local level, without leading to bottom-up dynamics.”²⁰⁵ This has allowed the Cuban government to maintain its power over the people and survive turbulent times such as that of the “special period” in the 1990s, when spiking inequality and poverty boded ill for the power of Castro regime. Repressive policies have worked to erase the visibility of collective protest, by dividing and depoliticizing dissension and its dangerous agency within the cultural sphere of Cuban artists and writers. Therefore, we recognize

²⁰² Phillips, "The field of discourse analysis," 17.

²⁰³ H  l  ne Combes & Olivier Fillieule, "De la r  pression consid  r  e dans ses rapports    l'activit   protestataire: Mod  les structuraux et interactions strat  giques," *Revue Fran  aise de Science Politique* 61, 6 (2011). And Jennifer Earl, "Controlling protest: New directions for research on the social control of protest," *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* 25, 3 (2004). Quoted in Marie Laure Geoffray, "Channelling Protest in Illiberal Regimes: The Cuban Case since the Fall of the Berlin Wall," *Journal of Civil Society* 10, 3 (2014): 234, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17448689.2014.932057>.

²⁰⁴ Geoffray, "Channelling Protest in Illiberal Regimes: The Cuban Case since the Fall of the Berlin Wall," 224, 34.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 234.

the “need to look at the social control of protest, i.e. at the ways protest is being channeled, so as to get a better understanding of how protesters manage to carve out a [limited] space for action.”²⁰⁶

5.2.3.1 Finding spaces

Within their emic environment, Cuban writers have had to use their agency to make spaces for themselves and their influential opinions, or else accept the call of Fidel’s *Palabras*, and assimilate into a politically defined frame of culture. Working within Cuba’s illiberal state, writers have found spaces of influence as their role in society is one that leads public opinion. Their audience, the Cuban people, are inclined to trust them, as public perception is oriented around the trust of an artist, in ways that rival the leadership of politicians. A reader’s perception of truth and beauty can create an intimacy with an artist’s work, that produces just as permanent of an emotional and ideological response as that of a powerful speech. And so, the opinions of intellectuals hold great weight in a society where certain opinions are denounced as false or dangerous, and their expressions, denied.

Cuba, having such a rich cultural space in which to operate, provides a unique context for intellectuals to play their pivotal role in guiding society. Ironically, it is the same socialist structure which has both historically provided this space, and also limited it. The magnitude of the Revolution’s cultural movements to improve literacy and construct cultural institutions, can be recognized today in Cuba’s rich cultural interest and public participation. In an interview with a student from the University of Havana, he stated that “the ‘luck of socialism’ is that—yes, capitalism has its economic advantages—but our luck is that when you turn on the television or radio, there’s no advertisements, and so there’s more room for culture.”²⁰⁷ The amount of space which is taken up by marketing in the western world, becomes quickly apparent upon entering Cuba, where marketing ceases to exist. Nevertheless, the media space is still there, from magazines, papers, books and billboards, to technological spaces such as on television, radio, and beyond. As these media spaces must be filled by something, it provides an expansive area for culture to find form and disseminate. During my fieldwork, I witnessed how much of this space is devoted to promotion of cultural events, developments, and happenings within the various

²⁰⁶ Jennifer Earl, "Introduction: Repression and the social control of protest," *Mobilization* 11, 2 (2006). Quoted in Geoffray, "Channelling Protest in Illiberal Regimes: The Cuban Case since the Fall of the Berlin Wall," 234.

²⁰⁷ Interview K

communities, municipalities, as well as on the national level. Yet on the other hand, despite this bountiful context for cultural operation, intellectuals are faced with the prohibition of developing any sort of counter-narratives that would challenge their non-democratic regime. Due to the nature of their artistic agency and influence, intellectuals, and writers in particular, have the potential to create their own pockets of social space in which to operate and build “meanings” from the bottom-up. This creates a complex tension of artistic authority, as many of Cuba’s hegemonic writers have accepted the regime’s political influence on the cultural realm, and in turn, have assimilated themselves to the project of the Revolution.

5.2.3.2 Assimilation

The nature of artistic conformity within Cuba’s socialist regime has worked to perpetuate the political processes of channeling and thereby, the shaping of public perceptions. The result is that “political dissidents have been marginalized, and legitimate critical intellectuals and artists have emerged who are willing to negotiate with the authorities and thus contribute to the reproduction of the erected border between the sociocultural and the political spheres.”²⁰⁸ In several interviews with leading figures of Cuban cultural institutions, they described their perception of Decree 349 as nothing more than a benign, normal political statute.²⁰⁹ Multiple sources defined 349 as a necessary measure with which *reggaeton* music can be controlled, as it represents around a third of the music consumed (illegally) in Cuba.²¹⁰ The illegal production of *reggaeton*, its explicit content, and the nature of its “loud” public consumption, justifies a basis for interpreting Decree 349 as normal and therefore, accepted by influential intellectuals.²¹¹ From a broader perspective, this demonstrates the opposition of intellectual conformity to those who wish to voice their divergent, conflicting opinions. Geoffray describes how even after the Soviet Union fell, “challenging socialism as a political project was not tolerated. Facing repression and imprisonment, dissenters were led to either self-censor or go into exile. In the 1990s, many choose to leave the country, which partly explains the small size and scope of dissident movements.”²¹²

²⁰⁸ Geoffray, "Channelling Protest in Illiberal Regimes: The Cuban Case since the Fall of the Berlin Wall," 234.

²⁰⁹ Interviews G, I, and M

²¹⁰ Interviews G and M

²¹¹ Interview M

²¹² Geoffray, "Channelling Protest in Illiberal Regimes: The Cuban Case since the Fall of the Berlin Wall," 226.

Therefore in face of assimilation and constrictions on their artistic capacity, many Cuban writers have chosen to exercise their agency outside of their emic environment, in exile.

5.2.4 Exile

The cultural sphere of Cuban artistic production has been complexified by the high emigration of Cuban writers who made the choice to live abroad in exile, rather than suffer under Castro's socialism. To manage the risk of Cuban emigrants making counter-revolutionary claims from the safety of their newfound freedom, the Castro regime has worked tirelessly to discredit and delegitimize them. In the same speech in which Fidel Castro declared his concept of "Revolution," he criticized Cuban emigration to the US, stating that "Florida is being filled with criminals who arrive by illegal means. Five out of every ten individuals who reach the United States in this way have criminal records that include burglary and other similar crimes."²¹³ Yet the nationalistic "othering" of exiles cannot erase the void that emigration has left in Cuban communities, from both a social and cultural standpoint. For dissenting poets, the "well-trodden path into exile" was one option to avoid conforming to the state's cultural criteria.²¹⁴ The other, would be to operate in an informal, illegal manner that breaches Cuba's cultural boundaries.²¹⁵ While certain nationalist poets drove politically "acceptable" social change within the project of the Revolution, others made the conscious choice to stay behind and refuse exile. This meant not only suffering the separation from many loved ones, but also facing the risks of voicing their opinions. These risks are still recognized today, following what would become the defining case of Cuban poetic dissension: the "Padilla Affair."

5.3.1 The power of poets: Heberto Padilla

The case which defined poetic dissension within Cuba and the national policies which would manage it, was the "Padilla Affair," as it brought the "confrontation between the artist and the totalitarian system" to the revolutionary front.²¹⁶ Existing academic research has analyzed and

²¹³ Fidel Castro Ruz, Speech at the mass rally called by the Cuban youths, students and workers on the occasion of the International Labor Day at the Revolution Square, May 1st, 2000.

²¹⁴ Kapcia, *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture*, 209.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, 209-10.

²¹⁶ José Manuel Prieto, "Herberto Padilla, the First Dissident (of the Cuban Revolution)," in *Caviar with Rum: Cuba-USSR and the Post-Soviet Experience*, ed. Jacqueline Loss and José Manuel Prieto, New Directions in Latino American Cultures (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 120-21.

revisited Padilla's case as it examines this confrontation, which Professor Alfred G. Cuzán eerily likens to the development of Hitler and Stalin's controlling policies.²¹⁷ Not only in his arrest and detention, but also in the forced, self-abasing confession Padilla was forced to make to the Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC), were the "most sordid moments of the Stalinist epoch" brought to mind by the indignant international community of intellectuals who implored Castro directly through letters, for Padilla's release.²¹⁸ Yet, the power of Padilla's dissension lies in the significance of his positioning as an "internal exile," not outwardly rejecting "revolutionary tasks," but rather, going to work on them.²¹⁹

While Heberto Padilla believed in the Revolution and its new cultural project, he "always believed it necessary to be critical of the (R)evolution from within."²²⁰ Thereby positioning himself as being actively involved in the revolutionary process, his poetic criticism was legitimized by acting from within, instead of being considered "disaffected," by acting from without.²²¹ Furthermore, Padilla's travels to the USSR and his association with Soviet poets, helped cultivate his critical perspective, as Cuban novelist José Manuel Prieto relates, by stating:

"(Padilla) would return from the Soviet Union not just with a better understanding of how the totalitarian state rigidly controlled art but with something even more significant that he was to learn there: the role of the intellectual, of the poet as critic within a socialist society, more strictly speaking, to a position that nobody had yet occupied within the Cuban Revolution, that of being a writer, who, never ceasing from being a revolutionary and from declaring himself as one, sought to be critical of that very revolution by establishing himself from within it as a dissident voice."²²²

Padilla's position as an "internal exile" and his convictions rooted in the Soviet reality he witnessed, gave his poetry the very weight of legitimacy that the regime sought to dismantle through his "confession." The regime sought to degrade his influence among the intellectual sphere and threat of his poetry to bring social change and political pressure from the bottom-up. The repression which followed the "Padilla Case," on poetics and all forms of art as potential counter-revolutionary activity, reached a new level of severity as Fidel condemned the "mafia of

²¹⁷ Alfred G. Cuzán, "Totalitarianism in the Tropics: Cuba's 'Padilla Case' Revisited," (2015): 7, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2136252>.

²¹⁸ Cuzán, "Totalitarianism in the Tropics: Cuba's 'Padilla Case' Revisited," 41.

²¹⁹ Casal Lourdes, *El Caso Padilla: Literatura y revolución en Cuba—documentos* (Miami: Nueva Atlantida, 1971), 64. Quoted in Prieto, "Herberto Padilla, the First Dissident (of the Cuban Revolution)," 123.

²²⁰ Prieto, "Herberto Padilla, the First Dissident (of the Cuban Revolution)," 119.

²²¹ *Ibid*, 119.

²²² *Ibid*, 121.

bourgeois intellectuals.”²²³ However, despite the stifling political boundaries put in place on the emic environment, the agency of Cuban poets still shined through as they drove change within the frame of operation available to them. One poet who exemplified this agency, was Carilda Oliver Labra, whose artistic expression helped drive the movement for gender equality in Cuba.

5.3.2 Carilda Oliver Labra

One of the “founding mothers of contemporary women’s poetry” in Cuba has been Carilda Oliver Labra, whose work drove social change for gender equality, within the framework of the Revolution.²²⁴ The legacy of her participation in the Revolution is remembered across Cuba, as she went to the Sierra Maestra mountains to recite her poem titled “*Canto a Fidel*,” on Che’s *Radio Rebelde* audio broadcast.²²⁵ Having positioned herself as a revolutionary poet, Oliver Labra was able to establish her influence as her opinions were not only validated in the eyes of the regime, but also were valued by a public that perceived her with trust. This allowed her to drive feminism in Cuba “by using the *word* in a distinct way,” as a woman inventing new social discourses, that were hitherto unacceptable.²²⁶

In her hometown of Matanzas, the impression Oliver Labra left on her community is remembered through the social impact of her poetry as well as in her profound commitment to the community itself. From the late 1950s, she would challenge the social norms and customs of women placing the power of her poetic agency against gender inequality in Cuba, and the influence of the Catholic church.²²⁷ Embodying the principle of female liberation in her life as in her poetry, Oliver Labra’s work confronted the social systems of her community with an expression of “freedom as a principle of life.”²²⁸ The public perception of Carilda in Matanzas resonates with a sense of truth, which people recognized in her work as well as in her life. Amidst the mass emigrations of people who did not want to “participate in the project” of the Revolution and its socialism, Oliver Labra choose to stay behind in Matanzas, while the rest of her family left for the United States.²²⁹ As Cuban communities were fragmented by the departure of friends and family members who would never return, the social tension between mobility, memory, and a sense of

²²³ Davies, "Contexts: Women Writers in Post-revolutionary Cuba, 1959-92," 122.

²²⁴ Ibid, 124.

²²⁵ Interview H

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

home, became palpable, while the fragmentation of these communities remains. Carilda addresses this tension in one poem, relating how her mother took a small bag of soil from Matanzas when she left for the US, in the same way that her grandmother had brought a small bag of soil from Spain to Cuba, in order to *remember*.²³⁰ Breaking the tradition, Oliver Labra writes that she wants the soil of her homeland to be instead “on her grave,” thereby sending a powerful message of commitment to her community and Cuban identity, leaving a deep impression on the people of Matanzas who would fill the streets during her funeral in 2018.²³¹

The social change Oliver Labra achieved, stemmed from her ability to appeal a “common meaning” to the Cuban collective.²³² Described by a close relation as one of her most influential poems, “*Declaración de amor*” (“Declaration of love”) calls to “put aside the madness of war and enter into the fundamental finality of existing, that is life and love.”²³³ Written at the cusp of the Cuban Missile Crisis, it calls for love over war, to instead make “arms of reason” and thereby, demonstrating “the power of the word that is this poem.”²³⁴ Driving both peace and social change within the revolutionary regime, as one of its participant, Carilda Oliver Labra demonstrated how a poet’s non-violent agency can operate with influential success in the Cuban context. Another poet who also drove social changes within this context was Nicolás Guillén, who helped set the framework of Cuba’s cultural institutions, while also leading the fight for racial equality.

5.3.3 Nicolás Guillén

“The national poet of revolutionary Cuba,” Nicolás Guillén, led the Afro-Cuban movement for social justice through racial equality, while being thoroughly committed to the Communist party himself.²³⁵ His legacy still permeates his own local community where his poetry found its roots among the Cuban people, in addition to the national cultural institutions of Cuba, primarily that of UNEAC. To analyze his influential role, the humble setting of childhood home in Camagüey, now a museum, presents a foundation for understanding his work in relation to the streets in which his ideas took form. Guillén wrote and fought for what he saw as the “Cuban

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "Nicolás Guillén," in *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., July 12, 2019). <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nicolas-Guillen>.

color,” as “he wanted to take this ‘black’ from the parts in which it was encountered and raise it into society.”²³⁶ Thus, writing a social critique to denounce the injustices of racial inequality, Guillén wrote on common themes for the common people, which had not been done before in Cuba, with a sort of humanist poetry dedicated to its social environment.²³⁷ Furthermore, his audience, people of the same streets in which he lived himself, related to his verses and the rhythmic, musical quality which they could comprehend and find beauty in, and thereby, appropriate the influence of his work into their own lives.²³⁸ While his poetry emerged with the Afro-Cuban movement for social justice in the 1920s and 30s, Guillén would then go to Spain during the civil war to fight with the Republicans and to write as a journalist, who was “(n)o longer satisfied with mere picturesque portrayal of the daily life of the poor.”²³⁹

Returning from Spain, full of ideas for social and political reform, Guillén joined the Communist party and cemented his place of cultural influence within the framework of the Cuban Revolution.²⁴⁰ It can be noted that the verses which were earlier analyzed in their relation of José Martí to Fidel Castro, were in fact those of Nicolás Guillén. Furthermore, his positioning alongside the powers of the revolutionary regime, gave him influence in the “tightening up of cultural policy and state control.”²⁴¹ This influence can be heard in one of his speeches from 1969, in which he states that “Cuban writers and artists have the same responsibility as our soldiers in defending the nation [...] he who does not fulfil his duty, no matter what his rank, will receive the most severe revolutionary punishment for his crime.”²⁴² In addition to taking such a strong stance, Guillén founded and became president of UNEAC, which was created with a clear political purpose of cultural regulation. At the same time, UNEAC “carried cultural weight, respectability and prestige” thanks to the support and leadership of its highly respected figures, such as Guillén.²⁴³ What this meant for poetry, is that it “in particular continued to be feted, partly because of its traditional prestige, partly because its immediacy allowed it to reflect the changing environment best and partly because of the political and cultural authority of the poets dominating the post-

²³⁶ Interview B

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Britannica, "Nicolás Guillén."

²⁴⁰ Interview B

²⁴¹ Davies, "Contexts: Women Writers in Post-revolutionary Cuba, 1959-92," 121-22.

²⁴² Seymour Menton, *La narrativa de la Revolución cubana*, ed. Nova scholar, Colección Nova scholar, (University of California: Editorial Playor, 1978), 144. Quoted in Davies, "Contexts: Women Writers in Post-revolutionary Cuba, 1959-92," 122.

²⁴³ Kapcia, *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture*, 134.

1959 cultural institutions, such as (...) Guillén.”²⁴⁴ While a poet’s agency to drive social change was demonstrated in Guillén’s immense influence leading the fight for racial equality, it is in the establishment of Cuba’s cultural organizations and their fundamental spaces, where poets are able to exercise their agency, even today.

5.4.1 Cuba’s cultural organizations: UNEAC

The Union of Cuban writers and artists (UNEAC) is recognized as the dominant cultural organization in which Cuban artistic production has taken place from the start of the Castro regime until today. Founded in unison with the new revolutionary regime, membership to UNEAC was compulsory for intellectuals hoping to continue in their profession.²⁴⁵ While membership to UNEAC guaranteed jobs for a number of teachers, translators, and editors who also found space and time for creative work, the rapid hegemonic rise of UNEAC in turn crushed all other innovating enterprises of artistic production.²⁴⁶ Cuban novelist José Manuel Prieto describes the totalitarian establishment of UNEAC as being “designed as a copy of the Union of Soviet Writers,” giving the example of how it “was utilized to crush the dissidence of ... (Padilla) who belonged to their ranks.”²⁴⁷ The role of UNEAC in defining Cuba’s national boundaries today, can be found in the several objectives defined on their website which include a few of the following: “Stimulate, protect and defend intellectual and artistic creation. Recognize the widest freedom of creation. Reject and combat all activity contrary to the principles of the Revolution.”²⁴⁸ Thus, UNEAC presents a fundamental space for artistic creation to prosper, albeit under certain “revolutionary” conditions, in which artists may associate with one another provided their work merits membership in the first place.²⁴⁹

UNEAC is structured to unite writers and artists from different affiliations, within a common arena of professional production and presentation, both of which require institutional membership.²⁵⁰ Without the opportunity for private artistic enterprise, all artists must be part of an institution if they hope to pursue a profession in a discipline such as that of poetics, music,

²⁴⁴ Ibid, 139.

²⁴⁵ Davies, "Contexts: Women Writers in Post-revolutionary Cuba, 1959-92," 121.

²⁴⁶ Ibid, 121.

²⁴⁷ Prieto, "Herberto Padilla, the First Dissident (of the Cuban Revolution)," 127.

²⁴⁸ "LA UNEAC: Objetivos," <http://www.uneac.org.cu/uneac/union-de-escritores-y-artistas-de-cuba>. Translated by Sergio Ryan.

²⁴⁹ Interview E

²⁵⁰ Interviews E and G

theater, etc.²⁵¹ This being said, the tourist economy on which Cubans depend on to survive, has given birth to a wide range of black market, artistic production as non-professionals sell artwork, make performances, and so on, in the streets. Ironically, this informal, illegal market in fact offers a much higher economic benefit than the production taking place within an institutional setting such as UNEAC. Despite having such a wide cultural space within Cuba, becoming a writer or artist out of passion or economic interest, has certain difficulties which can be traced back to the notion of structural violence. How the skills and talents in addition to materials necessary for artistic production are to be acquired, presents a fundamental problem to artists. One organization, the *Asociación Hermanos Saíz* (AHS), seeks to address this problem by opening their doors to Cuba's youth.

5.4.2.1 Asociación Hermanos Saíz (AHS)

The youth organization *Asociación Hermanos Saíz* (AHS), provides space for anyone under the age of 35 to gather and create, while working tirelessly to promote the artistic and literary work of its members.²⁵² Founded in 1986, AHS rose to national prominence in the 90s when the political motivation to “include youth at a time of crisis and potential disaffection” was crucial.²⁵³ As the Cuban regime does not allow the commercialization of one's self as an artist, AHS is able to promote the work of its members within a legitimate framework of operation.²⁵⁴ Through events, workshops, and extensive promotion, many young artists and writers are able to hone their talents and associate across disciplines, in hopes of transitioning to a professional institution after, the foremost being that of UNEAC.²⁵⁵ Thus access to artistic agency is provided through AHS, whereas the only other alternative for promising young artists and writers would be to enroll in a national arts academy, which are limited by their acceptance of extremely few students of each specific age.²⁵⁶ Yet despite its national support and recognition, sustaining AHS faces certain challenges as a non-governmental organization operating in Cuba.²⁵⁷

²⁵¹ Interviews E and M

²⁵² Interviews L and N

²⁵³ Kapcia, *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture*, 199.

²⁵⁴ Interview M

²⁵⁵ Interviews E and L

²⁵⁶ Interview M

²⁵⁷ Interviews M and I

While AHS survives financially through foreign support from mostly European donors, providing materials for its members remains a fundamental challenge. One musician describes how in the 90s, he would strip bicycles of their brake cables, as well as telephones, in order to string makeshift guitars.²⁵⁸ While this demonstrates the dire conditions of their capacity for artistic creation, it also highlights the eager desire of Cuba's youth to create.²⁵⁹ For young poets who need only a paper and pencil to begin, the circumstances necessary to cultivate an artistic agency are more within their grasp.²⁶⁰ Furthermore, national events bring opportunity and culture to the foreground, such as that of the annual gathering "*Juegos Florales*." Pulling into the city of Ciego de Ávila last May 2019, preparation for "*Juegos Florales*" was in full swing, as young poets from around Cuba were gathering at the local AHS center. For 25 years now, the event has rotated its focus to include different forms of writing, as this year, a book publication would be awarded to whichever young poet's public reading receives the largest, loudest reception.²⁶¹ In addition to its various provincial and national events, AHS runs various projects, such as "*Callejas*," in whose work, the capacity of poetry expresses itself.

5.4.2.2 "*Callejas*"

The mission of *Callejas*, the cultural-editorial project based in Trinidad, is to promote local poets' work through artisanal production.²⁶² Each published piece is its own individual work of handmade creation, as the project goes beyond the small allowance of materials allotted to them, even utilizing recycled dry leaves from the beach, for example.²⁶³ For all the effort that goes into the creation of each piece, the project gains no profits as their work is given away for free in the street or at events, for the sole purpose of promoting the poets they support.²⁶⁴ Therefore, the drive to disseminate meaning and truth through art is contained in the entire project. In fact, the very act of poetic promotion by *Callejas* and AHS, provides youth with the hope for economic opportunities and a space in which self-realization may take place and self-efficacy may develop.

²⁵⁸ Interview I

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Interview F

²⁶¹ Interview D

²⁶² Yeilén Delgado Calvo, "El mensaje en las hojas que vuelan," *Granma* (La Habana) May 15th 2019, Bibliofagias, <http://www.granma.cu/cultura/2019-05-15/el-mensaje-en-las-hojas-que-vuelan-15-05-2019-22-05-52>.

²⁶³ Interview I

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

Following the participatory efforts of *Callejas* to disseminate meaningful expressions among the public, the power of poetry resonates for today's Cuban youth who recognize "the need to be critical."²⁶⁵ The role of youth is in fact crucial to pressuring political transitioning in Cuba, as they continue to seek "alternative information and views about the outside world as well as their own country, including the root causes of the economic failure."²⁶⁶ Through Cuba's cultural organizations and the inclusion of youth in its closely regulated spaces, a potential for economic opportunity is provided with which one may overcome the enveloping structure of social injustice. Furthermore, by developing poetic agency within a physical space in each province's community, the meanings created may be brought to the people, as public participation brings new perceptions forth, from youth in particular.²⁶⁷ And so, each new generation of young Cuban poets emerges into a structured space where their ideas face the trials of national conformity, and where the seeds of social change may take root, and thereby challenge the confines of their expression, through expression itself.

6. Conclusion

Leaving the brutally steep Escambray mountains where Castro's guerrilla revolutionaries once found shelter, my friend and I coasted the long way down to the seaside city of Cienfuegos, during our bike tour across Cuba. Winding our way into the city center, we found the main plaza with a statue of the poet and patriot, José Martí, standing tall in the center with his arm raised towards the horizon. There beside the plaza, stood the city's main cultural venue, *Jardines de la UNEAC* (Gardens of UNEAC). We made plans to return later that night to see the local band who would be playing and headed to find a place to sleep. A friendly man renting out rooms at his *casa particular* opened his door to us, and upon finding out my friend was Italian, began to rattle off stories to us in perfect Italian. Seeing how impressed we are, he then switched to perfect Russian, getting a kick out of it. Telling us about his travels to Italy and Russia in the days of his youth, he goes on to reminisce on growing up in Cuba, having studied political science in Havana in the 70s.

²⁶⁵ Interview K

²⁶⁶ Vegard Bye, "Cuba's Critical Juncture: Main Challenges," *Iberoamericana - Nordic Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 1, 46, no. 1 (2017): 115, <https://doi.org/http://doi.org/10.16993/iberoamericana.214>.

²⁶⁷ Interviews D and F

I asked him what those studies were like, and he just laughed, saying “It’s a long story. I’ll tell you guys at breakfast tomorrow.” Later on, we find the UNEAC venue filled, as the Cuban rock band played late into the night. Amidst the crowd, we met a group of young Cubans who were local members of the *Asociación Hermanos Saíz* of Cienfuegos. As the show ended, we went with them to the *Malécon*, the seaside strip and local hangout spot. The young Cubans were all aspiring poets or musicians, or both, who described their writing processes to us and then went on to recite some verses of theirs. One guitarist invited us to come eat at his restaurant the following day (where he works for a wage of roughly five dollars a day). But knowing we would have to leave before the heat of the next day set in, we instead made plans to meet in the morning at the AHS venue, where he would give us a tour and introduce us to some of the staff. At the end of the night we walked back to the *casa*, passing the massive billboard at the end of the *Malécon*, where an image of José Martí watched over, accompanied by his words: “*La patria está hecha del mérito de sus hijos*” (“The homeland is made up of the merit of its children”).

With a new constitution, a new president, and the tides of time beckoning a transition, the tension between maintaining Cuba’s revolutionary regime and moving forward, could be felt within its communities as we biked across the country. Along the 1100 kilometers of dusty Cuban road, I was able to recognize the realities of these impoverished communities, from the visual dilapidation of infrastructure, to the attitudes revealed in conversations with locals along the way. The tally sheets of weekly food rations and the lines of people waiting outside the local distribution centers present the everyday struggle of a socialist poverty, while those who thrive, or rather, survive, often depend on the economic support of foreign tourists. For the Cuban people, suffering stems from their own state policies in addition to the oppressive imposition of other forces beyond their control, such as the United States embargo. Their capacity to influence their own liberation from structural violence has been examined in this thesis through the powers of language and expression, in which the pressures of nationalist narratives weigh against the agency of poets.

The politization of culture by the Castro regime has birthed a population which is not only literate, but one which is capable of critical understanding and most importantly, creation. In an environment where openly protesting the politics in place is not an option, those who desire to sound their critical voice must do so in different ways. Dissension against the nationalist order requires a creation of meaning that opposes not only Cuba’s political structure, but the very sense of memory and identity that its nationalist stories have consolidated. While this is no easy task,

the nature of poetic devices function to present meanings to an audience in ways that are not necessarily explicit but may rather be disguised and coded through language. The Castro regime has worked tirelessly to etch out the possibility of these meanings disseminating amongst its people. Yet the potential for creative expression itself cannot be quelled, especially in a cultural context like that of Cuba, where music, art, and writing hold such a prominent place in its communities, as well as in the nation's history. While other scholars have investigated the socialist handling of dissension, so too have journalists brought to light the abuses, imprisonments, and hunger strikes of poets and activists. My research instead seeks to explore the spaces and means through which Cuban poets can realize their capacity to voice meanings, and thereby transform the conflict of structural violence from the bottom-up. In relation to their positioning as influential intellectuals within Cuba's emic cultural environment, the discursive forces that weigh down and limit them have also been analyzed. As the language of nationalist narratives functions to define notions of identity and cultural memory, my research seeks to illuminate the power of these stories to limit both knowledge and truth. Thus, I explore how nationalist narratives legitimize an everyday reality of structural violence.

In the first chapter of this thesis, the political and cultural background of the Cuban context were introduced. The relevance of political developments that took place when Fidel Castro assumed power, can still be recognized in the changing environment of the last three years, during which time Cuba has gained both a new president and a new constitution. Additionally, Decree 349 has presented a renewed declaration of the historical repression of creative freedom for the cultural community of Cuba. The richness of this community can be traced back to the national campaigns of the "cultural revolution," which brought literacy to all corners of the nation and with it, a critical capacity for creation at the local level. The significance of these efforts is reflected throughout my research, the methodology of which was explained in the second chapter.

In consideration of the methods with which I collected and analyzed data, accessing Cuba by bicycle provided several advantages in terms of timing and especially building trust with locals. As an American studying in Norway, I attempted to be as reflexive as possible in consideration of my positioning and how different perceptions would affect data gathering. By conducting semi-structured interviews, I was able to facilitate qualitative data collection that would give room for political topics to emerge on their own, while my interview guide focused on social and cultural themes. This allowed me to avoid asking politically sensitive questions, which I foresaw as a

potential problem in terms of ethics. By taking the local's own perspective into account, I was able to conduct my investigation within an interpretivist epistemological framework, while positioning my research within a constructionist ontological reality. Other representations of nationalist narratives were collected along the way, while secondary data, such as documents and speeches, also helped to strengthen the reliability of my findings through triangulation and compensate for my limited time frame of data collection. While I had hoped to find openly dissenting poets to interview and works of theirs to analyze, I found myself unable to locate them, which in turn deepened my recognition of artistic repression in Cuba. Yet, I was able to instead explore the environment in which artistic creation manifests itself, in order to understand its capacity from the bottom-up in relation to its repressive environment. Various lenses of artistic production and consumption were then established in order to create a theoretical framework around the expression and language of nationalist narratives and poetic verse.

As seen in chapter three, narrative theory was explained in order to understand the implications of stories within Cuban communities. The different features of narratives (social context, temporality, and meaning)²⁶⁸ are explained in relation to the different approaches to narrative theory (structural, interactional, and thematic analysis).²⁶⁹ In relation to how stories are comprehended and appropriated, the theory of hermeneutics was introduced in order to structure a sphere of interpretation. Furthermore, while critical discourse analysis is used as a method, it was conceptualized in this chapter as an exploration of the power of language underlines the ideas and conclusions of the thesis itself. The ability of language to define the limits of knowledge and truth, in addition to its creative capacity, are particularly relevant to the Cuban context where the power of language, and also expression, are revealed. As these fields of discourse continuously remember the past, cultural memory was also conceptualized. Its processes of remediation and premediation are particularly significant, as the past is being continuously re-represented through different media, and the circulation of existent representations provide the "schemata" that define how the future is not only represented, but also, experienced.²⁷⁰ Lastly, structural violence was conceptualized in order to frame the everyday realities of social injustice in Cuba, within the

²⁶⁸ Elliot, "Narrative and New Developments in the Social Sciences," 10-12.

²⁶⁹ Nygren, "Analysing written narratives: considerations on the 'code-totality problems'," 31. And Nie, "Combining Narrative Analysis, Grounded Theory and Qualitative Data Analysis Software to Develop a Case Study Research," 56-57.

²⁷⁰ Erll, "Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory," 392-95.

academic framework of peace and conflict transformation. Accountability for this structural violence was considered in terms of external pressures such as the US embargo, while this thesis in particular, orients its focus on the pressures *within* Cuba as created by its socialist regime, which I rhetorically defined as “illiberal.” With this theoretical structure in place, I then moved into next two chapters of data analysis, each of which focused on a specific research question.

In chapter four, the first research question asks: *how do nationalist narratives function to justify and consolidate structural violence in Cuba from the top-down?* Following the Cuban Revolution, a national Cuban identity has been formed as notions of the self are collectively remembered through culture. The consolidation of nationalist narratives within Cuban culture and identity can be recognized in the rhetoric of “Revolution,” which reaches beyond the meaning of the event itself as it has instead become a concept of what it means to be Cuban in relation to the ruling regime. Thus, the Cuban nation’s historic struggle for sovereignty relates its anti-colonial past and leaders such as José Martí, into an overarching nationalist narrative in which Cuba’s heroes and martyrs have cemented their status as irrevocable symbols of truth and Cuban dignity. By pushing out the “soft-line” of revolutionaries who desired sovereignty but rejected socialism, the Cuban regime has perpetuated an encompassing narrative of national “continuity” which Cuba’s new socialist president, Miguel Díaz-Canel, has embraced wholeheartedly. Furthermore, while creating notions of selfhood, the Cuban regime has also led a discourse of “othering” and hate speech against the United States and Western imperialism, in order to justify the actions and policies of its own illiberal regime. As a result, nationalist narratives form the basis for the legitimization of structural violence in Cuba, through the collective meanings of remembrance in its revolutionary identity and a collective hatred of an oppressive “other.” While everyday social injustices demonstrate an enduring state of conflict, the potential to overcome them on the local level draws the role of intellectuals into frame, and specifically Cuban poets, as their public influence emanates from the function of their craft: to express meaning.

From an opposing position in chapter five, the second research question asks: *what capacity do Cuban poets have for creating social change and political transition from the bottom-up within Cuba’s illiberal regime?* The nature of writing, to create and disseminate meaning, places writers in a position of influence and provides them with the capacity to dissent against injustice. In fact, “a single great writer faithful to the truth is all it takes to deal delegitimizing

blows against even the mightiest dictatorship.”²⁷¹ This threat was recognized by Fidel Castro’s illiberal regime, whose repressive political efforts have defined the emic environment of Cuban cultural production. These efforts include limiting the field of discursive knowledge of truth and the strategic practice of “channeling” protest. This has complexified Cuba’s wide cultural space as intellectuals seek out spaces to operate within these parameters by assimilating, or otherwise taking the alternative path into exile. For poets to exercise their agency in Cuba, their positioning within the revolutionary regime has played a critical role in the resonance of their poetic voice. One of the most pivotal cases of poetic dissension, was the affair of Heberto Padilla, who while dedicated to going to work on the project of the Revolution, opposed its political repression and socialist ideology. Thus, management of poetic dissension by Castro would be made clear through Padilla’s arrest and coerced confession. For other poets who aligned themselves with Castro, their ability to drive social change manifested its results within their communities. Carilda Oliver Labra, committed to her Cuban homeland, led the movement for gender equality through the liberating influence of her poetry, as she lived out the expressions of freedom on which she wrote in her hometown of Matanzas. One of Cuba’s poetic hegemons, Nicolás Guillén, drove the movement for racial equality, while his rooted ideals in socialism positioned him as the politically active cultural figure who founded the Union of Cuban writers and artists (UNEAC). Still Cuba’s leading cultural organization today, UNEAC represents the institutionalized space for cultural production in which an artistic profession can be pursued through membership, rather than as a private enterprise. Likewise, flourishing spaces of artistic association, production, and cultural events are found in Cuba’s non-governmental youth organization, *Asociación Hermanos Saíz* (AHS). By opening its doors to provide an institutional domain for young artists to legally work and thereby, find their way, AHS works tirelessly to promote its members and assist them in achieving their professional goals. Following this promotion, the lofty goal of becoming professional in one’s discipline becomes feasible in Cuba’s emic environment. This presents both an artistic and economic motivation for Cuban youth who are inspired to create and who seek to overcome the structural violence that surrounds them. While AHS hosts various cultural events within each of its provincial hubs and brings together aspiring artists from all over Cuba, so several of its projects embody its mission, such as that of *Callejas*. Through artisanal production, *Callejas*

²⁷¹ Cuzán, "Totalitarianism in the Tropics: Cuba’s ‘Padilla Case’ Revisited," 57.

promotes the work of young local poets as they strive to realize their goals, and furthermore, spread meaningful expressions into the public sphere.

For the people of Cuba, the everyday struggles of living within a system that fails to satisfy their most basic needs, have manifested themselves in a consolidated pattern of continuity. The justification for this structural violence has been written into the nationalist narratives which define the collective sense of cultural memory and identity in Cuba. Whether the potential for a state of peace that would transcend social injustice may be driven by Cubans themselves, depends heavily on their capacity to influence social change and political transition. For a Cuban poet, it is within the lead of a pencil that this capacity lies and through which, meanings may threaten a socialist regime with change. These meanings, poetically expressed, have the ability to resonate deeply and influentially with an audience that recognizes discursive truth by engaging with it as readers, and thereby, appropriate it as their own. As time brings the inevitability of change, the future of Cuban communities is uncertain, as is that of Cuba's enduring "Revolution." In a nation where politics and culture have become inextricably intertwined, Cuban poets hold a place in society where they may influence the hearts and minds of their people from the bottom-up. And so, a future that does not sacrifice Cuba's sovereignty, but rather improves upon its system and social issues, may be expressed through the verses of a poem, and in doing so, transform a pattern of continuous conflict into a state of enduring peace for the Cuban people.

Appendix A:²⁷²



²⁷² Moro, 2019. UNEAC.

Appendix B.²⁷³



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Interviews

Conducted in May and June 2019

Interviews cited in this thesis: B, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N

²⁷³ maps.me, "Cuba," (Version 9.4.4.0 OpenStreetMap, April 28th, 2020 2020). Red pins indicate overnight stops along the way at the following locations: Santiago de Cuba, Contramaestre, Bayamo, Las Tunas, Guáimaro, Camagüey, Florida, Ciego de Ávila, Sancti Spiritus, Trinidad, Topes de Collantes, Cienfuegos, Santa Clara, Colón, Varadero, Matanzas, and Havana.

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