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Tynan, Jane

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## CHAPTER 9

# Images of Insurgency: Reading the Cuban Revolution through Military Aesthetics and Embodiment

*Jane Tynan*

Transnational histories of insurgency are growing. The increased emphasis on transnational aspects of political violence have challenged traditional understandings of insurgency as a form of militarism internal to the state.<sup>1</sup> Few studies, however, draw attention to how insurgency is shaped by aesthetics and embodiment. The aesthetic turn in international relations has generated new research on material and visual cultures of militarisation, but there is less understanding of how this impacts patterns of resistance in revolutionary contexts, that is, how social actors resist, rebel and revolt against political authority. In this chapter, I examine how ideas of 'revolution' can be read through images and self-presentation techniques. Here, the visuality of the Cuban Revolution is brought into focus, first through its strategies of urban guerrilla warfare and then through its nation-building programmes. How did rebel leaders embody the revolutionary spirit, and did the circulation of images of insurgency enlist people to a participatory revolution? Further, did the revolution consolidate and circulate specific kinds of images and embodiments of military masculinities?

Since the nineteenth century, Cuba has had many periods of economic, political and social change, and these 'crises have been characterized by strong ideas about renewal, progress, development, social justice, national vindication, and independence'.<sup>2</sup> In 1511 the Spanish established themselves on the island and for the next two centuries it acted as a gateway to the region, making Havana a significant commercial location. Since the island's indigenous population was small, the Spanish colonisers met their demand for labour by importing enslaved Africans. Slavery would only be abolished in 1886, and Afro-Cubans

continued to experience discrimination and segregation after that.<sup>3</sup> A short period of British occupation in the late 1700s gave Cubans a taste of freedom from Spanish taxation policies, while strengthening trade relationships, an episode that prompted interest in wider political change. When Spain's empire fell in the early 1800s, it was the USA that sought to develop commercial interests on the island, not least because slavery was still widely practiced there.<sup>4</sup> By the mid-1800s, the drive for abolition and independence led to various attempted rebellions, culminating in the Cuban War of Independence in 1895–8. Afro-Cubans played an influential role in this war, but the Negro Rebellion in 1912 saw their own demands for equality with Cuba's white population denied.

The discourse that formed around Cuba's struggle for independence once slavery had been abolished in 1886 was inspired by the activism and writings of Cuban intellectual José Martí, who sought exile in various countries including Spain, Mexico and the USA before eventually returning to Cuba. Martí was a key figure in the intellectual movement for independence and he advocated education and free speech as key to the development of Latin America. Martí founded the Cuban Revolutionary Party (PRC), uniting various separatist factions and in 1895 Cuba's War of Independence began with uprisings across the island, which became the Spanish–American War. When a peace treaty was signed in 1898 it became clear that the peace was a victory for the US rather than Cuban revolutionaries; in 1899, the USA formally began a military occupation of Cuba.

By the 1920s, growing public frustration that the ideals of independence had not been fulfilled led to a complex period of upheaval. Fulgencio Batista came to power, first from 1933–44 bringing peace and prosperity and then from 1952–9 as a US-backed dictator, until rebel forces dramatically deposed him. On 26 July 1953, an anti-Batista activist named Fidel Castro led a group to attack Moncada army barracks in Santiago de Cuba, a disaster that saw many of them, including Castro, sent to jail. Disastrous though it was, the Moncada attack did make a case for revolution and became symbolic of Cubans' struggles, so much so that rebel forces adopted the name 'the 26 July Movement'. Following an amnesty for all political prisoners, Castro and others fled to Mexico to plot their return to Cuba. In November 1956, Castro and eighty men, including an Argentinian doctor called Ernesto 'Che' Guevara who had come to Cuba to join rebel forces, staged an insurgency against Batista. Other revolutionary groups supported them, including the University of Havana's student group, Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil, who in 1957 attacked the presidential palace in an attempt

to assassinate Batista. The informal group Revolutionary National Action, led by Frank País, was also strategically important to support Fidel Castro's forces in its use of cell-based structures and guerrilla tactics. It was this military strategy that ensured success for the January 1959 insurrection. Extensive political support and the social networks of the 26 July Movement were also critical to uniting a political coalition of groups to overthrow Batista.

The '26 July' commanders, soldiers and rank and file came to embody the 1959 revolution, even though the insurgency was supported by a wider anti-Batista front. A discourse emerged from the insurrection that gave form to the revolutionary Cuban citizen, who came to embody the characteristics of those who fought for independence: as Julia Sweig writes, 'the guerrilla *foco* came to be cast as the formative experience of the revolutionary, the womb that gestated the "new Cuban man."<sup>5</sup> If the efforts of guerrilla fighters were perceived to have won Cuban independence, the identities they laid claim to gained currency in the post-revolution period. The revolution had a masculine image, not because it excluded women, who were on the front lines shaping the process of revolution, but because they were not conspicuous as combatants in battles such as the Sierra Maestra.<sup>6</sup> This 1958 battle saw a group of 300 rebels led by the Castro brothers defeat Batista's 10,000-strong army. From 1953 an estimated 5 per cent of guerrilla fighters were women, most of whom were mobilised as students.<sup>7</sup> In common with many similar insurgencies since the start of the twentieth century, women had key roles, but usually as non-combatants: they formed women-only groups, played strategic roles as liaisons, distributed propaganda, raised funds and smuggled information. Women clearly participated in the Cuban Revolution in various ways, but the struggle created images that were distinctly masculine, suggesting 'the central role played by gendered imagery and discourse in the revolutionary process'.<sup>8</sup> This discussion considers why a discourse emerged in media reports, photographs, in accounts from the rebels themselves and throughout popular culture to frame the revolution as a masculine enterprise. The distinctive aesthetic that emerged in visual images of the revolution and in evidence in the self-presentation techniques of the rebel army offer insights into how these events were later interpreted and understood.

Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, through his image, in particular, became a transnational figure thanks to the Cuban Revolution. In fact, his participation and military leadership in the revolution not only concerned Cuba, but also represented a Marxist view of how poor and working-class solidarity might be forged across the developing world. Guevara

inspired, and continues to inspire, those interested in developing social structures based on egalitarianism, transnational social justice, liberatory education and anti-imperialism (including the Black Panther Party in the USA, whose own iconic aesthetic is the subject of the next chapter in this volume<sup>9</sup>). The ways in which Guevara's image has been circulated and appropriated in popular culture in Europe and North America will be discussed later. What is clear is that Guevara himself was convinced that identity could be formed and re-formed through events. His specific dispositions in youth, central to his idea of creating the new man or woman (*el hombre nuevo*), betrayed his belief that institutions could only change through the transformation of subjectivity.<sup>10</sup> His awareness of the role of subjectivity in social transformation highlights how studies of aesthetics and embodiment offer critical insights into the revolutionary project. He saw the value of instilling a desire for change on every level, which not only meant creating new images of the future, but also involved 'making' new kinds of people. While a focus on aesthetics and embodiment is important when considering how any kind of military identities are formed, in a revolutionary context like the Cuban Revolution it is critical: in revolutions, the functions, meanings and circulation of images, ideas and bodies all exist in opposition to hegemonic structures of power, and thus revolutionary ideologies about bodies, and how they might be militarised, necessarily involve an aesthetic sense of how those bodies will need to be transformed in order to break down the structures that the revolutionaries oppose. The revolution is often itself a creative and improvised project. Many of the rebel leaders, including Guevara, improvised revolutionary masculinities; this chapter considers the significance of these identity positions, how they emerged as part of a visual culture, and asks whether their construction was a political or a creative act.

### Revolutionary Masculinities

Studies of masculinity emphasise its instability and contingency. The philosopher Judith Butler highlights gender as a performance, a being in process, but one constrained by the 'various forces that police the social appearance of gender'.<sup>11</sup> While the notion of performance might suggest free expression, for Butler gender scripts work within a rigid regulatory frame. Thus, the range of acceptable masculine social roles is 'determined within this regulatory frame and the subject has a limited number of "costumes" from which to make a constrained choice of gender style'.<sup>12</sup> This is further enforced in military culture, which normalises a narrow range of

masculine identities within its structures. This tendency towards gender normativity is evident in the representation of social relationships that make up military institutions.<sup>13</sup> The military, represented as a masculine institution, does not offer the opportunity to express a range of masculine identities beyond those enshrined in military culture. Masculine unity is one of the most pervasive fictions in military discourse, neatly perpetuated by images of a uniform military masculinity.<sup>14</sup> This uniformity speaks of power and control exercised through a binary construction of gender, but also through the demand to conform to heterosexual ideals. Images are critical to perpetuating gender fictions. Hegemonic masculinity, a term used to describe how particular groups of men legitimate and reproduce their power through relationships of dominance, is powerfully represented by images of uniformed military men.<sup>15</sup> Revolutionary masculinities, though, upset this image of unity and uniformity, both visually and in terms of subjectivity. How then are military bodies imagined and created to embody social roles in a revolutionary struggle?

A very distinct form of military masculinity is created within revolutionary struggle. If dominant masculinities are framed by patriarchal capitalism, do men taking up revolutionary struggle give up masculine privilege? If men engaging with ideas of anti-imperialist revolution act them out through insurgent forms of military action, does this behaviour necessarily depart from normative military masculinities? What does it mean when whiteness and masculinity dominate the representation and embodiment of a revolutionary struggle? What is clear is that the social appearance of masculinity is meaningful to how histories of war are played out. According to the historian Joanna Bourke, men's bodies were, in World War I, produced by material forces that 'affected not only the shape and texture of the male body, but also the values ascribed to the body and the disciplines applied to masculinity'.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the performance, the experience of 'being' a soldier, is critical to understanding how military conflict shapes people.<sup>17</sup> Whatever material forces affect the shape of the male body is, therefore, also critical to understanding the nature of the conflict. So too is the absence or marginalising of other kinds of gendered and raced bodies. Revolutionary masculinities owe much to normative embodiments of military masculinity, but there are significant ways in which they can also be disruptive and deviant.

How particular versions of military masculinity circulate is of interest, but so too is the paradox of revolutionary masculinities, whereby military identity is defined both by power and by dissent. Insurgents might engage with some myths of militarism consistent with patriarchal norms, but insurgents are forced through the circumstances of the conflict itself

to creatively interpret masculine tropes. History in revolutionary contexts is made from below, and often recreated from the remnants of disestablished structures. For Bourke, it was the material reality and experience men had of conflict, rather than its coded representations, which determined the destiny of the male body. Uniform, one of the techniques by which these disciplines are applied to men's bodies in military conflicts, is a technique to mobilise key elements in the myth of bodily masculinity.<sup>18</sup> Insurgents are under particular kinds of pressures to create their own myths of military strength and to contest the disciplinary power of state armies. While state soldiers might engage in micro acts of embodied resistance to uniform codes, insurgents are inventing and improvising military identities through the specific conditions of the conflict. A critical part of that is the creative construction of the combatant civilian. A visual culture that exalts revolutionary masculinities engages with complex military identities. Revolutionaries are simultaneously defined by patriarchal power, but also by its undoing; they are equivocal about modernity but also seek to build new social structures.

The power of images coming out of Cuba in the 1950s and 1960s lay in their communicative quality and transnational potential. The events of the revolution ignited social transformations which had been common to various anti-imperialist struggles in earlier decades, in Ireland, Bengal and Palestine, where the success of insurgencies owed much to strategic alliances formed between urban and rural people. Nationalism in the colonial world had forged localised protest with a strong ideology: 'Colonial "nationalism" was therefore an expression of a dual focused rhetoric . . . no successful protest movement was made without ideology and without peasant support.'<sup>19</sup> National liberation had to be invented, which could not be achieved by military strategy alone, but relied upon the manipulation of symbols, ideas, material objects and even bodies. Victory was dependent upon the peasantry and the bourgeoisie coming together to foster nationhood, and so too would it be in Cuba. Guevara explained this in very material terms in a speech he made on 27 January 1959 in Havana:

We were a group of city people who were thrown into the Sierra Maestra, but were not part of it . . . Little by little the peasants' view toward us began to change . . . The shift in the peasants' attitude translated into the incorporation of palm-leaf hats into our ranks, as our army of city folk was becoming transformed into an army of peasants.<sup>20</sup>

Guevara sought to articulate the revolutionary spirit as one where subjective experience for peasants became incorporated into the actions of

the rebel army, while also demonstrating how urban rebels could learn from citizens who lived in the Cuban countryside. Through references to embodiment, he articulated how the raising of consciousness manifests in the revolutionary transformations of the body. The notion of incorporation is particularly powerful in revolutionary contexts because non-state actors are forced to hide and often find it useful to adopt a civilian image. Guevara used an example of peasant adornments infiltrating military units to signal how the conflict was a transformative event that made guerrilla fighters and civilians become one. As the introduction to this volume suggests research on aesthetics and embodiment exposes how the intimate politics of militarisation operates.

Guevara's *foco* theory of guerrilla warfare, whereby a vanguard sought the support of workers and peasants through their fast-moving attacks in the countryside, exploited uncertainty. What distinguishes insurgents from regular forces is their capacity for surprise attacks, which necessarily involves some skill in camouflage and disguise; this kind of warfare is thus characterised by an equivocal attitude to uniform on the part of revolutionaries.<sup>21</sup> Guerrilla warfare embodies the energy and vision of peasant rebellion combined with the ideology of modern revolution.<sup>22</sup> In another part of the same speech, Guevara explains that the peasant was the 'invisible collaborator who did everything that the rebel combatant could not'.<sup>23</sup> He articulates something important here about how guerrilla warfare works, by highlighting the strategic reliance on invisibility, disguise and transformation.

In the Cuban countryside, invisibility, or the capacity to create illusion, had been critical to the guerrillas' military strategy. When rebel leaders came into view, however, they had a distinctive appearance. More often they were white, male charismatic leaders with a raw appearance and informal attitude representing a new kind of image for revolutionary socialism, particularly in Latin America. The notion that revolution constructs new forms of masculine power had already been evident in how the Bolsheviks, during the Russian Revolution, had 'invented an entirely new lexicon for gender and masculinity'.<sup>24</sup> Significant in the Cuban context is the extent to which revolutionary military identities had to be improvised through the lived reality of conflict, illustrated by Fidel Castro's description of his comrade Camilo Cienfuegos (Figure 9.1):

One sure thing is that Camilo became legendary, among other things because of that medium-brim Stetson hat, which was the most distinguished headpiece in the whole Rebel Army, and not just because of the way it evoked a Tombstone sheriff. There simply wasn't a hat or cap like it in Cuba. Nor boots, whether they were tall or short.<sup>25</sup>





Figure 9.1 Robert A. Paneque and Camilo Cienfuegos. Bayamo, February 1959 (photographer unknown). Wikimedia Commons: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Robert\\_A.\\_Paneque\\_y\\_el\\_Comandante\\_Camilo\\_Cienfuegos,\\_en\\_Bayamo,\\_febrero\\_de\\_1959.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Robert_A._Paneque_y_el_Comandante_Camilo_Cienfuegos,_en_Bayamo,_febrero_de_1959.jpg)

Castro lovingly describes Cienfuegos's clothes in ways that revere a particular version of masculinity, one reminiscent of the cowboy or renegade, or the outsider prepared to be unconventional. Part of a familiar discourse that elevates heroic masculinities in time of war, Castro's exaltation of his comrade places a curious emphasis on dress and body. More significant, though, are the ways in which the Cuban Revolution gave new impetus to established ideas of what constituted a soldier hero.<sup>26</sup> Castro cites his creative approach to dress as evidence of Cienfuegos's revolutionary militarism. By focusing on the body and its adornments Castro places value in the role of dress to constitute military identity, and in particular hints at its distinctive power in unconventional warfare. With the instability of masculinity in mind, improvised military identities such as these reflect the creativity rebel soldiers brought to the work of 'fashioning' their bodies. Various models of identity adopted by the rebels were communicated verbally, textually and in visual images,

which contributed to the widespread mythologising of the rebel army. Unlike the conventional images of military men that had been established by the modern appearance of state armies in the first half of the twentieth century, those of Cienfuegos, Castro and Guevara displayed less concern with an appearance of masculine unity. The rebels departed from the ideal that had been embraced by the US Army in World War II, and were instead more interested in the dynamics of visibility and invisibility; creating illusion was critical to the guerrillas' military strategy, but rebel leaders also at times saw the value of being conspicuous. A new vocabulary for masculinity was evolving through the circumstances of the struggle itself.

In fact, the very notions of military heroism, traditionally framed by British colonial narratives to express power and dominance, were being reinvented by the architecture of the conflict in late 1950s Cuba. In its more traditional forms, the soldier hero is ordained by a Christian God, represents a sovereign state, and ideally embodies the gentlemanly state through a convincing image of a 'civilizing force'.<sup>27</sup> In both colonial and anti-colonial military action, bodies can be fashioned to legitimise extreme actions, and the uniform's abstraction from violence is what allows it to authorise the use of violence while maintaining an image of fashionable progress. Impeccably uniformed, formally presented, white and sexually restrained, the gentleman soldier embodied colonial power and its claims of superiority. The gendering of adventure and its imaginative connection with imperialism endured in various regions up to the twentieth century as the 'modern adventure tale is imbued with the imaginative resonance of colonial power relations underpinned by science and technology'.<sup>28</sup> Graham Dawson claims that these images, which had energised imperial adventure, were by World War I redundant and by this time the soldier, his struggles and contradictions laid bare, had become a figure of irony, as exemplified by T. E. Lawrence; the characteristic soldier hero of the new century was a secular figure, often an irregular, and was more likely to be a guerrilla fighter on the margins of the conflict.<sup>29</sup> Dawson was describing dynamics with British imperialism, but how might this be significant to the colonial imaginaries at work in Cuba, which were Spanish and then American? What he does highlight is the extent to which the myth of a unified military masculinity was breaking down in the early twentieth century under the pressure of new kinds of warfare. Less concerned with morality than the pleasures of adventure, the popular soldierly ideal was changing just as the notion of heroism itself underwent transformation. By this time, as Dawson suggests, distinctive outsider qualities had become a desirable

form of military masculinity in various regions, due partly to the prevalence of anti-colonial struggle. Whatever outsider qualities the Cuban rebels had, though, and however much they sought to craft an alternative military masculinity, their bodies were presented as distinctly white, male and heterosexual.

Exaltation of physicality and fearlessness were common to both traditional and modern forms of military heroism. The Cuban Revolution saw military masculinities emerge that were oppositional and secular. Further, the motivations of combatants were consistent with a form of militarism that arose from anti-colonial struggle. The new soldier hero embodied not a sovereign gentlemanly state but its rupture. These revolutionary masculinities were the product of the imagination, but also arose from the experience and reality of conflict. When Arminio Savioli, a reporter for the Italian newspaper *L'Unità*, sought to interview Fidel Castro in 1961, he witnessed a group of guerrilla fighters entering the El Caribe nightclub in the Havana Libre Hotel in the early hours of the morning. His description of the all-male group, which included Castro, is revealing of the ways in which the physical presence of the Cuban rebels inspired onlookers: 'Five athletic silhouettes in uniform, with pistols on their waists and small submachine guns on their shoulders, came in in complete silence (the carpet eliminated any noise made by the boots), sat around a table and ordered Coca Cola.'<sup>30</sup> As is clear from Castro's description of Cienfuegos, the rebel leadership gave themselves special status through their creative approach to military clothing, but particularly striking in Savioli's account is his willingness to observe beauty in these men's bodies. Clearly star-struck by Castro, Savioli admires his physique in the half-darkness of the club, when he recalls 'I recognized the heavy and slightly round shoulders, the tall size and the black, Renaissance-like beard of Fidel Castro.'<sup>31</sup> In both Castro's detailed description of Cienfuegos's clothes and Savioli's sketch of Castro, there is a sense that the circumstances of the revolution allow men to take pleasure in observing male physical beauty. These homo-social narratives, however, did not translate into progressive views on same-sex desire in revolutionary Cuba. In fact, between 1959 and 1980 there was a particularly repressive attitude towards what were considered the visible hallmarks of male homosexuality.<sup>32</sup> While the outsider qualities of Cuban rebels were conspicuous, they were constructed within a frame of normative military masculinities that valorised heterosexuality and whiteness.

Images of military men work to mythologise the actions of particular soldiers. How then did ideas of heroism, common to various forms of

military masculinities, operate in the context of the Cuban Revolution? As instigators of an anti-colonial war, the Cuban rebels were less interested in being viewed as a civilising force and instead saw themselves as agents of social transformation who sought to encourage creative rather than conformist styles of citizenship. Once the soldier became a figure of irony, a new kind of popular militarism emerged through the way in which the rebels fashioned themselves and, in turn, how this was then represented in photography and poster art. These images accommodated many of the characteristics of anti-colonial struggle: the misunderstood outsider, the irregular soldier or the guerrilla. Invisibility was critical to the identity of the guerrilla; accounts of the rebel leadership suggest that a capacity for camouflage was ideally complemented by charisma and physical beauty. Castro's description of Guevara's military appearance draws attention to the rebels' blatant disregard for uniformity and the ways they sought to transform and mutate:

And everywhere he went, Che descended the airplane steps in his baggy olive-green uniform, never mind that it was American Army Infantry clothing that Batista's army wore until their defeat, his shirt regularly hanging out of his pants, his boots tied only halfway up his calves, sporting a black beret sometimes and not others, his spare beard with those gaps under his sideburns where his beard refused to grow and his hair meticulously combed at times, and other times glowing freely like Prince Valiant's pageboy.<sup>33</sup>

A tendency to move in and out of focus contributed strongly to the magical persona of what appeared to be the typical Cuban revolutionary fighter. As Castro's description implies, Guevara's capacity to transform from guerrilla to leader, when the situation demanded it, contributed to his success as a new kind of revolutionary. As with other anti-colonial struggles from World War I onwards, the dynamics of the revolution demanded an equivocal attitude to uniform and a new kind of physical presence. Guevara's bodily transformations, his metamorphoses from meticulous soldier to shabby rebel, his tendency to choose when and how to wear his beret, reflect ideas about fashion as an expressive and adaptive force that is 'transitory, mobile and fragmentary'.<sup>34</sup> Fashion in this context, however, is not about the consumption of apparel, but instead represents the everyday work of making the self. Guerrilla fighters in this context used the instability and mutability of identity to maximise military effectiveness.

These shifts between civilian and military identities reflect how anarchic bodies shaped events in the Cuban Revolution, through the strategic

use of camouflage, disguise and bodily transformation. When translated into the language of popular entertainment, informal kinds of military appearance quickly evoke the idea of the heroic outsider. Further, these forms of casual militarism suggest that the unique pleasures of adventure are available to men prepared to be outsiders and renegades as they move through the countryside on an unauthorised, and often dangerous, quest for freedom. This is not to suggest that visual culture drove the popularity of the Cuban Revolution, which in the USA has been attributed to the influence of journalists and scholars, but many narratives that emerged from the conflict were reliant upon images such as one favoured by news editors at the time, who delighted in calling the rebels Castro's *barbudos*, or 'bearded ones'.<sup>35</sup> Uniform is one of the techniques by which discipline can be applied to men's bodies in military conflicts; indeed, it is one of the 'costumes' available to men who conform to a narrow range of masculine identities. Castro adopted uniform for the discipline and control it gave his troops, but over time he also saw the value of improvising military identities, which made war experience pivotal to how Cuban revolutionary citizens came into being. His equivocal attitude to uniform is evident in his own words:

Nothing mattered, nonetheless, as long as the uniform's cloth was olive-green. You could add all of whatever pockets, buttons, zippers, epaulets and pleats you could think of to the basic cloth. So, with an olive-green uniform, a cigar in your mouth and an assigned task, you were invested of all the powers the Revolution gave you.<sup>36</sup>

When his rebel army crafted a military appearance, Castro appeared to value creativity above discipline. He was flexible about what might constitute a military masculinity, and, as his description suggests, it was one capable of yielding to events and circumstances. Photographs taken by Reverend David W. Havens in the first week of January 1959 offer a glimpse of what passed for military garb for the rank and file.<sup>37</sup> In one photograph, a large group of young men in fatigue uniform, some bearded, others clean-shaven, point their guns at the camera. The shabbily dressed men have uniforms, in a sense, and the drab colour and cut of the loose-fitting shirts suggest that they are likely to be US infantry uniforms. Many also wear the field cap, but there is little effort to conform to a uniform style. In another photograph taken by Havens, an unknown reporter engages two rebels in conversation, both men in fatigues, one matches his uniform with a top hat while the other prefers to wear a beret.<sup>38</sup> Other photographs featuring women revolutionaries

show they adopt the same air of casual militarism. The impression is of a ragtag army of cheerful civilians unaccustomed to military life, playfully styled to look like a military unit. Other photographs taken by Havens depict women guerrillas who wear a combination of civilian and military clothing and also men mixing with ordinary Cubans, their unmilitary appearance amplifying the sense that on the street combatants were often indistinguishable from civilians.

Though Castro was not interested in enforcing a strict uniform policy, for him the use of olive green was his nod to military discipline. He was fetishistic, however, about the cigar, which for the rebel leadership at least was a key signifier, and became central to his idea of what constituted the Cuban revolutionary masculinity. Castro was vocal on the masculine pleasures of cigar smoking, and boasted that even during the Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961, when counter-revolutionary militants surrounded the island, he would have sent Cuban cigars to the White House if the press secretary had asked for them. In his view, the cigar mediated and deepened male bonds:

Cigar-smoking is a bond that doesn't fail the powerful . . . Oh, to slowly roll a puff of smoke over my tongue, meditating on it, because meditating on smoke when you're the one in power – preferably ruling with an iron fist – has been the experience of very few men.<sup>39</sup>

He delighted in making personal gifts of Cuban cigars to foreign dignitaries: for him, this symbol represented and embodied masculinity in ways that he knew were resonant. He may have appeared to be casual about uniform but he was also very aware of the currency of male privilege for the purposes of diplomacy.

There are many photographs from the period featuring prominent women fighters such as Vilma Espín Guillois (Figure 9.2), and various images also show women in uniform interacting with Fidel Castro. A feature of the revolution was the priority given to gender equality, but this was often a tactical weapon, which in a new Cuba was unsustainable, partly due to the potency of images and ideas about revolutionary military masculinities.<sup>40</sup> Of the available photographs of women – many fewer than those images featuring exclusively men – their military uniforms are clearly modelled on the garb worn by male fighters. Women too concocted a military image by mixing uniform with civilian fashionable clothing, and their outfits often included olive green fatigues, boots and military caps. It was not the first time that women were forced to mimic a version of militarism created by men for men. But when Celia



Figure 9.2 Raúl Castro, Vilma Espín Guillois, Jorge Risquet and José Nivaldo Causse in Tumba Siete, 1958 (photographer unknown). Wikimedia Commons: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Raúl,\\_Vilma,\\_Jorge\\_Risquet\\_y\\_José\\_Nivaldo\\_Causse.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Raúl,_Vilma,_Jorge_Risquet_y_José_Nivaldo_Causse.jpg)

Sánchez prepared to enter Santiago de Cuba with Fidel Castro alongside the rebel army to declare victory it was not the usual olive green tunic and trousers that she wore but the 26 July uniform 'and a cloth cap, perched on the back of her head so the bill stood up'.<sup>41</sup>

Sánchez, like the male rebels, sought to craft an image that mythologised the revolutionary struggle; here her clothing was a device used to re-enact key battles, but she also engaged with the present through contemporary fashionable styles. A particularly captivating image by photographer Alberto Korda shows Castro and Sánchez engaged in conversation, him with his signature cigar and her holding a cigarette.<sup>42</sup> They are both uniformed but the distinct styles they adopt suggest a desire to highlight gender difference. Images such as these reflect how rebels and their photographers used style to signify rebellious bodies but when women fashioned themselves as feminine it held specific connotations. Women in uniform made compelling images, precisely because of their transgressive qualities, incorporating as they did both masculine and feminine aspects. Despite the interest they could attract, there is also a strong sense that women in uniform would always be subordinate in military terms to their male counterparts and had to contend with the

reality that the image of military men would dominate the memory of the revolution – much as it dominated the memories of other wars and conflicts discussed in this volume where women had also fought.<sup>43</sup>

Castro might have been casual about uniform but he was also very concerned with crafting a revolutionary image that referenced aspects of military masculinities. The rebels were anarchic bodies shaped by events in the Cuban Revolution, so they were bound to fashion their own informal and unauthorised military appearances. Castro's 'gendered tactics' describe his use of gender transgressions, such as women taking on traditionally masculine tasks, to provide evidence of the urgency of revolutionary struggle.<sup>44</sup> His narrative suggested that the revolution was so compelling that *even* women took up arms. As I have shown, rebels had various embodiments, but it is also clear that a narrow range of masculine styles were pre-eminent. Hegemonic masculinities were raided to create dominant Cuban revolutionary images; although they were less likely to rely on the rigid aesthetics of uniformity, they did opt for the traditional military olive green for their loosely regimented uniforms. Castro's rebels were selective in their use of normative masculinities, and while leaders sought to subvert symbols such as the phallic cigar, they rejected the imperialist connotations of gentlemanly soldiering, signified by the perfection of regulation uniform. For Cuban rebels, uniform was a marker of masculinity and an assertion of power, but they also sought to undercut its potency through their improvised approach to clothing. Enlisting women in the rebellion and softening masculinities were both gender tactics that sought to offer an alternative vision of society in order to effectively legitimise military action.

A set of images by the press photographer Burt Glinn features members of the rebel army entering Havana in January 1959, to reveal a militarism that fuses elements of past military traditions with US military influences and aspects of popular culture.<sup>45</sup> Glimpses of popular culture suggest that the rebels crafted their unique military image in an Americanised Cuba but also in response to the brutal reality of revolution itself. A photograph of rebels returning atop trucks, jeeps and on foot dressed in a diverse range of military outfits offer an incoherent but captivating pageant: all guerrillas wear fatigues but not of a uniform design; headgear ranges from the field cap to the beret to nothing at all; and finally some men sport long hair, some short, some bearded, some not. Such uncontrived bricolage gave the Cuban Revolution a subversive image, which arose as part of the complex reality of the military struggle, but provided compelling images that anticipated alternative social structures. Another intriguing photograph of three rebels by Glinn offers



a range of military looks: on the left a man wears a heavy jacket over what appears to be a pair of overalls, along with a field cap on his head and scarf around his neck. The figure in centre of the photograph wears the familiar fatigue uniform, while the man on the right erodes any faint impression of uniformity with a gaucho wide-brimmed hat and fatigue trousers matched with a dark shirt and an improvised bandolier exposing his ammunition. All three men wear the heavy army boots. They are not military in the traditional sense, but the rebel army appeared to draw on normative ideas about military identities to then subvert their meaning, weaving in local symbols to improvise a uniform that mixed conformity with creativity.

In his autobiography Castro recalled diplomacy missions by the Cubans, where he observed a certain improvised aesthetic forming of its own accord. Castro describes Guevara playing the role of the swaggering veteran fighter, in contrast with Salvador Vilaseca whose bourgeois suit befitted his role as the prim and polished mathematics professor, while other fighters were neither, presenting instead a neat and tidy military image. Vilaseca was of the revolutionary left but not military in the sense the others were, having returned from exile after the revolution. It was the combined force of these clashing versions of revolutionary masculinities which gave these unlikely heroes a distinctive attitude, and promoted an image of diversity. The visible range of masculine tropes succeeded, according to Castro, in making their cause convincing in the eyes of the world:

Che came out first, with that moody smile, and behind him his seven or eight companions, who were also bearded and uniformed, although they were more rigorous about wearing their jackets all pressed and proper, tucked into their pants, and finally Professor Vilaseca, with his sober dark suit, white shirt and tie. And so it was, without our having set out to do so, that we inaugurated that shabby diplomacy that has become such a deep part of the history of the Cuban Revolution.<sup>46</sup>

Governments that disliked the Cuban guerrillas were particularly bothered by their seeming capacity to capture the popular imagination. In 2004, the British government declassified documents written by the British embassy in Havana in 1960; it emerged that in 1967, when they had been concerned with Guevara's involvement in the revolution and his position in government, they provided a vivid description of him as a 'bearded Argentinian, with his Irish charm and his inevitable military fatigue uniform, [who] has exercised considerable fascination'.<sup>47</sup> What

these official papers reveal is a detailed description of the threat this revolutionary masculinity represented to the British establishment at the time. Further, the reference to Guevara's Irish ancestry demonstrates a very specific fear about the transnational threat an attractive image of revolutionary masculinity might pose. Guevara's bricolage of military and masculine signifiers clearly caused irritation; his image in part built on a complex reality, partly invented as a set of fashioned poses. The revolution happened at a time when youth culture was exploding in the USA, and its distinctly oppositional and dissenting texture made revolutionaries attractive as heroic outsiders. When Guevara and Castro took the stage they somehow embodied the youthful, brave outsider, which had first been aestheticised in modern forms of military discourse, but then came to embody angry rebellious youth, as 'Castro was one piece of a larger fascination with a certain type of male rebel' akin to Elvis Presley.<sup>48</sup> In the 1930s, American movies, in particular gangster films, had been especially popular in Cuba, influencing forms of political violence: 'The drive-by machine-gun shooting, so much part of the film genre, became a prominent motif of political warfare in Havana.'<sup>49</sup> Cuban insurgency found various reference points in American popular culture that would have made images of the revolution accessible to young people in the USA. Guevara's image in particular was fashioned by the realities of the conflict, but his oppositional attitude also spoke to people who had no experience of military conflict.

Unconventional in behaviour and appearance, 'the sheer hairiness of Castro and his barbudos endeared them to North American youth, indelibly associating the Revolution with a generationally inspired insouciance and defiance of convention'.<sup>50</sup> If these gender styles had transnational meanings, it was not confined to military conflict. A defiant hairiness was an expression of revolutionary masculinities, but it was also emerging as a reflection of new social movements such as hippies in North America. Like Lawrence on the Middle Eastern front of World War I, Castro's outsider quality was inscribed on a body that had been racialised as white, producing a figure that Van Gosse has described as the 'White Guerrilla' who had 'thrown it all away, and chosen to live dangerously so as to truly live' – implying that his white privilege was foregone in his quest for adventure and justice. He was rewarded with popularity in the USA up until 1959 when this image began to fade.<sup>51</sup> While there were Afro-Cubans involved in the revolution, they do not appear much in the photographs still circulating. José Nivaldo Causse comes into view in some photographs (Figure 9.2), a prominent Cuban revolutionary who saw military

action, was prominent in the propaganda arm and enjoyed a political career in the new Cuba.

What is clear is that to oppose dominant ideologies Cuban revolutionaries drew on established symbols of power, but they also embodied new kinds of identities emerging in civil society: people, usually young white men, who sought justice through rebellion. Rebels were well aware of, and regularly reflected upon, the distance between theory and reality in a revolutionary context. The rebels themselves often embodied contradictions by performing masculinity in ways that made sense in a postcolonial context, by subverting traditional military codes and fusing them with dominant symbols in popular culture. Their military bricolage gave the revolution a subversive quality that inspired youth beyond Cuba.

### Cuban Revolutionary Visual Culture

The proliferation of visual imagery, political cartoons, government-sponsored advertisements and propaganda highlight just how valuable visual culture was to the Cuban revolutionary government in order for them to build a society based on collectivity, revolutionary ideals, responsibility and diligence.<sup>52</sup> The revolutionary process was focused on Cuban and Soviet ideology, and in particular on the value of labour, which continued to be meaningful in the new Cuba. The figure that emerged from the revolution was the New Man, a concept developed by Guevara, an idea that became central to nation-building efforts. While it drew on some characteristics of the rebel leadership there were ways in which it was clearly different. This model of the new Socialist Man, partly a Soviet-style Stakhanovite,<sup>53</sup> took on a more flexible form in Cuba where various roles might have to be held simultaneously by the revolutionary citizen. Most important to revolutionary Cuba, though, was the creation of citizens who could overcome future uncertainties through their physical and spiritual strength. A new citizen identity echoed the form and texture of military figures that emerged at various stages of the revolution, a key strength being flexibility and responsiveness to events.

Images of Guevara and Castro as heroic warriors were embedded in Cuba's official popular culture. Models of the 'Cuban new man were guerrilla war heroes and heroines, volunteers, work heroes' who were commemorated in various ways in communities, schools and workplaces.<sup>54</sup> The 1959 revolution led by Fidel Castro had brought about the transformation of Cuba's society. He was determined to support

other revolutionary regimes, intervening in Angola between 1975 and 1991, to maintain opposition to a creeping US hegemony over various parts of the world. Central to Cuba's revolutionary project were the constructs of internationalism, co-operation amongst nations, and transnationalism, people-to-people relationships.<sup>55</sup> An important aspect of the transnational experience was cultural exchange, and for Cuba this was primarily through images, commodities, film and art. Images of heroism transcended physical borders, such as the famous image of Guevara, which spread rapidly following his assassination in Bolivia in 1967. The famous 'Che' photograph, entitled *Guerrillero Heroico*, taken by Alberto Korda at a funeral in Havana in 1960 (Figure 9.3), became one of the most reproduced in the world.

Korda took the photograph while working as a photojournalist for the Cuban government newspaper *Revolución*, but it was never published due to its poor quality. The Italian editor Giangiacomo Feltrinelli was



Figure 9.3 Popularised cropped version of *Guerrillero Heroico* ('Heroic Guerrilla Fighter'), an iconic photo of Che Guevara at the funeral for the victims of the La Coubre explosion. Photo taken on 5 March 1960, published within Cuba in 1961, internationally in 1967 (photo: Alberto Korda). Wikimedia Commons: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CheHigh.jpg>

given the photograph by Korda, when he was in Cuba to write Castro's memoirs, and upon obtaining exclusive rights to Guevara's *Bolivian Diary* following his death in 1967 he put the image on the cover, but also used it to print posters for the Paris uprising in May 1968.<sup>56</sup> Another early version of the image was created by the Irish artist Jim Fitzpatrick, who found the Korda photograph in *Stern* magazine and used it to create a black and red screen-printed poster soon after Guevara's death, a version that was reproduced widely and 'universalized Guevara as a symbol of revolutionary masculinity'.<sup>57</sup> Artists and designers have since appropriated the 'Che' image; it continues to inspire student movements, is regularly re-purposed to sell all manner of commodities, and appears on murals in conflict zones. Most ubiquitous, however, was the Che Guevara T-shirt, which began as a countercultural statement and eventually became a fashion item. This image of Guevara was by the end of the twentieth century not only powerful but also very marketable.

Images were a powerful form of cultural exchange for revolutionary Cuba. Photographs that created the image of the revolution were circulated in newspapers, in touring exhibitions and were later appropriated and recreated by graphic artists. Images became a weapon of war not least because developments in photography synchronised with the revolution, which encouraged Cuban photographers and attracted the foreign press to the island. In 1957, René Rodriquez, from the rebel army, took a photograph of Castro in command of the Sierra Maestra, which circulated all around the world. At the time, the image clearly contradicted the Batista government's propaganda that Castro was by that time dead. Cuban photographers were integral to the construction of the new order as images acted as a conduit for positive messages about the new Cuban state and what it meant, like the Soviets did decades before. Photography, and images generally, communicated the transformation of Cuba to the world.<sup>58</sup> Images were also a form of propaganda feedback. The 1950s was a critical time for the growth of television and of journalism, which by this time were less inclined to be conservative and relied more on images. Guevara became an inspirational image at a critical moment in the development of the Cuban political poster.<sup>59</sup> Castro later said of Guevara that he was inelegant, he 'was scruffy because he thought that was the poster child for rebellion to the extreme . . . I must admit, in the end Che's worn and crumpled clothing would give things a fresh air that we hadn't conceived of beforehand.'<sup>60</sup> In retrospect, the scruffy appearance of the rebels and the 'shabby diplomacy' of the leadership described by Castro offered a fascinating bricolage of masculine and military signifiers that fitted a

new culture of youth rebellion characterised by a vibrant visual culture that spoke to a North American audience.

The 'bearded Argentinian' who wore the military fatigue uniform, partly a response to the demands of guerrilla warfare, partly adopted as a fashioned pose, fused the myth of the unconventional military adventurer with the 'angry young man' of the 1960s emerging in the USA at the time. Cuban insurgency, which found various reference points in American popular culture, created images of soldier heroes worthy of a new age. Perhaps Guevara became the 'poster child of the rebellion' because his creative approach to performing a revolutionary masculinity involved subverting established symbols of power. Images were increasingly part of popular culture and were undoubtedly meaningful for a population who accessed information through news media, posters and television. Visual gender codes framed the story of a Marxist uprising in Latin America, by re-purposing military masculinities to create new kinds of soldier heroes that were meaningful to youth audiences beyond Cuba. The revolution reinvented the poster as a rhetorical medium with a new visual language that used iconic photographs to build up oppositional consciousness.<sup>61</sup> And yet this oppositional language was not sufficiently radical to include women or to incorporate the possibility of other gender positions.

Images of Guevara and Castro were reproduced to represent the revolution locally, but their innovative gender performances were very useful to communicate the complexities of both the revolution and its aftermath to the wider world. Guevara, a transnational figure who embodied the ideals of the New Cuban Man, was also an inspiration for anti-imperialist struggle in other regions. Reproducing Guevara's image in revolutionary Cuba was a significant part of nation-building efforts; he was exalted as the model citizen but also embodied a form of leadership that had surface masculine qualities but whose identity incorporated feminine attributes to articulate opposition to the military strength of US colonial power. Guevara was often pictured with children, so that his revolutionary image incorporated both a rugged masculinity and a softer nurturing side. Guevara's informal militarism aestheticised his opposition to colonial power; his 'shabby' improvised masculinity reassured with its intimacy, warmth and humanity in contrast to the distant coldness of the crisp gentlemanly colonial state. Such complexity and contradiction deflected from readings that might be made of Guevara's image that emphasise his conventional background and education. In common with Castro and Cienfuegos, Guevara represented the acceptable face of militarism on the island, which was reassuringly white and

middle class. By incorporating aspects of peasant identity, femininity and a disregard for colonial gentlemanly soldiering Guevara's popular media image de-emphasised his racial and gender conformity to hegemonic power.

The Cuban Revolution gained its power from the material reality and pace of the conflict, embodied by the military appearance of rebel forces, which offered compelling visual material for image-makers to work with, whether photographers or poster artists. Castro suggests that many actions and experiences were a corrective to ideas he gleaned from books, emphasising his reliance on events to create compelling images and ideas to capture the imagination of Cubans and the international community. The visual images that form the legacy of the revolution were not carefully invented but they did exploit the distinctiveness and novelty of new and re-purposed military masculinities. Militarily, classic options were often not available, and so the rebels were forced to act with tactical flexibility. Thus, the reality of asymmetrical warfare pushed Cuban rebels to experiment with their appearance in an effort to evade the enemy and to reach out to young people, intellectuals and the media beyond Cuba.

Dress practices in the Cuban Revolution had parallels with how marginal groups used clothing under colonial rule in Latin America. Historically, in the colonial period, clothing was a visual tool to establish racial and ethnic difference and to claim the superiority of colonisers, but then became an 'avenue of self-expression . . . manipulated by marginal sectors of the society such as mestizos, blacks, mulattos and women who wanted to find a space of their own in a society governed by the categories of race, gender and birthplace'.<sup>62</sup> Fashioning the self was not so much an opportunity for consumption but shaped personal identity in ways that allowed people to break out of the categories created for them. The Americanisation of Cuban society from the late nineteenth century was reflected in how citizens viewed themselves as modern, sharing values with their North American counterparts: 'Cubans and North Americans not only shared similar fashions, but more significant, they invested similar psychic faith in what clothing could do for them.'<sup>63</sup> A belief in the power of image, and the potential for clothing to transform the self, informed a revolution that was distinctly modern in its deployment of representational aesthetics. Media developments meant that war had become entertaining spectacle and identity had also become malleable, which fused with notions of the transformation of subjectivity so critical to the building of a new Cuba.

A visual culture that drew on images of patriarchal power, but paradoxically sought its undoing, therefore explored the flexible space created by insurgency to reconcile the various social groups that made up the new Cuba. National liberation involved manipulating symbols, ideas, material objects and even bodies in order to transform society. Fashioning the self was critical to shaping personal identity and gave Cubans access to new self-identities to meet the challenges of revolutionary society. The Cuban Revolution 'meant access to the world market for culture. In the 1960s, Cuba put Latin America in fashion.'<sup>64</sup> While the Americanisation of Cuba appeared to put it on the map, it was the visibility and the shock of the revolution that reached the world, with its dreams of rupture and transformation. As politics and culture converged, the latter became the site of contestation, but also where citizens sought recovery: 'The growing political crisis gave new urgency to the reconfiguration of cultural forms and in the process created possibilities for radical political change.'<sup>65</sup> Revolutionary Cuba had to recreate itself and offer its citizens some part of the heroic event.

One of the ways revolutionary Cuba managed to offer citizens a part in heroic events, led by a few white, male rebel leaders, was through the cultural practice of re-enactment. The Pioneer movement, for instance, a Cuban youth organisation, re-enacted key battles of the revolution to offer young people on the island a material connection with those events. Castro described re-enactments in a speech to the Ismaelillo Pioneers' Camp in Las Villas Province in 1976, when he spoke of how emotional it was for comrades to 'watch the Pioneers reenacting the "Granma" landing. [applause] Eighty-two Pioneers with their backpacks, rifles and olive-drab uniforms landed on that beach to reenact that historic event.'<sup>66</sup> Castro and eighty-one other revolutionaries had landed in Cuba on the yacht *Granma* in December 1956, a key moment in the revolution when Castro returned from exile in Mexico. His speech in 1976 reflected his concern that the revolution be kept within popular memory, but also revealed that for him visual culture and performance was an ideal form of commemoration. Fidelity to the minutiae of events was clearly important to him, but so too was a careful approach to aestheticising and embodying the *Granma*. He went on to say that 'those children did not look as if they were reenacting an event, they were so solemn and acted their roles with such emotion that it seemed as if it were a real landing. [applause]'<sup>67</sup> Castro clearly valued fidelity to historical accuracy, but re-enactments are a curious form of commemoration, which betray an interest in encouraging citizens to inhabit the costume and attitude of the revolutionaries. Military





Figure 9.4 Fidel Castro, 1950s (photographer unknown (Mondadori Publishers)).  
Wikimedia Commons: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fidel\\_Castro\\_1950s.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fidel_Castro_1950s.jpg)

re-enactments, which continue to this day in Cuba, carefully recreate the clothing and general appearance of the rebels, including the signature beards.

Re-enactment reflects an interest in stabilising the revolutionary moment,<sup>68</sup> which was also evident in Castro's insistence on always wearing a military uniform (Figure 9.4). He wore the uniform in every photo from the late 1950s to the 1990s, which appeared to be central to how he maintained the fiction of an eternal and unchanging revolutionary masculinity. The paradox is that what eventually became a hegemonic discourse of rebellion had first relied heavily on radical images and gender performances to mobilise the movement for independence. As time went on, despite memories of the *barbudos* as a transgressive group of outsiders, 'the revolutionary movement relied on familiar imagery and discourse regarding masculine honor, sexual discipline, and even Catholicism and paternal duty'.<sup>69</sup> This was clear when a reporter asked Fidel Castro in 1994 why he was still wearing his guerrilla uniform

thirty-five years after the revolution. His response revealed an investment not in the flexibility of masculine performance, but an assertion that his was immutable:

These are my clothes. I have worn them throughout my life. They are comfortable and simple. They are cheap and they are never out of fashion. I also have another suit, a more formal one with a tie. But forgive me if I ask you a question: When you interviewed the pope, did you ask him why he always wears that white vestment?<sup>70</sup>

### Conclusion

Despite the fact that Castro had invented novel images to embody the revolution, precisely by exploiting the instability and contingency of masculinity, by the 1990s he was unprepared to admit how creative he had been when he first constructed his military identity. By this time his image was, as far he was concerned, immutable. Image and self-presentation techniques were critical to the Cuban Revolution, which embodied and aestheticised strategies of urban guerrilla war, to then form the basis of nation-building programmes. This bold participatory revolution was underpinned by a visual culture enabled by the growing currency of images in the 1950s and 1960s. Guevara and Castro in particular were chosen to represent the revolution; their images functioned as models of the Cuban new man but were transnational in terms of their symbolic and social power. The power of revolutionary images was in no small way the result of their genesis in the events of 1953–9, whereby the anarchic form of militarism adopted by the rebels demanded flexible, informal and unauthorised military appearances. At times they came into view as hypermasculine, complete with cowboy hats, long hair, cigars and a cheerful contempt for uniformity. Gender was for the rebels a performance, constrained somewhat by convention, but they also managed to manipulate established codes of military masculinity. If the range of acceptable masculine social roles tends to limit the 'costumes' available to men, the Cuban rebel leadership sought to push those limits and in doing so crafted a convincing image of revolutionary masculinity in an age of popular culture. Traditional images of uniformity might have represented conformity, gentlemanly soldiering and the interests of colonial power but none was attractive to the Cuban rebels who preferred to exploit the space between civilian and military, masculine and feminine, the secular and the spiritual; liminality enabled them to fashion bodies that could embody a revolutionary Cuba, one that promised creative

rather than conformist styles of citizenship. While revolutionary images appeared to highlight creativity and subversive visual practices, performances were clearly gendered and racialised.

Aesthetics and embodiment are critical to understanding the dynamics of insurgencies, in particular how this kind of conflict creates distinctive military identities that incorporate both combatant and citizen. If insurgents invent their own myths of military strength, Cuban rebels sought to do this by fashioning their bodies in distinctive ways. Enlisting women in the rebellion and softening masculinities were gender tactics that formed part of the complex reality of military struggle. This discussion draws attention to the various forms militarisation can take and highlights the cost of ignoring specific aesthetic forms and embodiments in favour of larger motifs and narratives in research on war and conflict. The intimate politics of militarisation deserves much more attention if we are to understand how social transformations are constituted through material and aesthetic forms that are often fleeting but become critical to the formation of popular myths and memories of revolution.

### Notes

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57. 'Che Guevara, Jim Fitzpatrick and the Making of an Icon', *History Ireland* 16:4 (July–August 2008). <https://www.historyireland.com/20th-century-contemporary-history/che-guevara-jim-fitzpatrick-and-the-making-of-an-icon/>; Lisa Corrigan, 'Visual Rhetoric and Oppositional Consciousness: Poster Art in Cuba and the United States', *Intertexts* 18:1 (2014): 71–91, 77.
58. Nan Richardson, 'Image and Revolution', in Burt Glinn, *Havana: The Revolutionary Moment* (New York: Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2001), 106–10, 106.
59. David Kunzle, *Che Guevara: Icon, Myth and Message* (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1997), 29.
60. Fuentes, *Castro*, 399.
61. Corrigan, 'Rhetoric', 74.
62. Mariselle Meléndez, 'Visualizing Difference: The Rhetoric of Clothing in Colonial Spanish America', in *The Latin American Fashion Reader*, edited by Regina A. Root (New York: Berg, 2005), 17–30, 30.
63. Pérez, *Becoming*, 316.
64. Hernández, *Looking*, 40.
65. Pérez, *Becoming*, 473.
66. Fidel Castro, 'Fidel Castro Speaks at Dedication of Pioneer Camp', speech at the dedication ceremony at Ismaelillo Pioneer's Camp in Las Villas Province, 1976, Latin American Network Information Center (LANIC), Castro Speech Data Base. <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1976/19760718.html>.
67. Ibid.
68. Katherine Johnson considers re-enactment as 'living history' that serves a variety of purposes including popular pastime, public pedagogy and commemorative performance: Katherine Johnson, 'Performing Pasts for Present Purposes: Reenactment as Embodied, Performative History', in *History, Memory, Performance: Studies in International Performance*, edited by David Dean, Yana Meerzon and Kathryn Prince (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 36–52. See also Alan Filewod, 'Warplay: Spectacle, Performance, and (Dis) Simulation of Combat', in *Bearing Witness: Perspectives on War and Peace from the Arts and Humanities*, edited by Sherrill Grace, Patrick Imbert and Tiffany Johnstone (McGill–Queen's University Press, 2012), 17–27, where re-enactment is viewed as a spectacle to stabilise historical moments but variously also to commemorate, to create fantasy or to perform a political function.
69. Chase, *Revolution*, 211.
70. Jas Gawronski, "'Exclusive" Interview with Castro', *Clarín*, 2 January 1994, 28–9, as reprinted by Latin American Network Information Center (LANIC), Castro Speech Data Base (PY0301221594). <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1994/19940105.html>.