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Renovating Revolution. Carlos Fuentes, Mexico, and Cuba in the Long 1960s

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Introduction

Born into a family of diplomats in Panama in 1928, Mexican author Carlos Fuentes—who would go on to become one of Latin America's most celebrated twentieth-century writers—spent most of his childhood outside of Latin America. His father, Rafael Fuentes, was stationed at the Mexican embassy in Washington, D.C. for much of the first decade of Carlos's life, and Mexico existed for the young boy as something out of history books and his father's stories.[1] It was an "inexistent country…invented by my father to nourish my infant imagination with yet another marvelous fiction: a land of Oz with a green cactus road, a landscape and a soul so different from those of the United States that they seemed a fantasy."[2] Not until 1940, when twelve-year-old Carlos and his family traveled to Chile, did he "[enter] fully the world of the Spanish language, of Latin American politics and its adversities."[3] For the rest of his life, this would be Fuentes's world.

Fuentes alluded to a mixture of literature and politics that would define his

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[1] Carlos Fuentes [hereafter CF], "Cronología personal," in Julio Ortega, *Retrato de Carlos Fuentes* (Galaxia Gutenberg, 1995), 104. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
[2] CF, *Myself with Others: Selected Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988), 4.
[3] Ibid., 9.

prolific literary and political career. He came of age during a heady moment in Latin American letters: over the course of the 1960s, "Latin American fiction emerged from obscurity in Europe and the United States to become a major critical and commercial phenomenon."[4] Fuentes, along with Colombian Gabriel García Márquez, Peruvian Mario Vargas Llosa, and Argentinean Julio Cortázar, would be a protagonist of what would come to be called the "Boom" in Latin American literature. Alongside these authors, who were also some of his closest friends, Fuentes pioneered new styles, addressed new audiences, and became newly self-aware of the position of Mexican and Latin American literature on the global stage.

Also, alongside these authors Fuentes experienced the hemisphere's moment of greatest collective revolutionary effervescence since the independence movements of the nineteenth century. The 1959 Cuban Revolution opened a sense of revolutionary possibility to the rest of the region, illustrating, in Fuentes's mind, "what a popular and patriotic government could do."[5] Radical agrarian reform, nationalization of foreign industries, greater equality of income and wealth—these were the dreams of the Latin American left, and Cuba seemed to be achieving them. For Fuentes and many of his contemporaries, the Cuban Revolution fit neatly into a teleology that led from the 1910 Mexican Revolution to its Cuban sister, a half-century later.[6]

During the early years of the Cuban Revolution, Fuentes was a vocal critic of the Mexican state and the ways in which it was failing to live up to its revolutionary ideals. However, by the late 1960s, Fuentes had become increasingly critical of the Cuban regime and its assaults on intellectual freedom, though he continued to support the island's right to self-determination. In 1970, he threw his support behind Luis Echeverría, the presidential candidate of Mexico's hegemonic Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) and a likely orchestrator of the 1968 repression of leftist student protesters, with whom Fuentes had sympathized.

This set of transitions appear to indicate Fuentes's trajectory from "critical intellectual" to "intellectual in the shadow of the state." While political economist Adam David Morton puts it most forcefully—in the mid-1960s, "Fuentes increasingly

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[4] Russell Cobb, "The Politics of Literary Prestige: Promoting the Latin American 'Boom' in the Pages of *Mundo Nuevo*," *A Contracorriente* 5, no. 3 (Spring 2008): 75.

[5] CF, "El libro negro," *Política: Quince días de México y del mundo* [hereafter *Política*], April 15, 1961, 39.

[6] The concept of a revolutionary teleology is borrowed from Alan Knight, "The Myth of the Mexican Revolution," *Past and Present*, no. 209 (November 2010): 223-73. However, Knight is concerned solely with the Mexican Revolution and does not address how its understanding was shaped by the Cuban Revolution.

began to perform a function organic both to capitalism and maintaining the unity of the PRI in Mexico"—the limited historiography on Fuentes's life and politics tends to concur with Morton in this assessment of Fuentes as an "institutional intellectual," particularly after 1970.[7]

However, an analysis of Fuentes's political writings, correspondence, and personal archive suggests that he was more consistent in his politics during the long 1960s than might appear at first glance. The "paucity of options" available to Fuentes in the polarized Cold War atmosphere meant that any path he took would have required the sacrifice of some of his ideals, which remained remarkably consistent.[8] Perhaps the most important continuity in Fuentes's thought was his conviction in the latent potential of the Mexican Revolution: while unafraid to attack the shortcomings of the party that claimed to institutionalize it, Fuentes never lost faith in the possibility that Revolution's goals—diminished inequality, social and economic inclusion, agrarian reform, nationalization of natural resources—be realized peacefully, through the existing governmental apparatus. Even during the period when he most fervently supported Cuba and championed the benefits of revolution in other Latin American countries, he never advocated for another revolution in Mexico. Indeed, multiple authors have spoken to the fact that the vast majority of the Mexican left did not want another revolution, but rather the fulfillment of the promises of the first.[9]

Though Fuentes's commitment to the Revolution was steadfast, his perspective on how best to achieve its goals was another matter. Three related processes over the course of the 1960s led to his qualified support for the PRI candidate in 1970. Most importantly, the Cuban Revolution altered Fuentes's understanding of the Mexican Revolution, embedding it in a new context of anti-imperial struggle that positioned the United States as the primary opponent of revolutionary progress in Latin America. The nation-state as an instrument of anti-imperial defense became central to Fuentes's conception of how best to defend the legacy of Mexico's Revolution. Secondly, Cold War polarization forced Fuentes into uncomfortable and contradictory positions. Committed to both independent socialism (antithetical to the U.S.) and critical freedom

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[7] Adam David Morton, "The Social Function of Carlos Fuentes: A Critical Intellectual or in the 'Shadow of the State'?", *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 22, no. 1 (2003): 28.

[8] Patrick Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 18.

[9] See Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom*; Renata Keller, *Mexico's Cold War: Cuba, the United States, and the Legacy of the Mexican Revolution* (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2015); and Jaime Pensado, *Rebel Mexico: Student Unrest and Authoritarian Political Culture during the Long Sixties* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

(increasingly antithetical to Cuba), Fuentes could not help but sacrifice one or the other at various moments in his life. Finally, the 1968 massacre at Tlatelolco, during which the military killed several hundred student protesters, was instrumental in changing Fuentes's assessment of how best to achieve revolutionary progress. While before the massacre, the path to a "peaceful evolution towards socialism" seemed wide open, the violence of the government's response abruptly closed this possibility. In its stead, Fuentes saw a crossroads leading to either "a right-wing military dictatorship" or "a bourgeois liberalism."[10] Critical engagement, but engagement nonetheless, was necessary to ensuring that Mexico took the second path and not the first.

When Echeverría emerged as a presidential candidate in 1970, it was with a commitment to a democratic opening at home and to vigorous promotion of Mexican and Third World interests abroad—exactly what Fuentes thought critical to the continuation of the Mexican Revolution. "There is a new climate of truth and it would be idiotic not to take advantage of it," he declared to his close friend Octavio Paz after Echeverría took office.[11]

Fuentes's trajectory thus complicates the binary between intellectuals as "'deputies' or instruments of hegemony," and intellectuals as supporters of "subaltern groups engaged in promoting social change."[12] Fuentes did not view his collaboration with the state as a betrayal of revolutionary ideals, but rather as the best way to achieve those ideals given a highly constrained set of options. His (mis)alignment with different presidential administrations should therefore be understood not as evidence of changing ideology, but rather as a product of his appraisal of the changing political context and the narrowing of options he faced as a consequence of domestic repression, polarization, and U.S. interference in Latin America. Fuentes's trajectory can also be understood as emblematic of a more general struggle faced by the Mexican left: a grappling with a kind of Mexican exceptionalism that has refused to abandon a belief that the fundamental structure of the Mexican state is sound and need only be renovated—not revolutionized—to fulfill its unmet promises.

Prologue: Mexico's Baptism

An understanding of Fuentes's literature and politics is impossible without

[10] CF to Octavio Paz [hereafter OP], October 4, 1968, Box 306, Folder 4, Carlos Fuentes Papers [hereafter CFP].

[11] CF to OP, December 22, 1971, Box 306, Folder 4, CFP.

[12] Morton, "The Social Function of Carlos Fuentes," 30.

considering the Mexican Revolution and its aftermaths, which were "a persistent, indeed quintessential, theme" in both his literary and non-literary pursuits.[13] The conflict itself, a complicated, inconclusive, and protracted civil war, nevertheless resulted in the creation of a radically progressive and nationalist constitution in 1917. The constitution established legal provisions for extensive land reform, labor rights, and social and economic inclusion of the lower classes. Fuentes described it as "Latin America's first profound social revolution," and based his vision for Mexico's future on the complete realization of what he considered its goals.[14]

The *sexenio* of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) is widely regarded—both by historical actors, such as Fuentes, and in more recent historiography—as the fullest expression of these objectives. Cárdenas espoused an ambitious program of agrarian reform and a commitment to "education, indigenismo, [and] local public works" that made him one of Mexico's most popular and fondly-remembered presidents.[15] In 1938, he nationalized Mexico's oil industry. This was the moment when young Fuentes—still a private-school student in Washington, D.C.—first began to identify with Mexico: "I was popular, I was regular. Until a day in March—March 18, 1938. On that day, a man from another world, the imaginary country of my childhood, the President of Mexico, Lázaro Cárdenas, nationalized the holdings of foreign oil companies. The headlines in the North American press denounced the 'communist' government of Mexico and its 'red' president…I became a pariah in my school."[16] Though Cárdenas's nationalism may have turned nine-year-old Carlos into his school's pariah, adult Fuentes viewed him as the last truly revolutionary president in recent Mexican history. After Cárdenas, Fuentes argued, the Revolution "was halfway there"—but over the course of the next two decades, Mexican presidents would adopt a more conservative stance, rolling back many of the more revolutionary policies of their predecessor.[17]

The 1940 "turning point" in Mexican history has been characterized by historians as a shift from Cárdenas's popular/populist style and radical political program towards a more elite-driven "policy of intensive capital accumulation" under the presidencies of Manuel Ávila Camacho, Miguel Alemán Valdés, and Adolfo Ruiz

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[13] Ibid., 25.

[14] CF, "Imagen de México" (Concepción, Chile, January 1962), 7, 5, Box 48, Folder 4, CFP.

[15] Alan Knight, "Cárdenas and Echeverría: Two Populist Presidents Compared," in Amelia M. Kiddle and María L. O. Muñoz, eds., *Populism in Twentieth Century Mexico: The Presidencies of Lázaro Cárdenas and Luis Echeverría* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010).

[16] CF, *Myself with Others*, 7.

[17] CF, "Imagen de México," 7.

Cortines.[18] The year 1940 has also traditionally marked the beginning of the "Mexican miracle," a period of sustained economic growth that began to peter out in the later 1960s before ending definitively with the Mexican debt crisis in 1982.[19] To ensure the stability necessary to secure foreign investment (largely from the United States), the Mexican government evolved more authoritarian tendencies, clamping down on campesino and worker unrest and holding nominal elections that guaranteed the PRI's continuance in power. Historians characterize the PRI of this period as a "dictablanda" that mixed "democratic and authoritarian elements," in varying amounts.[20]

Contemporaries of the trajectory from Cárdenas to Ruiz were not unaware of the increasingly authoritarian character of their government. Over the course of the 1950s, a variety of protests challenged the PRI's "claim of the ongoing Revolution," pointing to divergences between the revolutionary rhetoric of the regime and the lived realities of most non-elite Mexicans.[21] Historian Renata Keller highlights the *henriquista* and *jaramillista* movements as those most threatening to the regime. Both argued that they, not the PRI, represented the true legacy of the Mexican Revolution; both were repressed by the government. In urban and industrial areas, student and worker strikes intensified and likewise faced repression.[22]

This decade of simmering unrest also marked the end of Fuentes's schooling and the start of his career. During the 1950s, Fuentes worked for a string of organizations that sought to promote Mexican culture on the international stage: he was Assistant Director of the Cultural Division of the Universidad Autónoma de México (UNAM) from 1953 to 1956; he helped to reorganize the magazine *México de hoy* in 1954; he co-founded the *Revista mexicana de literatura* in 1955; and he served as Director of International Cultural Relations for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1956 to 1959.[23] Each of these projects, in its own way, had at its heart the question of the representation of Mexico to foreign audiences.

Such engagement with the international projection of Mexican culture reflects

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[18] Gilbert Joseph, Anne Rubenstine, and Eric Zolov, "Assembling the Fragments: Writing a Cultural History of Mexico Since 1940," in *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 8.

[19] Knight, "The Myth of the Mexican Revolution," 260.

[20] Keller, *Mexico's Cold War*, 16.

[21] Arthur Schmidt, "Making it Real Compared to What? Reconceptualizing Mexican History Since 1940," in Joseph, Rubenstein, and Zolov, eds., *Fragments of a Golden Age.*

[22] Keller, *Mexico's Cold War*, 28-34.

[23] CF, "Bio-Bibliographical Data," mid-1970s, 1-3, Box 136, Folder 4, CFP; CF, "Proyecto de reorganización de la revista 'México de hoy,'" 1954, Box 47, Folder 5, CFP; Maarten van Delden, *Carlos Fuentes, Mexico, and Modernity* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998), Chapter 1.

what scholar of comparative literature Maarten van Delden signals as one of the most important features of Fuentes's work: an "ongoing tension…between nationalism and cosmopolitanism."[24] Fuentes was concerned by Mexico's tendency towards defensiveness and closure, which had led the country to forgo opportunities to promote "an active projection of Mexico to the wider world."[25] Yet, for Fuentes, this heightened level of international interaction, of "giving and receiving," was predicated on a strong national identity.[26] In this sense, cosmopolitanism and nationalism (the latter conceived of not as chauvinism, but rather a strong and unique sense of self) were not in tension, but rather complementary. Indeed, Fuentes considered that it was only after the Mexican Revolution of 1910, "a baptism" that made Mexicans "conscious of ourselves and of our possibilities for the first time," that Mexico was ready to "penetrate [international] dialogue" with its own contributions.[27] While inherently a cosmopolitan project, the projection of "Mexico" to the world required, as well, a definition of what, exactly, "Mexico" was.

In this regard, Fuentes's suggestions for the UNAM's Cultural Division are telling. Advocating a program of "cultural missions" to expose foreign countries to Mexican culture, he wrote that representatives would speak "about our constitutional history and Mexican labor and agrarian legislation."[28] All three were products of the Mexican Revolution, which suggests the centrality of the Revolution in Fuentes's conception of Mexican identity. Indeed, the Revolution would occupy a primary place in nearly all of Fuentes's literary work, beginning with his first novel, *La región más transparente*, in 1958. Yet there is a clear tension between Fuentes's desire for an international exhibition of the products of the Revolution, and his treatment of the Revolution in *La región*, a novel he conceived of as "a critique of linear time, of progress, of modernity…a critique of the Mexican Revolution and its most obvious results."[29] This tension traces a division signaled by Fuentes himself in notes for a 1958 interview: "We should distinguish between Mexico's revolutionary process and the

[24] Van Delden, *Carlos Fuentes, Mexico, and Modernity*, 9.

[25] CF, "Programa de actividades de la Oficina de Intercambio Cultural de la UNAM" (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma de México, 1956), 1, Box 47, Folder 9, CFP.

[26] Ibid.

[27] CF, "Talón de Aquiles," *Revista mexicana de literatura*, no. 3 (January-February 1956), 286.

[28] CF, "Programa de actividades de la Oficina de Intercambio Cultural de la UNAM," 4.

[29] Interview of CF, by Claude Dumas, 1958, 6, Box 60, Folder 10, CFP.

Revolution of 1910," he wrote. "The former…is still unfinished."[30]

It was the promise of the Revolution, then, and not the ways in which it had proceeded, that Fuentes wished to share with the world. In many respects, he was right to be proud of the paper legacy of the Revolution—and for at least a few decades after the Revolution (principally during Cárdenas's presidency) there was more to be proud of than just paper. However, by the time of *La región*'s publication in 1958, it was apparent to Fuentes that Cardenas's successors had led the Revolution-as-process to stall or even regress.[31] The PRI was failing in the materialization of the promises enshrined in the 1917 Constitution, and this divergence between the *de jure* and *de facto* revolution-as-process led Fuentes to characterize his country as one whose history could be understood as "a battle between sacred texts and profane reality."[32] Of Miguel Alemán (1946-1952), Fuentes wrote, "he left to his successors a mortgaged, corrupted, silent country: a revolution betrayed."[33] Fuentes's desired projection of Mexico was one which the PRI itself was actively undermining.

This gap, between revolutionary promise and the realities of revolutionary progress, was the primary motivator of Fuentes's politics in the decades to come. Significantly, before the Cuban Revolution, he understood Mexico's problems on a national scale. Like the *henriquistas*, the *jaramillistas*, and the student and labor strikers of the decade, Fuentes's critique of the Revolution was "not yet connected to [the] geopolitical confrontation" of the Cold War, but rather had predominantly national referents.[34] The advent of another major social revolution in Latin America would profoundly shape his understanding of the first, opening new possibilities for Mexico's future and new ways of viewing its past.

"¿Cuál es el camino?": Fuentes and Cuba, 1959-1964[35]

Historian Alan Knight describes the construction of the "myth" of the Mexican Revolution over the course of the twentieth century, remarking that "it did

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[30] CF, "¿Cuál es la situación actual de la Revolución Mexicana?" (1958), 1, Box 47, Folder 11, CFP.

[31] CF, "Imagen de México," 7.

[32] CF, "Viva Zapata: A Review of John Womack's 'Zapata and the Mexican Revolution,'" *New York Review of Books*, March 13, 1969, 5, Box 157, CFP.

[33] CF, "Imagen de México," 5. That Fuentes contributed this analysis in 1962 is notable, as later historians have characterized 1968 as the moment when the state-promoted narrative of "Revolution to Evolution" (the notion of an ongoing revolutionary process) fell apart. See Arthur Schmidt, "Making it Real Compared to What?" in Joseph, Rubenstein, and Zolov, eds., *Fragments of a Golden Age.*

[34] Keller, *Mexico's Cold War,* 33.

[35] CF, "Sí, ¿cuál es el camino?" *Política*, December 15, 1960, 19.

not subvert, so much as consummate, Mexico's past…[and] was readily slotted into a teleological sequence: Independence > Reforma > Revolution."[36] The Revolution, Knight argues, could be interpreted as a continuation of the "patriotic liberalism" of the Reforma, which was in turn a reaffirmation of Mexico's original struggle for independence from empire.[37] This teleology was clearly evident in Fuentes's thought. In an early political article, he wrote that Mexico's government faced two paths: one, to continue obeying the wishes of a self-interested bourgeoisie; the other, "to take its strength from the people and pursue the irreversible path towards the next phase of the Mexican Revolution—not the commemorative and rhetorical, but that which began in 1810 and is still unfinished."[38] Frequent references to independence, Juárez and the Reforma, and, of course, the 1910 Revolution, characterized Fuentes's interpretation of Mexico's history as an inevitable process, moving—albeit with many fits and starts—toward a socialist utopia in which the goals of the Revolution were fully realized.

What Knight does not discuss are the ways in which the Cuban Revolution was slotted into Mexico's revolutionary teleology, at least for those who supported Castro. *Política* published the full text of Castro's "Declaración de la Habana" in its September 15, 1960 issue and headed the article with a sequence of photos of Latin America's most eminent revolutionaries: Hidalgo, Bolívar, San Martín, Juárez, Martí, Zapata, Sandino, Castro.[39] Not only did this visual representation of Latin America's history show Castro following in the footsteps of Hidalgo, Juárez, and Zapata, but it also expanded the pantheon of revolutionary leaders to include other Caribbean and South American heroes, thereby embedding Mexico's own history, long understood as something exceptional and apart, in a shared regional past—and future.

"For a Mexican writer—product of a culture that has lived with its back to the Latin American world—the moment holds a powerful emotional charge," opened Fuentes's reflections on his first visit to Cuba, in 1959. [40] In just the first sentence of this piece, "Testimonios de Cuba," Fuentes hinted at the ways in which the Cuban Revolution was affecting Mexican and Latin American consciousness. Mexico's isolationism was challenged, its linkages to the rest of the continent emphasized:

> …we are in Cuba, we are witnessing a Revolution that opens the way to the transformation of the antiquated molds of our feudal, exploited, fragmented America; and we are participating in this experience with a group of writers

[36] Knight, "The Myth of the Mexican Revolution," 241.
[37] Ibid.
[38] CF, "El pueblo puede 'saltar las trancas,'" *Política,* July 1, 1960, 23.
[39] Fidel Castro, "Declaración de la Habana," *Política*, September 15, 1960, 32-33.
[40] CF, "Testimonios de Cuba,"1959, 1, Box 47, Folder 12, CFP.

> that, in a certain sense, captures the critical and active conscience of this intermediary swath of the Continent where common problems are most acute: the Antilles, Central America, Venezuela, Ecuador, Mexico.[41]

Just a few months after Castro's military victory, Fuentes began to see Latin America as a more integrated unit, one that could benefit from greater exchange and solidarity. "Our America" was suffering from "common problems"—and Cuba offered a possible path forward. "In 1959 alone," Fuentes explained to a group of Latin American authors in 1962, "the Cuban Revolution built 1300 kilometers of local roads…The Revolution has freed Cuban lands from idleness, underutilization, and irrational use and has made them into a factor of diversified production and a source of greater income for the campesinos."[42] Statistics such as these would form the cornerstone of Fuentes's arguments in favor of Cuba in the coming years. Through his political writings, his work with Mexican political movements, frequent visits to Cuba, and his best-known novel of the period (*La muerte de Artemio Cruz,* 1962), Fuentes was one of the most prominent Mexican intellectuals promoting the triumph of the Cuban Revolution—and, more importantly, exploring what it meant for the rest of the region.[43]

The Cuban Revolution touched off Fuentes's headiest period of political involvement. He left his job in government in 1959 to take up writing and politics full time. In May 1959, he helped found the political magazine *El Espectador,* whose fundamental purpose was "to fight, from now on, for that which is demanded by all: the effective exercise of democracy in Mexico."[44] The magazine was also openly of the left, a stance the editorial team defined as in favor of "*political democracy* and *economic justice*."[45] The ambitious publication had a final commitment: rejection of dogmatism and openness to criticism of all stripes. "A valid left, by definition, is an open left," the editorial team claimed.[46]

Fuentes also wrote for a slew of other political magazines, with his most frequent contributions going to *Política*—the "vanguard voice of the New Left in Mexico"—and *¡Siempre!,* a more moderate publication but one that nevertheless "seemed to tilt to the left."[47] These magazines were Fuentes's primary platforms in

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[41] Ibid.

[42] CF, untitled draft of lecture notes for writers' conference (Concepción, Chile, January 1962), 24, Box 48, Folder 1, CFP.

[43] Van Delden describes *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* as a novel of the Cuban Revolution. See Van Delden, *Carlos Fuentes, Mexico, and Modernity*.

[44] "Presentación," *El Espectador*, May 1959, 3.

[45] Ibid. Emphasis in original.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Keller, *Mexico's Cold War*, 57 ("vanguard voice,"); Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom*, 166 ("seemed to").

articulating his political views over the coming years, though he also produced content for less overtly political magazines in Mexico and the United States.

"Revolutions Aren't Tea-Parties":[48] *Fuentes's Revolutionary Discourse*

While the tone of Fuentes's articles varied from magazine to magazine—aggressive and radical in *Política*, much more lighthearted and didactic in less-political or English-language publications—the thread common to all of his writings and speeches from this period was revolution. "Let's be clear," Fuentes explained to his companions at a writers' conference in Chile in 1962, "Latin American development requires revolutionary acts that destroy its traditional colonial molds."[49]

Revolution, for Fuentes, was above all a destructive force. His diction is highly significant in this regard: almost every mention of Latin American revolution incorporates some form of breakage or elimination. The Mexican Revolution, he argued in a 1964 interview with sociologist Irving Louis Horowitz, "*broke* the spine of feudalism."[50] The Cuban Revolution, similarly, illustrated the need "for the *destruction* of the factors that impeded it."[51] Fuentes interpreted revolutions as irreversible processes; once accomplished, the groundwork would be laid for rational, just development and progress.

While this conviction in historical inevitability betrays the significant Marxist influences shaping Fuentes's politics, it does not follow, as some authors have asserted, that Fuentes rejected political pluralism during this period. Frequently cited in supporting this conclusion is an article Fuentes wrote for *Política* in 1962, in which he commented that Stalin's policies in the Soviet Union, while criminal, nevertheless contributed to the resilience of that country in the years to come. Pieces such as this, in conjunction with Fuentes's promotion of revolutionary activity, have led political scientist Yvon Grenier to assert that "any sympathy Fuentes may have had for vanguard revolutionary politics in Latin America (in Cuba, Nicaragua, or even Mexico) was in contradiction to his deeply held views on [the need for pluralism in] culture and society."[52] While it is indeed the case that Fuentes saw in revolution "a universalist spirit" that was common to all men, once revolution had cleared the way for

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[48] CF, "On Gringos and Latinos: A Mexican Dialogue," draft of an article for *Holiday*, October 1962, 5, Box 47, Folder 11, CFP.

[49] CF, untitled draft of lecture notes for writers' conference, 29.

[50] "A Dialogue on the Future of Latin America," interview with CF, by Irving Louis Horowitz, July 1964, Box 60, Folder 11, CFP. Emphasis added.

[51] CF, "El libro negro," *Política*, April 15, 1961, 39. Emphasis added.

[52] Maarten van Delden and Yvon Grenier, *Gunshots at the Fiesta: Literature and Politics in Latin America* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009), 157.

development, this universalism gave way to an individualism that promoted unique developmental pathways for each country: "Let us say, then, that only one phase of the revolution is susceptible to…being spelled-out in handbooks: the insurrectional phase, the taking-over of power. But once the revolutionary forces gain power, there are no laws to indicate how the transformation of society—the second phase—is best achieved… Each Revolution is a new birth."[53]

Indeed, the search for alternatives—not just to the U.S. model of development, but to the Soviet and Cuban models, as well—was a constant, defining feature of Fuentes's writings, and suggests a greater moderation and respect for pluralism than has been ascribed to his thought from the early 1960s. His opposition to the imposition of a U.S.-based model was most strident (perhaps because the United States was the nation most bent on imposing its model on other nations), but he also rejected as unwise the simple imitation of other revolutionary experiences: "The problem does not consist in repeating the Cuban experience *verbatim*, but precisely, after the Cuban experience, in searching for concrete possible ways of revolution through means other than the Cuban, for national revolutionary roads that do not fall into any previous blueprint."[54]

Revolution, then, was both universal and particular for Fuentes. It was universally necessary to address shared structural problems—including, critically, U.S. imperialism—yet it was also important that revolution and subsequent development not blindly follow predetermined ideology, and instead adhere strictly to the will of the people in addressing peculiar local problems. Fuentes's early admiration for Cuba stemmed not from its adoption of socialism or communism per se, but rather from his perception that the Cuban government's "only commitment [was] to the Cuban people," not U.S. commercial interests or Soviet or Chinese ideology.[55]

Renewing the Mexican Revolution

Paradoxically, Fuentes's Marxist-tinged reading of revolution led to moderation in his domestic politics. Mexico, after all, had already undergone its revolution, and therefore, as Van Delden explains, "could not regress to a historical phase that had already been superseded."[56] Its government, then, should be capable of the same kind

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[53] "A Dialogue on the Future of Latin America."
[54] Ibid.
[55] CF, "Requiem por la OEA," *Política,* September 15, 1960.
[56] Van Delden, *Carlos Fuentes, Mexico, and Modernity*, 46.

of commitment to the will of the people as Cuba's. For all of his radical writings, all of his advocacy of revolutionary movements throughout Latin America, Fuentes never lost faith in the ability of the post-revolutionary Mexican state to evolve, peacefully, into a system that recognized (in real life and not just on paper) the Constitution of 1917. In a crucial early article for *Política*—where he offered the most radical articulations of his views—Fuentes listed his principal demands of the Mexican state: "restoration of the broken constitutional order, freedom for political prisoners, repeal of the so-called 'crime of social dissolution,' unconditional respect for the right to association, and the definitive end of the use of repressive methods to settle social conflicts."[57] These demands were clearly grounded in existing constitutional and legal precedent and were only revolutionary in the sense that they were based on the accomplishments of the 1910 Revolution. Moreover, they foreshadowed with remarkable precision the demands of the student movement of the late 1960s, which historians have characterized as "overwhelmingly 'moderate.'"[58]

Fuentes was far from alone in his confidence in the enduring power of the Mexican Revolution. Even *Política* published a cover in December 1961 that read, "Revolución completa, o violencia".[59] The juxtaposition is fascinating: a complete revolution was nonviolent, achievable within the existing system. Failure on the part of this system to carry out the Revolution, on the other hand, would lead to violence. The most important leftist organization in Mexico, the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional (MLN), of whose National Committee Fuentes was a member, adhered to the same principle. Also, in 1961, its figurehead and spokesperson, ex-president Lázaro Cárdenas, proclaimed, "This organization is licit; it will not harm the principles established in the Constitution that governs the country's life. It will be an organism that contributes to the realization of the postulates of the Mexican Revolution that are enshrined in our political Constitution."[60]

Though Cárdenas and the MLN leadership "worked assiduously to keep out foreign funds" and ensure that the movement remained rooted in domestic issues in order to avoid accusations of foreign influence, it is impossible to understand the MLN or the Mexican left outside of the context of the global Cold War, and particularly the

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[57] CF, "El pueblo puede 'saltar las trancas'", 23.
[58] Pensado, *Rebel Mexico,* 151.
[59] Cover image, *Política,* December 1, 1961.
[60] Lázaro Cárdenas, quoted in "Programa del Movimiento de Liberación Nacional," *Política*, September 15, 1961.

Cuban Revolution.[61] Indeed, Fuentes saw in the Cuban Revolution the impetus necessary to bring about a fuller realization of the Mexican Revolution. Paralleling his earlier push for greater internationalism in Mexico's literary world, Fuentes now rejected Mexico's political isolationism, "the reason for the weakness of our revolution."[62] Even popular support for the Cuban Revolution, he argued, could lead to domestic change. After all, Mexican enthusiasm for Cuba's new government had already pressured President Adolfo López Mateos into adopting a favorable position towards Cuban President Osvaldo Dorticós; surely the tensions between López Mateos's foreign and domestic policy, drawn into sharper relief by Cuba, would lead to popular reforms at home.[63]

In the context of the Cold War, the Mexican Constitution's nationalism, more so than its social progressivism, took on new importance. If Mexico and Cuba both "show[ed] that *things could be done*" to remedy poverty, inequality, land tenure problems, and undemocracy, then the U.S. embargo of Cuba, the vote to exclude Cuba from the Organization of American States, and—most dramatically—the Bay of Pigs, all illustrated what could be done by the United States to countries that disrupted the regional status quo.[64] It was not only secondhand, through the Cuban experience, that Mexicans experienced U.S. imperialism. Their own government, hoping to win the favor of the powerful United States, "quietly implemented many of the same economic and political sanctions against Cuba that it was publicly protesting, which, combined with Mexico's assistance in intelligence collection, earned the gratitude of U.S. officials."[65] This was merely the icing on the cake of what the left viewed as a less overt but more profound imperialism: the preservation of Latin American countries as semi-colonial entities in the service of the U.S. economy. After Cuba, "revolution" had acquired a decidedly anti-imperialist, anti-U.S. tinge, and was necessarily an international conflict. During their 1964 interview, Fuentes concurred with Horowitz's assessment: "the extent to which real revolutionary movement is possible is a direct consequence of a weighted dryad [*sic*]: Brazil *versus* the United States, Chile *versus* the United States, Mexico *versus* the United States."[66]

There were thus complicated linkages between the domestic and international

[61] Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom*, 147.
[62] CF, "De Bandung a Ciudad Acuña," *Política*, October 15, 1960.
[63] CF, "Dorticós en México: Un triunfo popular," *Política*, June 15, 1960.
[64] CF, "Siete días con Lázaro Cárdenas," *Política*, April 1, 1961. Emphasis in original.
[65] Keller, *Mexico's Cold War*, 167.
[66] "A Dialogue on the Future of Latin America."

aspects of Fuentes's and the MLN's goals. While the MLN was at heart a movement for domestic democratization, achieving the conditions for this democratization required the transcendence of national borders. "Can one even speak of democracy," Fuentes queried in 1962, "if two percent of the population are owners of 79 percent of the land, if three or four foreign companies control the means of production and if that production is limited to two or three exports whose prices are fixed by an anonymous society in New York?… Can there be democracy without self-determination?"[67] The implicit answer, of course, was no.

The echoes of the Mexican Revolution—which in its day "did not claim universal validity and was not designed for export," drawing rather on "national-historical" inspiration—were now refracted through a new international political situation in which the United States was the primary antagonist of progressive and revolutionary movements in Latin America.[68] For Fuentes, the Cuban Revolution delocalized Mexican grievances, contextualizing them in the Latin American region and signaling the United States as a common enemy. Alluding to a comment made by friend and colleague Fernando Benítez during their 1960 trip to Cuba—"The day when the attacks against Cuba cease will be the day when the revolution ceases to be one"—Fuentes wrote in 1962 that it was only when the Mexican Revolution lost its "sense of danger" for the U.S. that it began to stagnate.[69]

"Víctimas por partido doble":[70] *The Problems with Imperialism(s)*

The reinterpretation of the Mexican Revolution as a struggle against imperialism influenced how those seeking its renewal would frame their fight. As Fuentes wrote, the Mexican left confronted a dual enemy: "North American imperialism from the outside…[and] our own imperialism, that of the military, financial, and bureaucratic classes, from within."[71] Sometimes, the two imperialisms were mutually reinforcing. Mexico's ruling classes benefitted from U.S. foreign investment; the United States, from a stable, capitalist Mexico. This offered the opposition a coherent focus: radical agrarian reform, for instance, was antithetical to elites on both sides of the border.

[67] CF, "Imagen de México," 10-11.

[68] Knight, "The Myth of the Mexican Revolution," 227-228.

[69] Fernando Benítez, quoted in CF, "Testimonios de Cuba" ("the day"); CF, untitled draft of lecture notes for writers' conference, 7 ("sense of").

[70] CF, untitled draft of lecture notes for writers' conference, 2.

[71] Ibid., 2-3.

One of Fuentes's favorite targets in this arena was the U.S.-led and financed Alliance for Progress. The Alliance was an ambitious program for hemispheric development, proposed by U.S. President John F. Kennedy in 1961 and formalized in the Punta del Este charter in August of the same year. Spurred by fears of communist contagion in Latin America, the Alliance was "in essence a Marshall Plan" for the region that sought to "improve health, housing, and sanitation, wipe out illiteracy, modernize tax structures and land tenure, maintain sound fiscal and monetary policies, and stimulate private investments."[72] While promises of $20 billion in foreign aid were received warmly by some, Fuentes was not among them: "A $20 billion loan to Latin America's dominant classes is conditioned on political servility and abstention from harming U.S. commercial and mercantile interests," he wrote in September 1961.[73] As it was precisely these interests that were complicit in preserving Latin America's dependent, exploited state, any development plan that kept them intact was, in Fuentes's mind, destined to fail.

Fuentes's opposition to the Alliance for Progress was predicated in part on the Alliance's preservation of exploitative power structures within Latin American countries, not just between Latin America and the United States. However, these imperialisms often worked at cross purposes with each other. Nationalization of foreign properties required a powerful national state that could withstand reprisals from an even more powerful neighbor; similarly, maintaining an independent foreign policy depended on a high-capacity central government. The Mexican government's deliberate "balancing act" between support for the U.S. and support for Cuba meant that Fuentes (and much of the Mexican left) was loathe to ever fully disavow the state, and struggled to navigate between opposition to the state's undemocratic domestic policies and support for its moments of pro-Cuban foreign policy.[74]

Mexico's foreign policy has long been one of the most independent in the hemisphere, despite its proximity to the United States. The country takes particular pride in its tenets of non-intervention and self-determination, and its abstention from the vote to expel Cuba from the Organization of American States (OAS) was the best official representation of this policy during the early years of the Cuban Revolution.

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[72] "Alliance for Progress and Peace Corps, 1961-1969," *Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations* (U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian), ("in essence"); Rieck B. Hannifin, "The Alliance for Progress: Background Information" (Foreign Affairs Division, U.S. Congress, January 22, 1968), ("improve health").

[73] CF, "De Bandung a Belgrado," *Política,* September 15, 1961, 17.

[74] Keller, *Mexico's Cold War*, 167.

Colombia, one of the few Latin American countries to have broken relations with Cuba, convened the January 1962 OAS meeting that resulted in the Cuba's expulsion.[75] The United States entered the meeting hoping to pressure the rest of the hemisphere into adopting sanctions against Cuba; Mexico's delegation had to walk a fine line between crossing the United States and setting off an uproar at home. The resultant policy was fittingly contradictory: though Mexico continued to maintain diplomatic relations with Cuba and abstained from the vote expelling Cuba from the OAS, it was the Mexican delegation that established a "radical incompatibility between membership in the OAS and a Marxist-Leninist political position." The hope was that Cuba would voluntarily withdraw from the OAS. When the time came, however, the island was forcibly voted out.[76]

Fuentes's interpretation of the Mexican position illustrated how difficult it was for the left to grapple with a domestically undemocratic state that was nevertheless willing to take a lukewarmly nationalist stance against U.S. imperialism. Acknowledging that the Mexican government (as it stood) could not fully support Cuba—doing so "would demand that the current government be something it is not: the government of a militant and radical revolution"—Fuentes celebrated Mexico's adherence to the norms of non-intervention and self-determination and the "defeat" that this represented for the United States.[77] Yet, he argued, the fight was not over: "We of the left must keep alive our legitimate program: that of a government that identifies completely with the Revolution…In the meantime, let's not bark up the wrong tree and be grateful…that thanks to a Revolution that cost a million and a half lives, Mexico is not Nicaragua."[78] This conclusion is enormously significant in understanding what the Mexican Revolution had come to mean in the context of the Cold War. Fuentes conceived of it as a fight against imperialism, a triumph that had prevented Mexico from becoming like its exploited, dependent neighbors in Nicaragua and Guatemala—the pitiful victims of CIA interventions and U.S.-orchestrated coups. Defending the legacy of the Revolution meant, in addition to processes of domestic democratization and socialist reform, resisting U.S. imperialism and the reprisals that would inevitably accompany any movements toward socialism.

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[75] See Carlos Tello Díaz, "México frente a la expulsión de Cuba de la OEA," *Politeja* 6, no. 38 (2015): 243–56.

[76] Ibid., 248.

[77] CF, "La postura de México," *Política,* February 1, 1962, 19 ("would demand"); CF, "Coexistencia o fascismo," *Política*, February 15, 1962, 27 ("defeat").

[78] CF, "La postura de México,"19.

"El verdadero socialismo":[79] *Fuentes and Criticism*

Anti-imperialism and revolution were not Fuentes's only political causes. A firm supporter of both socialism and individual liberties—particularly freedoms of expression and the press—he rejected the sectarianism and closure to dialogue that flourished across the political spectrum during the 1960s. For Fuentes, criticism was an inherent part of socialism, or any system of good governance. This commitment to openness would lead to ruptures with those who otherwise shared his political positions, and strange alignments with those who otherwise espoused very different views.

In 1964, Fuentes and four of *Política's* other prolific contributors renounced their positions at the magazine. Arguing that *Política's* increasing radicalism amounted to an unnecessary "terrorism of the left," these authors distanced themselves from what they believed had become a "marginal" publication incapable of engaging in substantive debate.[80] Yet even in their scathing public letter to *Política's* editor, they expressed their appreciation for the magazine's positions on Cuba, the death of *jaramillista* leader Rubén Jaramillo at the hands of the military, and Mexico's political prisoners. The issue was not *Política's* politics as much as it was the ways in which those politics had become incompatible with pluralism: "We will not cease in our fight, limited but honest, for the independence and progress of Mexico, for the complete realization of the Mexican Revolution…for the eventual development of a socialist democracy in our country—and also for the right to…[oppose] alienation, sectarianism, or rhetoric," the ex-contributors wrote.[81] This fragmentation was not unique to Fuentes and his friends at the magazine: the MLN began to fall apart in the same year, victim to similar internal divisions and polarization induced by the 1964 presidential election.[82]

It was not only the domestic left that struggled to maintain a unified front as the 1960s wore on. At the international level, Fuentes's commitment to criticism led to a break in his relationship with Cuba. While he remained an ardent supporter of the Revolution throughout the early 1960s, the Cuban government's increasingly hardline

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[79] CF to Mario Vargas Llosa, May 20, 1971, Box 82, Folder 17, Mario Vargas Llosa Papers [hereafter "MVLP"].

[80] CF et al., "Cinco intelectuales explican por qué han dejado de escribir en 'Política,'" *Política*, August 15, 1964, 19.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom*, 164-170.

stance on the role of art and the intellectual vis-à-vis the state gradually alienated him. In 1963, he wrote a piece for the New York-based *National Guardian* criticizing Khrushchev's theory of art, arguing that art conceived of as nothing more than a "[weapon] of social and economic transformation" was not art at all. Socialism implied not just economic and political restructuring, but also "respect without qualification for the right to tell the truth." [83] As Cuba began to fall in line with a doctrine mandating that art demonstrate unconditional support for the state, Fuentes found himself the victim of a scathing critique by a group of Cuban intellectuals who—likely under pressure from the regime—took offense at his and Pablo Neruda's presence at a 1966 PEN conference in the United States.[84]

Though Fuentes did not return to the island after 1966, it was not until a similar incident in 1971 that he more explicitly distanced himself from the regime. The jailing of Cuban poet Heberto Padilla for his criticisms of the government outraged many Latin American authors, including Argentinean Julio Cortázar and Peruvian Mario Vargas Llosa; the latter would go on to formally break ties with Castro as a result of the affair. "I feel an urge to cry," wrote Fuentes to Vargas Llosa. Nevertheless, he continued, "we must maintain high our aspirations for true socialism and the right to criticism, without which there can never be true socialism."[85] As in his earlier piece criticizing Khrushchev, Fuentes refused to see any incompatibility between socialism and criticism. In fact, he argued quite the reverse: that only through rigorous, honest analysis could socialism function properly. "I am for the left and against the right, but I am *critically* for the left," he wrote to Octavio Paz in 1968.[86]

The refusal to abstain from criticism of the left drove Fuentes—unintentionally—to write for a publication initially financed by the CIA. As the Cuban literary review *Casa de las Américas* became more hostile to uncommitted writing, *Mundo Nuevo* emerged as a welcome space for writers to express themselves without being

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[83] CF, "Soviet Theory of Art Challenged," *National Guardian*, May 16, 1963, in FBI file on Carlos Fuentes.

[84] The year 1965 marked a shift in the structuring and purpose of *Casa de las Américas*, Cuba's literary review. Judith Weiss argues that 1965 was the moment when *Casa* "assume[d]…the role of ideological conscience for Latin American artists and intellectuals," eventually resulting in "a schism between those intellectuals willing to subordinate their craft to the demands of the historical moment and those caught in a relative isolation that militants came to condemn more intransigently" over the latter half of the decade. See Judith A. Weiss, *Casa de las Américas: An Intellectual Review in the Cuban Revolution* (Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1977), 13. For the letter to Neruda from Cuban intellectuals, see Alejo Carpentier et al., "Carta abierta a Pablo Neruda," June 25, 1966, https://www.neruda.uchile.cl/critica/cartaabierta.html.

[85] CF to Mario Vargas Llosa, May 20, 1971, Box 82, Folder 17, MVLP.

[86] CF to OP, March 22, 1968, Box 306, Folder 4, CFP.

hamstrung by ideological disputes. It featured Fuentes in its very first issue.[87] However, the publication received funding from the Congress for Cultural Freedom, funded in turn by the CIA. The CCF, for the CIA, was "a kind of…anti-Casa de las Américas," meant to serve as an anti-communist bulwark in the realm of cultural and literary production.[88]

Fuentes's collaboration with *Mundo Nuevo* was nevertheless a double-edged sword: while his name would be associated with U.S. interference in Mexico, the CIA was also involved in the dissemination of Fuentes's decidedly anti-U.S. thought. In the interview of Fuentes that appeared in the first pages of the magazine's inaugural issue, Fuentes said,

> …I refuse to accept that "Inter-American forces" have the right to be in Santo Domingo in the name of democracy, because if I accept that, then tomorrow I must accept that they have the right to be in Mexico, and the day after tomorrow that they have the right to decide, in the name of democracy, what can be said and what must be silenced in my country, and finally, the right to dictate what I write.[89]

Thus, his collaboration with *Mundo Nuevo* reflected the deeper ambiguities present in the atmosphere of the cultural Cold War. In addition to pieces by Fuentes, the magazine published works by García Márquez—lifelong friend of Fidel Castro—and was run by an editor who, while not pro-Cuba, supported the left and was not unfriendly to socialism.[90] As battle lines between Cuba and the United States became more deeply entrenched, and polarization more pronounced, those with ideologies that did not align neatly with either side—such as Fuentes—were pushed into relationships with actors that shared only parts of their larger agendas. This pattern was one that would continue to challenge Fuentes and influence the ways in which he navigated Mexico's political landscape in the years to come.

"A pesar de todo": The Crisis of 1968 and its Aftermaths

"What do you make of 1968? The only thing missing, really, is for Mexico to catch fire!" Fuentes wrote to Paz in August 1968.[91] Fuentes, living in Paris, had witnessed the student uprisings there and was caught up in the revolutionary potential

[87] Emir Rodríguez Monegal and Carlos Fuentes, "La situación del escritor en América Latina," *Mundo Nuevo*, July 1966, 5.

[88] Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom*, 14.

[89] Rodríguez Monegal and CF, "La situación del escritor en América Latina," 21.

[90] Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom*, 198.

[91] CF to OP, August 3, 1968, 1, Box 306, Folder 4, CFP.

of similar protests throughout the world. Little did he know that Mexico was indeed on the eve of its own student movement—one that would face violent repression by the Mexican government and that would shake his own political convictions to the core.

While the participants in the 1968 student movement were a heterogeneous mixture, by and large the students advocated moderate demands along the lines of those Fuentes had listed in his 1961 article for *Política*.[92] As the protests ramped up in the months before the 1968 Olympics—the first time a Latin American country had ever hosted the Games, and a crucial moment for the PRI in promoting a modern, peaceful, developed Mexico—President Díaz Ordaz and his advisors became increasingly uneasy. On October 2, the government brutally put down the unrest in a massacre of several hundred students and protesters who had congregated in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas.[93]

The Tlatelolco massacre threw Fuentes into a period of great uncertainty about Mexico's future and his place in it. His disgust for the state was palpable and personal: the Díaz Ordaz government clamped down on freedom of the press and surrounded the houses of several writers, threatening them over the phone.[94] News of Fuentes's and Paz's books was blocked from much of the Mexican press.[95] The atmosphere, Fuentes wrote to Vargas Llosa in November 1968, was "comparable only to the darkest periods of Mussolini's Italy."[96]

The heightened repression in the last years of the Díaz Ordaz regime—including both the massacre itself and the ramifications it had on freedom of the press and personal liberties—radically altered Fuentes's evaluation of Mexico's political landscape. Things in Mexico had gotten so bad that he no longer felt a peaceful realization of revolutionary goals was in the cards: "I do not believe revolution is possible, for the moment, in Mexico… But resistance, yes," he wrote to Paz in 1968.[97] Paz concurred, replying, "The current regime is no less rotten than the Porfirianism of 1910, but it is much more powerful and the international situation is such that one cannot discount, in the case of revolutionary conflict, armed intervention from the

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[92] See Hiber Conteris, "New Outbreak of the Student Rebellion," trans. Jackie Quayle, *Marcha*, September 27, 1968, 8.

[93] For accounts of student culture and protest in 1960s Mexico, see Pensado, *Rebel Mexico*; and Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

[94] CF to OP, August 3, 1969, 2, Box 306, Folder 4, CFP.

[95] Ibid.

[96] CF to Mario Vargas Llosa, November 12, 1968, 1, Box 82, Folder 17, MVLP.

[97] CF to OP, October 2, 1968, 1, Box 306, Folder 4, CFP.

United States…the fight must be, fundamentally, for the reform of the political system—as the students protested from the beginning."[98]

The two friends' conversation illuminates the ways in which the massacre and the Cold War context of U.S. imperialism seemed to foreclose many of the options available to Mexico. Though they found themselves mired in a situation they likened to that preceding the 1910 Revolution, it seemed that they would have to abandon the goals of that Revolution in the face of the domestic hegemony of the PRI and the international hegemony of the United States. The "peaceful evolution towards socialism" that Fuentes had envisioned in 1964 was off the table, replaced by a harsh dichotomy between "a right-wing military dictatorship" or a "bourgeois liberalism" like that of the United States.[99]

Paz and Fuentes exchanged letter after letter wondering which path the regime would take—whether their country was doomed to a slide into military authoritarianism or whether the regime was capable of reforming itself, slowly, into a more open democracy—not a particularly progressive one, but a democracy nonetheless. They agreed that they should not take teaching positions or fellowships lasting longer than a few months in case the situation in Mexico grew worse.[100] Feeling responsible for the students' activism and the repression they had experienced, Fuentes and Paz struggled with how they, as prominent, upper-class intellectuals who were protected from government violence, should respond to the crisis.[101]

Ultimately, Fuentes decided to return home to Mexico, where, alongside friends and fellow writers Paz and Benítez, he was "perceived at the forefront of the resistance to Díaz Ordaz's government."[102] But he was careful to clarify that opposition to Díaz Ordaz, "the butcher of Tlatelolco," was not equivalent to opposition to the Mexican state in the abstract.[103] The government was but "a temporary representative" of the nation. The 1970 presidential elections were around the corner, and Fuentes remained convinced in the possibility of reform: "despite everything, Mexico is the only Latin American country with a public sector strong and integrated enough to

[98] OP to CF, October 31, 1968, Box 306, Folder 2, CFP.

[99] "A Dialogue on the Future of Latin America" ("peaceful evolution"); CF to OP, October 4, 1968, Box 306, Folder 4, CFP ("a right-wing," "bourgeois liberalism").

[100] OP to CF, December 12, 1968, 1, Box 306, Folder 2, CFP.

[101] See CF to OP, October 4, 1968, Box 306, Folder 4, CFP, and CF to OP, May 20, 1969, Box 306, Folder 4, CFP.

[102] Claire Brewster, *Responding to Crisis in Contemporary Mexico: The Political Writings of Paz, Fuentes, Monsiváis, and Poniatowska* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005), 65.

[103] CF to José Donoso, October 11, 1977, Box 69, Folder 7, José Donoso Papers.

attempt… a renovation that, at a minimum, secures a better distribution of wealth, the defense of certain national sectors, the possibility to expand dialogue and criticism."[104] Even at this moment, when the Mexican government had shown its willingness to violently quash moderate, democratic protests, Fuentes maintained his conviction in the exceptional character of the Mexican state, in its latent potential for positive change: "The Revolution has not had its last word in Mexico," he declared in 1969.[105] Yet the Revolution, through the lens of the Cuban experience and now the Tlatelolco massacre, had acquired new meanings, faced new roadblocks, and required new forms of defense and advancement.

In 1968, historian of Mexico John Womack, Jr. published *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*, which Fuentes reviewed for the *New York Review of Books* in 1969. Fuentes used the review as an opportunity to discuss Zapata's legacy for Mexico's present. As in his writings from earlier in the decade, Fuentes portrayed Zapata's *guerrilleros* as the forefathers of Cuban *guajiros*, a legacy that now extended to include student protesters, Czech workers on strike against censorship, and Vietnamese opposition to U.S. imperialism. The Mexican Revolution was globalized, its particular national character reinscribed onto the present as a fight against, first and foremost, imperial domination—from both the United States and the Soviet Union. It was "the specialized technocracies of the two major powers" that posed the greatest threat to "both individual rights and socialist experience" throughout the world. And so, Fuentes concluded, "we have all become *Zapatistas*," in a fight for liberation whose principal conflict was across national borders, rather than within them.[106]

"Echeverría or Fascism": Renovating Revolution in a World of Empires

Luis Echeverría Álvarez, the PRI's candidate in the 1970 presidential election, was nearly guaranteed his victory. This was in spite of the horrors of Tlatelolco and in spite of Díaz Ordaz's catastrophic presidency. It was in spite of continued repression under Echeverría himself, beginning with the Corpus Christi massacre in June 1971, in which Mexican troops attacked another group of student protesters.[107] And it was in spite of a dirty war that unfolded in Guerrero over the course of the 1970s—though it is not clear how much of this was known to Mexicans living the vast metropolis of the

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[104] CF, quoted and translated in Brewster, *Responding to Crisis in Contemporary Mexico,* 63 ("a temporary"); CF to OP, June 10, 1969, 1, Box 306, Folder 4, CFP ("despite everything").
[105] CF, "Viva Zapata"
[106] All quotes from CF, "Viva Zapata".
[107] Keller, *Mexico's Cold War*, 222.

Distrito Federal, or to those who, like Fuentes, were never in one place for very long (a friend once wrote him, "*carajo*, you travel so much that more than simply writing to you, one must take aim at you with letters: and with good aim at that").[108] In any case, conditions in Mexico, while an improvement over the *sexenio* of Díaz Ordaz, were not "objective[ly] free," as Fuentes would describe them in a letter to Paz.[109]

Fuentes's support for Echeverría thus seems contradictory—a shift from "critical intellectual" to "intellectual in the shadow of the state."[110] However, his paradoxical position must be understood against the backdrop of his shifted perception of how best to realize the goals of the Mexican Revolution, his enduring commitment to freedom of thought and expression, and the trauma of 1968—and how all of these factors intersected with Echeverría's promises.

The reinterpretation of the Mexican Revolution as a struggle against U.S. imperialism meant that Mexico's foreign policy had acquired heightened importance: the battle for the renewal of the Revolution would be fought largely between Mexico and a foreign power. Furthermore, the anguish of Tlatelolco meant that a relative improvement in domestic conditions, more so than an absolute improvement, was satisfactory—and Echeverría promised to restore freedom of the press, one of Fuentes's foremost concerns. After having seen Mexico's future reduced to a dismal dichotomy between dictatorship or marginal reform, to Fuentes, Echeverría offered a wider spectrum of potential futures. In an ebullient letter to Julio Cortázar, Fuentes celebrated "the new possibilities that exist in our country" following Echverría's election.[111]

"The battle is wide open":[112] *Re-opening the Door to Revolution*

Aware of the damage that had been done to the PRI's legitimacy, Echeverría—channeling Fuentes's hero, Lázaro Cárdenas—promised a democratic opening involving greater inclusion of, and respect for, the indigenous, campesinos, and young people.[113] He promoted greater freedom of the press and less corruption in government. Most importantly for Fuentes, he was "deeply suspicious of Mexican big business, international capital, and the United States."[114] However (in)substantial one

[108] Gabriel Infante to CF, January 10, 1963, Box 305, Folder 1, CFP.
[109] CF to OP, June 15, 1977, Box 306, Folder 4, CFP.
[110] Morton, "The Social Function of Carlos Fuentes."
[111] CF to Julio Cortázar, September 5, 1971, Box 305, Folder 4, CFP.
[112] CF to Norman Mailer, December 6, 1971, Box 305, Folder 10, CFP.
[113] Brewster, *Responding to Crisis in Contemporary Mexico*, 69.
[114] Knight, "Cárdenas and Echeverría: Two Populist Presidents Compared," 23.

considered this opening, Fuentes argued that it was a significant development that should change the way the left interacted with the government, allowing leftists to move away from the oppositional posture they had adopted under Díaz Ordaz and towards closer collaboration with the president.[115] Echeverría reopened the door to the possibility of making the Revolution "with the Constitution"—something many on the left had desired all along.[116]

The role played by the government's high degree of centralization should not be dismissed out of hand. The political system afforded immense power to the president, resulting in the "belief that only the president [could] bring about significant changes," both for good and for ill.[117] Working outside of the state was difficult, rarely effective, and, Fuentes believed, unnecessary after Díaz Ordaz had left office. Once Echeverría opened the pathway to renewed collaboration with the government, Fuentes saw every reason to take him at his word and push for (echoing the mission statement of the 1959 *El Espectador*) "economic development with social justice and political freedom," a new kind of "Mexican socialism."[118] Echeverría was certainly powerful—but so had been Díaz Ordaz and López Mateos, and Fuentes had not allied himself with them. The allure of presidential power was but one factor in a larger calculus shaping Fuentes's decision to work with, rather than against, the state.

"Los peligros que corren países en desarrollo":[119] *Revolution, Echeverría, and the Third World*

"Everything is moving in this country," Fuentes wrote to Paz in December 1971. "The bad part is we could move towards Brazil; however…we could also head towards something new and good, for the first time in the Third World: the principle of democratic socialism without fatalism or Stalinist derangement."[120] This juxtaposition was markedly different from what Fuentes had envisioned just two years earlier—between fascism and tepid reform—and merits unpacking. "Brazilianization," for Fuentes, referred to the "triumph of North American [US] plans" to accomplish the seemingly related goals of economic exploitation and the removal of democratic governments in favor of right-wing, military dictatorships. It was anathema to "any

[115] CF, *Tiempo mexicano* (Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 1971), 180-181.
[116] CF to OP, December 7, 1971, Box 306, Folder 4, CFP.
[117] Van Delden, *Carlos Fuentes, Mexico, and Modernity*, 120.
[118] CF, *Tiempo mexicano*, 178, 192.
[119] "Civilización de Mestizos: Roman Samuel entrevista a Carlos Fuentes," interview of CF, by Roman Samuel, January 16, 1977, Box 61, Folder 1, CFP.
[120] CF to OP, December 7, 1971, Box 306, Folder 4, CFP.

project…for independence in Latin America."[121] On the other hand, the increasing repression of the Cuban regime had pushed Fuentes away from using it or the Soviet Union as an acceptable model for Mexico. "The models of the modern world are in crisis," Fuentes wrote in 1972.[122] With neither East nor West offering a viable path forward, the alternative to domination by either of the major powers—in line with much Third World and non-aligned thinking at the time—was the creation of a unique national form of socialism, something Fuentes articulated in his 1971 book of political essays, *Tiempo mexicano*.

Against the backdrop of Cold War imperialism, a necessary mechanism for the fuller realization of the Revolution was a national state that could defend the public interest against the incursions of the United States. And the United States, in the early 1970s, did nothing to regain favor in the eyes of those who still chafed at its treatment of Cuba. The combined abuses of general economic influence, a penchant for political and cultural meddling, the spiraling disaster that was Vietnam, and the Chilean coup of 1973 only exacerbated Fuentes's ire against his neighbor to the north. "[Going to the United States now] is like going to the University of Heidelberg while Hitler destroyed Poland," he railed to García Márquez, even before the overthow of Salvador Allende in Chile.[123] Indeed, he wrote in *Tiempo mexicano* that "fascism, in 1971, is the radical depoliticization of the masses plus a rapid integration into the supranational economic project of the U.S. oligopolies." It was "the total loss of Mexican independence" and identity—precisely those things the Revolution had established.[124]

Fuentes and Paz corresponded at length about the possible ways to bring about the fuller realization of revolutionary progress in Mexico, given the international situation. Defense of national sovereignty was foremost in the pair's minds. Paz wrote that it would require the "strengthening of the national State and the public sector against Yankee imperialism and the private sector" combined with "democratization of the State…through the democratic reform of popular institutions."[125] Fuentes concurred, elaborating on the ways in which labor unions and campesino organizations should be the primary loci of local democracy, defended from above by a powerful national state.

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[121] CF to OP, September 25, 1973, Box 306, Folder 4, CFP.

[122] CF, "Opciones críticas en el verano de nuestro descontento", *Plural*, August 1972, 5, Box 157, CFP.

[123] CF to Gabriel García Márquez, November 24, 1970, Box 305, Folder 9, CFP.

[124] CF, *Tiempo mexicano*, 184.

[125] Ibid., 192 ("Mexican socialism"); OP to CF, October 28, 1971, Box 306, Folder 3, CFP ("strengthening of").

Dependency theory also played a clear role in shaping Fuentes's perception of the proper role of the state. The answer to Mexico's dependent, peripheral status? "The state," he scrawled in notes for a speech given at the Woodrow Wilson Center in 1974. "In absolute terms, *the* factor for change and independence…[The] state [is the] center for autonomous national decisions. State [is] the only power cable of *negotiating* greater independence."[126] Once the state was strong enough, independent enough, a host of positive consequences would follow:

> Then [the] intelligentsia contributes options rather than appocalyptic [sic] visions…Then [the] bourgeoisie is harnessed to national objectives…then the middle class and the proletariat are free to organize themselves into political parties of a plural denomination and exercise concrete democracy…Then the peasantry will be able to work out its problems in the local scale proper to it, and perhaps even to communicate its very deep communitarian and egalitarian values to broader strata of society.[127]

This was not a radical vision. Social classes would persist—Fuentes's elitism when speaking about "the peasantry" is undeniable—but they would at least be integrated in a common project of national welfare, rather than tied to external commercial or political interests. And the key element in making it all possible was the independent, nationalist state.

Echeverría's policies aligned well with Fuentes's priorities at this juncture. The new president reeled in the repressive tendencies that had evolved in the later stages of the Díaz Ordaz administration, opening up freedom of the press and freeing the political prisoners of 1968. More important for Fuentes was Echeverría's nationalist economic policy and his willingness to integrate Mexico into the Third World. The timing of Echeverría's presidency on this front could not have been better: around the world, the countries of the global south were pushing for a new global order—eventually termed the New International Economic Order—which militated against vast inequalities between nations and promoted a vision of positive interdependence. To use Fuentes's language, the goal was an "interdependence of independents."[128]

"El gobierno…menos malo":[129] *Limited Options in the Summer of Fuentes's Discontent*

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[126] CF, notes for speech, September 1, 1974, 2, Box 53, Folder 13, CFP. Emphasis in original.

[127] Ibid.

[128] CF, "Hacia la interdependencia de los independientes," 1974, 1, Box 49, Folder 1, CFP.

[129] CF, "Opciones críticas," 9.

Following Echeverría's election, in typically hyperbolic fashion, Fuentes wrote an article denouncing intellectuals who "left Echeverría isolated" as committing an "historic crime." The backlash against this piece prompted him to write an article for Octavio Paz's new political magazine *Plural*, "Opciones críticas en el verano de nuestro descontento," in which he backtracked somewhat, arguing that "isolating the current President of the Republic means…abstaining from critical participation in our political life…not…refusing to lend the regime unconditional support." The article was both a defense of Fuentes's position and a call to arms. Mexico's sovereignty was fragile, threatened. Fuentes lamented, "The world doesn't give too many possibilities to a country like ours." However limited Echeverría's democratic opening was, it was an opening, and it was up to the left to take advantage of it, to push for every inch of revolutionary change possible, "so that our country is not merely a harassed, oppressed colony with no future of its own."[130]

The alternative? Fascism, the complete abandonment of revolutionary ideals. Echeverría may not have been the ideal candidate, and he wouldn't make the country a "utopia." But neither had he induced "the apocalypse."[131] Fuentes concluded, "He has simply accompanied us in the search and creation of a freer, less dependent, and more humane model of progress."[132] Though an exaggeration, the dichotomy Fuentes posed to his friend Fernando Benítez—"Echeverría or fascism"—spoke to the slimness of Mexico's options in the early 1970s. Echeverría, for all his flaws, was certainly "the least bad" of the two.[133]

Fuentes's apparent political reversal was therefore not as clear-cut as it might seem. He recognized that the government was not going to carry out the kinds of democratic reforms needed to push the Revolution forward—hence his emphasis on the importance of democracy and communitarianism from below. Yet he also believed that democracy and communitarianism from below stood no chance in a world of empires. The dilemma faced by the Latin American left at large—being "[left] with almost no viable aims for pursuing its options without compromising them"—was one Fuentes was forced to confront over and over.[134] He could critique U.S. imperialism—from the pages of a CIA-funded magazine. He could bemoan Mexico's closure to

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[130] All quotes from CF, "Opciones críticas".

[131] Interview of CF, by Beatriz Nevares, June 8, 1976, Box 61, Folder 1, CFP.

[132] Ibid.

[133] CF, quoted and translated in Van Delden, *Carlos Fuentes, Mexico, and Modernity*, 125 ("Echeverría or"); CF, "Opciones críticas," 9 ("the least").

[134] Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom*, 3.

dialogue and discourse—by holding up the U.S. as an exemplar of freedom of thought.[135] And he could push back against U.S. hegemony on the international stage—by supporting a candidate whose domestic policies and use of state repression were not far off the mark of his predecessor's.

The consistency of Fuentes's commitment to the goals of the Mexican Revolution and to freedom of thought and expression—the two most important pillars of his politics—has been obscured by these contradictory positions, as a forceful position in support of one ideal often came at the expense of another. Yet it is their very contradictions that emphasize the contingency of Fuentes's posture and the constancy of his convictions. In moments when he felt the Mexican state strong enough to withstand internal criticism, he critiqued it. In moments when he felt the state too threatened by external forces, he supported it. These oscillations, then, reflect less changes in Fuentes's underlying objectives—really, the renovation of the Mexican Revolution—and more changes in how he felt those objectives would be best achieved. They also hint at a more generalized problem of the Mexican left: the tension between a hope that revolution could be made "with the Constitution," working with the existing state, and the fear that such work would not go far enough. As Fuentes's story shows, even the seemingly moderate project of renovation has been conflicted, contested, and, to this day, incomplete.

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[135] See CF, "La prensa, el primer y la conferencia latinoamericana," *Política*, March 15, 1961, 12-13.

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