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# Percepción y Periodismo: Bohemia in 1950s Cuba

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# PERCEPCIÓN Y PERIODISMO: *BOHEMIA* IN 1950S CUBA

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

in

The Department of History

by

Jeffrey E. O'Brien

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## ABSTRACT

*Bohemia* is perhaps one of the most popularly used sources among Cuban historians because of its array of content. For the vast majority of scholars, the use of *Bohemia's* content is utilized to put the nature of the Cuban Revolution in perspective. Rarely have historians ever analyzed *Bohemia* itself, as a publication. What is intriguing is that historians who analyze the Cuban Revolution usually conclude the *leit motif* of the insurrection evolved around—and was prompted by—the rupture of the constitutional order. *Bohemia*, as a magazine committed to democracy—free speech, transparency, fair elections, and so on—provides an important way to see the unraveling of the constitutional order in Cuba. By analyzing *Bohemia* as a journalistic reflection of Cuban democracy, the anger associated with Cuba's republican democracy being thwarted by Batista's becomes clear. In essence, *Bohemia* is not just a key to understanding the Cuban Revolution, but a key to understanding the very nature and the undoing, of Republican Cuba.

In the dawn of Republican Cuba (1902-1959), journalist and editor Miguel Angel Quevedo Perez undertook the task of creating an illustrated weekly magazine. *Bohemia* was unveiled with little fanfare, the lack of early attention is a disappointing yet accurate descriptor of Quevedo Perez's time as director. In 1926, his son, Quevedo de la Lastra, took the helm of the magazine and recognized similar themes of progressive reform clamored for during that year's presidential campaign. The product Quevedo envisioned balanced the cultural aspects bestowed to the publication by his father, with the addition of a social and political arm. With this step, *Bohemia* marketed itself as the democratic voice of the Cuban people.

Quevedo determined to keep *Bohemia* unaligned from any particular government or privately owned corporation during his editorial oversight. Quevedo's strategy left the messages

and ideas within each issue unencumbered by outside influence. The magazine's diverse content, and belief its ideas should not come with strings attached, resulted in a product readers could trust during a period of democratic crisis and scandal. When Cubans read *Bohemia*, they actively engaged with a tangible piece of Cuban democracy.

## INTRODUCTION

*Bohemia* is perhaps one of the most popularly used sources among Cuban historians because of its wide array of content. For that reason historians have used its content to make broader arguments about Cuba, never properly taking into consideration the core nature of the publication as one of Republican Cuba's key democratic institutions. Content such as private advertisements, reviews of nightlife events, or an overall lack of constructive representation within the magazine's pages has helped scholars make sense of Cuba's conflictive past over the question of race. Others have used similar content and the reportage of the magazine to evaluate studies on gender and sexuality. One prominent historian, Louis Perez Jr., has made great use of the magazine's content to create a historiography of relations between the United States and Cuba. *Bohemia's* content, for the vast majority of scholars, has been utilized to put the nature of the Cuban Revolution in perspective.<sup>1</sup>

A point of intrigue found among a number of historians who analyze the Cuban Revolution is the conclusion that "by and large the *leit motif* of the insurrection evolved around—and was prompted by—the rupture of the constitutional order." *Bohemia*, as a magazine committed to democracy—free speech, citizen participation, transparency, fair elections, and so on—provides an important way to see the unraveling of the constitutional order in Cuba. The Cuban Revolution overshadows all. And such has been the case with historical analysis of

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<sup>1</sup> For resources on race in Cuba refer to Devyn Spence Benson's *Antiracism in Cuba: The Unfinished Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 2016) or Alejandro de la Fuente's *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill, 2001). As for gender on the island Michele Chase's *Revolution within the Revolution: Women and Gender Politics in Cuba, 1952-1962* (Chapel Hill, 2015) and K. Lynn Stoner's *From the House to the Streets* (Durham, 1991). In regards to the Perez's work refer to *On Becoming Cuba: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (Chapel Hill, 1999) and *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* (New York, 1988).



Cuba's media. Historians have looked simply at pro or anti-Batista or Castro indicators.<sup>2</sup> The same is true for *Bohemia*. Historian Patricia Calvo González concluded that *Bohemia* drew “that mystical and romantic image of the guerrilla and raised Fidel Castro as the undisputed leader of the rebellion.” By dichotomizing print media, more specifically *Bohemia*, into pro-or-anti camps, historians have missed the point of the magazine's intimate relationship with democracy. My thesis argues that *Bohemia* was committed to the idea of Cuban democracy and the removal of Batista through peaceful means as to preserve the security of the people and Cuban democracy.<sup>3</sup>

*Bohemia's* diffusion within democratic society developed the magazine into *the* prominent symbol of Cuban democracy. Quevedo's determination to keep *Bohemia* unaligned from any particular government or privately owned corporation left the messages and ideas within each issue unencumbered by outside influence and coercion. Regardless of what concerned Cubans about their society they could rely on *Bohemia* to share, reflect, and expand on the issues that resonated with the population. In addition, Cubans who sought entertainment and enlightenment also found solace within *Bohemia's* pages. The magazine's assortment of content left the door open for readers to identify their priorities and immerse themselves in the corresponding content. In fact, one of their popular slogans, “*Bohemia* sells for only fifteen cents; that is our price,” displays the minimal expectation the magazine expected from their readers regarding their attachment and agreement to the content. This belief fits nicely into G.

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<sup>2</sup> Aside from Patricia Calvo Gonzalez, Lillian Guerra's *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959-1971* (Chapel Hill, 2012) attributes resistance to Batista as *Bohemia's* source of success and pro- Castro mission. Sara Cooper's “Humorismo en Cuba: *Bohemia* Comics from The Year of the Revolution,” *Kunapipi*, 30 (2008), 116-135, claim that upon Fidel's triumph *Bohemia* immediately fell in line with Revolutionary government that Castro himself was not yet officially in control.

<sup>3</sup> Ramón L. Bonachea and Marta San Martín, *The Cuban Insurrection, 1952-1959* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1974), 2.; Patricia Calvo González, “Visions from the Inside: The Cuban Insurrection through the *Diario de la Marina* and *Bohemia*,” *História* 33, no. 2 (December 2014): 371, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1980-436920140002000017>.

Stuart Adam and Roy Peter Clark’s belief that it is the obligation of the journalist, or in this case the magazine as a whole, to “incarnate ideals that promote individual freedom and collective life.” The combination of the magazine’s diverse content and belief that it did not come with strings attached promoted a product in which Cuban readers could independently engage with outside the auspices of political party. Therefore when Cubans read *Bohemia*, they actively consumed a tangible piece of Cuban democracy.<sup>4</sup>

While *Bohemia* may be a physical piece of democracy its readers could touch and consume, my argument is nearly baseless if the circulation of the magazine is not put into context. To this effect, Quevedo never shied from sharing the magazine’s success with its readers. In a 1953 editorial, *Bohemia* became the “first publication in Cuba today, with a circulation of more than a million copies a month.” After a lapse in censorship decrees by Batista, *Bohemia*’s first normal edition was read by a resounding three and a half million people. The Cuban population in 1953 resided right around 5.8 million inhabitants. The year of 1953 was the last census before the Revolution, and it registered Cuba’s literacy rate at 76.4 percent. *Bohemia* even won awards because of its circulation. For instance, in the spring of 1953, the Association of Advertisers of Cuba bestowed an award on the general-interest magazine for its “magnificent distribution, which makes it an excellent advertising vehicle.”<sup>5</sup>

*Bohemia*’s role in Cuban society is closely tied to the beginnings of Cuba’s Republic era. In the dawn of Republican Cuba (1902-1959) journalist and editor Miguel Angel Quevedo Perez

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<sup>4</sup> “El 45<sup>th</sup> Aniversario de ‘Bohemia,’” *Bohemia*, May 10, 1953, 3.; G. Stuart Adam and Roy Peter Clark, *Journalism: The Democratic Craft* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), xcii.

<sup>5</sup> “El Aniversario,” 3.; Louis Perez Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 224.; *ibid.*, 278.; Lillian Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959-1971* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 42.; “El Aniversario,” 3.

undertook the task of creating an illustrated weekly magazine. The unveiling of *Bohemia* met with little fanfare, a disappointing yet accurate descriptor of Quevedo Perez's time as director, in the midst of the second U.S. intervention (1906-1908). After a fateful decision made by the unstable Estrada Palma Presidency, U.S. Marines landed on the island 1906 to quell the "August Revolution." These forces spent a majority of their time mapping out the island. Until 1909 the United States and the contingency of the Marines ran the Cuban government. The increased American influence on the island was the reason for the deployment of the Marines. Historian Louis Perez reiterates that American influence before the intervention was quite deep and American citizens owned the majority of Cuba's rural property. Essentially, under the Platt Amendment (1902) Cubans had created a sovereign nation in which they never fully controlled or benefitted.<sup>6</sup>

It is not difficult to imagine then that *Bohemia* suffered just as Cuba did. Cuba's people inherited a "stagnant and poor colony" as a result of war and Spanish colonialism. In its transition to a sovereign nation, Cubans came face to face with further uncertainty as the future of the nation was clouded by the overwhelming presence of a pseudo-colonial power. But it is important to remember that the Constitution that put constraints on Cuba through the Platt Amendment also ensured that "every person may freely, without censorship, express his thoughts either by word or in writing." From its first edition in May of 1908, until Quevedo Perez's son, Miguel Angel Quevedo de la Lastra, took the helm in 1926 at the youthful age of eighteen, *Bohemia* gasped for life as it searched for attention needed to thrive.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 115-116; Perez, *Between Reform*, 151.

<sup>7</sup> "Exhortacion de Año Nuevo," *Bohemia*, December 28, 1952, 83.; "Cuba 1904 Const. title 4 § art. 25," Constitution of the Republic of Cuba, Archive.org, accessed February 5, 2018,

Quevedo de la Lastra took the helm of the magazine from his father in 1926 and recognized similar themes of reform and progressivism Gerardo Machado clamored for during his presidential campaign. Without abandoning his father’s vision of a literary magazine, Quevedo de la Lastra painstakingly began sculpting the publication he envisioned. The product Quevedo foresaw balanced the cultural aspects—bestowed to the publication by his father—with the incorporation of a social and political arm. Quevedo expanded the magazine to include thought-provoking opinion pieces on current topics, which allowed *Bohemia* to take the first steps to marketing itself as the democratic voice of the Cuban people.<sup>8</sup>

The restoration of honest government began with the passage of the Constitution of 1940 and its full implementation with the election of 1944. Historian Charles Ameringer states that the period from 1944-1952, under the Auténtico government, offers “a sense of the only time in their history when Cubans had the opportunity to be free.” Not exempt from this claim *Bohemia* wrestled free of its adolescence and hit its stage of maturity where it fully enjoyed the freedom of expression, perhaps the greatest gift of the Auténtico years. Maturity, for *Bohemia*, meant adhering to its founding mission and the embrace of an ideology that promoted a social responsibility for media. The magazine became so committed to the ideals of an honest democratic society it referred to itself as one of the ‘five aces of Cuban democracy.’<sup>9</sup>

Miguel Angel Quevedo became such an ardent proponent of democracy he arranged a meeting with ex-Venezuelan President Romulo Betancourt (1945-1948) and other members of the Caribbean Legion to plot a new strategy against the Dominican Republic dictator Rafael

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<https://archive.org/details/translationprop00cubagoog>; “Obituary 7,” *New York Times*, November 15, 1929, 20.

<sup>8</sup> Luis Aguilar, *Cuba 1933: Prologue to Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 51-52.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.; *ibid.*, 185.

Trujillo (1930-1961).<sup>10</sup> The magazine even published the details of the meeting. *Bohemia's* pages were open to all opinions, whether cultural, political, foreign, or domestic. Although a great deal of space was taken up to denounce the corruption and failures of the Auténtico government, *Bohemia* never shied from championing a decision or policy it viewed to be in Cuba's best interest.<sup>11</sup> Thousands of Cubans took note. During the democratic experience, *Bohemia's* circulation expanded to over one hundred thousand copies. Clearly experiencing heightened success and influence, it forged ahead with the assumption democracy would prevail.<sup>12</sup>

In the first chapter, the editorial page is identified as the official voice of the magazine and analyzes the messages it transmitted to *Bohemia's* massive readership. The editorial page is the sole place where we find the publication's mission clearly articulated. The editorials provide perhaps the most productive source of information for understanding *Bohemia's* admiration and definition of democracy. The magazine defined democracy by its adherence to, and outspoken defense of, the freedom of the press. Without the protection given to the press, Cubans were denied the enjoyment and benefit of a democratic institution, *Bohemia's* editors argued. The most prevalent message in *Bohemia's* editorial page is the condemnation of all violence. *Bohemia* recognized the vast majority of its readers were not actively engaged in carrying out violent acts against other Cubans and simply wanted to get on with their lives. Therefore,

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<sup>10</sup> Charles Ameringer, *The Caribbean Legion: Patriots, Politicians, Soldiers of Fortune, 1946-1950* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 9. Ameringer refers to the "Caribbean Legion" as a "general staff" of exiles that made up the anti-dictatorial struggle in the Caribbean in post-WWII years.

<sup>11</sup> Charles D. Ameringer, *The Cuban Democratic: The Auténtico Years, 1944-1952* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2000), 85. The creation of the Group for the Repression of Subversive Activities (GRAS) is similar to the United States FBI to battle gangsterismo.

<sup>12</sup> Ameringer, *The Cuban Democratic*, 104.; "About Us," *Bohemia Revista*, accessed December 12, 2017, <http://bohemia.cu/quienes-somos/>.

*Bohemia* articulated its editorial page to represent itself as a staunch defender of peace for the Cuban people. *Bohemia* offered the Cuban people a vision of democracy without the threat of violence, political or otherwise. The publication, therefore, became a voice for the Cuban majority, who desired peace, stability, and protection under the law. Because the magazine believed it was the voice of Cuba, it extended their defense to all Cubans.

Chapters two and three will serve as counterpoints to the outright declarations made on the editorial page. Moreover, we will find that the work under discussion in these chapters—investigative reporting and cartoons—better represent “the buoyant rhythm” of the magazine “to serve the spiritual recreation and moral conviction” of the Cuban people. The contributors analyzed in both of these chapters had just begun to carve out a recurring place within the pages of *Bohemia* in the late fifties. Although their subject matter was starkly different and less overtly political, they reflected prominent ideas and issues within Cuban society.<sup>13</sup>

The ability for *Bohemia*'s readers to find content important to them is contingent on the freedom of expression promised and practiced by Miguel Angel Quevedo. *Bohemia*'s contributors are practitioners of individual expression cultivated by the desires of the editor-in-chief. Each piece published by Cabrera and Wilson, therefore, is inseparable from the democratic idea of freedom of expression outlined in each of Cuba's Republican constitutions (1901, 1940). But it is deeper than that; both contributors developed content that, in varying degrees, make Cuban society more transparent. The transparency provided by such journalistic actors provides the opportunity for entertainment and serious discussion to intermingle for the further benefit of reflecting “the values of collective life.” Regarding the collective life Roy Clark and G. Stuart Adam state: “the richer the portrait, the richer the possibilities of democratic life.” Therefore the

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<sup>13</sup> “El Pueblo Tiene Una Nueva Casa,” *Bohemia*, December 23, 1956, 59.

work of these two *Bohemia* contributors represents pieces of the portrait, based in individual freedom of expression, provided to the readers to better inform them of the totality of the society in which they live.<sup>14</sup>

Chapter two provides an in-depth analysis of investigative journalist Luis Rolando Cabrera's reportage. The primary drive of the reporter was violent crime in Cuba. This chapter explores how Cabrera approached his work as an inseparable mixture of news reporting and literature. Later in life, the journalist compared his breed of journalism to that of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*. Both writers magnificently "extracted a new and serious artistic form: the novel without fiction." This chapter adopts Cabrera's journalistic beliefs as an approach that simply uses the deaths of Cubans as a placeholder so he could build emotion in readers, all the while creating a visceral scene to comment on broader issues than the death of a Cuban. For Cabrera crime and death offered opportunity to curate a social commentary for Cubans to consume while being entertained. *Bohemia*, in essence, allowed for a democratic space in which Cubans could reflect on the meaning of life, death, and violence in society.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, the last chapter explores the role of the Cuban *mulata* within the context of *Bohemia's* humor pages. The cartoonist Luis Felipe Wilson Valera created a cartoon narrative in the last full year of the Cuban insurrection (1958) entitled *Chicas de Wilson*. His decision to utilize the most visible indicator of Cuban identity in no way was an attempt to remove the *mulata* out of the constraints of the male gaze. The *mulata* has a long history of simultaneously being visible and invisible because she is known for her beauty and sexuality but symbolized as nothing else. Therefore, Wilson's cartoons never stray from belittling the *mulata* when she

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<sup>14</sup> Clark and Adam, *Democratic Craft*, xvii.; *ibid.*, xi.

<sup>15</sup> Luis Rolando Cabrera, *Anatomía del Repotaje* (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 1982), 92.

attempts to be something more than a sexual commodity for men. In as much as the cartoons did not envision a revolutionary or even progressive vision of gender and race, *Bohemia* remained a magazine committed to traditional Cuban identities and gender relations. The traditionalism underscores *Bohemia's* attachment to democratic ideals as it rejected radicalism that could have associated it with a political group.



## **CHAPTER ONE: DEFENDER OF DEMOCRACY: THE VOICE OF CUBA**

As a general-interest magazine *Bohemia* subjected itself to a mountainous task of trying to provide content to such a swath of the reading public. The magazine included political editorials; a society page; international, national and regional news; horoscopes; historical vignettes; a recipe section; sports; fashion; crosswords; movie reviews; short fiction; technological and medical advances and humor pages. With such an array of subjects, many historians have cherry-picked *Bohemia's* content to support larger arguments which meant their definitions of the magazine were a product of this partial understanding. The different ways in which historians have interpreted *Bohemia* was laid out in the introduction. So we are left with the question: How did *Bohemia* define itself as an institution? Secondly, what did *Bohemia's* editors believe was its place in Cuban society was? As with other publications—in the United States, for instance—often the best place to look for a periodical's self-definition is on the editorial page.<sup>16</sup>

The true voice of the magazine lies in its editorial page. *Bohemia*, which does not stray from American journalistic practices, utilizes the editorial page as “the thought of an institution.” Clay Felker, the founding editor of the magazine *New York*, observed the human element embedded in journalism when he stated “the vitality of a magazine” depends on “the vitality of one man's editorial dream.” Just as the editorial page defined the institution, the source of its editorial vision sprang from Quevedo's dream for the magazine. The editorial page provides the clearest articulations of *Bohemia's* understanding of its role in Cuban society. Even Fulgencio

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<sup>16</sup> Sara Cooper, “Humorismo en Cuba: Bohemia Comics from the Year of the Revolution,” *Kunapipi*, 30 (1), 2008. <http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol30/iss1/11>.

Batista's Ministry of the Interior recognized the mission of *Bohemia's* editorial page and its potential to influence and called it out by name in censorship decrees forwarded to the magazine.<sup>17</sup>

*Bohemia* embraced a role in Cuban society as a defender of democracy and the rights democracy provided to the magazine and its readers. The editorial page consistently criticized attacks on Constitutional guarantees which threatened *Bohemia's* ability to report on further overreaches by the Batista regime. Restrictions on the freedom of press hampered the magazine's ability to put forward a true democratic product for its readers because it retracted all content regarding political opinions and events. However, the most frequent concern the magazine dealt with was the continual attacks against the Cuban people. The relationship between readers and *Bohemia* was reciprocal; the magazine relied on the people to gather the feelings of the nation and the people relied on the magazine to articulate these feelings. The defense of the Cuban people meant the defense of *Bohemia's* democratic message. The effects of censorship by Batista prompted the magazine to write about Cuban politics obliquely. The periodical wrote scathing pieces about American dictators as an alternative to Batista. Its readers could easily draw comparisons about life without democracy. These themes dominated the editorial page, which established a narrative that attempted to undercut the legitimacy of current or future tyranny. But the magazine sculpted this position, as a defender of democracy, through decades of criticism aimed at *any* Cuban government that misrepresented or misled the will of the people. *Bohemia* was not only critical of Batista, in other words. The magazine criticized all regimes that failed live up to a democratic ideal. Thus the magazine presented itself as the democratic authority

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<sup>17</sup> William Rivers, Bryce McIntyre and Alison Work, *Writing Opinion, Editorials* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1988), 10.; Clay S. Felker, "Life Cycles in the Age of Magazines," *The Antioch Review* 29, no. 1 (1969), 13.; "Republica de Cuba Ministerio de Gobernacion," *Bohemia*, January 20, 1957, 73.

Cubans could call on in times of need. *Bohemia's* foreign audiences, moreover, could rely on the magazine for reliable insight into the troubling issues on the island.

### Irredeemable Actions

*Bohemia's* editors held a staunch belief that a return to democratic procedures could solve the political crisis brought on by Batista. The editors employed different approaches to emphasize their concerns over the violence in the country. Most obviously they condemned Batista and the forces that acted on his behalf. The magazine's stance is due to the fact that "untold numbers of men and women lived life uninvolved in the pursuit of nation" yet they increasingly became the targets. Victimized Cubans were not just the result of government attacks but insurrectionists who acted with little direction to spread sabotage. On most occasions, these editorials came in response to an uptick in violence throughout the island or especially destructive events. Quite obvious direct calls for peace were plentiful yet rarely came to define an editorial as a whole. Also, easily recognizing Cuba's tumultuous past with sovereignty the editorial writers benefitted their readers by invoking their shared history with the struggle for sustained sovereignty. Even more evident were the defenses and reminders to readers of *Bohemia's* convictions in conjunction with the ongoing struggle.<sup>18</sup>

Early on in Batista's illegitimate presidency—he took power without elections—*Bohemia* constructively made use of the historical vignettes, which had been a recurrent theme throughout the year, to encourage Cubans to action. While *Bohemia* often incorporated calls to action in their editorials throughout the fifties these initial calls in the uneasy days present an uncharacteristic aspect of *Bohemia*. The promoted message was irregular, but the concern was

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<sup>18</sup> Julia Sweig, *Inside the Cuban Revolution: Fidel Castro and the Urban Underground* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 42.

genuine. Just before the anniversary of the 1940 Constitution, the magazine reminded readers the obtainment of freedom derived from the edge of the machete that culminated in the struggle throughout the *manigua*.<sup>19</sup> The editorial made the audacious statement that historically “Cubans have mobilized to raise their claims, to demand of the Metropolis [Havana] a better deal, to conspire in secret societies, to enlist, the patriots, in short, the patriots in a revolutionary determination that would cause much havoc and many lives.” By highlighting Cubans’ shared past of the independence wars and other struggles against tyrants, such as Machado, *Bohemia* connected the current struggle to the attainment of freedom.<sup>20</sup>

Although this connection represents an irregularity in the magazine’s body of work, it raises a salient detail about *Bohemia*. The magazine would not shy from its position as a defender of freedom and carefully proved this with the employment of national history to invigorate its readers to resist Batista’s bid for power. The fact the magazine did so at this time make us able to make a few judgments. The first is the point raised by historian Louis Perez, that the opposition against Batista was extremely disorganized and ineffective. No longer could Cubans “adopt an attitude of apathy toward their government.” Secondly, Batista’s constant presence in Cuba’s political scene truly perturbed *Bohemia* as he yet again disrupted the stability of the nation. His refusal to exit the national scene once again stirred fears of “the growing power of the military.” Lastly, national holidays, such as the installation of the 1940 Constitution<sup>21</sup>, were the rare and fitting journalistic occasions to amplify nationalistic themes for purposes of

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<sup>19</sup> A term for the forest in which the Cuban Independence Army fought its guerilla warfare campaign

<sup>20</sup> “Ante Un Nuevo 20 de Mayo,” *Bohemia*, May 17, 1953, 3.

<sup>21</sup> The Constitution of 1940 guaranteed work as inalienable right to the individual, declared primary education free to every citizen, and continued to support the desire for President’s to be unable to seek reelection. Charles Ameringer mentions the Constitution of 1940 has been referred to as “one of the most liberal and progressive ever written in the American hemisphere.” For further detail refer to Charles Ameringer’s *The Cuban Democratic Experience*.

collective action. All of this is to say that *Bohemia*, the ardent supporter of Cuban freedom, worried that Cubans lackluster response to the attack on their Republic spelled the end of the Republic.<sup>22</sup>

The responses to Batista's actions were not immediate, however. Fidel Castro's July 26<sup>th</sup> Movement (M26-7), Carlos Prío's Auténtico Organization, and José Antonio Echeverría's Student Revolutionary Directorate organized to resist the dictator by violent means. What *Bohemia* did not recognize in their attempt to inspire a response from Cubans is that discontent ran deep enough to incite violent responses. Although the actions of oppositionists largely did not loosen Batista's grip on power early on, *Bohemia* quickly recognized the promotion of violence undermined the safety of its readers. Just days after the Granma landed in swamps off the northwestern coast of the Oriente province the Batista government erroneously declared Castro dead and buried. But the violence that preceded the landing sparked *Bohemia* to internalize what it constituted as Cuban nationalism—a rejection of violence and a cross-class, cross-racial collective movement.

Many of the prominent nationalist leaders of Cuba's independence movement expressed the idea that Cuba had become a land where “‘Cuban’ means more than white, more than mulatto, more than Negro.” And “on the battlefields, the souls of whites and blacks who died for Cuba have risen together through the air.” *Bohemia* adopted this idea, altered it slightly in hopes of stopping the violence between Cubans. The magazine did not distinguish in the death of any Cuban because they “are all children of this land” and ultimately want “to live and work in peace.” Later in the month, the editorialists reiterated the point that all bloodshed is Cuban blood

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<sup>22</sup> Leonard Ray Teel, *Reporting the Cuban Revolution* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 13.; Frank Argote-Freyre, *Fulgencio Batista* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 127.

no matter if it touches “the home of the military man fallen in the line of duty or of the insurgent who takes up weapons.” This shared sense of all Cubans being affected, shaped the editorialists’ message as the winter holidays approached. Cubans viewed Christmas and the New Year, they wrote, as “essential to forget for a moment the evidence of existence.”<sup>23</sup>

Behind these messages of unity in death, *Bohemia* was steadfast in its opposition to the regime. *Bohemia* reasoned that Cuba’s uniformed men could never be wholly absolved for their hand in the destruction of families. To highlight their distaste towards State repression the magazine conjured horrors of the Machado era after onslaughts by Batista forces like the “monstrous and inhuman cluster of twenty-three men killed” in response to a work stoppage in Santiago. The magazine referred to this mass slaying as a spectacle reminiscent of Machado henchmen Arsenio Ortiz that Cubans believed to be a thing of the past. Cubans who participated in the struggle against Batista “searched for a freedom that does not breathe in their country.” The bloodshed embittered Cuban hearts as families lacked a father, a son, or a brother because of the crisis. For this reason, *Bohemia* offered its greetings “to the Cuban prisoner, exiled and chased, to the humble and selfless son” before offering it to the rest of the nation. Therefore the focus connecting extrajudicial killings in the present, under Batista, to a past Cuban dictator’s made the image of the suffering Cuban a central symbol in the way the magazine defended a people who suffered without democracy.<sup>24</sup>

While *Bohemia* condemned the military man and pitied the Cuban citizen, the magazine acknowledged the detriments of the insurrectionary tactics carried out by M26-7 saboteurs. But

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<sup>23</sup> Jose Marti, *Complete Works*, trans. Esther Allen (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 319.; “Alto Al Fuego,” *Bohemia*, December 9, 1956, 53.; “La Mano Abierta de ‘Bohemia’,” *Bohemia*, December 23, 1956, 57.; “El Pueblo Tiene,” *Bohemia*, 59.

<sup>24</sup> “La Mano,” 57.; “El Pueblo,” 59.

with this critique, the magazine instituted subtle journalistic techniques to develop messages that condemn both sides in the struggle. The last edition of 1956 took on an increasingly dismal tone as *Bohemia's* pleas to stop the violence were going unheard as a new wave of terrorism spiraled out of control. Historian Julia Sweig describes how sabotage units focused on the disruption of Cuban lives in hopes of proving that Batista was unable to stop the terrorism. The editorial began by describing that new wave was targeting official centers—trade—“to the places of healthy and modest popular recreation and important public services, such as those of transport and water supply and light.” Some of *Bohemia's* cartoonists illustrated the routine nature of these destructive tactics as one cartoon depicts a goateed man with a built physique dressed in women's clothing holding a purse full of dynamite standing in line at the movie theatre with the intention of setting the explosives off in the theatre. This type of sabotage effectively reduced the “comfort and the rights of an effective material improvement and moral welfare” of Cubans.<sup>25</sup>

As sabotage became a popular tool for insurrectionists beyond M26-7, the editorialists carefully organized an editorial to inform the readers about their disappointment towards the use of terrorist actions. An editorial published right before 1957 summarized the latest wave of explosions perpetrated by insurrectionists and the magazine declared that it condemned terrorism “without distinguishing between the hands that promote it.” Furthermore, their sad realization that “what was believed to be a transient outbreak tends to be prolonged and aspires for permanence” motivated them to plead to “all those responsible for terrorism, those who provoke

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<sup>25</sup> Sweig, *Inside*, 96,97.; Luis Felipe Wilson Valera, “Humorismo Criollo,” *Bohemia*, July 14, 1957, 158.

it and those who use it clumsily” to “stop the suicidal violence!” For *Bohemia*, the presence of terrorist actions could never bring about true peace.<sup>26</sup>

A photo occasionally accompanied these pleas for peace. The photos alone were meant to evoke emotion that could sway a reader’s opinion. Attached to the editorial entitled *Stop the Terrorism*, is a photo of a Cuban man, middle-aged and balding, who stares without expression into the camera. The man is covered in sweat and blood with bandages that covered his missing hand, and a half of his other arm, after a bomb exploded. The editors used the grisly scene to underline their message: “that no end can justify a despicable means.”<sup>27</sup>

The inclusion of the image of a maimed Cuban was a conscious decision by the editors to highlight the absurdity such actions inflict upon on those who refuse to find a path to peace. The interaction between journalists and rebels was forbidden and left the latter to only write about rebel capture or deaths. In this case, *Bohemia* focused on the maimed bomb maker to further display its utter disapproval toward the violence that kept Cuba from peace. Furthermore, the editors surprisingly expanded the burden of blame for the violence in Cuba to all violent actors regardless of their affiliation when it looked as if they were condemning insurrectionists. This declaration of general guilt stemmed from their larger concern for the promotion of peace. However, a better comprehension of journalistic structure, practiced by *Bohemia*, reveals an ulterior message of the editorial that pinpointed the magazine’s belief Batista’s decision to subvert democracy was the cause for the entire national situation.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> “¡Que Cese la Violencia Suicida!” *Bohemia*, December 31, 1956, 51.

<sup>27</sup> “Alto Al Terrorismo,” *Bohemia*, February 2, 1958, 80.

<sup>28</sup> Teel, *Reporting*, 58.



The most significant dilemma any periodical faces is catching the reader's eye. With such a visceral photograph to grab the reader's attention, the editors needed to unveil the true tone of the piece in the opener. The choice not to open with an anecdote—the maimed Cuban said it all—the editorialists display a subtle defensive appeal, almost a disclaimer, using the photograph as “an imperative of exemplarity” in its mission to describe a fractured nation as a result of violent actions. Thus, the opener benefits the most from the addition of such a shocking image that editorialists need not provide a drawn-out suspenseful story to describe the nature of this incident. However, the opener acts as an independent entity separate from the remaining information in the editorial.<sup>29</sup>

A noticeable transition followed, and the remainder of the editorial takes on a specific structure Michael Robert Evans describes as an *inverted pyramid*. Evans asserts this is a “classic newspaper approach, in which the most important information is given first” with the remaining information revealed on a sliding scale. Therefore we again find that *Bohemia* “severely condemns and without looking at the affiliation of the hand that has caused the havoc and death.” Here in this statement, the editorial made a clear point to denounce not just the action of the sloppy bomb-making but all violent Cubans. By doing so, the magazine refused to let the police and military off the hook for the extrajudicial killings carried out under Batista's name. The structure mentioned earlier made it clear that violence perpetrated by terrorists knew no affiliation and for those who “received the mission of preserving the peace and the lives of the inhabitants of the Republic cannot become an agent of death at the margin of law.” The

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<sup>29</sup> “Alto Al Terrorismo,” 81.

magazine incorporated its negative feelings towards the government by organizing its message properly to capitalize on the emotion readers may feel after seeing the attached photograph.<sup>30</sup>

While this editorial continued to unveil less important information the topic of terrorism and more specifically State terrorism found spurts of life on the editorial page during the “national drama.” For example, *Bohemia’s* editor, Quevedo, was victimized by government forces during the Mendieta’s presidency. The editors used this as proof of the magazine’s long history “as a representative of democratic opinion” that “has a proven militancy against negative violence outbreaks.” While *Bohemia* did not mention any other details about the event, Frank Argote-Freyre author of *Fulgencio Batista* found that *Carteles* published an article that unearthed Quevedo’s kidnapping and forced consumption of castor oil by government forces. *Bohemia*, therefore, used Quevedo’s tragic victimization as a declaration to the current regime that even in the face of potential torture the magazine would not abandon its obligation “as a guardian against governmental encroachments” for the protection of the people. Although *Bohemia’s* attitude towards terrorism and violence acknowledged the perpetration of violent actions by government forces and civilian Cubans alike, it tended to characterize the former as the irresponsible aggressors because the government had the responsibility to protect the individuals it served.<sup>31</sup>

Evident throughout *Bohemia’s* editorial page is the utter disgust towards violence and the devastation it promised to inflict on a nation that not long ago had settled into a period of stability through democratic processes. In these editorials the writers identified an actor, whether passive or active in Cuban society, to provide a personal affiliation for readers to latch on to and

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<sup>30</sup> Michael Robert Evans, *The Layers of Magazine Editing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 179.; “Alto Al Terrorismo,” 81.; “Violencia Negativa,” *Bohemia*, January 6, 1957, 51.

<sup>31</sup> “Violencia Negativa,” 51.; Argote-Freyre, *Batista*, 156-157.; Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm, *Four Theories*, 76.

for foreign readers to widen their understanding of the issues on the island. Moreover, the utmost concern of the magazine was denouncing the use of violence. It built off that point by situating the lion's share of the blame on government forces for their lack of concern to end this war. Editorialists did this through a number of methods: practical and responsible article organization, colorful yet concise language, and invocation of historical parallels.

### The Pitchforks of Press Censorship

The decision to speak out against the violence with such vehemence put *Bohemia* in a group of its own, but the discussion of freedom of the press made Cuba part of a broader movement. In fact, Quevedo usually signed appeals to Batista with the publishers of *Diario de la Marina*, *El Mundo*, *Información*, and more that were members of Inter-American Press Association. The differences *Bohemia* displayed were not necessarily radical; they worked to echo an active resistance against yet another Cuban leader that attacked the freedom of the press. According to historian Patricia Calvo Gonzalez, *Bohemia* limited itself from giving its opinion on censorship, but it did comment when censorship decrees lapsed because the restrictions directly attacked the magazine's ability to produce a genuine reflection of Cuban society. In a time of intense persecution against the media, censorship defined the final years of the decade, making it necessary to remind readers of their purpose. Batista's repeated decision to silence the media positioned Quevedo's publication to rationalize with the government to see the repercussions of their actions. In addition, *Bohemia* still defined its position in the moments when censorship seemed endless by claiming its authority over content control.<sup>32</sup>

In attempts to mitigate the potential economic effects that censorship could cause, a blunt and concise approach was undertaken to define the function of the magazine. Media scholar

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<sup>32</sup> González, "Visions from the Inside," 362-363.

Chilton R. Bush mentions that the editorial may tackle a number of subjects but “aim first at exerting a positive leadership in public affairs.” *Bohemia* parroted this notion as it worried about its main function as an “organ for civil truth” and promotion of “the open forum, perennially open to public opinion” being stolen. In the spring of 1957, *Bohemia* took on the responsibility to speak on behalf of Cuban press bloc with an editorial that stirred feelings of humanity and distinguished the simplicity of the primary function to undertake nothing more “but faithfully reflect the situation in the country.” Another, more eloquent, example stated that newspapers pages “are like mirrors that go through the reality of each day and collect it faithfully” so “it is absurd to blame that mirror for the mere fact that it relentlessly copies an imperfect reality.”<sup>33</sup>

The goal of Batista's censorship decrees was not just to punish critical news outlets, but to create an image of Cuba that did not scare away investors and, more importantly, tourists. Batista “sought to diminish Cuba’s dependence on sugar exports” and “set out to restore the island’s former glory” as a decadent tourist hub. Patricia Calvo Gonzalez stated that Batista not only censored the press for silence but to magnify government propaganda. Furthermore, Batista desired this propaganda as he wanted to “present himself as a magnanimous president who took care of his people.” For this Batista was not successful, and *Bohemia* formed a reasonable approach to protest the government overreach.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Chilton R. Bush, *Editorial Thinking and Writing; a textbook with exercises* (London: Appleton and Company, 1932), 356.; “Lealtad Conmovera que Nunca Olvidaremos,” *Bohemia*, February 2, 1958, 57.; “Nuestra Invariable Actitud,” *Bohemia*, March 3, 1957, supplement 3.

<sup>34</sup> Eduardo Sáenz Rover, *The Cuban Connection: Drug Trafficking, Smuggling, and Gambling in Cuba from the 1920s to the Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 90.; Dennis Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise: U.S. Tourism and Empire in Twentieth-Century Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2009), 112.; González, “Visions,” 351.; *ibid.*, 353.

Quevedo and his staff understood that its readers “have always seen in *Bohemia* a courageous and responsible organ of opinion.” For that reason, the magazine declared its intention to express its “thought on everything with full freedom, or silence our thought for when better times come, when it is possible to bring it [our opinions] to light without hindrance or pretense.” Quevedo and his staff “could not accept to go out on the street with a guided approach” as their readers deserved the whole truth and not tempered critiques and opinions. The retraction of content that followed the bloody events of the insurrection and political commentary meant to protect the integrity of the journalistic institution. But it also served to display to readers it was actively engaged in the national situation. The decision is “not only meant as our protest against that measure, but it was the only worthy response to it.”<sup>35</sup>

As a result of this protest, *Bohemia*’s most thought-provoking and popular sections found little space in the magazine during Batista’s rule. The editorial page, *EnCuba*, and other political commentary pieces were the major retractions. Calvo Gonzalez highlights the fact that *Bohemia* stood by its decision to carry out this protest and wait for times of journalistic freedom to reincorporate its domestic opinion pieces. But she blatantly ignores the fact that *Bohemia* put these ideas out in its editorials when it had the opportunity. The oversight is worth mention because Calvo Gonzalez work highlights a comparison that helps understand the approaches of other major press outlets in Cuba. She found that two major periodicals in Cuba, *Diario de la Marina* and *Bohemia* dealt with censorship differently. The former parroted official statements

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<sup>35</sup> “Nuestra Invariable Actitud,” *Bohemia*, March 3, 1957, supplement 9.; “Después De La Censura,” *Bohemia*, February 2, 1958, 59.; “Nuestra,” sup. 9.

and could be efficiently controlled by the government while *Bohemia* actively waited for a time to undermine Batista's goals, thereby articulating false tranquility on the island.<sup>36</sup>

While the Batista government "censors scissored daily unwelcome stories from imported publications," *Bohemia* put considerable effort to reason with the government about the repercussions of media censorship. Quevedo believed his readers should view censorship as more than just a crime but also a high cost-error. "The news will find multiple substitute instruments to reach the ears of the people," according to one editorial. Alejandra Bronfman argues these unofficial substitutes, rumors and gossip or as Cubans referred to them as "bolas," "shaped popular mobilization and political outcomes." For instance, rumors spread throughout Cuba in 1956 that the Dominican satrap, Rafael Trujillo, was in collusion with Cuban revolutionary groups to overthrow Batista. Castro, according to *Bohemia*, sent the magazine a letter to denounce any connection with Trujillo. The magazine responded in an editorial with a refusal to publish the letter for further exasperating the fear of the Cuban people based on unsubstantiated claims. The potential of such a situation worried the magazine. *Bohemia* believed that even "the most alarming journalistic information is less dangerous than an apparently insignificant rumor" because the "comment 'sotto voce' begins as nothing and ends up with gigantic proportions." Thus, more than simply by expressing itself freely, *Bohemia* contributed to the public peace for responsibly reporting more than unsubstantiated "bolas" that could cause more violence and misunderstanding.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> González, "Visions," 372.

<sup>37</sup> Teel, *Reporting*, 1. "Despues de la Censura," February 2, 1958, 59.; Alejandra Bronfman, "Batista is Dead': Media, Violence, and Politics in 1950s Cuba," *Caribbean Studies*, 40, no.1, 41.; "Bohemia' Ante La Grave Crisis Nacional," *Bohemia*, November 18, 1956, 65.; "Nuestra Invariable," supplement page 9.

Batista's employment of censorship with the added strategy of creating counterpropaganda bullied some press outlets into compliance or pushed them out of business. As mentioned earlier, Calvo Gonzalez's lapse to recognize the institutional message put forward by *Bohemia*—its strategy towards censorship—creates a disconnect from the rest of the material that served as a defense mechanism in the face of suppression. *Bohemia* made intelligent use of its mission and experience through the years to remind its readers it could always be a trusted outlet and that it remained as such. But readers of this comprehensive magazine needed more than a reminder: they needed a warning of the repercussions of censorship. This warning hoped to reach the eyes of those politicians enacting the measures. In the end, *Bohemia* refused to comply and stood with the Cuban people through a subtle, yet combative, protest that did not jeopardize its reputation. *Bohemia* reiterated its oppositional stance towards the government and took advantage of the fleeting moments of press freedom.

### Democratic Voices and Tyrants

Even though *Bohemia* defined its position as a defender of democracy through vehement denunciations against infringements on individual freedom, Quevedo expanded on Cuba's shared history of struggle for independence. Earlier we saw a brief urge by the magazine to use Cuban history to stir Cubans to action. However, it made better use of Cuba's history to connect the ideas for freedom held by the founders to ideas of democracy. All Cubans, according to *Bohemia*, derived its love for freedom and democracy from the independence wars and the heroes enshrined in the struggle against colonialism. By derailing Cuba's democratic regime,

which Bohemia had believed to be stable and immune from attack; Batista put to the test the faith of all Cubans.<sup>38</sup>

Moments of press freedom pushed Bohemia to express the popular understanding of freedom that Cuba's founding fathers held and engrained in the Cuban ethos. For instance, *Bohemia* referred to the *patria* as the land of all Cuba's most revered figures. According to Quevedo, this land is defined by a peace full of dignity "which can only subsist in an environment of respect for popular sovereignty, genuine democracy, and the broad exercise of public liberties." The Republic that the "glorious founders conceived" was never one to represent different classes because it will be an unenthusiastic sight if it came to fruition. Thus by emphasizing the men who played a definitive role in shaping the Republic *Bohemia* could trace a history of freedom and democratic practices Cubans fought so hard for.<sup>39</sup>

During Batista's regime, Cuba had no lack of influential figures that opposed the tyrant and *Bohemia* iterated their place among the island's democratic tradition. One man who shaped Cuba's democracy was Carlos Prio—the last democratically elected President and the man deposed by Batista's coup. In exile in Miami, Prio played a large role in organizing the expedition of the *Corinthia*, an undertaking to attack the island, adopting the same outline as Fidel and his *Granma* expedition. But in February 1958 Prio was arrested along with eight other Cuban conspirators for these insurrectionary activities. Prio's arrest was a response by the United States cracking down on Cuban revolutionary activity within its borders.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., sup. 9.; "Despsues," 59.; "Exhoracion de Año Nuevo," 113.

<sup>39</sup> "Ante un Nuevo," 3.

<sup>40</sup> Sweig, *Inside*, 92.



Cubans responded to a respected ex-President's arrest with contempt and *Bohemia* reported on the scenes that unraveled in the aftermath. From the streets of Miami to Dade County prison *Bohemia* described that Prio's arrest "provoked protests not only in Cuba, but also in the entire free America." Prio's treatment as a common criminal by the police was the reason for the uproar. *Bohemia* painted a snapshot of American democracy as a "chained Prio, between cops, by central Floger street, with hundreds of Cubans behind singing the anthem of his homeland." The police treated the ex-President as if he were a violent "gunslinger" even though he turned himself in when he heard a warrant was out for his arrest. This treatment is what sparked outrage among Cubans and its perennial voice. *Bohemia* questioned how "a friendly nation, governed by democratic laws, infers the mistreatment of leading" a democratic leader "away in irons." Finally, *Bohemia* acknowledged its past denunciations of Prio during his Presidency but respect the man for winning the position through the popular vote.<sup>41</sup>

For *Bohemia* the defense of the Cuban people meant the defense of the individual freedoms endowed by a democratic society. So when particular Cubans also took it upon themselves to make Cuba and its government more transparent and accountable they could find refuge knowing their cause was supported by Quevedo. One such figure was Pelayo Cuervo Navarro. The Senator and head of the *Ortodoxo* party had his law firm "pushing through the courts the charge against Grau for misappropriation of \$174,000,000 during his administration." But to understand the depth of *Bohemia's* devotion to men like Cuervo it is important to put into context the events that led to Cuervo's death.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> "Una Hecho Incalificable," *Bohemia*, February 23, 1958, 77.

<sup>42</sup> R. Hart Philips, *Cuba: Island of Paradox* (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1959), 307.

Perhaps the only legitimate opposition force in the capital was the Revolutionary Directorate (DR), a militant wing of the University Student Federation. Leaders Faure Chomon and Jose Antonio Echevarría wanted to strike a blow at the corrupt regime: "the physical liquidation of the tyrant in the Presidential Palace." The attack consisted of a force to storm the Palace while Echevarría and a smaller force took over the CMQ radio station to declare Batista's death and inspire the people to action. However, promised reinforcements never arrived at the Palace, and the revolutionaries were cut down. *New York Times* reporter R. Hart Philips recounted that "even after the attackers had been killed and order had been restored in the palace, soldiers, sailors, police and army tanks surrounding the palace kept right on firing." The firing went on for hours before a sense of normalcy returned, the military shot at anything that moved. Later, Batista's forces found retribution in the late hours hunting down the remaining members of the attack. But one victim stuck out as an oddity, Pelayo Cuervo Navarro. His body was discovered alongside the Country Club Lake outside of Havana.<sup>43</sup>

In response to Cuervo's slaying, *Bohemia* published an editorial titled *No More Blood, Cubans!* covering the tragic events that left bodies scattered throughout Havana. While the events of the Palace assault "will always be marked in the memory of all citizens" the murder of Cuervo upset *Bohemia* beyond reproach. The magazine set aside a large portion of the editorial for a dedication to his life. "Pelayo was a political fighter, a tough character, iron will, energetic; whose unique weapons were the word and citizen action." As a lawyer, his firm absorbed the defense of accused politicians and juridical disputes against government measures. He was also a distinguished delegate of the Constitutional Convention that shaped the 1940 Constitution. For

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<sup>43</sup> Carlos Franqui, *Diary of the Cuban Revolution*, trans. Georgette Felix, Elaine Kerrigan, Phyllis Freeman and Hardie St. Martin (New York: Viking Press, 1980), 147-148.; Philips, *Island of Paradox*, 305.

Quevedo, Pelayo Cuervo's death represented "the loss of a friend who enjoyed in this house [*Bohemia*] great affection and consideration." Much like *Bohemia's* demeanor not to be "lukewarm in the prosecution of the military coup" Cuervo did not try "to avoid the action of justice and whose only crime was to fight the regime head-on." More importantly, the death of such a fervent defender of freedom and democracy "showed that not even those of Batista's opponents who rejected violence were safe."<sup>44</sup>

While the editorial page rarely mentioned Castro's name during the insurrection, Batista was occasionally addressed yet the magazine more often alluded to the dictator. The simple allusion to Batista in its editorial pieces stemmed from a careful decision not to directly antagonize the dictator yet make their opposition to decisions made by the dictatorship undeniable. Repeatedly, the magazine identified March 10, 1952, the day of Batista's coup, as the "dismal dawn" or the source of Cuba's despair. For this reason "Cubans do not have any fault; against a situation that we have not sought but which we want to leave as soon possible; against a regime, in sum that" does not rely on the will of the people. Thus, this subtle approach to avoid Batista by name on their editorial page kept *Bohemia* at a safe distance from potential reprisal. While the mention of Batista may have triggered censorship or the closure of the magazine, Quevedo saved some biting language for dictators beyond Cuba's shores.<sup>45</sup>

The blatant hatred towards some of these Latin American dictators represented a therapeutic release and a source of comparison for readers to draw on as Cubans dealt with their own tyrant. First, it was Peron of Argentina, who *Bohemia* decried as an "arrogant demagogue that implemented a totalitarian regime in the land of Sarmiento and Mitre, so rich in democratic

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<sup>44</sup> "Nos Mas Sangre, Cubanos," *Bohemia*, March 24, 1957, 63.; "'Bohemia' Ante," 65.; Bonachea and San Martín, *Cuban Insurrection*, 130.

<sup>45</sup> "No se Puede Tapar el Sol con un Dedo," *Bohemia*, March 2, 1958, 79.

traditions.” Bohemia condemned Peron for "eliminating any contrary opinion, suffocating at birth any attempt at discrepancy." The dictator's 'justicialista' government "awarded the responsibility to the masses, attributing to them a capacity of sanction and vindication" that "could not be realized if the authorities did not give their consent." Although the “South American Fuehrer” [Peron] ended Argentine democracy, *Bohemia* believed within the hearts of the Argentine people democracy remains. The editorial left readers with a positive message hoping the land of “Sarmiento, that wonderful friend of Marti, who both strove to educate the people in doctrines of democracy and freedom” find their way from their current situation. Peron’s actions against the press reflected a specific situation the people of Argentina suffered but where *Bohemia*’s Cuban readers could see the despotic qualities of Peron in their despot.<sup>46</sup>

Venezuela’s dictator Marcos Perez Jimenez especially disgusted *Bohemia*, and his usurpation by a popular military-civilian coup was a joyful occasion for the magazine. Mustering as much emotion as possible *Bohemia*’s joy was a twisted appreciation for his demise when they stated: "the grotesque dwarf of Miraflores Palace, oblivious of the lessons of history, was cast as a shameful tumor that is removed from an organism to save it." For *Bohemia* Jimenez’s “obese and repulsive figure is inserted for the last time” into the magazine’s pages. Moreover, *Bohemia* made the point to remind despotic leaders that their position was never certain and even though “Perez Jimenez seemed unshakable from usurpation in his throne” because “economic prosperity seemed to provide a shell of protection against his political adversaries.” Batista experienced a similar misconceived insulation as the 1957-58 fiscal year saw Cuba’s highest level of budgetary revenues, which nearly approached \$400 million, in its history as a sovereign nation. However, Jimenez and Batista lacked “dignity and value in which the people desire.” The magazine

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<sup>46</sup> “Ha Caido un Dictador Mas,” *Bohemia*, February 2, 1958, supplement 22-23.; “La Tragedia Argentina, Una Leccion para todo la America,” *Bohemia*, April 26, 1953, 65.

concluded that tyrant's walk "into the abyss with the slightest missteps" will eventually end up in Jimenez's situation. The messages against America's tyrants served as a replacement for Cubans who faced similar issues that kept Batista in power but highlighted the vulnerability of tyrants such as Perez Jimenez.<sup>47</sup>

Since Cuba and its press are largely defined by instability in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Bohemia* developed a mission as an "incorruptible echo of the civil palpitations and problems inherent in Cuban society." A popular notion among journalists is the belief that editorialists should first and foremost defend the freedom of the press. *Bohemia* was no exception to this and condemned outright the suppression of the press throughout its editorial page because without it "humanity moved in the darkness of oppression and fanaticism." Only an unencumbered press could *Bohemia* thrive as "the vehicle of democracy" that was "perennially open to public opinion." Through the editorial page, *Bohemia* made it painfully clear that the freedom of the press meant the protection of "the open forum" or the right to express an opinion protected by the ideals of a democratic society. Periods of darkness provoked Quevedo not disrespect his journalists by sending them out with restrictions to their work and the consumption of tempered opinions by readers because of government censors. In protest, *Bohemia* chose to withhold any opinionated piece that tackled an issue critical of Cuba's current political crisis. Furthermore, the magazine identified how unproductive the suppression of the press is in times of crisis and urged the government to recognize the benefits of responsible

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<sup>47</sup> "Ha Caido," 23.; Fulgencio Batista, *The Growth and Decline of the Cuban Republic* (New York: Devin-Adair Company, 1964), 123.

journalism. As a result, *Bohemia* believed the defense of a free and responsible press represented an inseparable defense for democracy.<sup>48</sup>

The desire for normalcy was a layered ambition as *Bohemia* could not separate the layers from each other unless they were all addressed. And while the magazine found great issue with censorship, the threat to Cuban life became a more consistent issue as the lion share of Cubans did not participate in armed rebellion. “*Bohemia* did not defend weapons” and their use to solve the national crisis. Regardless of who the perpetrator was, they were guilty of the disruption of any potential peaceful negotiations. However, Quevedo’s “attitude of opposition to the regime” did find its way into the discussion because it held the belief the government was responsible for the safety of its people. The decision to oppose violence was not only one for the safety and defense of the Cuban people, but it was a decision of pragmatism. If *Bohemia's* messages against the use of violence were successful, the terrorization of the Cuban people would end, and the flow of ideas and possibility of peace became likely. Experience taught *Bohemia* that "when the exchange of ideas is interrupted, the exchange of bullets begins." Therefore it made sense to come out in defense of the people because it was a path to reestablish the freedom of expression fundamental to the strength of the press.<sup>49</sup>

*Bohemia's* eternal ambition was the defense and restoration of Cuba's democratic regime. The subversion by Batista of the 1952 elections was "the origin of the most serious ills that the Republic" experienced, according to the magazine. From the start, Batista was an opponent to the ideals of democracy upheld by *Bohemia*. Each attack against the dignity and safety of the Cuban people, therefore, placed Batista further within the ranks of America’s worst despots. However,

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<sup>48</sup> “Lealtad Conmovera,” 57.

<sup>49</sup> González, “Visions from the Inside,” 372.; “Alto Al Fuego,” 53.

anyone who jeopardized the lives of the majority of Cubans uninvolved in the struggle played a part in the denial of the reestablishment of peaceful democratic procedures. The abduction of the public will aggravated *Bohemia* as it put Cuban society in danger.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> “‘Bohemia’ Ante,” 64.; “No se Puede Tapar,” 79.; “Parece Una Pesadilla,” *Bohemia*, April 19, 1953, 67.

## **CHAPTER TWO: THE INVESTIGATIVE REPORT: CRIMINAL MOTIVATIONS AND SOCIETY**

The revitalization of tourism and subsequent shift towards the promotion of gambling in the early fifties according to Louis Perez, spurred “profits on so lavish a scale” that “could not have been achieved and sustained without the close collaboration between organized crime and Cuban officials.” But while government corruption is well noted, this period also saw the expansion of criminal activities such as drug trafficking and prostitution as a result of deeper economic ties with the United States. In regards to the former, Eduardo Sáenz Rovner concluded drug traffickers “avail themselves of the ‘commercial and technological advances in licit industries.’” Pilar Lopez Gonzalez told the author of *Four Women, Living the Revolution*, Oscar Lewis, that poor women of Cuba before the revolution were limited to the brothel or being a servant. This causal relationship hinders the ability to recognize and peruse other types of present crimes. These themes of wrongdoing have served academics quite well in making sense of Cuba during this time but leave much wanting. As of late, researchers have undertaken localized etiological analyses of crime in historically underrepresented areas in Cuba.<sup>51</sup>

The etiological claims of these newer investigations into crime, while beneficial, are of lesser importance for the current evaluation. In Juana Marta Leon’s article “Searching for Culprits,” she highlights the fact that local journalists of Pinar del Rio acted like psychologists when they made assumptions for the reasons behind criminal activity. Marta Leon concludes the Pinarena (people of Pinar del Rio province) press determined the causes of common crime were

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<sup>51</sup> Louis Perez, *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 224.; Oscar Lewis, Ruth Lewis and Susan Rigdon, *Four Women, Living the Revolution: An Oral History of Contemporary Cuba* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 237.



the influences of “foreign cultural elements that, as a part of the modernization process of the city, transformed traditional lifestyles.” Investigative reporter for *Bohemia*, Luis Rolando Cabrera, realized the opposite conclusion. One instance that characterizes the difference is when he announced a question as if he were thinking aloud, about a murderer he interviewed: “What’s the matter with him? Crazy? An effect of yesterday’s drunkenness? The reporter cannot say that is up to scholars of other subjects.” He believed that “in the news one succinctly reports the fact.” Instead, Cabrera left judgments on a person only to the extent that the facts allowed him, let alone the entirety of an issue, kept him within the framework of responsible journalism. Michael Robert Evans, the author of *The Layers of Magazine Editing*, bluntly describes this responsibility Cabrera adhered to when he said: “Credibility is all we sell.”<sup>52</sup>

As an investigative reporter, Cabrera wrote about the crimes themselves, in a way that he refers to as the news *lived*, not as a passive observer attempting to make determinations on the causes for all crime. He approached reportage to provide entertainment but all the while responsibly informing. The best way to achieve, this according to Cabrera, was to access “one of the purest sources of information” which he determined as “the people themselves.” He believed, what separated his reporting from the news was the magnification he put to the news for “deepening the causes, explaining the details, analyzing the characters, and reproducing the environment.” By doing so he “makes the reader think, to feel, in a word that they also *lived* that patch of life that we have presented.” Cabrera’s devotion to this journalistic style makes for an intriguing source of analysis of the relationship between writer and craft, but also, writer and

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<sup>52</sup> Juana Marta León Iglesias, “Buscando Culpables: La representación de las causas del crimen común en la prensa escrita de la ciudad de Pinar del Río, Cuba, durante la década de 1950,” *Historia y sociedad*, no. 30 (January-June 2016): 285, <http://dx.doi.org/10.15446/hys.n30.53787>.; Luis Rolando Cabrera, “El Trágico Final de Dulce Maria,” *Bohemia*, March 9, 1958, 74.; Luis Rolando Cabrera, *Anatomía del Reportaje* (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 1982), 5.; Evans, *The Layers*, 193.

society. *Bohemia's* investigative reporting was another aspect of the magazine's defense of Cuban democracy.<sup>53</sup>

Cabrera's approach and resulting work falls in line with Roy Clark and Adam Stuart's claim that journalism means "the transfer of consciousness from one human being to another through a story" which produces a form of public consciousness. Journalists like Cabrera believed in "a social contract with their fellow citizens to bring a real world into view." Perhaps a more direct interpretation of this is "enlightening the public to make it capable of self-government." The real world that Cabrera brought to the readers of *Bohemia*, with such eloquent prose, was one where violent crime was so familiar it served as a stock-in-trade genre for the reporter.<sup>54</sup>

This chapter argues that the nature of violent crime, which Cabrera diligently reported, was the vicious backdrop for him to express a larger commentary on societal issues in Cuba. The crimes themselves were derivative of cultural norms and economic disparities. In certain circumstances, Cabrera found that the frequency in which a crime befell a particular set of Cuban's became a cultural norm in itself. But usually, his adherence to the particular journalistic ideas mentioned earlier, highlighted instances where a person's misunderstanding of social status complicated courtship processes. Also, the rationalization of decisions by Cubans who sought relief from extreme situations spoke to more substantive problems throughout the island. All of this is to say that, "the properties of imagination, reason, and truth-seeking" displayed by

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<sup>53</sup> Cabrera, *Anatomía*, 7.; *ibid.*, 92.

<sup>54</sup> Adam and Clark, *Journalism*, 351.; *ibid.*, xi.; Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm, *Four Theories*, 74.

Cabrera created a body of work that informed society of the deeper motivations that brought about violent responses in Cubans.<sup>55</sup>

### Precarious Romance

Louis Perez found that gender violence was “sometimes of women against men, but was frequently of men against women.” The strongest evidence in Cabrera’s work agrees with Perez’s determination that the frequency of gender violence where men were often the aggressors. But men, in Cabrera’s reports, tended not to act out on feelings of jealousy, as Perez found, but instead in response to rejection and heartbreak. In fact, in the early days of 1958 an article titled “The Red Chronicle” in which Cabrera summarized the major crimes that had unfolded throughout the previous year he recognized that “crimes of passion occurred with frightening frequency.” In his reports, male perpetrators of these violent attacks tended to fit the description of acting out like “a wounded lion,” who rebelled against the decision of their female counterparts.<sup>56</sup>

The nature of rejection reflects more of a rash response from men who did not comprehend the cultural imperative where women, as well as men, need skillfully maneuver through social tests to promote their standing within society. Therefore public appearance had to be monitored with considerable attention and potential suitors must not jeopardize the opportunity for upward mobility. Anthropologist Mirta de la Torre Mulhare notes a number of criteria that determined class position, but Cabrera’s writing clearly reflects a few with great effect, specifically the emphasis put on physical appearance and occupation. The women in

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<sup>55</sup> Adam and Clark, *Journalism*, xv.

<sup>56</sup> Louis Perez, *To Die in Cuba: Suicide and Society* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2005), 232.; Luis Rolando Cabrera, “La Crónica Roja en 1957: Un Resumen de Sucesos,” *Bohemia*, January 4, 1958, 63.; Luis Rolando Cabrera, “Tres Hechos de Sangre: El Trágico Final de Dulce Maria,” *Bohemia*, March 9, 1958, 92.

Cabrera's work decided that their status within society was already better than the suitors and expressed as such to put distance between themselves and a socially damaging suitor.<sup>57</sup>

For men to take a step towards violent crime, a crucial divergence emerges from Mirta de la Torre Mulhare's conclusion about male respect towards women. She concludes: "even though a man may be maddened by desire for a woman and he will use all his cunning to gain her, if the woman rejects him it increases his respect for her." For example, Cabrera finds a young man, Pedro Sanchez Quesada, of "dark complexion" who one morning, before the reporters' arrival in the town of Palmyra, ran through the streets with a bloody knife in his hand. He discovered the boy sprinted to turn himself into the police because he murdered a woman he unsuccessfully courted. Once in jail, Cabrera discovered that Pedro had been disingenuously misled about Maria's feelings for him and wanted to hear from her himself. Cabrera reconstructed the dialogue of the meeting based on Pedro's jail cell testimony:

— "Well, Maria, tell me why you don't want to live with me? If you do not love me, finish me of this deceit. I am willing to leave you, to leave Palmyra."

The young man told the reporter Maria laughed at him and declared:

— "Look, you're right. I'm going to deceive you. You're too black to live with me."

Cabrera expressed that those words "must have been worse than a slap." We find that Maria determined Pedro's complexion was a detriment to how society would perceive her. Hurt by this blunt admission Pedro remorsefully took her life. Mulhare noted a decision like Maria's could

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<sup>57</sup> Mirta de la Torre Mulhare, *Sexual Ideology in Pre-Castro Cuba: A Cultural Analysis* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1969), 56-57.

have also been driven by the fear that future children “could have ‘stepped back’ and been born black.”<sup>58</sup>

The responsibility to decide what was or could be a positive relationship did not just fall on the shoulders of the female. In fact, parents played a big part in Cuban women’s courting process. Parents expected an interested boy “to clarify his position.” For Cuban parents, if his positions did not satisfy them “it could result in the girl ‘wasting her time,’ and losing her chances of obtaining other suitable pretendientes since she may be considered already committed to one man.” Dulce Maria Cabrera Baez, eighteen years old, of Guanabacoa, found herself falling for a young man named Gilberto Enriquez, and quickly the two became a couple. But “her parents were doggedly opposed to *those* relationships.” Their concerns were that Gilberto could not “give a roof, bread, and affection” to Dulce Maria because he did not have a job and drank heavily and often.<sup>59</sup> The relationship between the two had been nothing but “a few visits to the house” and therefore should not be hard to break off, so she reiterated her parents’ concerns as the reason for the relationship’s conclusion.<sup>60</sup>

The reporter reflected the emotion that overtook Gilberto as he attempted to deal with Dulce Maria’s decision to end things. Cabrera stated: “the presence of his beloved made his blood boil and beat hastily in reason.” He eventually began to stalk the young girl and “with a dull, hoarse voice” started to threaten her. “She would be his or she would see what he was capable of.” The surging anger coupled with Gilberto’s propensity to binge drink, drove him one day to steal a rifle from his uncle’s shooting gallery and hunt down Dulce Maria. What happened

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<sup>58</sup> Mulhare, *Sexual Ideology*, 142.; Luis Rolando Cabrera, “El Crimen de Pedro “El Guineo”,” *Bohemia*, August 31, 1958, 93.; Mulhare, *Sexual Ideology*, 64.

<sup>59</sup> Perez, *To Die*, 225. According to Louis Perez, unemployment usually increased the likelihood of male alcoholism which exasperated decision to lash out.

<sup>60</sup> Mulhare, *Sexual Ideology*, 243.; Cabrera, “Tres Hechos de Sangre,” *Bohemia*, 92.

next was an insidious and tragic scene. While Dulce Maria, her mother, and a few friends were eating lunch, Gilberto appeared within the door with what Cabrera described as “a criminal glow in his eyes.” As Dulce’s mother, Carmelina, yelled to her daughter to run Gilberto began firing the gun on the group. Dulce Maria died before reaching the hospital. The reporter’s devotion “to study the characters, understand their impulses, and their emotions” help identify just how Dulce’s recognition of Gilberto’s reckless lifestyle would not help her manipulate other social tests to improve her and her family’s social standing.<sup>61</sup>

While reflections of deeper cultural practices attached to social standing became points of conflict, Cabrera also deployed the popular practice of *choteo* to add a critique on the gross number of crimes of passion against young working women. According to Victoria McCard, “*choteo* is irreverent and funny,” and Perez adds that it is also a rejection of solemnity. An example of *choteo* arose in “The Red Chronicle” article when Cabrera described how the largest numbers of victims of these acts of passion “were young waitresses of bars that were killed as the culmination of a profession they chose as the only way to get rid of their misery.” Some of the stories of violence against waitresses written by Luis Rolando Cabrera were quite brief, perhaps a reaction to their prevalence.<sup>62</sup>

“Incidents of murder-suicide, mostly men killing women and then themselves, occurred with frightening commonplace frequency.” Therefore Cabrera had a plethora of options to inundate the readers of *Bohemia*. But the convergence of a fatal assault on a waitress rolled into murder-suicide became a ghastly scene that is befitting of Cabrera’s usage of *choteo* earlier on.

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<sup>61</sup> Cabrera, “Tres Hechos,” 92.; Cabrera, *Anatomía*, 92.

<sup>62</sup> Victoria McCard, “Christ and the “Choteo”: Approaches to Authority in the Stories of Nancy Alonso,” *South Atlantic Review* 75, no. 1 (Winter 2010), 116.; Perez, *To Die* 276.; Cabrera, “La Crónica Roja,” 83.

Two young employees, Victoria Marquez and Juan Sanchez Amaro, started a love affair that made them an object of envy among their co-workers. The two worked as wait staff at a small restaurant, 'The Blissful,' in an area west of Camaguey in central Cuba. The façade of happiness wore thin, and Marquez put an end to the relationship with her co-worker. Then one day at work Juan cut off a conversation with Victoria and attacked her with a knife. "The weapon, sharp, cut the [restaurant's] meats and the girl bathed in blood, fell to the ground." Cabrera described that Juan "already without his senses turned the weapon against himself."<sup>63</sup>

Cabrera's ability to figure out the progression of events secured a space for individual motivations to become clear. These motivations in large part reflected a point of conflict when social position was misunderstood. But at times the prevalence of particular violent outbursts indicated a greater current of criminal activity. The section serves to show the diligence of the reporter to understand the story and bring forth a product that would resonate with readers as they understood their own life.

### The Tragedy of the Cuban Mother

In chapter one, the affection towards Cuban mothers by *Bohemia* in the editorial page was routinized to humanize the magazine's pleas with readers and the fighting forces to cease the violence. The reportage of Cabrera highlighted the same affection but provides further depth to the importance of maternalism both within and without the violence caused by the insurrection. It is characteristic of Cuban mothers in Cabrera's reports to be overcome with emotion at the threat or reality of losing a child. Cuban mothers rarely challenged male authority within the household, but the threat towards her children created space to challenge the household

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<sup>63</sup> Perez, *To Die*, 234.; Luis Rolando Cabrera, "Tragedia en 'La Dichosa'," *Bohemia*, February 17, 1957, 66.

hierarchy. On rare occasions, Cuban mothers responded to the violent effects of the war by organizing around their roles as mothers. In both instances, Cabrera's work projects the maternal authority showing how it stirred when there were "disturbances to the sanctity of the home."<sup>64</sup>

Frank Pais, a martyr of the revolution with his "rare combination of meticulous organizational skills, a keen sense of politics, and strategic vision" planned a major uprising in Santiago for November 30, 1956, to coincide with Castro's landing. But the uprising did not bear fruit, only a few work stoppages and targeted sabotage acts were carried out. However what did happen was "a notorious rash of killings carried out by security forces" across Santiago. During a lapse in press censorship, an uncharacteristic report of Cabrera's work came out on January 13, recounted the eerily violent atmosphere that loomed over Santiago after the failed uprising. "The city had lost its cheerful physiognomy; it was quiet, sad, and almost deserted." Yet dead bodies kept appearing, Jose Diaz Ruiz an employee of a car company, was found with a bullet in his head sitting in car. William Soler and Froilan Blanco had been found on the grounds of a cement factory after last seen being arrested by soldiers. In both of these tragic occurrences Cabrera depicted the grief felt by the mothers of these young men. Jose's mother "Eduarda Ruiz, drowned in tears, exclaimed to authorities and journalists: 'my poor Pepe was never mixed up in revolutionary activities'." William's mother walking through Santiago after burying her son "raised her arms to the sky and cried aloud: They have murdered my son! They have murdered my son!"<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Michelle Chase, *Revolution Within the Revolution: Women and Gender Politics in Cuba, 1952-1962* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 81.

<sup>65</sup> Sweig, *Inside the Cuban Revolution*, 13.; Luis Rolando Cabrera, "Continuan El Terror Y La Muerte Ensangrentando La Tierra Cubana," *Bohemia*, January 13, 1957, 66.; Cabrera, "Continuan," 80.; *ibid.*, 81.



Much like the feminists of the Cuban women's movement for legal reform that ended with the 1940 Constitution, according to historian Lynn Stoner, the women of Santiago "sought power in gender difference." The indiscriminate reprisal by Batista's security forces led the women of Santiago to hold the first of their three *all-women's* demonstrations. In the early days of January the church of Dolores, in Santiago was filled with women. They "dressed in mourning, with more grief still in their souls" and took to the streets after mass to march. Cabrera noted that the men who encountered the women "were respectfully stopping on the sidewalks" to let them pass. The women marched with a sign that read: "stop the assassination of our children." And with a huge signature: "Cuban mothers." The entire demonstration took place in silence. Cabrera believed "it was like their organizers had wanted 'the manifestation of pain and silence'" that could only be felt by a bereaved mother. Here, Cabrera was able to reinforce the editorial line of *Bohemia* with the pathos of a grieving mother. It provided a human face to the results of political violence.<sup>66</sup>

Not only did Cabrera reflect the embrace of gender difference that afforded Santiago women power in motherhood he went further by mimicking an emotional technique to exploit the influence of mothers found on the editorial page. Editorialists asked readers a few months after Batista's 1952 *golpe*: "Who will dare to bear the tremendous responsibility of the mothers' tears?" Cabrera followed the women's demonstration, and when soldiers halted the march he made a powerful declaration as the two groups came face to face: "who could guarantee that a present soldier perhaps could have fired on his mother?" "No one dared shoot on these women."

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<sup>66</sup> K. Lynn Stoner, *From the House to the Streets: The Cuban Woman's Movement for Legal Reform, 1898-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 2.; Cabrera, "Continuan," 81.

The women, soldiers, and Cabrera recognized the influential role the women held as they grieved in protest.<sup>67</sup>

Cuban women and more specifically mothers suffered often from a dark underside of private life in Cuba: domestic abuse. Cabrera consistently brought the private out into public. On one such occasion, he set the tone of the report by giving the reader an outside perspective of what they would eventually find out was a result of constant abuse. In a poor and working-class neighborhood on the southern outskirts of Havana Cabrera described how many inhabitants were startled awake one night from screams of terror. The reporter described the intensity of the screams: “He was a man shouting but the pain and despair placed accents so pathetic it made those who heard his voice quake.” The screams were “as if an uncontrollable pain was putting an end to his life.” When a police officer eventually passed by, a neighbor informed the officer of the screams. What the officer found in the house was a man, enveloped in flames. “It was Prudencio Wilson, who turned into a human torch.” Reports by this reporter are characterized by these types of fragmentary emotional beginnings “to awaken the desire to keep reading.”<sup>68</sup>

While Prudencio recovered in the hospital, he identified his youngest son, Dominsio, twelve years old, as the one to light him ablaze. But Prudencio’s wife and mother of five, Norma, recounted just how abusive he was towards their children. On the night of the fiery attack, Norma recalled for the reporter: “He [Prudencio] wanted me to throw my children to the ground to satisfy his needs. What happened next is an example of “the maternal imperative” the “dominating mode of behavior for la hembra, the female.” When one of the youngest daughters, Mercedes, got in the way of Prudencio beating her mother, Norma “stirred against him like a

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<sup>67</sup> “Apelacion a La Cordura,” *Bohemia*, October 5, 1952, 75.; Cabrera, “Continuan,” 81.

<sup>68</sup> Luis Rolando Cabrera, “Mi Hijo No Es un Criminal; Salio en Defensa de su Madre,” *Bohemia*, April 17, 1958, 81.; Cabrera, *Anatomía*, 22.

lioness” to protect the youngster. La hembra is defined by her overpowering desire to nurture and protect her children. But it was the youngest, who took it upon himself to throw a lamp on Prudencio to end the abuse.<sup>69</sup>

### Motivated By Money

Perhaps the most likely motivation that armed the murderous hand of Cubans was not passion but greed. In a majority of cases, greed was not driven by an irrational desire for more but instead for just enough. Cabrera tended to increase the presence of his voice in the report to make moral judgements about a larger economic situation that he encountered. While he usually found room for compassion for those who were without, the actions of those who were driven by want also garnered pointed personal interjections by the reporter. *Bohemia*'s political contributors and editorialists were busy denouncing the systematic greed by the government and large industries; Cabrera's work reflected a painful reality of an economy that was producing less for an increasingly greater portion of Cubans.<sup>70</sup>

The extensive body of work put forth by Louis Perez is an excellent source to contextualize the economic dislocation on the island. “Prosperity and plenty were everywhere in evidence” but “the limits of economic growth had been reached decades earlier.” By the beginning of the decade fluctuations of an export economy burdened Cubans of all classes with constant apprehension. This feeling of apprehension was driven largely by the enormity of unemployment and underemployment that kept a large portion of the working class near or in poverty. According to Perez, “nearly 60 percent of the total labor force languished permanently in conditions between unemployment and underemployment.” It did not help that wages were

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<sup>69</sup> Mulhare, *Sexual Ideology*, 48.; Cabrera, “Mi Hijo,” 86.; Mulhare, *Sexual Ideology*, 48.

<sup>70</sup> Cabrera, “La Crónica,” 63.

stagnating at the same time inflation hit the island. If that were not enough, the prices of real estate made property ownership unimaginable which forced many Cubans to rent.<sup>71</sup>

In *Bohemia's* March 9<sup>th</sup> edition in 1958, Cabrera's multi-story report outlined the gruesome double murder of a mother and daughter in the town on the other side of the bay of Havana, Regla. The mother, Nicolosa Loza Hernandez was a landlord of some property in the unidentified slum. As a result of interviewing the neighbors, who recognized the slain women had not started their daily routine that morning, Cabrera found that the women "were not intimate with anyone" and quite "quiet and sullen." The reason for this we will see is mainly due to the larger issue of housing.<sup>72</sup>

Historian Jesse Horst found that since the passage of the 1940 Constitution "housing had become a citizenship right" and responsibility of the government. In fact, Batista had been one of the biggest proponents for strengthening the rights of tenants passing executive orders to make it more difficult to carry out evictions. Even Fidel Castro in his famed defense "History Will Absolve Me" made the reduction of rent a part of his social program. But just because it was nearly impossible to evict a tenant and rent decreases were popular, did not mean landlords were without recourse. Nicolosa's neighbors told Cabrera she expected little noise from her tenants and hoarded the key to access the water in the building. While these are rather mundane acts of aggression, the tenants on her property gave her the nickname of "stiff monkey" to describe her intolerable approach with tenants. She was demanding when trying to get payment and quick to file a complaint with the local judge about rule infractions most neighbors never heard of before. For this Cabrera summed up, "she wanted to govern her small kingdom as an autocrat whose will

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<sup>71</sup> Louis Perez Jr, *On Becoming: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 450.; *ibid.*, 226.

<sup>72</sup> Cabrera, "Tres Hechos," 74.

was the only law.” Other landlords delayed major repairs, turned off the water, or excessively subdivided units, according to Horst. But on that day, Nicolosa died with “several dozen pending trials.”<sup>73</sup>

The hardness of the mother’s character, mentioned frequently, add further weight to the descriptions of her actions that her neighbors shared with Cabrera. However, the reporter found that the two slain women, although isolated from their neighbors, confided in each other. But the arrival of a new tenant, Jose Angel Torres, had won some degree of their affection and in return for it, he brutally murdered them to get to the money Nicolosa constantly pestered her tenants. In the end Cabrera did not condemn Nicolosa, even though she represented a problem that put nearly 75 percent of Havana’s native population in rental properties to be subjected to such mistreatment and left the readers with a promise that the killer would not run free for long.<sup>74</sup>

Exorbitant housing costs left many in Cuba with little flexibility to cover other living expenses. The determination by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, in 1951, that Cuban per capita income is “only slightly above that of the early 1920s” evidenced just how little the Cuban quality of life improved.<sup>75</sup> As a result, Cabrera reflected a shrinking gap between the rationalization of theft and murder among vulnerable Cubans. Roberto Gonzalez Vigoa, a modest employee of the Havana based “Fried Chicken Company, S.A.,” received the compassionate approval of his manager, Raul del Valle Martinez, to sleep in the store after being

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<sup>73</sup> Jesse Horst, “Shantytown Revolution: Slum Clearance, Rent Control, and the Cuban State, 1937-1950,” *Journal of Urban History* 40, no. 4 (2014): 701.; Andrew Paul Booth and Pedro Álvarez Tabío, “History Will Absolve Me,” Castro Internet Archive, accessed February 2, 2018, <https://www.marxists.org/history/cuba/archive/castro/1953/10/16.htm>; Cabrera, “Tres Hechos,” 74.; Horst, “Shantytown,” 704.; Cabrera, “Tres Hechos,” 74.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 74.; Horst, “Shantytown,” 708.

<sup>75</sup> International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *Report on Cuba* (Washington, D.C. 1951), 6-8.; Perez, *Between Reform*, 227.

kicked out of his house by his wife. The arrangement went on for a short period without a problem. But Cabrera, in his interview with Roberto, found that his financial issues were making him frantic and without alleviation:

—“I urgently needed money and had no idea where I was going to get it!”

Before getting the chance to soul-search, Roberto returned to Raul to alleviate his situation. Quickly the decision between harmless pleas for money turned violent. After Raul turned him down initially, Roberto proposed:

—“Lend me the money. I’ll pawn a gun to you. It’s a brand new weapon.”

Upon Raul’s second rejection Roberto shot the man and took the money he had collected from the stores around the city. Cabrera’s report reflects just one brutal piece of a much larger economic destitution that pushed men like Roberto to alleviate financial issues with little foresight to his actions. The reporter concludes that “we are to pity the guilty because of his economic plight but not condone his actions.” The compassion Cabrera left readers with was the result of personal recognition of a deeper issue that continually cropped up.<sup>76</sup>

From compassion for the destitute to crimes of passion, Luis Rolando Cabrera brought a dark aspect of Cuban society to life—an aspect which happened with surprising frequency. The nature of crime Cabrera shared with *Bohemia’s* readers was traced by his search to collect the personal experiences of those involved. Only by doing so were the motivations of those familiar with the violent event traced too much larger cultural trends. Single men acted with blind intensity in the face of rejection from women who believed they were beneath them socially. A

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<sup>76</sup> Luis Rolando Cabrera, “Dió Muerte Al Que Lo Protegía y Después Asistió al Velorio,” *Bohemia*, August 24, 1958, 78-79.

woman’s recognition of her position usually derived from the guidance her parents bestowed upon her in their hopes of preserving or improving the family position. The extrajudicial killings of Cuban sons, as a result of police violence, mobilized Cuban mothers to organize under similar notions of motherhood that were effective to help obtain legal rights during the *Machadato*. With the façade of economic prosperity cracking Cabrera found a place for compassion and social critique about the most vulnerable in the island. Therefore, in each of Cabrera’s reports “society is born and reborn every day.” Cabrera’s crime reporting acted as a close-up view of Cuban society’s gender, economic, and social inequalities—all of which seemed to be deepening under the Batista regime. In Cabrera’s reporting, *Bohemia* offered its readers a raw reality, and with it, the commitment to be a voice for those suffering without authentic democracy.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Adam and Clark, *Journalism*, 351.

### CHAPTER THREE: CHICAS DE WILSON: THE MULATA AND MALE AUTHORITY

Luis Felipe Wilson Valera, a noted revolutionary Cuban cartoonist, famously known for his depictions of the *mulata* Cuban in his section “Criollitas de Wilson,” got his start before Castro’s ascent to power. In the year before Batista’s departure from Cuba, Wilson’s cartoons were in nearly every edition of *Bohemia’s* comedy page *Humorismo Criollo*. The vast majority of Wilson’s cartoons in 1958 were part of a series that became the bedrock for his future revolutionary work. The cartoons in *Bohemia* mostly fell under the title of *Chicas de Wilson* (Wilson’s Girls). Upon the artist’s death in 2006, the principal Cuban news agency *Granma* memorialized the influential role Wilson’s artistic work had on Cuban culture. Other news sources run by Cubans like *Cubans Around the World* (an online source based out of Miami) briefly acknowledged the debate over his revolutionary artistic work but quickly shifted focus to highlight the accomplishments of the Cuban cartoonist. In both of these articles, the latter published a few years after Wilson’s death, the authors’ recognition of the revolutionary artist’s career ignores any prior artistic work before the revolution.<sup>78</sup>

Wilson’s recurring cartoon narrative depicted the Cuban *mulata* who has had a long conflicted history within Cuban culture. Perhaps one of the most influential takes on the *mulata* figure is Cirilo Villaverde’s late 19<sup>th</sup>-century novel, *Cecilia Valdes*. The premise of the novel follows the life of a *mulata* Cuban Cecilia Valdes whose beauty brought her popularity that created adverse effects on her character. Villaverde described that “she grew vain, capricious,

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<sup>78</sup>“Fallecio el destacado humorist Wilson, el de las criollitas,” *Granma*, accessed December 18, 2006, <http://www.granma.cu/granmad/2006/12/18/nacional/artic05.html>; “Las Criollitas Cubanas de Wilson,” *Cubanos por el Mundo*, accessed September 12, 2014, <https://cubanosporelmundo.com/blog/2014/09/12/criollitas-cubanas-wilson-varela/>



haughty and extravagant” in the wake of treatment by white men who did not show “regard due to a lady and colored men subject her to coarse compliments.” The belief she held about herself led Cecilia to chase the heart of Leonardo de Gamboa, the son of a wealthy white landowner. After a brief love affair, Leonardo left Cecilia to marry a white Cuban from a wealthy respectable family. Alison Fraunhar highlights a proverb of the time that relates, “*blancas son para casar, negras son para trabajar, y mulatas son para amar*’ (white women are for marriage, black women are for labor, and *mulatas* are for love).” Villaverde’s work and many others implied that the *mulata*—a product of slavery, of conflict, identity—is intrinsically tied to her sexuality. The author never used Cecilia Valdes to tell a story that in some way was not a direct result of her beauty. Vera Kutzinski stated, “the *mulata*’s function is to provide sexuality without productive complications.”<sup>79</sup>

While *Cecilia Valdes* places the treatment of the *mulata* in a broader scope of history, it represents a larger attachment to sexualized *mulata*. Vera Kutzinski explained, “mestizaje has been perhaps the principle signifier of Cuba’s cultural identity.” She continues to elaborate that the Cuban “community encodes its national identity in the iconic figure of a *mulata*.” The countless images of the *mulata* just in the pages of *Bohemia* provide some validation to the claim of how closely tied the image of Cuba is to the sexualized image of the *mulata*. Placement of *mulata* as a national image but degrading her to the singular purpose to satisfy the male gaze left the *mulata* without consciousness beyond that purpose.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Cirilo Villaverde, *Cecilia Valdes, A Romance of Old Havana* (Boston: L.C. Page, 1935), 42.; Alison Fraunhar, “Tropics of Desire: Envisioning the Mulata Cubana,” *Journal for the Study of Media & Composite Cultures*, 12, no. 2 (November 2002), 219.; Vera Kutzinski, *Sugar Secrets: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 31.

<sup>80</sup> Kutzinski, *Sugar Secrets*, 5.; *ibid.*, 7.

In an attempt to understand the reasoning behind the negative usage of women in humor this brief section will lay a foundation of concepts on gender through this lens of comedic and popular cultural interpretation. Dianna C. Niebylski's historical review of women in Latin American humorous literature traces the philosophical commentaries of humor's true origins. The author finds that humor about women traces back to an early fear held by men that an outspoken woman was a "threat to public and private morality." Niebylski states that in Latin American literature the best-known archetype is the army of lawless female bodies. A similar argument could apply to the vast amount of female depictions in Cuban cartoons during the period under review. Thus, it makes sense why scholar Sara E. Cooper argues that *Bohemia* cartoons from 1959, the first year of the revolution, demonstrate a form of psychological violence meant to shame a female into proper behavior. Cooper claims that the comics of that year have a common denominator of women being on the receiving end of masculine humor.<sup>81</sup>

Wilson shaped the masculine interpretation of the *mulata* with the placement of the characters within public settings. In large part, the *mulata*'s "domain is on the streets of Havana and other centers of commercial activity." The placement of the *mulata* outside of the home meant to place her within an arena of increased visibility. Her looks and movements, therefore, were on display for a larger male audience to sexualize her at will.<sup>82</sup>

This chapter borrows Vera Kutzinski's claim that the *mulata* acts like a "symbolic container for all the tricky questions about how race, gender, and sexuality inflect the power relations" of late Republican Cuba. Just the name of the cartoon series alone, *Chicas de Wilson*,

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<sup>81</sup> Dianna Niebylski, *Humoring Resistance: Laughter and the Excessive Body in Latin American Women's Fiction* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2004) 23.; *ibid.*, 16; Cooper, "Humorismo en Cuba," 124.

<sup>82</sup> Kutzinski, *Sugar Secrets*, 60.

implies Wilson's ownership over the women and their representation. Through Wilson's use of bodily distortions, setting, dress, and subtitles filled with *choteo* the *mulata* is a stooge-like character that reaffirms *macho* biases. The *mulata*, then, is a visible figure for male consumption but never with genuine self-consciousness; only consciousness bestowed from the cartoonist. Therefore, the little agency given to *Chicas de Wilson* is meant to be humorous based on her misunderstood belief that she is an independent being. The commentary attached to the *mulata* is exclusively an expression of worth dependent on a successful relationship with a man. All the while, she never exits the sexualized notions thrust upon her, which makes her a joke. Wilson makes use of the *mulata*'s identification as a national symbol to develop her as a sexual commodity for the fulfillment of male desires, where agency only furthered the notions of masculine sexual understanding of her purpose in society. *Bohemia*'s depiction of gender inequality in the symbol of the *mulata* reveals that the magazine held traditional values, shared and consumed by many of its male readers. Even as *Bohemia* sought to defend Cuban democracy, it also upheld traditional sexual and racial roles for *mulata* women.<sup>83</sup>

Wilson's cartoons were fraught with depictions that highlighted male presumptions of acceptable work for the *mulata* in Cuban society. In the September 28 issue of 1958, Wilson drew a lesser used interior setting. However, the lack of detail of the interior of the building, besides a set of dumbbells and window shades, removes any signifiers of existence. Alison Fraunhar correctly surmised, "in a setting devoid of signifiers of family, home, property, or occupation she is written (or drawn) out of the social order except as a body of pleasure." What the only reasonable signifier of existence for the *mulata* can draw on is the connection between the improvements of the female physique that the dumbbells provide. Also, within the room are

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 7.

two *mulata*'s, one of which is performing a handstand next to the dumbbells. Her physique in comparison to the startled *mulata* who seems to have just entered the room is quite proportional. She has defined bare legs, where the distinction between the thigh, calf, and feet are recognizable. On the other hand, the startled *mulata* in a flowing dress that stops just below the knee has little normative shape between calves and feet. Her feet look like wooden pegs. While both have unrealistically thin waists, the startled woman's out-thrust hip looks as if her body is detaching at the waist. "It is in flirting with the out-of-control female body, the body that refuses external discipline," that Wilson chose the preferred female archetype to sexualize. The attention to detail on the physique of the *mulata* working out gained a more realistic human physique in return for a more sexualized appearance.<sup>84</sup>

With a more normal, yet, sexualized appearance of the female character the subtitle acts to degrade the little dignity the *mulata* may have internalized. She mentioned to the deformed *mulata*: "practice, because with what my boyfriend earns, I'm going to have to do a lot of acrobatic moves when I get married." Upon first notice, neither *mulata* has a name and therefore "presented as a type, not as an individual." This choice to leave the characters nameless further removes their identity and brings them closer to ownership of the cartoonist vision of them. Her boyfriend's inability to earn a sufficient amount of money will drive her into the workforce. However, Wilson implies the only work she could do is reliant on her ability to exploit her sexuality. Perhaps that meant working as a dancer in one of the grand floorshows of Havana's nightclubs or as a *jintera* (prostitute). The choice to narrow the opportunity of employment to positions that hinged on her sexuality ignores the larger movement of women joining the workforce to supplement the shifting living standards that plagued Cuba. In the oral history,

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<sup>84</sup> Fraunhar, *Tropics*, 222.; Luis Felipe Wilson Valera, "Humorismo Criollo," *Bohemia*, September 28, 1958, 158.; Niebylski, *Humoring Resistance*, 47.

*Reyita*, the old woman recalled that darker skinned Cubans had the opportunities to be teachers. In addition, women with some frequency took civil service jobs. Perez found that women made up roughly 12 percent of the nation's work force. While the choices were still quite limited Wilson ignored the presence of women in other portions of the workforce and placed restrictions on the opportunities available to the sexualized *mulata* to reinforce her role as a figure of sexual consumption.<sup>85</sup>

In the 1950s, Batista and generally Cuba were on a "tourism binge." Louis Perez, the leading historian of Cuban-American relations, found that Cuba was noteworthy to North Americans of middle and working class because of its accessibility and affordability. In fact, just a year before the publishing of this cartoon Cuba had hit its height of American tourism on the island, bringing in record 356,000 people. Therefore, the presence of tourists from North America was quite visible to Cubans, especially Cubans in Havana where the tourist industry thrived. In fact, the "Cuban tourist industry was driven by North American tastes and preferences."<sup>86</sup>

Wilson reflected numerous scenes of interactions between his *chicas* and tourists and the influence a tourist had while on vacation at the expense of the *mulata*. One particular cartoon depicted a beach setting where two *mulata* women strolled across the beach with fishing poles in hand. Just in front of them is a portly man who is seemingly clueless to the fact that money is spilling out of the waistband of his swimsuit. Now the *mulatas* are in direct contact with a man,

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<sup>85</sup> Wilson, "Humorismo Criollo," 158.; Perez, *On Becoming*, 452.; Maria de los Reyes Castillo Bueno and Daisy Rubiera Castillo, *Reyita: The Life of a Black Cuban Women in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 28; Mulhare, *Sexual Ideology*, 69.; Perez, *Between Reform*, 231.

<sup>86</sup> Dennis Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise: U.S. Tourism and Empire in Twentieth-Century Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 105.; Perez, *On Becoming*, 168.; *ibid.*, 167.

presumably an American tourist. Moreover, while the *mulata*'s tower over the tourist, a subtle declaration by Wilson to mobilize the *mulata* as a symbol of Cuba as superior to tourists; the women are still a pawn of male control. The porky tourist is not, in fact, clueless about his money. Instead, the tilt of his head and facial expression display a sense of gratification, he is quite aware of how simple it is to snare a *mulata*. The subtitle soaked in *choteo* humor, states, "I was saying, I always catch 'big fish'." This is not a comment on the obesity of the American tourist but the large stature of the *mulata*. Therefore, it is more likely that the tourist is the one speaking and the *mulata* is oblivious to the fact that the tourist is using her to accomplish a sexual conquest.<sup>87</sup>

In addition, Wilson portrayed *mulata*'s to speak on behalf of the reader to highlight the "low" nature of *mulata* promiscuity that "make it possible for the males to practice machismo." Wilson's sketch depicts a couple walking down the sidewalk with the skyline of a Havana in the background, they are noticeably less attractive than most characters, and a *mulata* approaches in more traditional Cuban attire. She looks to the couple and announces to the female that she, "Dorita, no longer has to worry because the new blouse she is wearing allows her the benefit of not having to pad her bra" to accentuate her figure. The cartoon illustrates the moment of interaction, and upon hearing this comment regarding her partner's dress the man's jaw drops in shock and the woman spoken about is noticeably angry. Wilson incorporated the comment to be at the expense of the female walking with the man. The *mulata* who made the comment has a

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<sup>87</sup> Luis Felipe Wilson Valera, "Humorismo Criollo," *Bohemia*, July 6, 1958, 158.

grin on her face, sporting her traditional Cuban dress that accentuates her figure, she sauntered down the street with her hip popped that further highlights her sexualized physique.<sup>88</sup>

The cynical comment is a male degradation of “Dorita” who has shed proper practices to display chastity. Mirta de la Torre Mulhare notes that proper women need to “avoid providing him [her betrothed] with the opportunity to make improper advances.” The most obvious indication she is a depiction of “low” *mulata* is the fact that she intertwined her arm with the man. Even just “casual body contact between a male and female” is enough to stimulate a man’s arousal. Moreover, the public setting in which Dorita resides with this man goes against acceptable courting practices of chaperoning. Even in Havana, where chaperoning morphed because of an increased economic independence of women, the belief remained that a woman needed a chaperon whether in groups or double dates. Furthermore, Wilson used the subtitle to highlight the severity of Dorita’s uncouth actions by providing her a name. In no other cartoon was the *mulata* provided an identity. Therefore, Wilson used the name to write the *mulata* back into social order for the sole purpose to belittle the *mulata* who actively sought out sexual desires, not in line with acceptable cultural norms. Wilson’s decision to identify her and put in this setting underscores the cunning with which a man worked to project his *machismo*.<sup>89</sup>

The humor behind the subtitle is the insinuation that the “low” *mulata* had accomplished winning the heart of a man. With the huge grin on the traditional *mulata*’s face, it clues to pleasure in shaming the other *mulata* for her ignorance in thinking she landed a man. The pleasure derived from a place of the male drive “to deflower a girl outside the bonds of marriage.” Wilson does not provide clues whether she is chaste, but her lack of attention to

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<sup>88</sup> Mulhare, *Sexual Ideology*, 152.; Luis Felipe Wilson Valera, “Humorismo Criollo,” *Bohemia*, July 13, 1958, 158.; Mulhara, *Sexual Ideology*, 141.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.; *ibid.*, 242.

cultural practices attached to courting insinuate she is willing to give up her chastity if she had not already. Therefore, the man had been the successful one in luring her into sexual relations or future relations, and the passerby *mulata* recognized the situation Dorita found herself. In *Cecilia Valdes*, Cecilia is blind to the fact that she serves the purpose of male desires when she replies to being asked about Leonardo's motivations, "Deceived me? I should hope not! Leonardo hasn't left me for any other girl and I don't believe he ever will!" In the cartoon, the *mulata* that walks with the man shows disgust and disbelief at the snarky comment about the nature of her relationship. However, since the *mulata* serves the purpose of love and temptation the Cuban man "loses all respect for her" if a woman like Dorita continued to allow his sexual advances. Mirta de la Torre Mulhare helps situate a popular proverb that Cuban men largely practiced, "they do not wish to drink from the water they have already contaminated." This proverb helps place the enjoyment the *mulata* obtained from her comment as it was a known practice that men did not seek out unchaste women who gave in to male overtures. Wilson made Dorita a joke for her misguided belief that disregarding cultural practices could win the heart of a man. However, the man had the upper hand as he found a way to get Dorita to disregard these practices bringing him closer to sexual conquest.<sup>90</sup>

With the skyline of Havana in the background, Wilson's June 1 cartoon depicted two well-dressed *mulatas* having a conversation about their relationships. Both of the women are dressed in sleek yet conservative dresses, which go below the knee, stylish gloves, and chic handbags that reference a higher social status. The *mulata's* attire is reminiscent of American style, posits that they are pretending to be something they are not. Wilson reflects the portion of the Cuban population that Mirta de la Torre Mulhare refers to as "Yanqui lovers," where "there

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<sup>90</sup> Mulhare, *Sexual Ideology*, 143.; Wilson, "Humorismo Criollo," 158.; Villaverde, *Cecilia Valdes*, 220.; Mulhare, *Sexual Ideology*, 144.; *ibid.*, 163.; Cooper, *Humorismo*, 125.



is unconscious as well as conscious imitation of some aspects of American behavior.” Moreover, most Cubans resented American influence, and Wilson used these *mulata* characters to criticize a despised portion of the population for their attachment to America.<sup>91</sup>

With the identification of the characters in this cartoon taken care of, the attached text extends the idea that Wilson bestowed consciousness on the *mulata*'s with a misconceived belief they shed their Cuban identity for that of an American. One of the *mulata*'s declares to the other that she has no reasonable option but to leave her boyfriend after making no progress towards marriage after ten years of a relationship. The female character that ended her decade-long relationship recognized she could exert her disdain by using her status as an unmarried woman to end the said relationship. Nevertheless, Wilson uses the embrace of American dress again to make fun of the power the *mulata* believed she had. Mirta de la Torre Mulhare found that long engagements are not uncommon in Cuba. Wilson's usage of the American attire highlights a *mulata* pretending to be an American woman instead of a Cuban woman who was constantly subject to such long practices. When the cartoon is taken in whole Wilson's depiction suggests the growing disdain for traditional rules attached to courtship and marriage were a product of American influence, which found a humorous vessel in the *mulata*.<sup>92</sup>

Scholar Carrie Hamilton notes the level of frustration anyone studying sexuality in Cuba prior to 1959 experiences because a lack of academic attention has been given “to the two decades succeeding the Constitution of 1940.” This project intended to alleviate this frustration by further the exploring the usages of the *mulata* in the years leading up to the revolution. Wilson's work highlighted the ebbs and flows of Cuban culture and economy and foreign

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<sup>91</sup> Luis Felipe Wilson Valera, “Humorismo Criollo,” *Bohemia*, June 1, 1958, 158.; Mulhare, *Sexual Ideology*, 135.

<sup>92</sup> Wilson, “Humorismo,” 244.; Mulhare, *Sexual Ideology*,

influences to create a sexualized character unaware of the space she lived in. The cartoonist also used drawing techniques to detach the *mulata* from acceptable society further degrading any potential of self-consciousness. Therefore, when Wilson bestowed agency on *mulata* characters, the words he attached to them were never their own. At times those words were to be read by the male reader as his own, or at others were given to the male character in the scene but every time it was meant to compartmentalize the *mulata* into a function of male dominance. Therefore, the symbolic *mulata* stood as a stooge in the face of influences and ignorance towards Cuban culture. Although *Bohemia* was a defender of political democracy, it was mired in racial and gender stereotypes. The present research helps to further strengthen the claim that *Bohemia* was not a voice for radical revolution, but rather the fragile democracy of the Republican era.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Hamilton and Dore, *Sexual Revolutions in Cuba: Passion, Politics, and Memory* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2012), 26.

## CONCLUSION

During the gaiety of Havana's New Year's festivities ringing in 1959, Fulgencio Batista and his closest advisers took to Camp Columbia, the Havana military base, and left Cuba for good. In the wake of the dictator's departure *Bohemia* printed 'freedom editions: "three editions of one million copies each, all of which sold out." Quevedo and company forged ahead with the assumption that Fidel Castro's ability to outlast Batista and decision not to name himself President meant Cuba could finally return to a functioning democracy. For a short period of time, *Bohemia* published uninhibited, in fact went a step further and printed the violent purges of Batista cronies and henchmen by revolutionary forces. However, not even with Batista gone for a full two years Quevedo realized under Castro democracy was unobtainable. The editor-in-chief and director of Cuba's symbol for democracy sought asylum in the Venezuelan embassy the day Castro signed a sugar deal with the Soviet Union. Castro nationalized *Bohemia* and Quevedo opened the exile publication *Bohemia Libre*.<sup>94</sup>

The nationalization of the magazine spelled the end of its longevity as *the* prominent physical piece of democracy Cubans could rely on to find themselves in and be informed on issues and ideas foreign to them. The only way to completely understand *Bohemia's* place within Cuban society up until the point of its nationalization is to reflect on Cuba's development as a Republic. With the passage of Cuba's democratic constitution, under the shadow of the United States, Cubans began to internalize the freedom of expression and the possibilities it could produce. *Bohemia*, a product of the early Republic had been born into the position of uncertainty much like the new country, but soon embraced the possibilities of the freedom of expression could provide citizens.

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<sup>94</sup> Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 42.; *ibid.*, 136.

Not until the magazine passed to Quevedo de la Lastra's hands did *Bohemia* become a publication that started to reflect the composition it held before Castro nationalized it in the early years of the Revolutionary period. Quevedo de la Lastra expanded the magazine beyond its narrow mission of elitist *habanero* cultural content to include social commentary. The expansion of content was twofold. Primarily, as Theodore Peterson pointed out, publishers and editors believed "freedom carries concomitant obligations" and the press had the responsibility "promoting democratic processes" and "enlightening the public." Secondly, Quevedo developed a space in the magazine to respond to Machado's move towards tyranny. *Bohemia* therefore began to develop a relationship to the democratic system it worked under and its responsibility to preserve it for the benefit of itself and the people who read the magazine.<sup>95</sup>

The ebb and flow between dictators and the revocation of freedom of the press had defined *Bohemia*. But Cuba briefly experienced a period of democratic stability prior to Batista's 1952 take over. The importance of this period adds to the larger argument that historians have overlooked when attempting to define the magazine's place in society. Many historians fall victim to dichotomy of organizing Cuba's institution and prominent figures into pro or anti-Castro groups. This may be due to the fact that the mid-twentieth century is understood "as series of causes leading up to the revolution of 1959." Thereby the Auténtico years perfectly articulate just how deficient a pro/anti-Castro determination is for *Bohemia* because it did not reserve criticism just for the times Cuba suffered under strongmen. Charles Ameringer astutely concluded that during these years of tremendous potential *Bohemia* was one of President Grau and Prío's severest critics. Therefore, *Bohemia* did not even ally itself with the winning public officials of Cuba's most transparent elections. For Quevedo, *Bohemia* needed to

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<sup>95</sup> Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm, *Four Theories*, 74.

maintain “its own financial self-sufficiency so as to be free from the pressures of special interests,” and better curate a democratic product for their reader.<sup>96</sup>

*Bohemia*'s massive circulation at the time of Batista's 1952 coup served as a point of legitimacy for the magazine's mission and utilized it to define its position within society. But *Bohemia* owed its success to the belief “about faithfully interpreting the feelings of the vast majority of our people.” *Bohemia* “is designed to appeal to a general audience, inclusive of both genders and most social positions” so as to make it “the most effective vehicle to influence public awareness and changing values.” Based on this insight and its circulation *Bohemia* proved it successfully interpreted the mood of Cubans and derived its position in society as *the* voice of the Cuban people.<sup>97</sup>

Nevertheless, in times of Constitutional crisis, *Bohemia* took additional care to express its position as Cuba's defender of democracy. The magazine defined democracy within the ability of Cuba's leaders to allow the press to act unimpeded. Only through the freedom of the press could *Bohemia* better inform its readers of information that was most vital to their lives. Due to past experiences where constitutional guarantees, never in fact a guarantee, the magazine acted as a resource for the possibilities the freedom of the press provided to citizens. Their ability to inform and comment without consequence exhibited a truer sense of Cuban society driven by individual expression. Since the publication held such a large circulation, it could not ignore a duty to speak out against attacks against the people of Cuba. The responsibility by reporters and contributors to go out into the country to find the stories put them in direct contact with Cubans who had little desire for the violent surges that disturbed normalcy. Therefore, the absence of

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<sup>96</sup> Bronfman, “Batista is Dead!,” 40.; Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm, *Four Theories*, 74.

<sup>97</sup> “No Mas Sangre,” 63.; Cooper, “Humorismo en Cuba,” 120.

normalcy pushed *Bohemia* to speak out for the safety of the people who served and benefitted from the protections provided to the press. Likewise, *Bohemia* recognized the world leaders who overstepped their powers with violence and attacks towards the press to further clarify its position that the peaceful dissemination of information to the people of a society was the primary responsibility for a press outlet to preserve democracy.

Since the magazine believed the freedom of the press was integral to the preservation of democracy each action taken by a journalist therefore added to *Bohemia's* embrace as a piece of consumable democracy. I highlighted two contributors that brought forth vastly different subjects but nonetheless served to increase the depth of what Cuban society looked like because of the freedom of the press. First, Luis Rolando Cabrera added to the collective consciousness through his literary reportage on the most brutal attacks against citizens. His body of work used a unique style that largely downplayed the aggression itself to further connect with the readers the moods of the people related to the crime. Therefore discussion of violence and crime unearthed social concerns and cultural norms where the point of conflict became the source of clarity. On the other hand, cartoonist Luis Filipe Wilson Valera used *Bohemia* to control the agency of the Cuban *mulata*. This particular female body had a long history of symbolizing the sexual desire of men. The cartoonist embraced that consensus and depicted her as gorgeous half-wit in constant belief she was something more. Therefore the *Chicas de Wilson mulata's* were a product propagated for the sexual entertainment of *Bohemia's* male readers.

Moreover, the diversity of the publication is what made it so imperative for the editorial page to come out in defense of these democratic ideals. Each piece put forth by a *Bohemia* contributor was an individual expression that added to a collective consciousness of Cuba at large. So if a reader prioritized the political happenings on the island they found a place within

*Bohemia's* multiple sections specifically geared for the current tides of political thought. However, Cubans never defined their worth solely through the status of the government and *Bohemia* obliged the diversity of their individuality with content that entertained and educated. All of this is to say that when a reader bought an issue of *Bohemia* he or she actively engaged with a broader understanding of their society. It did not matter what content the reader consumed because each topic represented a different facet of life. Whether or not they agreed with the ideas the issue put forth they still consumed a piece of Cuban democracy.

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