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## Subjectivity, psychology and the Cuban Revolution

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**Abstract**

This article contains a discussion on the Cuban Revolution and its effects on subjectivity and psychology. The authors reflect on the historical and psychosocial background of the revolutionary process of 1956–1959, the Cuban exception in the Latin American context, the role of objective and subjective factors in the revolution and in the socialist regime, Cuban psychologists' lack of interest in subjectivity, the history of Cuban psychology from the 1950s until now, and the connection of this history with historical events and specifically with the influence of the Soviet Union in Cuba. The great social achievements of the revolution are recognized, but also the appropriation of the revolutionary legacy by the regime and its negative consequences on the subjective sphere.

**KEYWORDS**

bureaucracy, Cuban history, Cuban Revolution, Marxism, social subjects, subjectivity

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Sixty years have passed since the Cuban Revolution managed to put an end to an American interventionism that had to a great extent been responsible for keeping Latin America in poverty, economic dependence, neo-colonial subordination, and lack of democracy. Between 1956 and 1959, as we certainly know, the greatest military and political power in the world, the United States, and the government of its unconditional lackey, Fulgencio Batista, were defeated by the bravery of the Cuban people and a handful of adventurers, among them Che Guevara, Camilo Cienfuegos, and the brothers Fidel and Raúl Castro. The revolutionaries established a regime that has managed to stay alive until now, surviving the economic blockade, the fall of its socialist allies, and the relentless attacks of global capitalism, the puppet governments in the United States, the world political establishment, the Cuban exiles in Miami, the mass media, and all its other enemies.

Parallel to its consequences in the Cold War and in the world political situation, the Cuban Revolution created a new Cuba, profoundly different from the one that existed previously. Not only did it transform the country on the socio-economic and political-governmental levels, but it had all kinds of effects on the planes of culture, art, science, and ideology, and also, inevitably, in the subjective sphere. The revolutionary effects in subjectivity and in the conception of the subject, as well as specifically in psychology as a science or ideology, are what the authors will discuss in this article.

The discussion will highlight the differences in perspective between the two authors. Fernando González Rey (hereinafter Fernando), currently resident in Brazil, is a renowned Cuban psychologist who was born and lived for more than 45 years on the island, studied for his doctorates in Psychology and Sciences in the Soviet Union, won the Inter-American Prize for Psychology, was president of the Society of Psychologists of Cuba and Dean of the Faculty of Psychology of the University of Havana. In contrast, David Pavón-Cuéllar (David), a communist and professor of psychology in Mexico, studied for his doctorates in psychology and philosophy in Spain and France respectively, and has only been to Cuba as a visitor and as a fervent admirer of the Cuban Revolution. The revolutionary passion of David, as we shall see, will sometimes be confronted, during the discussion, with the knowledge, direct experience, and good sense of Fernando. This confrontation will be overdetermined by the divergence between the theoretical orientations of the authors: the work of both belongs to the critical current of Latin American psychology, but David's is situated in the French structuralist–poststructuralist tradition, and especially in the intersection between Althusserian Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis, while Fernando's is critically positioned in the tradition of Soviet psychology and offers an original theory of subjectivity and personality that has made him one of the most influential Latin American psychologists in the present day.

## 2 | REVOLUTION AND SUBJECTIVITY

**David:** The Cuban Revolution was more than a national event. It had a global and a regional dimension. It can be said, for instance, that it also meant a revolution for Latin America. It meant this at least for many inhabitants of the region, in their subjective sphere, because it profoundly modified their collective identity, renewed their personal representation of history, disrupted their relationship with the world, and suddenly opened up a broad horizon of hopes and possibilities unsuspected in the past. The possible and the expected could no longer be the same after the odyssey of the *Granma*, the guerrilla activities in the Sierra Maestra, the battle of Santa Clara, the overthrow of Fulgencio Batista, the victory at the Bay of Pigs, the resistance against the US embargo and the remarkable achievements of Cuban socialism in matters such as social equality, quality of life, and, especially, health and education. The Cuban Revolution realized what could only have been an unrealizable dream before it. This was subjectively revolutionary for many Latin Americans. What was it for the Cubans? How did they experience the revolution on the subjective level?

**Fernando:** I think that a brief historical picture should be drawn before entering on a discussion of the main points you have raised. This is important due to the precarious history of the Cuban Revolution. The Cuban Revolution needs to be treated like all human phenomena, historically. It was not an isolated historical event. In the 19th century, a Cuban sense of independence from Spain developed that led later that century to the Ten Years War, which began with the so-called Cry of Yara on October 10, 1868, uttered by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes. At that place, de Céspedes unveiled the manifesto of the revolutionary junta of the island of Cuba expressing the ideas and aims of the revolutionary movement that sought independence based on the equality of all men, white or black, Cuban or Spanish. In that historical act, which occurred at La Demajagua, a property of de Céspedes, he decreed the freedom of his slaves, something that was very relevant to the definition of the popular character of the two wars of independence waged against Spain. After the Ten Years War, in which Cuban patriots were forced to sign a peace treaty with the Spanish army (The Zanjón Pact), two other wars took place: (1) the Small War

(1878–1879), when some Cuban generals, faced with imminent defeat in the Ten Years War, decided to continue to struggle against Spain in what turned out to be an ephemeral effort, whose importance was more symbolic than military; and (2) the War of Independence which began in 1895 and during which the Cuban army advanced in a strong military offensive from the east to the west of the island. Once the war had turned in favor of the Cuban offensive, the United States declared war on Spain. As a result of the North American presence, the independence so desired by the Cubans was mediated by the Platt Amendment, an appendix added to the Constitution of Cuba in the period of the first US military occupation of the island (1899–1902) that responded to the interests of the United States. The Platt Amendment (or Permanent Treaty) was repealed on May 29, 1934. The Republic of Cuba was proclaimed on May 20, 1902; when the American flag came down, the Cuban flag was hoisted. The occupation was brought to an end by military governor Leonard Wood handing power to the first president, Don Tomas Estrada Palma, along with the Constitution loaded with the appendix of the Platt Amendment. It is from these processes, which are subjective in nature, that national consciousness has emerged. I use “national consciousness” as a sociological concept that characterizes a general trend of the Cuban population and involves subjective processes such as national identity, antipathy to North American imperialism, and a sense of freedom as a nation. “National consciousness” designates the way in which historical and political events were subjectively experienced. Other levels of discussion, which cannot be developed within the scope of this debate, can lead us to different social subjective processes and configurations that integrate national consciousness.

Our idea of subjectivity has its roots in cultural-historical psychology. It refers to the ensemble of emotions and symbolic processes that emerge in social life through its symbolical realities and social symbolical constructions such as race, gender, illness, and religious or moral values. Subjectivity appears not as a reflection of these processes and realities, but as their production through the concrete experiences of individuals, groups, and societies. These symbolical-emotional ensembles are conceptualized in our work as subjective senses whose dynamic is organized in subjective configurations that become their generative sources. Subjectivity, unlike the subjects and agents who experience it, is not conscious, and is general to all human phenomena, not only to individuals (Gonzalez Rey, 2018; González Rey, 2014b, 2015, 2016, 2017).

**David:** The Platt Amendment demanded the sale or lease of lands to the United States; this allowed the US to lease land for the naval base at Guantánamo Bay. It also restricted the right of Cuba to make treaties and establish commercial relations with other countries. The United States had the right to intervene in Cuban government, finances, and foreign relations. It can be said, therefore, that Cuba was not yet fully independent (Foner, 1972). Despite its late independence and other particularities of Cuban history, this situation is an extreme example of the history of many Latin American nations that escaped Spanish colonialism only to fall under US imperialism and modern forms of colonial oppression (Grandin, 2006). The new world power was the one that ultimately capitalized on our efforts and made the most out of our struggles for freedom (Galeano, 1997). Our struggles have repeatedly ended in failures that we continue to see as victories, perhaps to console ourselves or in order to have a good reason to stop fighting. It is easy to forget that independence only inaugurated new forms of dependency. However, if we are now talking about all this, it is because the history of Cuba had a completely different outcome from that of any other Latin American country. How was this outcome achieved? How did the Cubans suffer frustrated independence and the imposition of the American yoke? How was all this experienced in Cuba? How did it affect the subjectivity, the ideas, but also the feelings of the Cuban people?

- Fernando:** The North American intervention and the imposition of the Platt Amendment wounded Cuban pride, because in the end it frustrated the strong desire for independence. This process led to a movement against American imperialism throughout the first half of the 20th century. Many Spanish people integrated into the new Cuban identity, and feelings against Spain, in a short period of time, became feelings against the United States. Many of the old generals from the War of Independence were grouped in the first political parties that marked the Cuban political picture in the first half of the 20th century. Corruption, racism, and social inequalities quickly increased. Nonetheless, that process did not represent a homogeneous tendency. The rescue of some periods, the presidents during those periods, and their achievements have been recently reported by historians and journalists inside Cuba. In the first half of the 20th century, many social conflicts and new armed struggles characterized Cuban society, as a result of which an increase in political and national interests and values proliferated by many different paths. The most important political event before the revolution of 1959 was the popular movement that led to the fall of the Machado dictatorship in 1933. After a brief attempt to establish a new provisional president, a military coup led by Fulgencio Batista, a sergeant in the Cuban army at the time, took place and the provisional government was aborted. Batista gained strong popular support for his role in avoiding that change of government, making possible a transitional government known as the Pentarquía, which was composed of five figures, with Grau San Martín, a professor from the University of Havana, as its president. Antonio Guiterras, a radical anti-imperialist figure and one of the most important figures of the revolution of 1933, was named as a minister in that provisional government.
- David:** Again, it is a history that looks too much like the histories of other Latin American countries. All the elements are there: conflict, instability, dictatorship, the popular movement, the military coup, the impossibility of democracy, imperialism and anti-imperialism. But Cuba ended up surprising us. How was it that the history you are telling us about led up to 1959? And what was the role of subjectivity? What happened on the subjective plane as a result of this struggle between sovereignty and dependence, between nationalism and imperialism, between what Guiterras represented and what Batista embodied?
- Fernando:** As a minister, Guiterras proposed radical and popular political resolutions, such as the reduction of the working day to eight hours, the creation of a retirement system for workers, the dissolution of the political parties that supported Machado's dictatorship, and government intervention in the North American Electricity Company. There were internal contradictions between the members of the provisional government, and criticism came from many different political fronts—from the Communist Party to the most conservative forces in the country—leading to the dissolution of this 100-day provisional government. Batista's political career began as a member of it. Anyway, progressive winds continued to blow in the island's political climate. These political events were important antecedents to the development of a national and political consciousness that had continued to grow from the time of the North American mediation of Cuban independence. This development of a national consciousness led to a social subjectivity within which emerged the Cuban revolutionary movement that came to power in 1959. Cuban history between 1940 and 1959 is very rich and allows an understanding of the Cuban Revolution as a result of a long pathway of political struggles. In 1940, one of the most progressive constitutions in Latin America was approved. In the same year, an election was held with Batista being elected with widespread popular support. The sergeant, promoted to a general, now became the new president of Cuba. Also, this was a fruitful period for the country due to the high price of sugar on the world market as a result of the Second World War. Batista established a political alliance with the Communist Party, and still enjoyed significant popular support despite having organized the murder of Antonio Guiterras in 1935. In 1944, Ramon Grau San Martín was elected as president, bringing forward important new popular policies (Briones Montoto, 2008; González Arenas, 2016).

- David:** Could we return to the subjective sphere? The historical data you provide are very interesting, but how was it that all this affected subjectivity and led to the 1959 revolution?
- Fernando:** The intensive and rich historical trajectory forged a strong national consciousness oriented against corruption and towards national emancipation, as well as towards a profound opposition to North American hegemony. The Cuban Revolution of 1959 capitalized on all the symbolical and historical value of that rich history, previously discussed. As you said, it achieved many unrealizable dreams for the countries of the region. It was a very popular and participative process, which integrated different revolutionary movements and organizations, and practically all the sectors of the Cuban population. Among the movements that participated more actively in the resistance to the dictatorship of Batista, who had become president of the country for the second time as a result of the military coup he led against Carlos Prío Socarras in 1952, were the Revolutionary Directory, founded in 1956 by Jose Antonio Echevarria, president of the University Students' Federation (FEU) and other leaders of that Federation. The Revolutionary Directory had its own guerrilla front in the Sierra del Escambray, in the province of Las Villas. The Cuban student movement had been very strong since the 1933 movement and was responsible for many heroic actions during the years of the Cuban Revolution, such as the assault on the Presidential Palace in the heart of Havana. The Communist Party, despite neglecting to support the July 26 Movement at the beginning of its actions, and not integrating within the armed struggle, was also very active in the opposition to Batista's dictatorship in those years, although at other historical moments it played along with the political games of the traditional Cuban political parties.
- David:** This is shocking when we consider the later history and the way in which the Cuban Revolution ended up being equated with the Communist Party in the imagination of many people, in various pro-revolutionary and anti-revolutionary discourses, and perhaps also in reality, at least in certain ways.
- Fernando:** Nonetheless, the movement that brought about the Cuban Revolution was the July 26 Movement, which was led by Fidel Castro along with a group of young people from different social classes, educational backgrounds, and religious and political beliefs. This movement simultaneously organized the armed struggle against Batista among the guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra and took the form of clandestine actions within cities. The triumph of the Cuban Revolution embodied the dreams and frustrations that had emerged since the first wars aiming at Cuban independence from Spain. The social subjectivity generated by the Cuban Revolution was a strong element in its achievements and consolidation during the 1960s, a decade in which every kind of aggression was directed at Cuba by the United States on all fronts: military, economic, political, and propagandistic—the latter focusing on campaigns intended to bring about the exodus of Cuban capitalists and professionals from the country. The assimilation of the Soviet model of state socialism occurred in the 1970s. Despite the uncritical assimilation of that model, Cuba, and specifically Fidel Castro, who in those years was at the epicenter of Cuban political functioning so that many of his personal opinions became state policies, was always an active interlocutor with Soviet leaders, and not a passive political extension of the Soviet order, like most of the leaders of European socialist countries.

Social subjectivity is the network of social subjective configurations within which different social practices, activities, and institutional rules obtain subjective senses for those involved in processes within social institutions and informal social organizations. Social relationships are, in turn, organized within these subjective social configurations through different, and often contradictory, subjective senses. These complex networks of subjective configurations simultaneously emerge at both the individual and social level through each of their different subjective configurations.

- David:** According to what you say, the Cuban Revolution was an event in which something fundamentally subjective managed to overcome all the objective obstacles. This makes me think of Gramsci's (1917/2010) interpretation of the October Revolution as a "revolution against Karl Marx's *Capital*", a revolutionary action that was "based more on ideology than actual events," and which demonstrated that the "main determinant of history is not lifeless economics, but man, societies made up of men, men who have something in common, who get along together, and develop a collective social will" (p. 35). Unlike other Marxists like Kautsky (1888), Lenin (1918) was well aware of the determining character of will, of the subjective human factor, and of a consciousness that is capable of escaping from its objective determinations by running forward. All this found its best psychological theoretical elaboration in the Vygotskian conception of learning. Vygotsky (1934/1986) knew that the subjective factor of learning must not submit, as in Piaget's theory, to a supposedly objective development, but that it internally determines development and can even accelerate it. The processes of reality can thus be speeded up by human beings. The Bolsheviks demonstrated this by making a socialist revolution in a quasi-feudal context without having to go through the long development of capitalism. Just as the Bolshevik revolution was made possible by the Bolsheviks and not by the adverse circumstances, so the Cubans were the ones who made their revolution against all the adverse circumstances, thus defying any objectivist and economistic mechanical vision of history. The expected effects of the economic blockade, for example, seem to have been neutralized by a state of mind and by an effective effort that can only be attributed to the subjects.
- Fernando:** The Cuban Revolution, immediately after its triumph in 1959, began social, political and economic transformations, the epicenter of which was the emergence of a new social subjectivity, without which Cuban political survival after the revolutionary victory would not have been possible. Some generations were centered on social interest in such a way that our responses to the calls made on behalf of the revolution made us very proud; this was strong evidence of how a new social subjectivity was emerging. Examples of this are many, such as the national literacy campaign in which thousands of youths aged between 11 and 20 years participated, or the giving up of studies for projected careers following the social demands of all spheres of Cuban actuality (González Rey, 1982, 1983, 1985).
- David:** However, at the same time, the subjective factor also manifested itself later in Cuba in ways that could compromise the revolution. On the one hand, we had arbitrariness, personalism, adventurist strategies, authoritarianism, and bureaucratic inertia; on the other hand, fatigue, discouragement, disappointment, dissidence, and rebellion against the regime.
- Fernando:** Like many human phenomena, revolutions are planned as rational projects; nevertheless, they are subjective movements that generate new and diverse subjective processes that are beyond any intentional possibility of control. So, independently of the ideal and the character of the revolution, injustices were arbitrarily committed on behalf of it; these were unperceived in the face of the popular effervescence generated by the achievements and popular measures of the revolution. Nonetheless, from the very beginning, the omnipotence of the group that came to power began to be justified on behalf of the revolution. In the 1960s, a dominant social subjectivity focused on sacrifice, collectiveness, defense of the revolution, rights to everyone, as well as on the social equality that was so central that any other human productions became secondary. Individuals and institutions came to be mere executors of the "revolution," which was very quickly positioned under the charismatic leadership of Fidel Castro. Imperceptibly, and through very subtle subjective mechanisms, it was becoming Castro's revolution.
- David:** But Castro's revolution was for the people of Cuba. What does it matter that the revolution was assimilated to the figure of Fidel when it benefited all the people? I will allow myself to argue with some truisms and banalities that still seem to me, however, too convincing. As you know, the human and social

achievements of the Cuban Revolution are unparalleled in other Latin American countries. None of our nations has achieved, either with their dictatorships or with their democracies, what was attained in Cuba: social equality, peace, education, nutrition, health, the lowest infant mortality rates and the highest life expectancy. Is not all this the most important thing? If the cost of all this has been Castro's personalism and the other vices of the system, has it not been worth it? On the other hand, even if we believe in the most exaggerated estimates of repression under the Cuban regime, they are nothing compared to the balance of tens of thousands of political murders and disappearances under the Guatemalan and other Central American tyrannies, dictatorships such as in Chile or Argentina, and even in seeming democracies such as those in Colombia and Mexico. And, in exchange for all this violence, no other people have obtained what the Cuban people have. Do you think this could explain, at least in part, the permanence of the revolutionary regime in Cuba? The regime's inertia, rigidity, and oppression certainly imply a widespread subjective experience of annihilation, dejection, fatalism, powerlessness, hopelessness, and loss of agency. But these feelings are not shared by all individuals in Cuba. In addition, they do not exhaust the subjectivity of every Cuban. People in Cuba experience many other things every day. Their daily passions, their desires and hopes, their joys and pleasures, their crushes, their affections and all the other feelings, different in each individual, are also internally enabled or facilitated, and even molded and colored by the revolution and by Castro's regime. The subjective effects of this regime are not only those that are openly associated with it. Nor are they only those that can be made explicit when talking about the regime. From a Freudian perspective, like mine, the best way to talk about something may be to talk about something else. On the other hand, even when Cubans talk about the regime, there is something latent that underlies the manifest judgments. Chatting with Cubans within and beyond the island, I have usually felt much discontent and disagreement with Castro's regime, as well as an understandable disappointment, but also often something more, a kind of calm satisfaction, of deep faith in the revolution, of gratitude and adherence, something that seemed sometimes almost unconscious to me, which would be difficult for me to describe, but which could contribute to the permanence of the Communist regime. Could you say something about this? How would you see the state of mind of those who currently live in Cuba? Have you also felt that affective recognition of the achievements of the revolution or do you think I am trying to convince myself of this?

**Fernando:** You are completely right about the achievements that you mentioned. But this should not make us forget the restrictions on Cubans travelling abroad, the obligatory education of adolescents and youths in schools located in the countryside (according to the principle of combining education and work, but without considering the conditions of both educators and schools for this kind of education), the increasing centralization of political decrees and policies without any consultation with or participation by the Cuban population, the professionalization of political nominations (members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party were, at the same time, deputies of the National Assembly, representing Cuban regions which they never visited). Besides this, other processes occurred, such as the suppression of the market as an ideological deviation in all areas and sectors of economy. Also, the state bureaucracy appeared to be ideologically more effective than private producers, which was an important factor in the deterioration of the Cuban economy. This process began with the so-called "revolutionary offensive" in the second half of the 1960s when, by a decree, all small-scale local production and domestic services, such as shoe repairers, bricklayers, and plumbers, were suppressed. All unofficial workers disappeared without the state offering any alternative.

**David:** This surely brought about great transformations in the daily lives of people, in their interpersonal relationships and in their ideas about the revolution, the state, society and the economy.

- Fernando:** Cuban daily life literally became a battle for survival. That situation was eloquently expressed in the popular daily language of Cuba. When one answered the usual question, "How are you?," the most common answer would be "in struggle." The bureaucracy generated many depersonalized ways of attending to the population in all spheres of state functioning, including the traditional achievements of the revolution, such as in health and education. All of these distortions began very early in the process like the "revolutionary offensive." However, the widespread popular support for the revolution in that first decade minimized the subjective effects on the population. Nevertheless, in the second half of the 1980s and the early 1990s, the situation got worse as a result of the political crisis in the European socialist countries and in the Soviet Union. Moreover, those generations that were born after what were defined as the "revolutionary times" (see González Rey, Machado, Martín, & Sánchez, 1989) and grew up with the previously described conditions and norms, did not have the same attitude to the "revolution" as their parents and grandparents. (I use the term in quotes because using the term "revolution" 30 or 40 years after its triumph in order to continue legitimizing a specific party and the state is a euphemism. Rather than a revolutionary government, it was what Gramsci (1973) defined as "statolatry", which represented the cult of the state as proclaimed by Benito Mussolini (1944), who coined the famous statement: "Everything within the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state," and which he used to criticize "Stalinism"). Those new generations experienced rather more of the government's arbitrariness in politics and decision making in its relations with the Cuban people than they did of the glorious achievements recounted every day by all official means of propaganda and in every official institution.
- David:** What was put across by propaganda and official institutions was not completely deceptive. It was useful to remind new generations of something that was often forgotten. Both visions seem equally true to me, but also partial and somewhat irrational.
- Fernando:** Subjectivity does not emerge by rational means, but by lived experiences. New inequalities emerged in that period (the second half of the 1980s and 1990s) between those who received foreign currency, mostly from members of families that had migrated to the United States, and those who did not receive money from abroad. Among the latter were those who had broken off relations with the parts of their families that had migrated from Cuba; some through political convictions, others because it was a prerequisite for acceptance as a member of the Communist Party, a condition that brought with it a lot of advantages in some sectors of Cuban life. These economic differences were officially stimulated by the creation of special shops in which many inaccessible products could be acquired by the minority of the population that received foreign currency. After being considered illegal for decades, suddenly foreign currency was not only accepted, but possession of it became a new socially desirable condition. In order to make its possession official, the so-called Cuban exchangeable peso was created; two different currencies began to circulate officially inside the country. The creation of the Cuban exchangeable peso forced those who received money from abroad to change the original currency into these pesos that had no real value outside Cuba. The Cuban peso, in which all Cuban workers received their salary, was completely devalued (the actual exchange rate for one Euro is about 22 Cuban pesos).
- David:** Paradoxically, the struggle for equality caused inequality.
- Fernando:** With the serious economic crisis after the fall of the Soviet Union, the situation became even worse. The sugar industry was completely destroyed by the mistakes committed by the State-Communist Party in its economic policies. From being the top world exporter of sugar, Cuba now has to import sugar. More than half of the sugar factories in the 1950s were closed in the years of revolutionary government. Tourism appeared to be the only way to save the economy. In the late 1980s and early 1990s what could be literally considered an "apartheid" of Cubans inside Cuba began; if Cubans were in a long line waiting to put petrol in their cars, a tourist's rented car could come to the gas station, ignore the

line and be served immediately. Even with exchangeable pesos, Cubans could not have access to tourist hotels and facilities. All of the national pride rescued by the revolution was broken in the face of such humiliations. A sequence of distortions in all spheres of Cuban actuality began to appear; professionals prefer to drive taxis or be hotel waiters than to practice their own professions. The most important value was to get closer and closer to tourists

**David:** The struggle for national dignity had also led to its opposite. . .

**Fernando:** This picture is completely different from the one you draw in your question. You seem to be located at one moment of the Cuban Revolution. However, as with any human reality, the Cuban Revolution is historical, and the symbolical values of a single moment cannot be used as a symbolical device to avoid the challenges created by this process.

**David:** I agree with what you say, but I see here, in the terms of our discussion, a conception of time that seems too linear to me. I feel that there are events that have, so to speak, eternal validity, because they create a new world in which we move. The problems of these events are the problems produced by their solutions to other problems. Criticizing these events presupposes accepting them, since they are criticized from within and with the resources that they provide (Badiou, 1988). I think that is the case for the Cuban Revolution. However, in any case, I completely agree with your point.

**Fernando:** I think that the point is not to be better or worse than other regimes in Latin America. Each society has its own problems and contradictions, as well as its means of subjectification of its realities that do not respond to rational comparisons. After the revolution, the Cuban population acquired a higher cultural level than most Latin American countries; as a result of this, its level of criticism increased as well as its intolerance of the unilateral and non-participative leadership of the country by the Cuban political elite. The Cuban Revolution was a dream, an illusion that led to thoughts that a new society would be possible. The utopia of a fair society was replaced by an ideologically stagnated power project; the bureaucracy, nepotism, lack of effectiveness, lack of participation in political decisions, artificial scenarios to show off to tourists, the preservation of a single group in power for six decades, and the various aforementioned contradictions, led to new social and individual subjective productions that, far from contributing to solving these problems, were a central part of them.

### 3 | REVOLUTION AND PSYCHOLOGY

**David:** Has Cuban psychology been interested in the subjective effects of the revolution? Are there works that deal with the relations between the revolution and subjectivity?

**Fernando:** Subjectivity was not a major topic for Cuban psychology.

**David:** Why? What was Cuban psychology doing then? Can you tell us a little about the history of psychological disciplines in Cuba?

**Fernando:** The study of psychology in Cuban universities began after the triumph of the revolution. The School of Psychology at Las Villas University was the first to be founded, in 1961, while another was created at the University of Havana in 1962. Before the revolution, there were a small number of psychologists in Cuba, most of whom worked in private enterprises and schools in topics such as psychometric studies, commercial propaganda, and a very tiny number in clinical psychology. In the late 1950s, a recently created private university in Havana, the University of Villanueva, included psychology among its careers. However, they did not manage to produce a generation of psychologists. That meant that psychology only appeared in the middle of the revolutionary climate that dominated the island in the first half of the 1960s. The first chairs of psychology in both universities, in Havana and in Las Villas, were taken up by psychologists devoted to practice in different fields, as well as by psychiatrists. From its

beginning, the School of Psychology at the University of Havana was oriented toward combining the study of psychology with socio-professional practice. This was done with great enthusiasm, but on the basis of completely empirical and intuitive criteria. Practice was dominant and took place in different fields and institutions such as sugar factories, rural communities, factories, etc. The programs were very eclectic and mainly expressed the personal experience and background of the professors who created both of these schools of psychology. However, that eclecticism was, in my opinion, healthy because it allowed students to overcome the narrow dogmatism based on classic psychological theories that has prevailed up until today in the teaching of psychology in Latin American countries.

**David:** However, if I understood correctly, there was no interest in subjectivity and the subjective effects of the revolution. And there was also no interest in the subject outside the universities and academic and professional psychology? Nowadays, in a time of psychologization and subjectivist postmodern ideologies, it is difficult to imagine a world in which subjectivity is ignored in such a way. It is clear, of course, that the subjective and the psychological were repressed at a certain stage in the Soviet Union and in communist parties around the world. I have shown recently how this repression was evidenced, especially in Stalin's time, with the proscription of psychoanalysis, the hope of replacing all psychology with an objectivist reflexology, certain interpretations of Vygotsky among some of his disciples, and the persecution of any theory, such as Rubinstein's, in which there was any room for the subject (Pavón-Cuéllar, 2017). However, although all this can be imagined in the historical context prior to de-Stalinization, one would think of the Cuban Revolution as a victory for the subject over objectivity and necessarily also over objectivism. As I said before, the Cuban Revolution can be described, in this sense, as a revolution against capital, as the young Gramsci (1917/2010) said about the October Revolution, showing how the revolutionary subject, well embodied by Lenin, had triumphed against the objective necessity of the capitalist system. The triumph of the subject also in some respects took place in Cuba. The Cuban Revolution was also a subjective affirmation against the objective necessity of capitalism, imperialism, dependence, and new forms of colonial subordination in the backward societies of Latin America. How was it possible, then, to ignore the role of subjectivity in history, paraphrasing Plekhanov (1898/2006)?

**Fernando:** Subjectivity is the most specific quality that characterizes human phenomena and, as such, it is inseparable from all human processes and realities. However, from a theoretical point of view, subjectivity has been quite ignored since its association with the rationalism represented by the modern philosophy of the subject in the 17th century. For philosophers such as Descartes, Leibniz, and Malebranche, reason means participation in divine nature through the knowledge of nature; it gives access to the intelligible world because this world is also organized on the basis of human reason. However, reason was prior in relation to all human experience. That philosophy, rather than subjectivity, focused on reason as the epicenter through which God would appear integrated into human knowledge. Bacon, who is contemporary with Descartes, founded philosophical empiricism in England, also in the 17th century. Modern natural science came to the fore with Newtonian physics in the 18th century. For the first time, a new and complete representation of the world resulted from science. Newton opposed Descartes' deductive ideal with a purely inductive one. From Newtonian physics until the emergence of the theory of relativity and quantum mechanics, the idea of a natural empirical science that operated entirely guided by the phenomenal world was dominant. That dominant way of doing science was based on the emergence of positivism in the 19th century. In that representation of science, there was no room for such a phenomenon as subjectivity. An objective representation of social life also prevailed; when you change social reality, human beings will change. With the emergence of French post-structuralism, subjectivity was also excluded in favor of language, local truths, and discourse. Subjectivity was not in the imagination of the

revolution despite Che Guevara's personal sympathy for psychoanalysis. Subjectivity implies recognizing the diversity of human phenomena as intrinsic to the human condition. Revolutions throughout history have aspired to the contrary, to control human behaviors through changes in the social environment. I would like also to argue that reflexology was not the only objective-oriented psychology within Soviet psychology. Kornilov's reactology was as objective as reflexology through its behavioral-empirical understanding of reactions to external influences as the basis for a real, objective Marxist psychology. Such a perspective coincides with what some authors have called the instrumental stage of Vygotsky's work (González Rey, 2011, 2014a; Yasnitsky, 2009, 2015; Zavershneva, 2015). I have also emphasized the behavioral stage of Vygotsky's work (Gonzalez Rey, 2018; González Rey, 2017).

**David:** But it is the subject that introduces changes! I see things the other way around. I think that revolutions demonstrate the importance of what you call "subjectivity" in history. If Marx (1850/2006) is right and "revolutions are the locomotives of history" (p. 622), it is the subject who drives these locomotives. Men make revolutions, and that is why, as Marx (1852/1981) also said, "men make their own history" (pp. 407–408). It is true that Marx recognized that men "do not make their history as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past" (p. 408). However, as Marx and Engels (1846/1974a) also pointed out, "men make circumstances" (p. 41), not only by making their own history, but by interpreting it in a certain way, since history, as Marx well knew, is always a "known history", a "conscious self-transcending act of origin" (1844/1997, p. 196). This is especially evident in revolutionary processes, which allow the subject not only to influence the course of history, but also to change the way of thinking and feeling about historical events through what Lacan described as "secondary historization" (Lacan, 1953/1999). It is also at this level that I imagined, perhaps naively, that the psychological should acquire greater relevance in the revolutionary years, especially in a context like Cuba.

**Fernando:** There was no psychological culture in Cuba in those years. The field of mental health was completely in the hands of the strong Cuban psychiatric profession. In relation to Marx's position on subjectivity, this was very contradictory at various times. I don't want to extend this point, but it was not only Marx, but the Marxist imagination in general, that had great difficulty in understanding the fictional and creative character of subjectivity as a social force that is not directly determined by social influences. In a recent paper (Gonzalez Rey, 2018), I discussed in depth Marx's relevance to my cultural-historical proposal on subjectivity. I can also give quotations by Marx that contradict the statements of his that you cited above: "Social being is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by social being" (Marx & Engels, 1846/1974b, p. 49). On this point, I completely agree with Eagleton's critique: "How can being determine consciousness when consciousness is an integral part of it?" (Eagleton, 2017, p. 85). Many other quotations could be given to continue our discussion on this matter.

**David:** But the issue that now concerns us is that of Cuban psychology at the time of the revolution. What happened in the following years? I have the impression that post-revolutionary Cuban psychology is one of the most interesting in Latin America (see Torre, 2009). And it also seems to me that it gives a central place to subjectivity. However, now that I think about it, I have this idea mainly because of what I know about the theory that you, Fernando González-Rey, have developed, which is unique in our continent. What is indisputable is that the modern history of psychology in Cuba is very original, and you are the best example of this. I suppose there are different circumstances that explain the originality of Cuban psychology. For instance, while the various histories of the psychologies of our continent were generally dominated by approaches from the United States or Western Europe, Cuban psychology was distinguished by its adherence to Marxism and Soviet psychological schools. You yourself studied in the USSR and became an expert in authors related to the Marxist tradition. Needless to

say, all this was a direct consequence of the Cuban Revolution. What do you think of such a consequence? Do you find it favorable or unfavorable—enriching or impoverishing—for psychology in Cuba? In what sense?

**Fernando:** The 1970s represented a rupture in relation to the 1960s. The failure of the sugar harvest in 1970, the death in 1967 of Che Guevara who was critical of the Soviet Union within the Cuban political leadership, the failure of the Cuban attempt to extend the revolution to other Latin American countries were, among other things, factors that influenced the importation of Soviet political and State structures and models of functioning into Cuban actuality. An important political turn toward the Soviet political model took place and, as part of this, the ideological alienation within Soviet Marxism was followed. Some antecedents from the end of the prior decade indicated that new winds had begun to blow in the areas of social thought and culture. The critical review, *Pensamiento Crítico* [Critical Thinking], published by the Department of Philosophy at the University of Havana, and promoted by Cuban politicians as a path along which to advance toward an original Cuban variety of social thought, was closed down in the second half of the 1960s. In 1971 legal proceedings were brought against the Cuban poet, Heberto Padilla. His book, *Fuera del Juego* [Out of the Game], was accused of having a counter revolutionary character. The proceedings resulted in public self-criticism by the poet, following the same pattern as Stalin's famous show trials of dissidents. The 1970s began with the firm intention of transforming Marxism-Leninism into the official basis of the Cuban State, as is evident from our constitution today, and of advancing the process of turning every sphere of culture, art, and social thought into a Marxist-based domain. The development of Cuban sciences was part of this process. It was in the 1970s when sciences began to be enhanced, and this process required the training of doctors, because, in those years, most professors at Cuban universities still did not have PhD degrees. The only option for taking that plan forward for Cuba, both for ideological and economic reasons, was the Soviet Union and, to a lesser extent, other socialist countries. A group of young Cuban psychologists, including myself, as you said, travelled to the Soviet Union, mainly to Moscow, in order to complete our doctoral studies. That situation, in my opinion, was very favorable to the development of Cuban psychology because Soviet psychology, despite having an official version throughout its history, had different trends with important contradictions in relation to each other. Although most of that group studied in the Faculty of Psychology at the Lomonosov State University of Moscow, which was headed by Leontiev, whose psychology was the most official version of Soviet psychology at the time, other psychologists, like myself, studied in other universities and institutes. This made it possible to bring to Cuba a heterogeneous view of what psychology was. This was an important factor in avoiding dogmatism, and in allowing the openness of different research lines sustained by different theoretical positions. For me, it was a great moment for the development of a new, different psychology in Cuba, allowing us to transcend the extreme dependency that, apart from rare moments and exceptions, prevailed in most Latin American countries in relation to the most traditional and well-established psychological traditions of the West.

**David:** Your opinion, in short, is that the USSR had a beneficial and enriching influence on Cuban psychology. I think we can say, then, that there is here an evident and unmistakable positive consequence of the revolution, which, as I see it, also enabled an intellectual and scientific liberation in Cuba. The Cubans managed to free themselves to some extent from what was called "bourgeois science," specifically from Western-dominated psychology (see Lacerda, 2015). Although sometimes they ended up submitting to the dominance of an official Soviet psychological perspective like that of Leontiev, I personally think that this perspective, however open to criticism it may be, was much more sophisticated, subtle, and insightful than the dominant options in the Western world. I know that such a general comparison is dangerous and very questionable, but I cannot resist making it!

- Fernando:** Together with these facts, it is important to point out how we compromised, as young doctors at that time who were promoting a psychology on a Marxist basis capable of answering to the ideology that we spontaneously shared at the time, mainly through our collaboration with the political process, in which most of us actively took part. The School of Psychology at the University of Havana was the country's leader in psychology. After that period of training, there was an important increase in psychological research, postgraduate studies, and international exchanges inside and outside of Cuba.
- David:** If I am following you properly, we have now reached the 1980s, the decade of the terminal crisis of real socialism in the world. Could you talk a little more about international exchanges and about other aspects of Cuban psychology during this decade?
- Fernando:** Within those important exchanges can be mentioned the Latin American Social Critical Psychology movement in the 1980s, the meetings between psychoanalysis and Marxist psychology also in the 1980s, the Interamerican Congress of Psychology, which was held for the first time in Cuba in 1987, and the psychological weeks organized by the University of Havana and the National Autonomous University of México (UNAM). The openness of the School of Psychology at the University of Havana was very relevant to our inclusion within international psychology in those years. It was a golden decade for Cuban psychology. Also, the *Cuban Journal of Psychology* was created, sponsored by the School of Psychology at the University of Havana, and the Society of Cuban Psychologists was reactivated. Fortunately, psychology, unlike the rest of the schools in social sciences, was part of the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Geography, which permitted it to be beyond the most rigorous surveillance of the Department of Sciences and the ideological sphere of the Communist Party.
- David:** It is paradoxical and revealing that the Communist Party was perceived as a danger by Marxist scholars who were trained in Soviet psychology. Now, in addition to the Communist Party's surveillance and the enriching adhesion to Marxism and Soviet psychology, could you mention other ways in which the revolution has impacted the recent history of psychology in Cuba?
- Fernando:** The revolution impacted psychology through the specific social reality and political processes that we all lived through as part of it. In the 1990s, Cuba suffered significant changes, particularly after the fall of the Soviet Union, whose economic support during the whole revolutionary period was the basis of our main achievements. New social problems and contradictions emerged from the late 1980s in Cuban society as explained above. Nevertheless, the Cuban state and the Communist Party, which were one and the same thing, were not interested in discussing new alternatives in view of the new situation, blaming prostitution, drugs, lack of motivation to work, the black market, and other deviations within Cuban society as "anti-social elements."
- David:** Your words show an unfortunate dissociation between, on the one hand, the Cuban people and, on the other, the state and the Communist Party. However, in the revolution and in the following years, I do not feel that the governmental and popular spheres were dissociated, or at least they had not reached such a degree of dissociation. Could you specify the beginning of this divorce between the Cuban people and their state?
- Fernando:** Popular participation was lost as early as the 1960s. Even inside the Communist Party, the autocratic position of Fidel was the main criterion to be followed. In that climate, there was no dialogue between social sciences and politics, or between the governmental and popular spheres. However, as I said before, the connection of the Cuban population with the revolution was so strong that the population's consciousness of the split with the governmental/party spheres only began to be critically perceived in the second half of the 1980s. There was also a time when criticism of the Cuban situation became stronger in literature, through authors like Leonardo Padura and Pedro Juan Gutierrez, and in the social sciences.
- David:** And psychology?

- Fernando:** Psychology was not an exception. Public policies in Cuba were, in fact, political orientations, and as such had to be uncritically accepted. Professionals and scientists did not participate in policy making related to mental health, education, immigration or in the discussion of the social problems generated by the new contradictions. The weight of psychology in the universities reduced and so too did the level of theoretical discussion and debate. The promising advances toward a productive psychology were banned. Having been a pioneering space for the introduction of Soviet psychology to Latin America, Cuban psychology not only ceased to generate new interpretations of that legacy but did not produce new paths for research and theoretical work. Philosophical debate stagnated, as did social thought. It has been impressive how a very empirical conception of scientific research has dominated psychological research in the country.
- David:** I'm not sure that I altogether understand. The 1980s were a time of great intellectual creativity and scientific productivity in the field of psychology. According to you, this was possible, in part, thanks to Soviet influence and economic support, and then, once this influence and support were lost in the 1990s, a period of decline began. If I have understood you correctly, the decisive element would have been the Soviet factor and not the Cuban state and the Communist Party. The revolutionary government was the same in the eighties as in the nineties and now. . .
- Fernando:** The euphemistically called revolutionary government, consisting of a power group organized around Castro's family, transformed itself into a very conservative body, within which nepotism still keeps the family in power after 60 years in the name of the revolution. In this picture, there was no room for any advances in the theory of subjectivity or for the emergence of new social and individual subjects. Even epistemologically speaking, there are no options for new knowledge. Power is exerted in place of the truth.
- David:** I feel confused by what you say. I do not think that power ever has enough power to completely supplant the truth. The place of the truth requires recognition. It cannot become just a question of power. In my view, however authoritarian and totalitarian the Cuban government is—and, perhaps out of ignorance, I do not think it is so far gone—I suppose that it cannot control absolutely everything that is at stake in the relationship with the truth, especially in the social, subjective and psychological fields. These fields are always battlefields. They are particularly refractory to authoritarianism and totalitarianism. In the face of oppression, the subject—as seen from my Lacanian perspective—always bursts in as a figure of subversion, revolt, resistance (Pavón-Cuéllar, 2010).
- Fernando:** My conception of subjectivity had its roots precisely in perceiving the diverse mechanisms of resistance that emerged in Cuba against the control of the state (González Rey, 1990, 1995). However, resistance is not necessarily positive for social change. I completely agree with you, and it is part of my reiterated critique of the omission of the subject in French structuralism and post-structuralism (González Rey, 2015, 2016); subject and subjectivity are based on social and individual resistance, something that even Foucault began to understand in the last period of his work. Nonetheless, these two forms of resistance imply very different processes. Social resistance in Cuba is highly fragmented because of the strong control over the population, making it difficult for social subjects to emerge who are capable of generating transformations in Cuban society. However, an invisible social resistance is growing up, expressed by the naturalization and extension of the “black market” sustained by the robbery of the state, the low productivity in all sectors of the economy, the massive exodus of Cubans abroad, mainly young people, and many other factors impossible to enumerate in this short space. Nonetheless, an open and direct opposition to the Cuban political *status quo* is restricted by a set of facts; the communication channels belong to the state, any publication is impossible without its official approval, civic protests are strongly repressed. An example of this repression was evident with the *Las Damas de*

*Blanco* (Ladies in White) movement, formed by women dressed in white who peacefully marched in the streets of Havana, but were immediately repressed and prevented from continuing to march. In Cuba, social networks organized via the internet are impossible due to the internet being precarious, expensive, and controlled.

**David:** And yet, control should not prevent resistance. It is precisely because of resistance that there is a need for control. It is impossible to completely get rid of the subject (Pavón-Cuéllar, 2014). It was not even possible to do it in Stalinist Russia, in which, by the way, we find all kinds of more or less subversive manifestations of subjectivity in art and science, and in psychological theory itself, as you know better than me. Are you not overestimating the power of the Cuban government over society, subjectivity, and psychology? What if this overestimation of power, more than power itself, were at the heart of the problem?

**Fernando:** David, during Stalinism, I don't remember any movement of resistance, whether in science, art, or in any other field.

**David:** I was not thinking of broad movements of resistance, but only of specific subversive manifestations of subjectivity, like those that can be found in the works of the psychologist Sergei Rubinstein, writers such as Mikhail Bulgakov and Anna Akhmatova, composers such as Dmitri Shostakovich, Sergei Prokofiev, Nikolai Myaskovsky and Aram Khachaturian, and many others. However, in all cases, the demonstrations were persecuted and censored by the regime, but this did not prevent them from existing, although always with great difficulties.

**Fernando:** The heroes of the revolution were murdered or became submissive to the regime. Submission and opportunism are two strong expressions of social subjectivity within authoritarian regimes that should be more deeply studied in psychology. Soviet psychology was very conservative and uncritical in relation to Soviet society, being a psychology founded on the premise of the social and cultural genesis of the human psyche. As I said above, Soviet psychology was mainly an individual psychology. Social psychology was one of the weakest fields in that psychology, as it also was in Cuba and in the rest of the so-called socialist countries.

**David:** It is as paradoxical as it is revealing that real socialism did not seek the truth of the subject in society, but in the individual.

**Fernando:** Historically, the place of the truth has been inseparable from power, from "micro-powers," as defined by Foucault. Authoritarian regimes have been characterized by the construction of truths that become myths that are reiterated by all the state's means of propaganda that focus on naturalizing them. This is one of the processes of social subjectivity by which autocratic regimes have been perpetuated over time and, on some occasions, it has led populations to take non-rational and catastrophic actions with wide popular support.

## 4 | CONCLUSION

When thinking of present-day Cuba, Fernando emphasizes power, authoritarianism, and propaganda, while David still finds something inspiring, encouraging, and liberating. How is this difference between David and Fernando explained? Is there a greater or lesser distance with respect to the revolution? Their respective political standpoints? David's naïve optimism? Fernando's personal experience? David's commitment to communism? Fernando's high expectations? Their different kinds of implication for the revolution?

The historical event is something in which the subject is implicated. Fernando's and David's attitudes to history are also part of history. The revolutionary process is expressed through their words and not only through what is designated by their words.

David and Fernando not only discuss the subjective factor in the Cuban revolution, but they also enact it. The words of both illustrate ways in which the revolutionary process has influenced subjectivity by provoking attitudes, interpretations, commitments, doubts, hopes, illusions, disappointments, and many other things. David and Fernando also embody, in their own way, the subjective effects of the Cuban Revolution in Latin America.

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