

## **MODULE 5**

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- **[Soon \(In 48 Years' Time\)](#)** *by Alexandra Kollontai*  
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**We are on That Path**  
*by Hugo Chavez*



## ***We are on That Path*** ***by Hugo Chavez***

SPEECH GIVEN AT THE AULA MAGNA OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF HAVANA ON DECEMBER 14, 1994  
– HAVANA, CUBA

Commander in Chief of the Cuban Revolution and President of the Republic of Cuba; Rector of this distinguished house of studies; President of the Federation of University Students; President of the “Simón Bolívar” House;

My dear compatriots, university professors, students of Cuba, of this land of Martí and Bolívar;

Comrades in arms:

First of all, please receive a warm and heartfelt Bolivarian embrace from the Venezuelan land, of which we feel so fulfilled and to which we have committed our entire life.

Last night, on this fleeting but nevertheless profound trip to Cuba, a Cuban compatriot on the plane asked me if it was the first time I had come to Cuba. I said to her: yes. But I also told her something that I want to repeat now, in this very moving moment: it is the first time I have come here physically, because we young Latin Americans have come to Cuba many times in our dreams. We Bolivarian soldiers of the Venezuelan army, who have decided to dedicate our lives to a revolutionary project, a transformative project, have come to Cuba countless times in our dreams.

And so, I am truly grateful for this new honor that President Fidel Castro gives me, that you all give me. Last night, when I had the immense and pleasant surprise of being

received at the José Martí International Airport by him in person, I told him, “I don’t deserve this honor. I aspire to deserve it in the months and years to come.” I say the same to all of you, my dear Cuban-Latin American compatriots. We hope to come one day to Cuba in a position to open our arms and mutually nourish each other with a Latin American revolutionary project. Imbued, as we have been for centuries, with the idea of a Hispanic American, Latin American, Caribbean continent. United as the single nation that we are.

We are on that path. As Aquiles Nazoa said of José Martí, we feel we belong to all times and all places. We walk like the wind behind the seed that fell here one day. Here, in fertile soil, it sprouted and grew as we have always said it would. I do not say this now because I am in Cuba and, as they say in my country, in the Venezuelan llanos, because I feel handsome and encouraged, but because we would say this in the Venezuelan army before becoming insurrectionist soldiers. We would say this in the halls of the Venezuelan military schools. Cuba is a bastion of dignity in Latin America. It must be seen as such. We must follow and nurture it as such.

At this moment there is a hurricane of emotions, ideas, passions, and feelings going through my mind and nesting in the soul of a soldier, a revolutionary, a Latin American. So many things gather in my mind, so many memories, so many dreams of Cuba, of being in Cuba. And at last, to be here!

I was remembering, among the many things that come to me at this moment in this Great Hall of the University of Havana, of having read in Yare prison, Comandante Castro, president of Cuba that fiery defense, those blazing words of yours in “History Will Absolve Me.” And of also having read in prison “A Grain of Corn,” the interview made at that time by the commander Tomás Borges. And of having so many comparisons of so many ideas, with almost 40 years of difference between the two. And to have drawn several conclusions as an imprisoned soldier. One of them being that it is worthwhile and necessary to keep the flag of dignity and principle raised high, even at the risk of being left to stand alone at any moment. To keep the sails high against unfavorable winds. To maintain positions of dignity. We would read and reread this in prison. For us it was, and still is, food for rebels.

Speaking of rebels, I emphasize what was said by the Commander in Chief Fidel Castro about the Miami summit: that summit was not held for rebels, therefore, Cubans were not there.

We cannot enter North American territory either. They have forbidden us to enter. I said it once in Colombia and I will say it again now, in Cuba, with more force and more vigor: they honor us as rebel soldiers by not allowing us to enter US territory!

There is no doubt that interesting things are happening in Latin America and the Caribbean. There is no doubt that the famous poet and writer of ours, of this America of ours, Pablo Neruda, was absolutely right when he wrote that Bolívar wakes up every 100 years when the people awaken.

There is no doubt that we are in an era of awakenings, of resurrections of peoples,

of strength, and of hope. There is no doubt, President, that the wave that you announced and continue announcing in that interview to which I referred, “A Grain of Corn,” is sensed and felt throughout all of Latin America.

There is no doubt that we are in the bicentennial era. We had the audacity to establish a movement within the ranks of the Venezuelan National Army. Fed up with so much corruption, we vowed to dedicate our lives to the construction of a revolutionary movement and to the revolutionary struggle in Venezuela and now, in the Latin American context.

We began this in the bicentennial year of Bolívar’s birth. This coming year is the centennial of the death of José Martí. This coming year is the bicentennial of the birth of Marshal Antonio José de Sucre. This coming year is the bicentennial of the rebellion and death of José Leonardo Chirinos on the coast of Coro in Venezuela, the land, by the way, of the ancestors of the hero Antonio Maceo.

As time calls us and impels us, it is undoubtedly time to walk once again along the paths of hope and struggle. That is what we are doing. After 10 years of intense work within the Venezuelan army. After one rebellion and another rebellion, we are now dedicated to revolutionary work in three fundamental directions that I will permit myself to summarize for you in order to invite you to an exchange; to invite you to extend bonds of unity and work, of concrete construction.

In the first place, we are determined to raise an ideological flag that is both pertinent and beneficial to our Venezuelan land and our Latin American land: the Bolivarian flag.

In this ideological work of reviewing the history and ideas that were born in Venezuela

and in this continent 200 years ago, when the first project of a nation, not only Venezuelan, but Latin American, was being built – that project that Francisco de Miranda called Colombellay, which Bolívar later called Colombia, and what we know today as the Great Colombia, the Bolivarian dream. In this plunge into history in search of our roots, we have designed and launched for national and international public debate the idea of what we call a “tree of three roots.”

The root of Bolivarian thought, of Simon Bolívar, who called for Latin American unity in order to oppose the pretensions of the North, which already clawed at our Latin American land. Bolívar who in Angostura proposed the need to incorporate, in addition to the three classic powers of Montesquieu, a fourth power, a moral power. Bolívar, who proposed a fifth power in the Bolivian Constitution, the electoral power. That Bolívar who, almost in his tomb and already in Santa Marta, said, “The military must take up its sword to defend social guarantees.” Bolívar, who said that the best system of government is the one that provides the greatest amount of happiness to its people and the greatest amount of political stability and social security.

We have unified this deep root, this Bolivarian root. It is united by time and by history itself, to the Robinsonian root, which takes as inspiration the name of Samuel Robinson or Simón Rodríguez, of whom we Latin Americans know very little. He was described as “Bolívar’s teacher” to us since we were children, and there he remained as if stigmatized by history, as the bizarre madman who died old, wandering like the wind through the peoples of Latin America.

Simón Rodríguez gave Simón Bolívar much of his revolutionary ideas. Simón Rodríguez, called on the Southern Americans to realize

two revolutions: the political and the economic. That Simón Rodríguez called for the construction of a social economy model and a popular economy model. That Simón Rodríguez left, as a challenge for us, the idea that Latin America, at that time termed South America, could not continue to imitate obediently Rather it must be original and called to invent or to err. That crazy old man, according to the bourgeoisie of the time, went around gathering already older and abandoned children: “Children are the stones of the future edifice of the Republic, come here to polish the stones so that this edifice will be solid and luminous.” That old man who, already on the verge of the grave, dedicated himself to making candles, and when someone asked him, “What are you doing making candles, teacher?” he said, “I can’t find any other way to give light to America.” That is another fundamental, deep and philosophical root of our ideological approach.

And a more recent root is the Zamoran root. Taken from the general of the sovereign people, Ezequiel Zamora. Zamora, leader of the Federal Revolution in Venezuela. Zamora, the general who wore a double head covering, a straw hat and a military kepi over the straw hat, and explained this with a concept that Mao Zedong later reflected in another way, in another time and another place.

Mao pointed out that the people are to the army as water is to the fish. You not only know this; you have applied it. I take this opportunity (excuse the digression) to give a huge embrace, a gigantic embrace to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba who have identified themselves with their people forever.

In just a few hours we are leaving dear comrades in arms of Cuba, convinced, in spite of the little we were able to see, that you do apply the idea that you are (just like the title

of a good work by a Panamanian scholar on the subject) like fish in the water.

Ezequiel Zamora, who I was referring to as the third component of the tree of the three roots, was perhaps ahead of the conception later expressed by Mao. Zamora explained that the straw hat represented the people of Venezuela, and the military kepi signified that the army should be united with the people in order to achieve the federal revolution that was demanded in Venezuela.

Ezequiel Zamora seized the Bolivarian project. Unfortunately, he died at the beginning of the federal war. With him was buried the dream of the poor peasants of Venezuela, who were betrayed after the war of independence.

This aspect of our work, of course, certainly has its complement in all of Latin America. Because we are Venezuelans, we surely have taken three Venezuelans as roots for our ideological project, determined to resist the thesis that comes from the North. Someone told me recently that everything bad comes from the North: the thesis of the end of history, of the last man, of the technetronic era, the thesis that ideologies are no longer useful, that they are outdated. No. We resist. We do not accept these formulations. We have chosen these three symbolic figures instead.

A Panamanian captain, still in hiding four months ago, told me, "I am in hiding, Comandante, because I hanged a gringo and I have an arrest warrant for murder." (Now, where are the arrest warrants for the thousands of deaths caused by the invasion of Panama?) He said to me, "Comandante, you have your god there, Bolívar; and we have our saint, Omar Torrijos."

In this way Martí is present in all the Americas. More recently, Omar Torrijos. More recently Juan Velasco Alvarado, a symbol of

the soldier of the people in Peru and the immense experience of the Inca plan, or in the Southern Cone. One early morning, a few months ago, I received a secret emissary from Montevideo with a letter from active officers of the Uruguayan army, who are called artiguista soldiers, with a gift on the political thought of Artigas.

San Martín, Sandino, Mariátegui, and so many other Latin Americans.... I take this opportunity to say that I also feel very honored to have met and embraced today Comandante Daniel Ortega of the Nicaraguan Revolution, who is here in Havana, as you know. Therein lie the roots of a project for a nation, a single nation of which we are all Latin Americans and Caribbeans.

Here is a first aspect of work that is well suited, my Comandante, to the coming centennial year of José Martí's death. To strengthen that ideological work, the pairing of Bolívar and Martí, as a way of raising the enthusiasm and pride of Latin Americans.

The other aspect of our work, for which we also need to strengthen the ties with the peoples of our America, is organizational work.

In prison, we received many documents on how the Cuban people organized themselves after the triumph of the Revolution. We are determined to organize an immense social movement in Venezuela: the Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement-200. Beyond that, we are calling for the creation of the Bolivarian National Front for this coming year. We are calling the students, the peasants, the indigenous people, the retired military (because unfortunately the military in the barracks in Venezuela are still muzzled, and the political system, or the Venezuelan politicians, intend to have forever a military that is mute, deaf, and blind in the face of the national tragedy), the military who are in the streets, the intellectuals, the workers,

the fishermen, the dreamers, all, to form this great social front to face the challenge of the transformation of Venezuela.

In Venezuela, nobody knows what may happen at any moment. For example, we are entering an electoral year, 1995. In a year's time, in December, there will be another illegal and illegitimate electoral process in Venezuela, marked by an abstention rate – you will not believe it – of 90% on average. That is to say, 90% of Venezuelans do not go to the polls, do not believe in the messages of politicians, and do not believe in almost any political party.

This year we aspire, with the Bolivarian Movement and with the National Bolivarian Front, to polarize Venezuela. Those who are going to the electoral process (where there are also honest people that we respect, but it is an electoral process that we do not believe in) are one pole. The other pole that we are going to nourish, push, and reinforce is the demand in the streets, with the people, to call for elections for a National Constituent Assembly, to redefine the fundamental structures of the republic that have collapsed. The juridical bases, the political bases, the economic bases, even the moral bases of Venezuela are in ruins, and this is not going to be fixed with band-aids.

Bolívar said, “Political gangrene cannot be cured with palliatives,” and in Venezuela there is absolute and total gangrene.

A few months ago someone asked me why we did not allow the democratic system – what they call democratic in Venezuela – to mature. Taking advantage of the fact that I have tasted some delicious mango sweets here in Havana, I gave him the example of the mango (which is lost in Venezuela because we do not know how to benefit from it). I told him a green mango ripens, but a rotten mango will never ripen. We must rescue the seed from the rotten mango

and sow it so that a new plant is born. This is what is happening in Venezuela today. This system has no way to recover itself.

And what I am going to say (I am going to use again the expression of the people of my town, of the Venezuelan llano), I am not going to say it because I feel handsome and encouraged here. I have said it in Venezuela. I have said it at the Ateneo de Caracas, which you know very well. I have said it to the press, to television, to the few programs that give us a place. I said it once in front of the Government Palace after I was released from prison. We do not discard the use of arms in Venezuela. We continue to have – and the government's own surveys say so – more than 80 percent favorable opinion in the Venezuelan military, in the army, in the navy, in the air force, and even in the National Guard, which is a force that invented and reinforced this system (it is like the regime's praetorian guard, but there are also good people there), and in the uniformed police, in the internal political direction, in the political police.

We have a force there and we feed it. We take care of it, although the young men, of course, are persecuted everywhere. Today if a Venezuelan officer names Bolívar in a speech in the barracks, he is considered a suspicious officer.

Despite all this, we have a force and, in addition to all this, we count on a very high percentage of Venezuelans, especially, dear friends, those 60% of Venezuelans who live in critical poverty.

Incredible, but true. Two hundred billion dollars have vanished in Venezuela in 20 years. “Where are they?” President Castro asked me. They are in the foreign accounts of almost all who have been in power in Venezuela. Civilians and military personnel who have enriched themselves under the protection of power.

In that immense majority of Venezuelans, we have a tremendous positive impact. You will understand that having these two forces, we are ready to give our all for the necessary change in Venezuela. That is why we do not discard the option of using the weapons of the people that are in the barracks and to look for that path if this political system decides, as it seems to have decided, to screw itself again and look for the means to manipulate and deceive.

We are calling for a Constituent Assembly and next year we will push for this as a short-term strategic resource.

To conclude these words, this greeting, this passion that moves me tonight, the third aspect in which we are working is a long-term strategic project in which the Cubans have and would have much to contribute and to discuss with us. It is a project with a 20 to 40-year horizon: building a sovereign economic model. We do not want to continue being a colonial economy, a subsidiary economic model.

For example, Venezuela has immense energy resources. No Caribbean or Latin American country should be exporting fuel to Europe. If Latin America has, among them, Venezuela with immense energy resources, why should Venezuela continue exporting 2.5 million barrels of crude oil per day to developed countries? Just as 500 years ago they took the raw material, today should they continue to take it in the same way?

It is a project we have already launched to the Venezuelan world under the name of "Simón Bolívar National Project," but with our arms extended to the Latin American and Caribbean continent. In this regard, we have already contacted some study centers in Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, and Cuba. A project in which it is not far-fetched to consider, from the political point of view: to build an association

of Latin American States. Why not think of this, the original dream of our liberators? Why continue to be fragmented? In the political area, the pretense for this project, which is not ours nor is it original, goes as far as 200 years old at least.

So many positive experiences in the cultural arena, in the economic arena (in this war economy in which Cuba is concretely living), in the sports arena, in the arena of health, of attention to the people, of attention to humanity, the first object of the homeland, the subject of the homeland.

So in that third aspect, in this long-term transformative political project, we extend our hands to the experience of the men and women of Cuba who have spent years thinking and working for this continental project.

To conclude, for now, we cordially invite you to a meeting in Santa Marta.

We have called to convene in Santa Marta, Colombia, on December 17. There we hope to begin preparations. This would be the first preparatory meeting for the Second Amphictyonic Congress of Panama, which we aspire to hold in Panama in 1996, the 170th anniversary of that First Congress, which was sabotaged by the North Americans. And we aspire to a third Congress in 1999, when the US army must withdraw its last soldier from that Bolivarian land and the Panama Canal.

This would be a Congress, or a Permanent League, where we Latin Americans would discuss our tragedy, our destiny. As that great revolutionary, that great Uruguayan writer, Eduardo Galeano said, destiny cannot be a curse. It is a defiance.

For us, the coming century is the century of hope. It is our century. It is the century of the resurrection of the Bolivarian dream, of Martí's dream, of the Latin American dream.



Dear friends, you have honored me by sitting down tonight to listen to these ideas of a soldier, of a Latin American fully and forever devoted to the cause of the revolution of our America.

A great Bolivarian embrace to you all. ■

**Culture as a Weapon of Struggle:  
The Medu Art Ensemble and Southern  
African Liberation**  
*by The Tricontinental Institute  
for Social Research*



# **Culture as a Weapon of Struggle: The Medu Art Ensemble and Southern African Liberation**

**by The Tricontinental Institute for Social Research**

**THIS DOSSIER** FOCUSES ON THE MEDU ART ENSEMBLE (1979-1985) AND ITS ROLE IN ORGANISING CULTURAL RESISTANCE IN THE STRUGGLE FOR LIBERATION IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE REGION.

## **From All Lands**

A *protest dance*. ‘Hai! Hai!’ the crowd chants, knees pumping high, feet stomping, and fingers pointing at an invisible, but known, enemy. With roots in the military drills of the Algerian liberation movement, *toyitoyi*, a form of resistance culture that mixes call-and-response chanting with energetic steps, journeyed through the training camps in Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe in the 1960s. This protest dance arrived at the exiled outposts of uMkhonto we Sizwe (‘Spear of the Nation’, also known as MK), the armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC), before eventually being smuggled back to be popularised in South Africa’s townships and factories. Nearly thirty years after the fall of the apartheid regime in South Africa, *toyitoyi* has evolved according to the conditions, cultures, and political objectives of those who take it up. It is seen at nearly every protest in the country, from those of the shack dwellers’ movement Abahlali baseMjondolo to the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) and from those of the mineworkers in Marikana to the students of the Fees Must Fall movement.

A *song*. The crowd roars as the legendary

South African musician Jonas Gwangwa introduces his next song, *Batsumi*, to thousands of fans attending the largest annual jazz festival in Johannesburg. It was 2006. The song, however, had been written thirty years before at the height of apartheid rule in South Africa. After years of pursuing his musical career in the United States, Gwangwa made Botswana his home base in the 1970s, soaking in the local Setswana musical traditions and later becoming one of the founding members of the Medu Art Ensemble in 1979, a cultural collective created and based in Botswana whose members were mostly exiled South African artists. Gwangwa’s *Batsumi*, meaning ‘the hunters’, pays homage to the hunting tradition of the First People of Botswana and universalises their historic struggle against oppression as a struggle of people ‘from all lands’ (*ba lefatshe lotlhe*).

A *poster*. The latest issue of the Cuban *Tricontinental* magazine had just arrived in a remote training camp in Angola. A poster tucked between its pages is unfolded, the four letters C-L-I-K written in yellow font against a night-blue background. Mandla Langa, a South African writer in exile, a Medu member, and an MK soldier deployed there recalls this moment: ‘I remember there was

one poster which I can't forget, from when the Cubans were having power failures, and they wanted to send messages through posters to the villages all over the country of how to conserve energy: *Clik*. Just switch off'. This poster, designed by the renowned Cuban graphic artist Félix Beltrán in 1968, travelled across oceans and continents to arrive at this remote Angolan camp a few years later. Posters and magazines like these were essential in carrying news about the struggles waged elsewhere. People took great risks not just with magazines, but with posters, songs, dances, and poems so that these cultural weapons could reach their intended audiences.

Put together, these vignettes are a drop in an ocean of rich cultural experiences in the South African struggle against white-minority apartheid rule and part of the tradition of liberation struggles across the colonised world. What were the conditions that necessitated and enabled culture to become such a strong mobilising force, both domestically and internationally? What was the Medu Art Ensemble, and what role did cultural groups like it play in pushing that moment of history forward? Over the last few years, Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research spoke with several members of Medu and studied some of the largely unpublished materials that the group produced in its short but deeply impactful years of existence.

The story of Medu is not just a South or southern African story, but an international one. No single liberation struggle can exist without the circulation and exchange of ideas, strategies, material resources, political solidarity, and culture across the globe. Reflecting on the role of national culture in the struggle against colonialism, the Martinican revolutionary Frantz Fanon wrote, 'It is at the heart of national consciousness that

international consciousness establishes itself and thrives. And this dual emergence, in fact, is the unique focus of all culture'.

In other words, there is no culture of national liberation that is not at once bound up with internationalism. During its six years of existence from 1979 to 1985, the Medu Art Ensemble built and innovated drawing from the cultural practices and artistic theories of African, Asian, and Latin American struggles for national liberation. Thami Mnyele – one of Medu's founders who was born in the impoverished Johannesburg township of Alexandra and murdered by the South African state for his artistic and political work – described this experience:

It was in [the] Medu Art Ensemble where the role of the artists concretised itself: the role of an artist is to learn; the role of an artist is to teach others; the role of an artist is to ceaselessly search for the ways and means of achieving freedom. Art cannot overthrow a government, but it can inspire change... the whole little ensemble is a workshop, a classroom, a jungle through which the people must carve out a home... The struggle of the artist must be rooted in that of the majority of our people. Any actual engagement in the making of change must of necessity seek inspiration and alliance with the movement of the people.

## **Culture as a Weapon of Struggle**

the struggle is food  
age-old rule of bloodhounds  
gives birth to revolt  
the sharp teeth of class struggle  
chew off whole epochs  
we have travelled a long way  
in soweto  
we were matadors  
trickling bullnosed war tanks  
and learned  
how much a brick  
can bleed a bullet to death

**BHEKI LANGA, 'ISANDLWANA INCARNATE',  
WRITTEN IN 1979 ON THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE BATTLE OF ISANDLWANA.**

The Medu Art Ensemble emerged as a necessity of a historic moment and out of a centuries-long tradition of cultural resistance on the continent. According to Judy Seidman, a member of Medu's graphics and research units, the traditions that inspired South African cultural resistance can be categorised in four waves: the early anti-colonial era, the Pan-Africanist movement, and then the first and second waves of South Africans who went into exile. Seidman, who is from the United States, spent her youth in Ghana during Kwame Nkrumah's presidency, dedicated her adult life to the South African liberation movement, and has helped to preserve much of Medu's history.

The first tradition that inspired South African cultural resistance consisted of different cultural practices that responded to colonial invasions from the seventeenth to early twentieth centuries. An important landmark in this period of resistance was the 1879 Battle of Isandlwana, when warriors of the Zulu Kingdom defeated the British colonial troops who had their sights set on expanding into

the diamond and gold-rich interior. This phase of cultural resistance developed alongside the emergence of the South African working classes as a social force, from the nineteenth century mineworkers, railway workers, and dockworkers to the twentieth century factory, domestic, and farm workers, bringing together pre-colonial cultural elements and ideas from the burgeoning international socialist and communist movements.

The second tradition is rooted in the Pan-Africanist movement, which began as early as the first two decades of the 1900s. This period was shaped by leaders like the Trinidadian lawyer Henry Sylvester Williams, women scholars like Anna Julia Haywood Cooper from the United States, and South African writers like Sol Plaatje. In Europe and the United States, Plaatje connected with W.E.B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, and other key thinkers. By the 1940s and 1950s, the Pan-Africanist movement had incorporated strong Marxist tendencies under the influence of important figures like Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), Sekou Touré (Guinea), and Amílcar Cabral (Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde) who understood culture to be a fundamental pillar of the struggle against colonialism and for Pan-African unity. A year after assuming the presidency of an independent Guinea, Touré made an important plea to writers, emphasising the symbiotic relationship between cultural production and the revolutionary processes that were underway: 'To take part in the African revolution it is not enough to write a revolutionary song; you must fashion the revolution with the people. And if you fashion it with the people, the songs will come by themselves, and of themselves'.

The third tradition emerged in the 1950s with South Africans who were exiled following the consolidation of the racially segregated political system that was formally inaugurated

with the 1948 election of the Afrikaner National Party. Despite the implementation of increasingly repressive laws and restrictions, such as the 1950 Group Areas Act, which further racially segregated residential and commercial areas, and the banning of the Communist Party of South Africa under the Suppression of Communism Act that same year, the liberation struggle only grew more militant. It no longer demanded inclusion in the existing racialised society, seeking instead to restructure all aspects of South African society. At the height of this moment, the historic Freedom Charter was adopted by the 1955 Congress of the People in Kliptown, just outside of Johannesburg. Beginning with its opening proclamation 'the people shall govern!', the Charter addressed the material necessities of land, housing, and work, as well as cultural liberation, declaring that 'the doors of learning and of culture shall be opened!'. This political militancy was met with increased state repression, marked by the Sharpeville Massacre on 21 March 1960 in which the South African Police killed sixty-nine people and injured hundreds more. Almost immediately after the massacre, the ANC and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), a group whose members had primarily broken away from the ANC Youth League, were banned and forced underground. This generation of exiles, including the renowned musicians Miriam Makeba, Hugh Masekela, and Jonas Gwangwa, interacted with international circuits of political artists and intellectuals, from the Afro-Asian Writers' Conferences (born out of the 1955 Bandung Conference in Indonesia) to the Pan-African cultural festivals, connecting black artists from the diaspora with those on the continent.

The fourth tradition of cultural resistance came with the exiled South African students and activists who were involved in the Black Consciousness Movement led by Steve

Biko. This movement emerged in the midst of the political vacuum of the late 1960s, which reached its height during the Soweto Uprising in 1976, when thousands of students revolted against the imposition of Afrikaans, the language of apartheid domination, as the medium of instruction in black schools. In response, hundreds were killed, affiliated organisations were banned, and many key leaders were exiled or jailed, including Biko, who died a year later in police custody. He was thirty years old. Many of the students and activists politicised in this moment ended up leaving South Africa, including some who went on to form Medu. At the same time, the increasing militancy in the trade union movement, as highlighted by the dockworkers who led the 1973 Durban Strikes and the increasing prominence of trade unionists (among them leaders such as Emma Mashinini), strengthened class consciousness in the artistic community and introduced the concept of a 'cultural worker', underscoring the notion that artists and intellectuals are part of the working class. By the late 1970s, these political and cultural currents had arrived in Botswana, whose capital, Gaborone, sits a mere fifteen kilometres from the South African border and became a vibrant breeding ground for a new cultural project.

'Medu started out as a coalescing of the different energies of different people from sometimes almost antagonistic strains', Mandla Langa recalls regarding his arrival in Botswana. 'I came from the Black Consciousness Movement, and I was still trying to check [out] the terrain and what was going on. There were people like Wally [Serote] who were already working for the ANC, and there were other young people who were still trying to find their own feet in Botswana'. Mongane Wally Serote, who was born in the poor but culturally vibrant black township of Sophiatown and today is South

Africa's National Poet Laureate, spent nine months in solitary confinement in 1969 under the Terrorism Act, which was used to repress many of the first-wave exiles. Within months of the arrival of Serote, Langa, and others in Botswana in the late 1970s, the idea of building a cultural collective such as Medu began to take root. In fact, the word *medu* means 'roots' in the southern African language of Sesotho.

In addition to bringing together various tendencies and traditions, South African activists and artists exiled in Botswana were exposed to a much broader world of liberation struggles from across the continent and the world. 'The whole of southern Africa was gripped in liberation struggles – Angola, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia, and so on', founding Medu member Wally Serote explains. 'And so, we extended our reach to those other countries which were also in struggle, and after we had discussed maybe for a year, we felt we should formalise the matter [of creating Medu] and anchor it'. It was in this context that the Medu Art Ensemble was born. Medu was divided into six creative units: theatre, graphic arts and design, publications and research, film, music, and photography. Led by an annually elected executive body, Medu's stated aims, in its own words, included:

- training Botswana nationals and exiles in the above-mentioned skills,
- fostering an environment suitable for cultural work,
- creating closer relations between cultural workers and the community,
- establishing closer relations and practical cooperation amongst Southern African cultural workers.

Medu established a number of programmes, especially practical workshops in various artistic areas for local and South African artists and students. In Botswana, it was also

important to create a legitimate front for exiles to work, gain access to resources, and build bridges with local communities without deepening the tensions with the hosting government. For Serote, having different creative units was important in allowing Medu to create a reciprocal relationship that put the organisation 'at the disposal of our people, so there was feedback for us, and we also fed back to the communities'.

Breaking from the isolation imposed by the apartheid regime, exiled South Africans expanded their horizons both artistically and ideologically. 'There were a lot of ideological teachings behind all this', Langa recalls. 'We were just learning about Amílcar Cabral's *Return to the Source* and the primacy of culture in the struggle. We were meeting writers like Pepetela [and] understood how Angolans, under the leadership of [President] Agostinho Neto, were bringing [a] cultural impetus into their own struggle. There were also writers like Mário de Andrade from Brazil and Abdias do Nascimento, who was a Pan-Africanist'. In addition to building good relationships, securing resources, and expanding their ideological and creative exposure, Medu needed to be 'anchored', as Serote calls it, in a concrete political project.

## To Anchor Yourself

Sobashiy'abazali'ekhaya  
Sophuma sangena kwamany'amazwe  
Lapho kungazi khon'ubaba no mama  
silandel'inkululeko

We will leave our parents at home  
We go in and out of foreign countries  
To places our fathers and mothers don't know  
Following freedom

**SOBASHIY'ABAZALI ('WE WILL LEAVE OUR PARENTS'), A POPULAR FREEDOM SONG IN THE TRAINING CAMPS.**

Although many of Medu's core leaders were already members of the ANC and affiliated with its underground work, the organisation itself was not conceived as an official cultural front of the ANC. For founding members of Medu like Serote, to be anchored in a political project did not mean to be bound by the colonial borders of nation, race, or language, but to be at the service of the various national liberation struggles being waged. 'Once you conceptualise a structure like we did in the context of southern Africa, it means that you are going to anchor yourself in FRELIMO [Mozambique Liberation Front], you're going to educate yourself in [Namibia's] SWAPO [South West Africa People's Organisation], you're going to act and call yourself a part of the Angolan liberation movement'. In order to be able to work across political divisions and attract a broad range of artists and activists, Medu established itself as a 'non-aligned' organisation, as Serote describes it, that was open to people from different backgrounds and political trajectories. For him, a guiding factor was that their 'work was anchored in liberation struggles'.

To produce cultural work while being anchored in a liberation struggle is not an easy task. Songs were composed, paintings painted,

and poems written in extremely difficult conditions. Barry Gilder, a member of Medu's music unit who is currently South Africa's ambassador to Syria and Lebanon and worked closely with Serote, recalls their day-to-day life as cultural workers and political militants: 'In between the clandestine meetings of the RPMC [Regional Politico-Military Council of the MK in Botswana], the highly secretive meetings with contacts at home, the extensive reading of reports from those contacts, the writing of voluminous reports to Lusaka, the dodging of the Botswana Special Branch, and the constant threat of apartheid death raids, Serote continued with his writing career'.

With many of Medu's more than sixty known members often working clandestinely, it is impossible to capture the breadth and depth of the organisation's cultural production during its six years of existence. As is the case with any national liberation struggle, there is no single historical archive that makes Medu's artefacts and cultural productions accessible to the public. One of its largest retrospectives, *The Peoples Shall Govern! Medu Art Ensemble and the Anti-Apartheid Poster*, was organised by the Art Institute of Chicago in 2019, featuring 130 of Medu's artworks and artefacts, including 60 of its 90 known posters. Still, this history remains largely out of reach to South Africans engaged in social and political movements today and younger generations of cultural workers around the world. Nonetheless, what has been documented demonstrates an impressive range of creative experimentation and a high-quality body of work. Medu's publications and research unit worked in conjunction with the other units to produce a newsletter filled with poetry, short stories, reviews of exhibitions, literary criticism, interviews, and political analyses by the organisation's members and artists alongside thinkers from other countries. Revolutionary poems by Tô Hữu in Vietnam



and essays by the Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, for instance, were interspersed with Medu's writings, whose authors found themselves in the process of articulating their own practices and theories on the art of national liberation.

Among Medu's most impressive achievements was the Culture and Resistance Symposium and Festival of the Arts, held from 5 to 9 July 1982. According to different accounts, anywhere from hundreds to thousands of people attended the festival, with cultural workers arriving in the small city of Gaborone in cars and on buses while others hitchhiked or flew. Over these five days, both South Africans who were living in exile and 'inziles', those living their own 'exiled' existence within South Africa, along with people from Europe, the United States, and across southern Africa gathered at the University of Botswana to discuss the essential role of culture in accelerating the struggle for South African liberation, which was becoming more imminent each day. Wally Serote, Thami Mnyele, and Sergio-Albio González (a Medu member originally from Cuba) led the initial preparations for the conference, inviting a range of Botswana and South African organisations to join the planning process over the next two years.

The Culture and Resistance Symposium and Festival of the Arts, following a long lineage of conferences and festivals held in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe, represented 'the first significant opportunity in decades for South Africa-based and exiled South African artists to engage each other – directly, intensely – through papers, discussions, performances, and social interaction', Barry Gilder recalls, having attended several conferences in exile held in the 1970s and 1980s. Though no formal declarations were made, the conference brought people

together from across political, racial, social, and geographic divides to build towards a liberated South Africa. They not only talked about but created culture together during the festival, which gave birth to new formations of resistance. Amongst the most significant was the United Democratic Front, which was formed a year after the festival by many of its key participants and would mobilise the masses to deal a lethal blow to the apartheid system.

Eighty-seven cultural workers from diverse backgrounds contributed over 300 paintings, sculptures, and photographs to the *Art Toward Social Development* exhibition that accompanied the festival. These works embodied fear and despair, but also optimism and hopefulness. 'It is this element of optimism and hopefulness', Thami Mnyele said in his speech on the opening night, 'which has brought us all together tonight; it is this indestructible and enduring spirit of struggle that nourishes our quest for social development and justice'.

The festival included performances across artistic genres, such as the Junction Avenue Theatre Company's production of *Marabi*, a musical theatre piece that recovered the vibrant cultural life of the African working class and featured jazz music, dance parties, and beer-brewing in the shebeens (taverns that existed before forced removals began in the 1930s as part of urban segregation policies). There were also several musical performances featuring Hugh Masekela on the trumpet, Barry Gilder on the guitar, and Abdullah Ibrahim (known then as Dollar Brand) on the piano, who closed off his set with a melancholic melody of *Tula Dubula*, sung with a glimmer of hope:

There's a new world a-coming,  
falsehood will all be gone.  
They'll come a-marching  
into town at dawn;  
singing songs of freedom,  
and laughing in the rain.  
Gone will be this old world,  
things won't be the same.

Though it is difficult to capture the spirit of the times, the cultural debates and experiments highlighted at the symposium and festival, and throughout Medu's existence, remain relevant for cultural workers engaged in political struggles today. What follows is an attempt to distil some of the theories that emerged from Medu's practices about the ideology, strategy, form, and content of revolutionary culture as well as the age-old tension between art and politics. Together, they point us towards a theory of art for national liberation.

**The necessity of art.** 'The Necessity of Art for National Liberation' was the title of the opening speech given by Medu member Dikobe wa Mogale Ben Martins at the Culture and Resistance Symposium and Festival of the Arts. Its title references the classic book by the Austrian art historian Ernst Fischer, *The Necessity of Art: A Marxist Approach* (1959). For Fischer, the major task of art – specifically socialist art – is two-fold: 'to lead the public towards a proper enjoyment of art, that is to say, to arouse and stimulate their understanding, and to emphasise the social responsibility of the artist'. In other words, the artist must help conscientise the people and has a social duty to do so. Similarly, for Dikobe wa Mogale, in a society of class and racial oppression, artists cannot hide behind 'artistic neutrality'. If culture is indeed a weapon of struggle, then, he said, 'art must teach people, in the most vivid and imaginative ways possible, to take control

over their own experience and observations [and] how to link these with the struggle for liberation and a just society free of race, class, and exploitation'.

This artistic responsibility was also emphasised in the writings of Thami Mnye, a key Medu member who helped theorise the organisation's work. Having grown up in the Alexandra township in northeast Johannesburg, Mnye was angered by the oppression and underdevelopment inflicted upon black communities and by the sanitising selectiveness of 'township art' that galleries deemed palatable for white audiences and buyers. In a written exchange with Dikobe wa Mogale on 'artistic neutrality', Mnye asked: 'In the face of so much grief, suppression, and repression (homeless squatters, death sentences, war in Angola, starvation), how do we explain our works and daily activities or inactivities? What credibility do we deserve from the people?'. For Mnye, credibility is earned by creating art that serves the people and that 'clearly popularise[s] and give[s] dignity to the just thoughts and the deeds of the people. With our brushes and paints, we shall need to visualise the beauty of the country we would like our people to live in'. Art is necessary for building a future, socialist, society while providing the spiritual shelter for a people that are still in the process of liberating themselves.

**No revolutionary soloist.** Even with the social responsibility of the revolutionary artist established, the relationship between the individual artist and the collective is often tenuous in practice. Socialist artistic traditions reject the ideas of 'art for art's sake' and 'artistic freedom' inherited from nineteenth century Romanticism and liberalism, which centre the creativity, aspirations, and even protest of the individual over the collective. But during revolutionary times, which were

brewing across southern Africa, the conflict between the individual and the collective heightens. Keorapetse William Kgositsile (or 'Bra Willie'), a leading Medu member who later became South Africa's first National Poet Laureate, reflected on this tension in his keynote speech at the Culture and Resistance Symposium and Festival of the Arts. He began with an anecdote about a fellow South African writer who asked him how he 'still manage[d] to write novels and poems', suggesting that his active political engagement was at odds with his creative production. Kgositsile replied: 'with a bit of acid on my tongue, I had always wondered how a South African writer could be outside the movement but hope to write anything of value or significance'. Affirming the fact that artistic production arises from concrete social relations, Kgositsile continued: 'There is no such creature as a revolutionary soloist. We are all involved. The artist is both a participant and imaginative explorer in life. Outside of social life there is no culture, there is no art; and that is one of the major differences between [hu]man and beast'. As an antidote to the plague of individualism, Mnyele emphasised the importance of organisation and organising skills as one of the 'most effective weapons against our problems'. An artist who is socially responsible is therefore an artist who is organised alongside the people, a part of – and not apart from – their movements.

**To be understood.** For art to fill its social function, it must be understood by the people. One of Mnyele's diagnoses of contemporary South African artists was that their work was 'acutely abstracted', 'lost to the mystical', and plagued with 'distortion'. In other words, their artwork confuses and distracts rather than clarifying and enabling its viewers to better understand the world around them. As a result, Mnyele explained, 'the work has lost that essential quality of community, the

immediacy of communication with the masses [to whom] the artist claims to address himself'.

In the early 1980s, the trends that dominated the Western art world – to which liberation movements were not immune – were filled with abstraction, from the minimalist stainless steel sculptures of Jeff Koons to the pop art of Andy Warhol. This was no accident. Abstraction as an aesthetic style was even deployed by the Central Intelligence Agency to counter the Soviet tradition of socialist realism during the Cold War, a form of cultural warfare that continues today. In the 1950s, artists like Jackson Pollock, through his abstract 'drip paintings', were actively promoted internationally to represent the rugged individualism and anti-communism of United States culture.

'The West was viciously anti-Soviet socialist realism and so how you made art in the context of a liberation movement was actually an issue', Judy Seidman recalls, speaking of the 'endless arguments' about socialist realism that defined this period. It was common for artists of the time to criticise 'posters of people with clenched fists [for being] socialist realist in the worst possible sense of the word'. She recalls what Mnyele used to say to the naysayers of the 'fists and spears' style of art: 'When I go to meetings and I draw people with fists in the air, it's because that's what I'm seeing and that's what I'm drawing'. To Seidman and Mnyele, it is neither possible nor responsible to exclude representations of the realities of the people in their art. Rather than adhering to a rigid style, Medu members aimed to make art that reflected the concrete realities of the people, with all their horrors, pain, and injustice, while at the same time instilling the confidence that these realities can be changed. In order to achieve both tasks, a work of art must be able to be understood by the people for whom it is made.

**Towards socialist art.** As a non-aligned, non-racial, and ideologically diverse organisation, Medu did not have a singular practice or theory around art. Through analysing some of their writings and debates, however, one could say that the group was moving towards a theory and practice of socialist art and towards restoring art to its social function, which capitalism and colonialism had destroyed. Medu members borrowed from different aesthetic and liberation traditions in order to break from the grip of the art galleries of the ruling class, which, according to Mnyeale, were ‘not only the monopoly outposts and shrines of African art, but they even determine[d] what form and content the art should take’. So instead, they looked to socialist muralists like David Alfaro Siqueiros and Frida Kahlo in Mexico and to Marxist cultural theorists like Bertolt Brecht and Ernst Fischer. For instance, Fischer’s formulation of socialist art as that which ‘anticipates the future’ with the past ‘woven into its fabric’ is echoed in Mnyeale’s own historical and materialist understanding of the development of art and aesthetics.

Medu’s members were inspired by communist artists around the world, from the songs of the Chilean musician Victor Jara to the poetry of Vietnamese writer Tố Hữu. They learned from the cultural thinking of national liberation struggles of the Marxist tradition, like that of Amílcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, and Mao Zedong, whose theories and practices they adapted to their own realities. Serote recalls, for instance, that ‘There was a lot of influence, especially from Mao. We read a lot about that and we also discussed it and always asked ourselves, “how do we ensure that the two interact and influence each other, and what [do] we get from China and what we want to do in southern Africa and South Africa?”’

The path towards socialist art can be understood more as an outlook, a method, and an attitude, rather than a monolithic style, and in many ways, this is the orientation that Medu upheld and attempted to articulate as revolutionary processes unfolded. Given Medu’s tragic and premature end, it is impossible, of course, to predict where those practical and theoretical innovations might have taken them.

### **My Blood Will Nourish the Tree Which Will Bear the Fruits of Freedom**

Didn’t you hear him today  
Even right now  
Sing his poem of love  
Write an epitaph of love  
With LIFE  
‘My blood will nourish the tree  
Which will bear the fruits of freedom’...

Yes for him too with LIFE  
We must reach freedom’s rich estates...  
Marching  
To the unbroken rhythm  
Of surging dancing spears

**LINDIWE MABUZA, ‘EPITAPH OF LOVE’ (IN  
MEMORY OF SOLOMON MAHLANGU, EXECUTED  
IN 1979).**

On the evening of 13 June 1985, a truck carrying sixty-three men from the South African Defence Force and an arsenal of rifles, 9mm pistols, stun grenades, gas masks, and more crossed the border into Botswana. Some sixty other tanks and armoured vehicles were on standby.

It was 1:15am when a team of eight men arrived at Thami Mnyeale’s house. He was still awake. Within minutes, his entire house, his artwork, and Mnyeale himself had been sprayed with bullets. He died trying to climb the fence next to a thorn tree while his pens laid

uncapped, ink freshly spilt. Perhaps his last act in life was painting those very thorns, which he often did to show not only the beauty but also the pain and violence of this world.

Michael Frank Hamlyn. Cecil George Phahle. Lindiwe Phahle. Joseph Malaza. Themba Duke Machobane. Dick Mtsweni. Basil Zondi. Ahmed Geer. Gladys Kesupile. Eugenia Kolobewere. Six-year-old Peter Masoke. These are the twelve people – two of them Medu members – who were identified as victims of the raids conducted that night by the South African Defence Force Special Forces in the sovereign territory of Botswana, while others who had gotten wind of a possible attack narrowly escaped. Some surviving Medu members and activists stayed in Botswana after the murders while others were deployed elsewhere to continue their political and artistic work. Nonetheless, this operation marked the end of the Medu Art Ensemble. In 2002, seventeen years after the raid, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission argued that the cross-border action was not within their area of competence, and the only men who were tried were those who collated information on the targets. They were granted amnesty. Today, even further removed from the times and conditions that produced Medu, what can and should be recovered from this history for those engaged in struggles and cultural work?

Mandla Langa reflects on Medu's ideological clarity during the South African liberation struggle and how the concept of nation and the Marxist analysis of class helped frame their understanding of who the oppressed in South Africa were. 'Unfortunately, today, everything has been muddled up'. He compares South Africa's young democracy to 'an older adolescent' with 'hormonal impurities' that require 'a lot of unlearning' to get on the right path. Along the same lines, Barry Gilder points to the importance

of preserving history in the process of transitioning to state power: 'We had a fear, a sensitivity about our history, our cultural history, our songs, and so on. Fear of offending those that we reconciled with'. To him, the process of reconciliation was also a process of forgetting critical and hard-earned lessons that came from revolutionary struggle, including in the realm of culture. Similarly, Serote laments the loss of internationalist cultural exchanges since the liberation period: 'I can't remember when last I read a novel from China... We have a lot of literature like that in our bookshops from [the United States of] America, Europe, and so on, but not from Vietnam, not from China, not from Cuba. There's something wrong'.

There is no doubt that South Africa's transition to democracy did not deliver the liberation to the majority of its people that so many fought and died for, that its process of national liberation is incomplete. The Freedom Charter is far from being realised, and South Africa remains an extremely divided and unequal society in which the top, mostly white, 10 per cent of the population own 85 per cent of the country's aggregate wealth. The process of national liberation does not end with the formal transfer of power from colonial hands, nor with the fall of an apartheid regime. Class society does not disappear overnight in a socialist project, and imperialism does not sit idly by as nations and peoples attempt to chart a sovereign path. Rather, liberation continues to be a process, and a struggle, that must be fashioned by and with the people continuously.

### **Opening the Future**

A poster. Dozens gather in a conference hall in the Diakonia Council of Churches in Durban, South Africa. It is October 2020, at the height of the global pandemic, and

Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM) is organising this and other events to celebrate its fifteenth anniversary. Since its founding in 2005, AbM has built a democratic self-organised movement of the poor and dispossessed in South Africa, occupying land, securing housing, producing food, and politically educating its 100,000 members. A large, centrally placed banner reads: 'Fifteen years of our revolutionary struggle for land, housing, and dignity'. Below it are posters by artists and activists from around the world, from Cuba to India, Venezuela to Lebanon, Brazil to Indonesia. This artwork is part of the four-part series of *Anti-Imperialist Poster Exhibitions*, jointly organised by Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research and the International Week of Anti-Imperialist Struggle. For the celebration, AbM members selected from the more than 200 posters that bear witness to peoples' struggles internationally, which resonate with their own realities on the ground. Amongst them is a hand-drawn portrait honouring Thuli Ndlovu, AbM's chairperson in KwaNdengezi and one of the twenty-five leaders who have been assassinated since the movement's founding. Above it is a poster that Medu's own Judy Seidman produced for the *Anti-Imperialist Poster Exhibitions*, which travelled around the world and the internet before landing on these walls in Durban. The poster reads, 'Capitalism kills, but we shall rise'.

for hope'. Art, therefore, has the capacity to capture both our collective victories and defeats, including the story of the Medu Art Ensemble, and turn them into a mobilising force for the struggles of today and those yet to come. In fact, the artist has a responsibility to do so. ■

In Kgositsile's speech at the 1982 Culture and Resistance Symposium and Festival of the Arts, he said: 'Our artists have over the years struggled along with the people, sensitised to and expressing the feelings, sufferings, hopes, failures and achievements in our struggle for national liberation'. Writing about the story of Medu and the southern African liberation struggles today is not a nostalgic endeavour. This attempt aspires, as Fanon wrote, 'to use the past with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and a basis

**Ghassan Kanafani interviewed in 1972:**

**“Anti-imperialism gives impetus to socialism if it does not stop fighting in the middle of the battle”**

*English translation produced by Samidoun Spain*



## **Ghassan Kanafani interviewed in 1972: “Anti- imperialism gives impetus to socialism if it does not stop fighting in the middle of the battle” English translation produced by Samidoun Spain**

PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS (ISSUE 36, PUBLISHED JULY 1974) OBTAINED THE FULL TEXT OF AN UNPUBLISHED PRIVATE CONVERSATION CONDUCTED BY A SWISS WRITER, WHO WAS A SPECIALIST IN GHASSAN KANAFANI'S LITERATURE. CONDUCTED JUST A FEW WEEKS BEFORE THE ASSASSINATION OF THE PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE MARTYR, [THIS INTERVIEW](#) EVENTUALLY FORMED PART OF THE WRITER'S SCHOLARLY STUDY ON GHASSAN KANAFANI'S LITERARY WORK.

### **KANAFANI: ON CHILDHOOD, LITERATURE, MARXISM, THE FRONT AND AL-HADAF**

**Question: Ghassan, can you tell me something about your personal experience?**

Ghassan answers: I think my story reflects a very traditional Palestinian background. I left Palestine when I was eleven years old and I came from a middle-class family. My father was a lawyer and I was studying in a French missionary school. Suddenly, this middle-class family collapsed and we became refugees, and my father immediately stopped working because of his deep class roots. Continuing to work after we left Palestine no longer made sense to him. This would have forced him to abandon his social class and move to a lower class. This is not easy. As for us, we started working as children and teenagers to support the family. I was able to continue my education on my own through my job

as a teacher in one of the primary schools in the village, which does not require high academic qualifications. It was a logical start, as it helped me continue studying and finish secondary school in the meantime. After that, I enrolled at university [Damascus University], in the Department of Arabic Literature, for three years, after which I was dismissed for political reasons. Then, I went to Kuwait, where I stayed for six years. There I started reading and writing.

My political career began in 1952, when I was fourteen or fifteen years old. In that same year, or in 1953, I met Dr. George Habash by chance in Damascus, for the first time. I was working as a proof reader in a printing house. I don't remember who introduced me to Al-Hakim, but my relationship with him began at that time. I immediately joined the ranks of the Arab Nationalist Movement and thus began my political life. During my stay in Kuwait, I was politically active within the Arab Nationalist Movement, which is now represented by a significant minority in the Kuwaiti government. In 1960 I was asked to move to Lebanon to work on the party's newspaper. In 1967 I was asked to work with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which is the Palestinian branch of the Arab Nationalist Movement. In 1969 I started my work on the



newspaper "Al-Hadaf", where I continue to work.

***Did you start writing as a result of your studies in Arabic literature?***

No, I think my interest in Arabic literature started before my studies. I suspect that this interest of mine was the result of a complex, if memory serves me correctly. Before we left Palestine, I was studying in a French missionary school, as I mentioned before. Therefore, I did not possess the Arabic language as an Arab. This caused me a lot of problems. My friends always made fun of me because I was not good at Arabic. This perception was not clear when we were in Palestine because of my social class. But when we left Palestine, my friends were of a different social class and immediately noticed that my Arabic was poor and that I resorted to foreign expressions in my conversations, and so I concentrated on the Arabic language to handle my problem. This was probably in 1954. I think I broke my leg that year in an accident. I had to stay in bed for six months. It was then that I started reading Arabic in earnest.

***I think we can cite many examples throughout history of people who have "lost" their language and are therefore trying to recover it. Do you think that this process develops a person politically?***

I don't know. That may be so. As for me personally, I was politicised in a different way. I got involved in politics at an early stage because we lived in the camp. And so, I was in direct contact with the Palestinians and their problems through that sad and emotional atmosphere that I experienced as a child. It was not difficult for me to discover the political roots of the environment I lived in.

When I started teaching, I faced great

difficulties with the children I taught in the camp. I always got angry when I saw a child sleeping in class. Then I simply found out why: these kids were working at night, selling sweets or chewing gum or something like that in the cinemas and on the streets. Naturally, they would come to class very tired. Such a situation immediately brings the person to the root of the problem. It became clear to me that the child's drowsiness was not the result of his disdain for me or his hatred of education, just as it had nothing to do with my dignity as a teacher, but was merely a reflection of a political problem.

***So your teaching experience contributed to the development of your social and political awareness.***

Yes, and I remember it happened one day directly. As you know, primary school teachers teach all subjects, including drawing, arithmetic, English, Arabic and other subjects. One day, I was trying to teach the children to draw an apple and a banana according to the syllabus approved by the Syrian government, as I was teaching there and so I had to stick to the book. And at that moment, when I was trying to draw these two pictures on the blackboard as best as I could, I felt a sense of alienation, of not belonging; and I remember well that I felt at that moment that I had to do something, because I realised, before even looking at the faces of the children sitting behind me, that they had never seen an apple or a banana. So these things were the last thing that interested them. There was no connection between them and these two pictures. In fact, the relationship between their feelings and these drawings was strained, not good. It was a decisive turning point, as I remember that very moment clearly among all the events of my life. As a result, I erased the drawings from the board and asked the children to draw the camp. A few days later,

when the inspector came to the school, he said that I had deviated from the government-determined programme, which would prove that I was a failed teacher. Having to defend myself led me straight to the Palestinian cause. Accumulating small steps like these pushes people to make decisions that will mark their whole life.

***Commenting on this point, I think when you engage in art, as a socialist anyway, you connect art directly to the social, political and economic spheres. You touched on this by drawing an apple and a banana. But as for your writings, are these works related to your reality and the present situation, or are they derived from [literary] heritage?***

My first short story was published in 1956 and was called "A New Sun". It revolves around a boy in Gaza. When I review all the stories I have written about Palestine so far, it is clear to me that each story is directly or indirectly linked, with a thin or solid thread, to my personal experiences in life. However, my style of writing fully developed during the period between 1956 and 1960 or, more specifically, in 1962. At first, I wrote about Palestine as a problem in its own right; as well as about Palestinian children, about the Palestinian as a human being, about Palestinian hopes, being themselves separate things from our independent and autonomous world; as inevitable Palestinian facts. Then it became clear to me that I saw in Palestine an integrated human symbol. When I write about a Palestinian family, I am actually writing about a human experience. There is no incident in the world that is not represented in the Palestinian tragedy. When I portray the misery of the Palestinians, I am in fact seeing the Palestinians as a symbol of misery all over the world. And you can say that Palestine represents the whole world in my stories. The [literary] critic can now notice that my stories

are not only about the Palestinian [individual] and his problems, but also about the human condition of a man suffering from those problems. But perhaps those problems are more crystallised in the lives of Palestinians.

***Did your literary development accompany your political development?***

Yes. In fact, I don't know which preceded the other. The day before yesterday, I was watching one of my stories that was produced as a film. I had written this story in 1961. I saw the film with a new perspective, as I suddenly discovered that the dialogue between the protagonists, their line of thinking, their [social] class, their aspirations and their roots at that time expressed advanced concepts of my political thinking. [So] I can say that my personality as a novelist was more developed than my personality as a political actor, not the other way around, and that is reflected in my analysis and understanding of society.

***Does your writing reflect an analysis of your society, or do you also colour your analyses in an emotional way?***

I suppose my stories were based on an emotional situation at the beginning. But you can say that my writing started to reflect reality from the early sixties. My observation of this reality and my writing about it led me to a proper analysis. My stories themselves lack analysis. However, they narrate the way the protagonists of the story act, the decisions they make, the reasons that motivate them to make those decisions, the possibility of crystallising those decisions, etc. In my novels I express reality, as I understand it, without analysis. As for what I meant by saying that my stories were more developed [than my political views], it was due to my sincere amazement when I followed the development of the characters in the story I was watching

as a film, and which I had not read for the last few years. I was astonished when I listened [again] to the dialogue of my characters about their problems and was able to compare their dialogue with the political articles I had written in the same period of time and saw that the protagonists of the story were analysing things in a deeper and more correct way than my political articles.

***You mentioned that you started your political work by joining the Arab Nationalist Movement the day you met Habash in 1953. When did you embrace socialist principles [then]? The Arab Nationalist Movement was not a socialist movement at the beginning.***

No, it wasn't. The Arab Nationalist Movement was [directed] against colonialism, imperialism and reactionary movements. It did not have an ideological line at that time. However, this movement adopted a socialist line of its own during the years it existed. Anti-imperialism gives impetus to socialism if it does not stop fighting in the middle of the battle and if it does not come to an agreement with imperialism. If this is the case, that movement will not be able to become a socialist movement. But if one continues to struggle [it is natural] that the [anti-imperialist] movement will develop into a socialist position. The Arab nationalists realised this fact in the late 1950s. They realised that they could not win the war against imperialism unless they relied on certain [social] classes: those classes who fight against imperialism not only for their dignity, but for their livelihood. And it was this [road] that would lead directly to socialism.

But in our society and our movement [the Arab Nationalist Movement] we were very sensitive to Marxist-Leninist [principles], and this position was not the result of our hostility to socialism, but the result of the mistakes

made by the communist parties in the Arab world. That is why it was very difficult for the Arab Nationalist Movement to adopt Marxism-Leninism before 1964. But in 1967, specifically in July, the Popular Front embraced the [principles] of Marxism-Leninism and was thus the only [front] within the Arab Nationalist Movement to take such a step. The Arab Nationalist Movement changed its name to the Socialist Labour Party. As for the Palestinian branch of it, it was called the "Popular Front". Of course, this is a simplification of the problem. We had developed within the Arab nationalist movement. There was a constant struggle within the movement between the so-called right and the left. In each round, the left was the winner because our position on anti-imperialism and reactionary attitudes was better [than the position of the right]. This resulted in the adoption of Marxism-Leninism.

As for me, I don't remember now whether my position on the conflicts that arose within the front was leaning to the right or to the left, because the border between right and left was not separated then as it is now, as occurs for example in the developed political parties. But I can say that the Arab Nationalist Movement included some young elements, including myself, who made fun of the old people's sensitivity to communism. Of course, we were not communists at that time and we were not in favour of communism. However, our sensitivity towards communism was less than that of the elders. Consequently, the new generation played a leading role in the development of the Arab Nationalist Movement into a Marxist-Leninist movement. The main factor in this was the fact that the majority of the members of the Arab nationalist movement belonged to the poor class. As for the members belonging to the petty bourgeoisie or the big bourgeoisie, their number was limited. They did not continue with this movement either, they left it within

two years of joining. New members [of these classes] also joined, who then left it in their turn [shortly afterwards]. As for the poor classes, they continued, and soon formed a pressing force within the Arab Nationalist Movement.

***When did you start studying Marxism-Leninism? Do you remember?***

I don't think my own experience in this regard is traditional. First, I was and still am an admirer of Soviet writers. However, my admiration for them was absolute at the time, which helped me to break the ice between me and Marxism. This way, I was exposed to Marxism at an early stage through my readings and admiration for Soviet writers. Secondly, my sister's husband was a prominent communist leader. My sister married in 1952 and her husband influenced my life at that early stage. Also, when I went to Kuwait, I stayed with another six young people in a house and, a few weeks after my arrival, I found out that they were forming a communist cell. So I started reading about Marxism at a very early stage. I don't know how much I absorbed at that time and at that stage, being under the influence of those emotions with the Arab Nationalist Movement. I can't measure my understanding or comprehension of the material I was reading. However, the content was not alien to me.

***It may have been these early influences that moved your [early] stories forward [in relation to your political ideas at the time]. I think your readings of Soviet literature and your contacts with Marxists were reflected in your writing.***

I don't think these factors take precedence. I think the biggest influence on my writing is due to reality itself: what I see, my friends' experiences, relatives, brothers and sisters, and students, my living in the camps with

poverty and misery. These are the factors that affected me. Perhaps my fondness for Soviet literature was due to the fact that it expresses, analyses, deals with and describes what I was actually seeing. My admiration continues, of course. However, I don't know whether Soviet literature had an influence on my writing. I don't know the size of this effect. I instead prefer to say that the first effect is not due to it, but to reality itself. All the characters in my novels were inspired by reality, which gave me strength; and not by imagination. Nor did I choose my heroes for artistic [literary] reasons. They were all from the camp, not from outside. As for the artistic characters in my first stories, they were always evil. And that's because of [my experience with] my subordinates at work. So life itself had the biggest influence [on my writing].

***You belonged to the middle class, but joined the proletariat as a child.***

Yes, of course, my background is related to the middle class because my father belonged to the middle class before we went to Syria as refugees. And my family's attachment to its [class] roots was far from reality, which had no connection to those roots. And we kids had to pay the price for this contradiction [between the past and reality]. Therefore, my relationship [with members of my class] became aggressive instead of friendly. I won't pretend to have joined the proletariat. I was not a real proletarian, but I joined what we call in our language the "lumpen proletariat", whose members are not part of the productive apparatus, they [live] on the margins of the proletariat. But then it helped me, of course, to understand the ideology of the proletariat, but I can't say that I was part of the proletariat at that time.

***However, from the beginning you were able to see reality from the perspective of the oppressed.***

Yes, you can say that. My concept, however, was not crystallised in a scientific, analytical way, but was [simply an expression of] an emotional state.

***Let’s go back now to 1967, when the “Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine” was born. What were the beliefs of this organisation and what were the reasons for creating a new organisation?***

As you know, the Popular Front was not a new organisation. It is essentially the Palestinian branch of the Arab Nationalist Movement of which I was a member. It developed at first through members of the movement in 1967. We created the “Popular Front” because the Arab world [took] centre stage [in the political space]. The size of the Palestinian branch of the Arab Nationalist Movement has also expanded a lot and there have been changes in its leadership and in the mentality of its members. So we joined the Popular Front. Of course, I personally joined the Front because I believe that the Front as a party represents a relatively advanced stage of the other [political] organisations in the field of Palestinian work. I believe that I can realise my future visions through this organisation. This is the main reason why I joined the Popular Front.

***How do you see your role as editor-in-chief of the newspaper “Al-Hadaf” in this organisation, and can you tell me something about its method of mass mobilisation?***

I am a member of this organisation, which in fact constitutes a party that has its own internal system and political strategy. It also has an organisational and leadership strategy based on core democratic principles.

Therefore, when the leadership assigns me this particular position, I have to complete a specific programme. I am a member of the Central Information Committee of the Popular Front. Al Hadaf is part of the media structure of the Front, according to our understanding of the media, which is not limited to propaganda, but goes beyond education, etc. I am not responsible for Al Hadaf. The task is entrusted to the Central Media Committee, and I represent this committee in the newspaper. In practical terms, I have to deal with the organisational aspect of this institution (Al Hadaf), but we have a committee that reads and evaluates the Al Hadaf, writes articles and discusses editorials. Within the Front, there are ten similar institutions and departments. Our institution may be smaller than the rest. However, there are circles within the Popular Front that practice social and political activities inside the camps. We also have those who work in the military struggle and other camps. Each of us is an integral part of the other. Of course, those who work in the organisational field, i.e. in organising conferences, educational programme, meetings and contacts with the masses, benefit from our newspaper to express the point of view of the Popular Front. They also consult us regarding the masses. Therefore, as a result of these dynamic relations between them, all circles carry out a mass mobilisation campaign together.

***Can you tell me something about the newspaper itself?***

Working [on the paper] is very stressful. That’s how I feel now that I’ve finished this week’s issue. I feel exhausted and it’s horrible for someone to work for a paper like this. By the time you finish the last sentence of another issue, you’re suddenly faced with twenty blank pages to fill. Also, every line, title and picture in the paper is discussed by the [members]

at the Front, and the slightest mistake is monitored. The newspaper is then subject to criticism and working on it is not like working on an ordinary newspaper. In the ordinary newspaper you just have to do your work, but in our newspaper the smallest details are discussed by the [different circles within the Front] who read them carefully. So it is very difficult for a person to do an integrated work in front of this big court, which is made up of [other] members of the Front. So, the person feels that he has to work harder.

Also, now we live in a developing country. In the resistance movement, and in an organisation like ours, every department tries to attract "people" with talents and competencies, however minor they may be, to fulfil the work involved, since the completion of the work and the implementation of the programmes assigned to one are essential things for the individual. We, at Al Hadaf have a small number of employees, and when we ask the Front to assign us more workers, the answer we hear is: "Give us two or three of your employees to teach the grassroots, because working at the grassroots is more important than working at the newspaper." So we remain silent, lest they take employees away from us. It is hard for others to believe that only three people edit Al Hadaf. This situation has existed for three years. Sometimes we get [extra] help from a fourth person, but then this person leaves us, and we get another one, and the story repeats itself.

***Then you have to work day and night.***

Yes. I don't think any of the colleagues work less than 13-14 hours a day. And that's non-stop, without holidays and without mercy from criticism. People in our organisation, in the government and in other newspapers have criticised us.

***Do you consider Al-Hadaf to be a progressive***

***newspaper, and do you think it reads like a progressive newspaper from a theoretical political angle?***

Yes, and I also think that causes a problem. I'm not trying to praise the paper, but it is very difficult to express deep political and theoretical ideas in a simple way. Few people have this ability. In the Popular Front we have two people who can express deep thoughts in an easy way that anyone who reads them can understand. One of them is George Habash. The other is one of the military leaders who wrote wonderful pieces. As for the rest, it is difficult, especially if they have not practised before. We always face criticism from the grassroots that it is very difficult to understand what our newspaper writes, and that we have to simplify things and write in an easy way.

That is why preparing the paper takes a lot of time, as I have to revise the paper and simplify some of the points it raises after writing it. I think that the creation of other internal newspapers on the Front would facilitate our task and the continuation of our work in this line. The internal newspaper can express easy things and simple ideas. As for a central public newspaper like ours, it is difficult for us to imitate the internal newspapers because we have to take a serious line. To do so, we are trying [now] to limit the amount of articles that deal with complex political ideas, so that these articles take up a small amount of pages and focus on direct political campaigns.

***Do you publish literary works, like poetry and other works, in your newspaper?***

We dedicate two pages to literature, film criticism, theatre, art, painting and more. I think the journalists mentioned earlier are the most popular ones because many of the members of the Front understand the left wing line of thought through these pages.

***Have you personally published short stories?***

I haven't had time to write since I started working at Al-Hadaf. In fact, I only [recently] published two stories about an old woman I always write about [Umm Saad]. I don't have time for literary writing and this is very annoying.

***Would you like to write more?***

Usually when I get out of work at the office and go home I feel so tired that I can't write. So I read instead. And, of course, I have to read for two hours a day because I can't go on without it. But after I finish reading I feel better going to sleep or watching a silly movie [for me], because I can't write [after finishing my work].

***Do you think that recent developments within the Front are reflected in the fact that it has become a collective where debates abound, rather than a collective that engages in military activities?***

No, I don't agree with you. In fact, in the Front we have always insisted on a certain strategic line whose motto is that every politician is also a fighter and every fighter is a politician. As for the phenomenon you are witnessing now, it is not limited to us [at the Front]. This phenomenon is due to the fact that the Palestinian resistance movement is now in a state of decline due to objective circumstances that are trying to destroy us in this period of time. We have been living in this state of decline since September 1970, which prevents us from increasing our military activities. But that does not mean that we are going to stop military action. This is for the resistance movement in general. As for the Popular Front in particular, our military operations in Gaza, the West Bank and Israel itself have intensified over the last two years. But Israel is trying to hide these operations. But we remain active.

We also have bases in southern Lebanon and we are preparing for a secret people's war against the reactionaries in Jordan. However, the state of decay in which we live and the general repressive atmosphere imposed by the Arab governments affects public opinion, and people think that we have stopped military activities. But this conclusion is incorrect.

***How did the state of decay, in your opinion, affect the Palestinian individual without referring to a specific political line?***

Political movements are like human beings. When a person is healthy, famous and rich, friends gather around him and everyone supports him. But when he gets old, sick and loses his money, the friends around him disperse. Now we are [as a resistance movement] going through this stage, the stage of apathy, so to speak. The Palestinian individual feels that the dreams he built up over the last few years have been undermined. This is a painful feeling, you know, and I think many comrades share my opinion: that this stage is temporary. When the Palestinian individual discovers that we are fighting a great enemy that we cannot defeat in a few years, that our war is long term and that we will be defeated repeatedly, then the loyalty of the Palestinian individual to the Palestinian revolution will not be as fragile and emotional as it is now. I believe that we can mobilise the crowd again when we win our first new victory. I am confident that this victory will come. We are not afraid of this 'down time', as I like to call it. This is normal since Arab leaders and Arab media spokesmen made many promises to the masses, praising an easily achievable victory. Now, many Arabs have discovered that these promises were misleading. Therefore, I do not believe that this phenomenon [i.e. the apathy of the Palestinian individual] is an inherent and continuous phenomenon. We know that we will overcome this stage in the future and that the loyalty of the masses to the revolution will be stronger than before.

***Were you or the Front leadership too optimistic in 1967, 1968 or 1969? Did you make too many promises? Did you see this conflict as an easy struggle?***

No. In fact the Popular Front was warning the masses through its written documents that the problem was not easy. It also warned them that they would be defeated repeatedly and would face bloodbaths and many tragedies, and massacres. We mentioned it many times, but in general, the leadership of the Palestinian revolution promised before the masses an easy victory. As for optimism, we are very optimistic, and I can say that our situation now, despite being at the lowest point of our difficult struggle, is better than in 1967, 1968 or 1969 – from a scientific point of view and as a resistance movement, through which it evaluates its historical movement, and not through its superficial appearances. ■



**Socialism and Man in Cuba**  
*by Che Guevara*



## ***Socialism and Man in Cuba by Che Guevara***

FROM "[ON SOCIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM](#)"  
BY ERNESTO "CHE" GUEVARA"

Dear comrade,

I am completing these notes in the course of my trip through Africa, driven by my desire to come through with my promise, even if belatedly. I would like to do so by addressing the theme set forth in the title above. I think it may be of interest to Uruguayan readers.

A common argument from the mouths of capitalist spokespeople in the ideological struggle against socialism is that socialism—or the period of building socialism into which we have entered—is characterized by the abolition of the individual in the interest of the state. I will not try to refute this argument solely on theoretical grounds, but rather to establish the facts as they exist in Cuba and then add comments of a general nature. Let me begin by broadly sketching the history of our revolutionary struggle before and after taking power.

As is well known, July 26, 1953, is the exact date that the revolutionary activities began that would culminate in January 1959. In the early morning of that day, a group led by Fidel Castro attacked the Moncada barracks in the Oriente Province. The attack was a failure; the failure became a disaster; and the survivors ended up in prison, beginning the revolutionary struggle again after they were freed by an amnesty.

During this process, in which there were only seeds of socialism, man was a fundamental factor. We put our trust in him—individual, specific, with a first and last name—and the

triumph or failure of the mission entrusted to him depended on that man's capacity for action.

Then came the stage of guerrilla struggle. It developed in two distinct environments: the people—the still sleeping mass that had to be mobilized—and its vanguard, the guerrillas, the motor force of the mobilization, the generator of revolutionary consciousness and militant enthusiasm. This vanguard was the catalysing agent that created the subjective conditions necessary for victory. Here again, in the framework of the proletarianization of our thinking, of this revolution that took place in our habits and our minds, the individual was the fundamental factor. Every one of the combatants of the Sierra Maestra who reached an upper rank in the revolutionary forces has a record of outstanding deeds to his credit; each attained their rank on this basis.

This was the first heroic period in which combatants struggled for roles with greater responsibilities, greater dangers, with no other satisfaction than fulfilling a duty. In our work of revolutionary education, we frequently return to this instructive theme. The man of the future can be glimpsed in the attitude of our fighters.

The act of total dedication to the revolutionary cause was repeated in other moments of our history. During the October Crisis and in the days of Hurricane Flora we saw exceptional deeds of valour and sacrifice performed by an entire people. Finding the method to perpetuate this heroic attitude in

daily life is, from the ideological standpoint, one of our fundamental tasks.

In January 1959, the revolutionary government was established with the participation of various members of the treacherous bourgeoisie. The presence of the Rebel Army was the basic element constituting the guarantee of power.

Serious contradictions developed right away. In the first instance, in February 1959, these were resolved when Fidel Castro assumed leadership of the government, taking the post of prime minister. This process culminated in July of the same year with the resignation of President Urrutia under pressure from the masses.

In the history of the Cuban Revolution there now appeared a character, well defined in its features, which would systematically reappear: the masses. This multifaceted being is not, as is claimed, the sum of elements of the same type (reduced, moreover, to that same type by the ruling system), which acts like a flock of sheep. It is true that it follows its leaders, particularly Fidel Castro, without hesitation. But the degree to which he won this trust results precisely from having interpreted the full meaning of the people's desires and aspirations, and from the sincere struggle to fulfil the promises made.

The masses participated in agrarian reform and in the difficult task of administering state enterprises; they went through the heroic experience of the Playa Girón [Bay of Pigs]; they were hardened by the battles against various groups of bandits armed by the CIA; they lived through one of the most important defining moments of modern times during the October Crisis; and today they continue to work to build socialism.

Viewed superficially, it might appear that those who speak of the subordination of the individual to the state are right. The masses carry out the tasks set by the government with unmatched enthusiasm and discipline, whether in the field of the economy, culture, defence, sports, etc. The initiative generally comes from Fidel, or from the revolutionary leadership, and is explained to the people, who make it their own. In some cases the Party and government take a local experience and generalize it, following the same procedure.

Nevertheless, the state sometimes makes mistakes. When one of these mistakes occurs, one notes a decline in collective enthusiasm due to the effect of a quantitative decrease in each of the elements that make up the mass; work is paralysed until it is reduced to an insignificant level; and it is time to make a correction. That is what happened in March 1962 as a result of the sectarian policy imposed on the Party by Aníbal Escalante.

Clearly this mechanism is not enough to ensure a succession of sensible measures; a more structured connection with the masses is needed, which we must improve in the course of the coming years. But, as far as initiatives originating in the upper strata of the government are concerned, we are currently utilizing the almost intuitive method of sounding out general reactions to the problems that we are facing.

In this, Fidel is a master. His own special way of becoming integrated with the people can be appreciated only by seeing him in action. At the great public mass meetings, one can observe something like the dialogue of two tuning forks whose vibrations interact, producing new sounds. Fidel and the masses begin to vibrate together in a dialogue of growing intensity until they reach the climax in an abrupt conclusion crowned by our cry of

struggle and victory.

The difficult thing to understand for someone who is not living through the experience of the Revolution is this close dialectical unity between the individual and the masses, in which both are interrelated and, at the same time, in which the masses, as an aggregate of individuals, interact with its leaders.

Some phenomena of this kind can be seen under capitalism, when politicians appear capable of mobilizing popular opinion. But when these are not genuine social movements—if they were, it would not be entirely correct to call them capitalist—they live only so long as the individual who inspires them, or until the harshness of capitalist society puts an end to the people's illusions. In capitalist society, man is controlled by a pitiless law usually beyond their comprehension. The alienated human being is tied to society as a whole by an invisible umbilical cord: the law of value. This law acts upon all aspects of one's life, shaping its course and destiny.

The laws of capitalism, which are blind and are invisible to ordinary people, act upon the individual without him noticing. One sees only the vastness of a seemingly infinite horizon ahead. That is how it is painted by capitalist propaganda, which purports to draw a lesson from the example of Rockefeller—whether or not it is true—about the possibilities of individual success. The amount of poverty and suffering required for a Rockefeller to emerge, and the amount of depravity entailed in the accumulation of a fortune of such magnitude, are left out of the picture, and it is not always possible for the popular forces to expose this clearly. (A discussion of how the workers in the imperialist countries gradually lose the spirit of working-class internationalism due to a

certain degree of complicity in the exploitation of the dependent countries, and how this at the same time weakens the spirit of struggle of the masses in the imperialist countries, would be appropriate here, but that is a theme that goes beyond the scope of these notes.)

In any case, the road to success is portrayed as beset with perils—perils that, it would seem, an individual with the proper qualities can overcome to attain the goal. The reward is seen in the distance; the path is solitary. Furthermore, it is a race among wolves; one can win only at the cost of others' failure.

I would now like to try to define the individual, the actor in this strange and moving drama of the building of socialism, in a dual existence as a unique being and as a member of society. I think that it is simplest to recognize the individual's quality of incompleteness, of being an unfinished product.

The vestiges of the past are brought into the present in one's consciousness, and a continual labour is necessary to eradicate them. The process is two-sided. On the one hand, society acts through direct and indirect education; on the other, the individual submits to a conscious process of self-education. The new society in formation has to compete fiercely with the past. This past makes itself felt not only in one's consciousness—in which the residue of an education systematically oriented towards isolating the individual still weighs heavily—but also through the very character of this transition period in which commodity relations still persist. The commodity is the economic cell of capitalist society. So long as it exists, its effects will make themselves felt in the organization of production and, consequently, in consciousness.

Marx outlined the transition period as resulting from the explosive transformation of the capitalist system destroyed by its own contradictions. The reality of the past has shown us, however, that some countries that were weak limbs on the tree of imperialism were torn off first—a phenomenon foreseen by Lenin. In these countries, capitalism had developed sufficiently to make its effects felt by the people in one way or another. But it was not capitalism's internal contradictions that, having exhausted all possibilities, caused the system to explode. The struggle for liberation from a foreign oppressor; the misery caused by external events such as war, whose consequences led the privileged classes to fall back onto the backs of the exploited; liberation movements aimed at overthrowing neocolonial regimes—these are the usual factors in unleashing this kind of explosion. Conscious action does the rest.

A complete education for social labour has not yet taken place in these countries, and wealth is far from being within the reach of the masses through the simple process of appropriation. Underdevelopment, on the one hand, and the usual flight of capital to 'civilized' countries, on the other, make a rapid transition without sacrifices impossible. There remains a long way to go in constructing the economic base, and the temptation is great to follow the beaten track of material interest as the lever with which to accelerate development.

There is the danger that the forest will not be seen through the trees. Following the pipe dream of achieving socialism with the help of the dull instruments left to us by capitalism (the commodity as the economic cell, profitability, individual material interest as a lever, etc.) can lead to a dead end. And, when you wind up there after having travelled a long distance with many crossroads, it is hard

to see just where you took the wrong turn. Meanwhile, the economic foundation that has been laid has done its work of undermining the development of consciousness. In order to build communism—at the same time building new material foundations—it is necessary to build the new man.

That is why it is so important to choose the right instrument to mobilize the masses. This instrument must be moral in character, without neglecting a correct use of the material incentive—especially of a social character.

As I have already said, in moments of great peril it is easy to muster moral incentives in order to retain their effectiveness. However, this requires the development of a consciousness in which there is a new scale of values. Society as a whole must be converted into a gigantic school.

The rough outline of this phenomenon is similar to the process by which capitalist consciousness was formed in its initial period. Capitalism uses force, but it also educates people in the system. Direct propaganda is carried out by those entrusted with explaining the inevitability of class society, either through some theory of divine origin or a mechanical theory of natural law. This lulls the masses, since they see themselves as being oppressed by an evil against which it is impossible to struggle.

Next comes hope; in this, capitalism differed from the earlier caste systems, which offered no way out. For some, the principle of the caste system will remain in effect: the reward for the obedient is to be transported to some fabulous other world after death where, according to the old beliefs, good people are rewarded. For other people, there is this innovation: class divisions are determined

by fate, but individuals can rise out of their class through work, initiative, etc. This process, and the myth of the self-made man, is profoundly hypocritical: it is the self-serving demonstration that a lie is the truth.

In our case, direct education acquires a much greater importance. The explanation is convincing because it is true; no subterfuge is needed. It is carried out by the state's educational apparatus as a function of general, technical and ideological education through such agencies as the Ministry of Education and the Party's dissemination apparatus. Education takes hold among the masses and the foreseen new attitude tends to become a habit. The masses continue to make it their own and to influence those who have not yet educated themselves. This indirect form of educating the masses is equally as powerful.

But the process is a conscious one. Individuals continually feel the impact of the new social power and perceive that they do not entirely measure up to its standards. Under the pressure of indirect education, they try to adjust themselves to a situation that they feel is right and that their own lack of development had prevented them from reaching previously. They educate themselves.

In this period of building socialism, we can see the new man being born. The image is not yet completely finished—it never will be, since the process goes forward hand in hand with the development of new economic forms. Aside from those whose lack of education makes them take the solitary road towards satisfying their own personal ambitions, there are those—even within this new panorama of a unified march forward—who have a tendency to walk separately from the masses accompanying them. What is important, however, is that, each day, men are acquiring ever more consciousness of the need for their

incorporation into society and, at the same time, of their importance as the motor of that society.

They no longer travel completely alone over lost roads towards distant aspirations. They follow their vanguard, consisting of the Party, the advanced workers, the advanced men who walk in unity with the masses and in close communion with them. The vanguard has its eyes fixed on the future and its reward, but this is not a vision of reward for the individual. The prize is the new society in which men will have different characteristics: the society of communist man.

The road is long and full of difficulties. At times we lose our way and must turn back. At other times, we go too fast and separate ourselves from the masses. Sometimes we go too slow and feel the hot breath of those treading at our heels. In our zeal as revolutionaries, we try to move ahead as fast as possible, clearing the way. But we know we must draw our nourishment from the masses, who can advance more rapidly only if we inspire them by our example.

Despite the importance given to moral incentives, the fact that there remains a division into two main groups (excluding, of course, the minority that for one reason or another does not participate in building socialism) indicates the relative lack of the development of social consciousness. The vanguard group is ideologically more advanced than the masses; the latter understands the new values, but not sufficiently. While among the former there has been a qualitative change that enables them to make sacrifices in their capacity as the vanguard, the latter see only part of the picture and must be subject to incentives and pressures of a certain intensity. This is the dictatorship of the proletariat operating not only on the defeated class but

also on individuals of the victorious class.

All of this means that, for complete success, a series of mechanisms, of revolutionary institutions, is needed. Along with the image of the multitudes marching towards the future comes the concept of institutionalization as a harmonious array of channels, steps, restraints and well-oiled mechanisms which facilitate the advance, which facilitate the natural selection of those destined to march in the vanguard, and which bestow rewards on those who fulfil their duties and punishments on those who commit a crime against the society that is being built.

This institutionalization of the Revolution has not yet been achieved. We are looking for something new that will permit a complete identification between the government and the community in its entirety, something appropriate to the special conditions of building socialism, while avoiding at all costs transplanting the common places of bourgeois democracy—such as legislative chambers, for example—into the society in formation. Some experiments aimed at the gradual institutionalization of the Revolution have been made, but without undue haste. The greatest brake has been our fear that any appearance of formality might separate us from the masses and from the individual, which might make us lose sight of the ultimate and most important revolutionary aspiration: to see man liberated from his alienation.

Despite this lack of institutions, which must be overcome gradually, the masses are now making history as a conscious collective of individuals fighting for the same cause. Man under socialism, despite his alleged standardization, is more complete; despite the lack of a perfect mechanism, the opportunities for self-expression and making oneself felt in the social organism are infinitely greater.

It is still necessary to deepen conscious participation—individual and collective—in all the structures of management and production, and to link this to the idea of the need for technical and ideological education so that the individual will realize that these processes are closely interdependent and their advancement is parallel. In this way, the individual will reach total consciousness as a social being, which is equivalent to the full realization as a human being, once the chains of alienation are broken. This will be translated concretely into re-appropriating one's true nature through liberated labour and the expression of one's own human condition through culture and art.

In order to develop a new culture, work must acquire a new status. Man-as-a-commodity ceases to exist, and a system is installed that establishes a quota for the fulfilment of one's social duty. The means of production belong to society, and the machine is merely the trench where duty is performed. Man begins to free his thinking from the annoying fact that one needs to work to satisfy one's animal needs; he starts to see himself reflected in his work and to understand his full stature as a human being through the object created, through the work accomplished. Work no longer entails surrendering a part of one's being in the form of labour power sold, which no longer belongs to him, but becomes an expression of himself, a contribution to the common life in which one is reflected, the fulfilment of his social duty.

We are doing everything possible to give work this new status as a social duty and to link it with the development of technology, which will create the conditions for greater freedom, and with voluntary work based on the Marxist appreciation that man truly reaches a full human condition when no longer compelled to produce by the physical necessity to sell oneself as a commodity.

Of course, there are still coercive aspects to work, even when it is voluntary. Man has not transformed all of the coercion that surrounds him into a socially conditioned reflection and, in many cases, still produces under the pressures of one's environment. (Fidel calls this moral compulsion.) There is still a need to undergo a complete spiritual rebirth in one's attitude towards one's own work, freed from the direct pressure of the social environment, though linked to it by new habits. That will be communism.

The change in consciousness does not take place automatically, just as change in the economy does not take place automatically. The alterations are slow and not rhythmic; there are periods of acceleration, periods that are slower, and even regressions.

Furthermore, we must take into account, as I pointed out before, that we are not dealing with a period of pure transition, as Marx envisaged in his **Critique of the Gotha Programme**, but rather with a new phase unforeseen by him: an initial period of the transition to communism, or of the construction of socialism. This transition is taking place in the midst of violent class struggles, and with elements of capitalism within it that obscure a complete understanding of its essence.

If we add to this the scholasticism that has held back the development of Marxist philosophy and impeded systematically addressing the transition period, whose political economy has not yet been developed, we must agree that we are still in diapers and that it is necessary to devote ourselves to investigating all the principal characteristics of this period before elaborating an economic and political theory of greater scope.

The resulting theory will, no doubt, privilege

two pillars of the construction of socialism: the formation of the new man and the development of technology. Much remains to be done in regard to both, but the delay in understanding technology as an essential foundation is less excusable, since this is not a question of going forward blindly but of following a long stretch of road already opened up by the world's more advanced countries. This is why Fidel pounds away with such insistence on the need for the technological and scientific training of our people and especially of its vanguard.

In the field of ideas that lead to unproductive activities, it is easier to see the division between material and spiritual necessity. For a long time, man has tried to free himself from alienation through culture and art. While he dies every day during the eight or more hours in which he functions as a commodity, he comes to life afterwards through his spiritual creations. But this remedy bears the germs of the same sickness: that of a solitary being seeking harmony with nature. He defends his individuality, which is oppressed by the environment, and reacts to aesthetic ideas as a unique being whose aspiration is to remain immaculate.

This is nothing more than an attempt to escape. The law of value is no longer simply a reflection of the relations of production; the monopoly capitalists—even while employing purely empirical methods—surround that law with a complicated scaffolding that turns it into a docile servant. The superstructure imposes a kind of art in which the artist must be educated. Rebels are subdued by the machine, and only the exceptionally talented are able to create their own work. The rest become shamefaced hirelings or are crushed.

A school of artistic inquiry is invented, which is said to be the definition of freedom; but



this 'inquiry' has its limits, imperceptible until there is a clash, that is, until the real problems of man and his alienation arise. Meaningless anguish or vulgar amusement thus become convenient safety valves for human anxiety. The idea of using art as a weapon of protest is combated.

Those who play by the rules of the game are showered with honours—such honours as a monkey might get for performing pirouettes. The condition is that one does not try to escape from the invisible cage.

When the Revolution took power, there was an exodus of those who had been completely housebroken. The rest—whether they were revolutionaries or not—saw a new road. Artistic inquiry experienced a new impulse. The paths, however, had already been more or less laid out, and the escapist concept hid itself behind the word 'freedom'. This attitude was often found even among the revolutionaries themselves, a reflection in their consciousness of bourgeois idealism.

In countries that have gone through a similar process, attempts have been made to combat such tendencies with an exaggerated dogmatism. General culture became virtually taboo, and the acme of cultural aspiration was declared to be the formally exact representation of nature. This was later transformed into a mechanical representation of the social reality they wanted to show: the ideal society, almost without conflicts or contradictions, that they sought to create.

Socialism is young and has its mistakes. We revolutionaries often lack the knowledge and intellectual audacity needed to meet the task of developing the new man with methods different from the conventional ones—and conventional methods suffer from the influences of the society that

created them. (Once again the theme of the relationship between form and content is raised.) Disorientation is widespread, and the problems of material construction absorb us. There are no artists of great authority who at the same time have great revolutionary authority. The men of the Party must take this task in hand and seek to achieve the main goal: to educate the people.

What is sought, then, is simplification, something everyone can understand, something functionaries understand. True artistic inquiry ends, and the problem of general culture is reduced to taking some things from the socialist present and the dead (and therefore not dangerous) past. Thus, socialist realism arises upon the foundations of the art of the last century.

The realistic art of the nineteenth century, however, also has a class character, more purely capitalist perhaps than the decadent art of the twentieth century, which reveals the anguish of the alienated man. In the field of culture, capitalism has given all that it had to give, and nothing remains but the stench of a corpse, today's decadence in art. But why try to find the only valid prescription in the frozen forms of socialist realism? We cannot counterpose 'freedom' to socialist realism, because the former does not yet exist and will not exist until the complete development of the new society. But we must not condemn all art forms since the first half of the nineteenth century from the pontifical throne of realism-at-all-costs, for we would then fall into the Proudhonian mistake of returning to the past, of putting a straightjacket on the artistic expression of the man who is being born and who is in the process of making himself. What is needed is the development of an ideological-cultural mechanism that permits both free inquiry and the uprooting of the weeds that multiply so easily in the fertilized

soil of state subsidies.

In our country, the error of mechanical realism has not appeared, but, rather, its opposite. This is because the need for the creation of a new man has not been understood: a new man who would represent neither the ideas of the nineteenth century nor those of our own decadent and morbid century. What we must create is the man of the twenty-first century, although this is still a subjective aspiration, not yet systematized. This is precisely one of the fundamental objectives of our study and our work. To the extent that we achieve concrete success on a theoretical plane—or, vice versa, to the extent that we draw theoretical conclusions of a broad character on the basis of our concrete research—we will have made a valuable contribution to Marxism-Leninism, to the cause of humanity. By reacting against the man of the nineteenth century, we have relapsed into the decadence of the twentieth century. It is not a very grave error, but we must overcome it lest we leave the door open for revisionism.

The great multitudes continue to develop. The new ideas are gaining a good momentum within society. The material possibilities for the integrated development of absolutely all members of society make the task much more fruitful. The present is a time of struggle; the future is ours.

To sum up, the fault of many of our artists and intellectuals lies in their original sin: they are not true revolutionaries. We can try to graft the elm tree so that it will bear pears, but at the same time we must plant pear trees. New generations will come that will be free of original sin. The probability that great artists will appear will be greater to the degree that the field of culture and the possibilities for expression are broadened.

Our task is to prevent the current generation, torn asunder by its conflicts, from becoming perverted and from perverting new generations. We must not create either docile servants of official thought, or ‘scholarship students’ who live at the expense of the state, practising freedom in quotation marks. Revolutionaries will come who will sing the song of the new man in the true voice of the people. This is a process that takes time. In our society, youth and the Party play a big part.

Youth are especially important because they are the malleable clay from which the new man can be built with none of the old defects. Youth are treated in accordance with our aspirations. Their education is every day more complete, and we do not neglect their incorporation into work from the outset. Our scholarship students do physical work during their vacations or along with their studies. Work is a reward in some cases, a means of education in others, but it is never a punishment. A new generation is being born.

The Party is a vanguard organization. It is made up of the best workers, who are proposed for membership by their fellow workers. It is a minority, but it has great authority because of the quality of its cadres. Our aspiration is for the Party to become a mass Party, but only when the masses have reached the level of the vanguard, that is, when they are educated for communism. Our work constantly strives towards this education. The Party is the living example; its cadres must teach hard work and sacrifice. Through their action, they must lead the masses to the completion of the revolutionary task, which involves years of hard struggle against the difficulties of construction, class enemies, the maladies of the past, imperialism . . .

I would like to explain the role played by personality, by man as an individual leading

the masses that make history. This is our experience; it is not a formula.

Fidel gave the Revolution its momentum in the first years, and also its leadership. He always set its tone; but there is a good group of revolutionaries who are developing along the same road as the central leader. And there is a great mass that follows its leaders because it has faith in them. It has faith in those leaders because they have known how to interpret its aspirations.

It is not a matter of how many kilograms of meat one has to eat, or of how many times a year someone can go to the beach, or how many pretty things from abroad you might be able to buy with present-day wages. It is a matter of making the individual feel more complete, with much more inner wealth and much more responsibility. The individual in our country knows that the glorious period in which they happen to live is one of sacrifice; he is familiar with sacrifice. The first ones came to know it in the Sierra Maestra and wherever they fought; later, all of Cuba came to know it. Cuba is the vanguard of America and must make sacrifices because it occupies a forward position, because it shows the masses of Latin America the road to full freedom.

Within the country, the leadership has to carry out its vanguard role. It must be said with all sincerity that, in a real revolution to which one gives his all and from which one expects no material reward, the task of the vanguard revolutionary is both magnificent and agonizing.

At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality. Perhaps it is one of the great dramas of the leader that he must combine a passionate

spirit with a cold intelligence and make painful decisions without flinching. Our vanguard revolutionaries must idealize this love of the people, of the most sacred causes, and make it one and indivisible. They cannot descend, with small doses of daily affection, to the places where ordinary men put their love into practice.

The leaders of the Revolution have children who, uttering their first words, have not yet learned to say 'father'; their wives, too, must be part of the general sacrifice of their lives in order to take the Revolution to its destiny. The circle of their friends is limited strictly to the circle of comrades in the Revolution. There is no life outside of it.

In these circumstances, one must have a large dose of humanity, a large dose of a sense of justice and truth in order to avoid falling into dogmatic extremes, cold scholasticism, or isolation from the masses. We must strive every day so that this love of living humanity is transformed into concrete deeds, into acts that serve as examples, as a mobilizing force.

The revolutionary, the ideological motor force of the revolution within his Party, is consumed by this uninterrupted activity that comes to an end only with death, unless the construction of socialism is accomplished on a world scale. If his revolutionary zeal is blunted when the most urgent tasks have been accomplished on a local scale and he forgets about proletarian internationalism, the revolution he leads will cease to be a driving force and sink into a comfortable drowsiness that imperialism—our irreconcilable enemy—will take advantage of this to gain ground. Proletarian internationalism is a duty, but it is also a revolutionary necessity. This is how we educate our people.

Of course there are dangers in the present

situation; not only that of dogmatism and not only that of freezing the ties with the masses midway in the great task. There is also the danger of the weaknesses that we can fall into. If a man thinks that dedicating his entire life to the revolution means that he cannot be distracted by worries such as his child lacking certain things, that his children's shoes are worn out, that his family lacks some necessity, this reasoning allows the seeds of future corruption to infiltrate. In our case, we have maintained that our children must have, or lack, those things that the children of the ordinary citizen have or lack; our families must understand this and struggle for it to be that way. The revolution is made through man, but man must forge their revolutionary spirit day by day.

And so we march on. At the head of the immense column—we are neither ashamed nor afraid to say it— is Fidel. After him come the best cadres of the Party, and immediately behind them, so close that we feel its tremendous force, come the people in their entirety, a solid structure of individuals moving towards a common goal, individuals who have attained consciousness of what must be done, men who fight to escape from the realm of necessity and to enter the realm of freedom.

This great throng organizes itself; its organization is a result of its consciousness of the necessity of this organization. It is no longer a dispersed force, divisible into thousands of fragments thrown into the air like splinters from a hand grenade, trying by any means in a heated struggle with their equals to achieve some protection from an uncertain future.

We know that sacrifices lie ahead and that we must pay a price for the heroic fact that we are, as a nation, a vanguard. We, as leaders, know that we must pay a price for the right to

say that we are at the head of a people that is at the head of America. Each and every one of us readily pays his quota of sacrifice, conscious of being rewarded with the satisfaction of fulfilling a duty, conscious of advancing with everyone towards the new man who can be glimpsed in the horizon.

Allow me to draw some conclusions:

We socialists are freer because we are more fulfilled; we are more fulfilled because we are freer.

The skeleton of our complete freedom is already formed. The flesh and the clothing are lacking; we will create them.

Our freedom and its daily sustenance are the colour of blood; they are filled with sacrifice.

Our sacrifice is a conscious one: an instalment paid on the freedom that we are building.

The road is long and, in part, unknown. We recognize our limitations. We ourselves will make the man of the twenty-first century.

We will forge ourselves in daily action, creating a new man with a new technology.

Individuals play a role in mobilizing and leading the masses insofar as they embody the highest virtues and aspirations of the people and do not wander from the path.

Clearing the way is the vanguard group, the best among the good, the Party.

Youth are the fundamental clay of our work; we place our hope in them and prepare them to take the banner from our hands.

If this rambling letter brings clarity to anything, it has accomplished the objective that motivated it.

Accept our ritual greeting, which is like a handshake or an 'Ave Maria Purísima': Patria o muerte! ('Homeland or death!') ■