

# Tempo & Argumento

e-issn 2175-1803

## Socialist governmentality: political formation, revolutionary instruction, and socialist emulation in the CDR, Cuba, 1961-1965

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### To cite this article:

MEDEL TORO, Juan Carlos. Socialist governmentality: political formation, revolutionary instruction, and socialist emulation in the CDR, Cuba, 1961-1965.

*Tempo e Argumento*, Florianópolis, v. 12, n. 29, e0203, jan./abr. 2020.

 <http://dx.doi.org/10.5965/2175180312292020e0203>

Received on 10/07/2019

Approved on 19/12/2019



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### Abstract

During the 1960s, the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (Comités de Defensa de la Revolución [CDR]) took relevant actions along with the Cuban masses, organizing cultural, social, and economic activities that shaped socialism from below. Thereby, through their work, the CDR gave meaning to their own idea of Cuban socialism. In the context of revolutionary upheaval, they were major players in the process of governmentality deployed by the revolutionary project. They willingly participated in their own governance. As a result, the CDR deployed a productive power that actually aimed at improving the lives of fellow Cubans. This article highlights the political formation of CDR members through revolutionary instruction and ideological formation. Also, this is an analysis of the role of CDR members in the revolutionary process beyond political surveillance, focusing on their impact in the everyday lives of Cuban people. The work of the CDR was key to build a new hegemonic project in revolutionary Cuba. They took a significant ideological role, creating and promoting a new cultural hegemony that sought to convince fellow Cubans about the potential benefits that the revolution could eventually bring. Thus, through the work of the CDR, we may see the Cuban Revolution beyond the vanguard.

**Keywords:** Governmentality. Ideology. Socialist Emulation. Representations. Political Formation.

## Governamentalismo socialista: formação política, instrução revolucionária e emulação socialista nos CDR, Cuba, 1961-1965

### Resumo

Durante a década de 1960, os Comitês de Defesa da Revolução (Comités de Defensa de la Revolución [CDR]) desenvolveram ações relevantes entre as massas cubanas, organizando atividades culturais, sociais e econômicas que moldaram o socialismo de baixo para cima. Assim, por meio de seu trabalho, os CDR atribuíram sentido à sua própria ideia de socialismo cubano. No contexto do levante revolucionário, eles foram agentes fundamentais no processo de governamentalidade implantado pelo projeto revolucionário. Eles participaram prontamente de sua própria governança. Como resultado, os CDR implantaram um poder produtivo que realmente almejava melhorar a vida dos outros cubanos. Este artigo destaca a formação política dos membros dos CDR por meio da instrução revolucionária e da formação ideológica. Além disso, trata-se de uma análise do papel dos membros dos CDR no processo revolucionário além da vigilância política, enfocando seu impacto no cotidiano do povo cubano. O trabalho dos CDR se mostrou fundamental para construir um novo projeto hegemônico na Cuba revolucionária. Eles desempenharam um papel ideológico significativo, criando e promovendo uma nova hegemonia cultural que procurava convencer os outros cubanos acerca dos potenciais benefícios que a revolução poderia vir a trazer. Assim, por meio do trabalho dos CDR, podemos ver a Revolução Cubana além da vanguarda.

**Palavras-chave:** Governamentalidade. Ideologia. Emulação Socialista. Representações. Formação Política.

## Introduction

The Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (Comités de Defensa de la Revolución [CDR]) are usually known as a mass organization that conducted political surveillance in every block of the main Cuban cities. Thus, the CDR may look like a repressive institution working for the Cuban State. From this perspective, they could be described as repressive State apparatuses, resorting to the concept proposed by Louis Althusser (2014). However, in this article, I would like to highlight the ideological dimension of the CDR. I argue that their function in promoting revolutionary ideology was even more significant than their role in repressing counter-revolutionary enemies. As a result, the CDR were not just repressive State apparatuses, but also, and perhaps more important, ideological State apparatuses.

Also, this article aims to highlight, addressing some activities deployed by the CDR in the early 1960s, the role played by the Cuban people in the revolutionary experiment. Therefore, analyzing the history of the CDR, we may see the Cuban Revolution beyond the revolutionary vanguard. CDR members, of both sexes, have put into question traditional social roles in Cuban society. CDR actions have changed the lives of Cuban people throughout the island. Thus, they have a significant influence, for good or bad, on the path taken by the revolutionary process. CDR members took actions, made decisions, and promoted ideas that had an impact on the everyday lives of fellow Cubans. They chose a specific historical road and became social subjects through political consciousness and collective action, persuading other Cubans to join the socialist project and exerting coercion upon them when persuasion was not enough. As a result, they gave new meanings to the concept of vanguard in a revolutionary context. By means of their decisions and actions, they shaped Cuban socialism from below.

The CDR had various functions. Richard Fagen (1969) identified 5 main functions in the organization at the end of the 1960s: a) as integrator; b) as socializer; c) as mobilizer; d) as implementer; and e) as protector. Having CDR members' interviews, reports, and testimonies as a basis, I argue that, although Fagen (1969) was right and all these functions were crucial for the CDR, the

organization's role as implementer was the most significant. Its role as protector (revolution defense, surveillance) was a must until 1965. After that, its role became more symbolic than real. The organization's role as mobilizer began to decay after 1970 and the 10-million-ton harvest (GUERRA, 2012). Its role as socializer also began to decay after this event and throughout the 1970s. Its role as integrator (i.e. popular gathering center) became more and more unpopular after 1976, when the organization and the revolution became institutionalized. However, the organization's role as implementer (social labor, social programs, blood donations, etc.) persisted as its main function until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Undoubtedly, the organization's role as protector has usually been highlighted as the most significant. This function came hand-in-hand with another key aspect of the CDR: repression. The social control dynamics deployed by CDR members is widely known among scholars of Cuban history (FAGEN, 1969; FARBER, 2011; GUERRA, 2012; GORDY, 2015). However, specific information about the kind of repression CDR members practiced in their everyday activities is not easy to find. Then, what kind of repression was practiced by the CDR? Above all, the CDR engaged in something that we may call 'low intensity' activities concerning social harassment in their neighborhoods. As far as the evidence shows, the CDR did not kill anybody; their actions were limited to various dynamics involving daily life harassment. Indeed, these activities had a significant negative impact on the lives of many Cubans who did not fit the revolutionary standards imposed by the vanguard. Johnathan C. Brown (2017, 112), for instance, highlights that "the CDR served as neighborhood watch groups," adding that "they turned in the names of suspected counter-revolutionaries to the security police." Brown (2017, p. 112) goes deeper arguing that CDR members, eventually, "gained the privilege of redistributing properties belonging to families going into exile." Also, Brown states that the CDR organized "people in the neighborhoods for voluntary work in the countryside" (2017, p. 112). Brown provides more information on the CDR in the context of the April 1961 Bay of Pigs Invasion (Invasión de Bahía de Cochinos). In that context, the author claims that "the CDR collaborated in apprehending one thousand potential enemies of the revolution" (BROWN, 2017, p. 117).

So, social control-related actions taken by the CDR were mostly linked to neighborhood surveillance. Michelle Chase (2015, p. 148) highlights that those activities tried to “keep organized watch over bodegas to make sure people were purchasing in ‘normal’ rather than ‘excessive’ amounts.” Anyway these actions were taken even before the government made it a cause. Chase (2015) reports that these local vigilantes were mostly women, because “CDR membership in this period was predominantly female.” Likewise, when it came to the issue of provisions, Chase (2015, p. 148) argues that “grassroots actors” – such as CDR members – “often outpaced leaders’ directives.” Maybe these actions represent the core of social control put into practice by the CDR on a daily basis. As Chase (2015, p. 149) highlights, they “confronted vendors, called on [S]tate inspectors, weathered interminable lines, improvised distribution schemes, and demanded increased [S]tate intervention.” Overall, Chase (2015) describes that CDR actions implied some coercion, but they do not seem to reach high political repression levels. The author quotes a CDR leader announcing that “the revolution wouldn’t permit (some people to have) more and other less or nothing, like before; everything was going to be distributed in equal shares, equitably” (CHASE, 2015, p. 159). This was precisely the context where CDR members deployed their surveillance and organizing activities.

Samuel Farber (2011, p. 17), contrary to what I advocate in this article, assures that “the primary purpose of the CDR was vigilance and repression.” The author adds that the CDR “functioned as a major mechanism to enforce political conformity and social control” (FARBER, 2011, p. 17). According to him, the CDR “frequently chastised people regarded as social deviants” (FARBER, 2011, p. 17). And the author points out that all Cubans were expected to be part of their local CDR; failure to do so could bring “serious educational and employment repercussions” (FARBER, 2011, p. 17). Yet, Farber (2011, p. 17) highlights that, after some years, the CDR spent most of their time and efforts “in other tasks[,] such as the control of ever-increasing criminality and infectious diseases, urban agriculture, reforestation, and the collection of scrap and recyclable materials.” Nevertheless, Farber (2011, p. 24) also claims that one of the tasks of CDR members related to social control consisted in the collaboration to provide

“information to the intelligence agencies.” Furthermore, Farber (2011, p. 26) assures that CDR members “organized mob action to yell obscenities, throw eggs and garbage, and paint demeaning slogans on the walls of the houses of those leaving the country.” According to the author, these actions were usually carried out against “those labeled as social deviants, especially gays” (FARBER, 2011, p. 26). It is widely known that homosexuals suffered from harassment and hostility in Cuba during the early decades of the revolution. There was even an infamous institution where many homosexuals were sent to in order to experience various kinds of forced labor; this institution was called the Military Production Aid Units (Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción [UMAP]). According to Garcés Marrero (2019, p. 110), the Cuban State created the UMAP to reform possible “social deviations,” mainly through agricultural labor, in order to isolate those who showed “enemy tendencies.” Their goal was, as a result, economic, repressive, and ideological (GARCÉS MARRERO, 2019). The CDR, although detached from the UMAP, also took homophobic actions during the 1960s. Those activities were mostly linked to social harassment and various political hostility manifestations. Similar actions were taken against dissidents, who were, as Farber (2011, p. 27) tells us, “confronted by rapid response brigades attempting to break up their usually small demonstrations, and by organized mobs stoning and defacing their homes.” There was, as we may see, a rationale of public humiliation adopted by some CDR members during the 1960s. Such a dynamics had an impact on the very feelings of human dignity among fellow Cubans. According to Farber (2011, p. 172), many of these actions can be explained following the nature of the CDR as an organization that worked “as transmission belts for the implementation of party and governmental policy,” something with which Michelle Chase (2015, p. 148) disagrees, arguing (as we saw above) that sometimes mass organizations, like the CDR, did influence the vanguard from below.

The purpose of this article is not denying the actuality of such a dynamics. Undoubtedly, the social control dynamics takes part in the governmentality process addressed herein. Instead, my goal consists in shedding some light in order to see that the work of CDR members during the 1960s went beyond this kind of repression. Social control and coercion were some of the aspects put into

practice in CDR members' work. The critique of these actions may even be found in the writings of prestigious Cuban authors, like Reinaldo Arenas and Leonardo Padura<sup>1</sup>. However, other dimensions of their work, usually overlooked by historians, offer a much more positive idea of their social work undertaken along with the Cuban masses. This social work highlights a rather humane dimension of thousands of people, of both sexes, who struggled to build a better world. They had dreams and pursued them through hard work, surely making mistakes, sometimes big mistakes that ruined the lives of fellow Cubans. But we cannot restrict their agency to repressive activities. Their everyday work to improve their lives and collective life within their local communities deserves as much historiographical attention as the history of repression from the 1960s on.

Overall, the CDR constitute one of the key mass organizations that explain the long success of the revolution as a hegemonic project, its consolidation and its resilience. The CDR role in the governmentality process (FOUCAULT, 1994) made the success of the Cuban government possible in a context of continued international harassment. The willing participation of those ruled (i.e. CDR members) reinforced the hegemonic capability of the socialist project in Cuba<sup>2</sup>. Through the CDR, the Cuban State brought hegemonic ideas of socialism to the poorest neighborhoods in the country. As a result, the country was easier to govern by having the CDR on the streets. This is a key aspect that explains the resilience of the Cuban Revolution. Since the beginning of this process, the revolutionary leadership saw that the revolution would be successful only if it incorporated the masses into the socialist project (FAGEN, 1969).

## The CDR and the National School of Revolutionary Instruction

Ideology is a key concept to assess the work done by the CDR. Their members gave and received revolutionary instruction through a political formation process. This political formation played a major role in the creation of

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<sup>1</sup> By Reinaldo Arenas see *Arturo, la estrella más brillante* and *Antes que anochezca*. By Leonardo Padura see, among others, *El hombre que amaba a los perros*, *Herejes*, and his tetralogy entitled *Las cuatro estaciones*.

<sup>2</sup> I take the concept of *hegemonic capacity* (and its meaning) from José M Aricó (2005) – see chapter 4.

a new Cuban subject. The CDR divided their work into fronts. Every front had specific cadres in charge. These cadres had the task of providing revolutionary instruction to other CDR members. For this reason, first, these cadres had to receive ideological formation from the School of Cadres of the National School of Revolutionary Instruction (Escuela Nacional de Instrucción Revolucionaria [ENIR]). However, the ENIR did not determine the ideological dimension of the CDR, although that was a major learning moment for the cadres. On contrary, CDR members gave meaning to their own ideas of socialism through everyday practices in the local communities.

In a text originally published in October 1962, Gil Blas Sergio (1965) writes about the School of Cadres of the CDR<sup>3</sup>. The author starts with the ENIR, about 20 km far from Havana. In the road to Guatao, according to Blas Sergio (1965, p. 29, our translation), there are “two ‘haciendas’ abandoned by their owners.” The ENIR worked there.

Blas Sergio (1965, p. 29, our translation) describes

[...] two streets, surrounded by trees, which go to the old building, long, with just one floor, in the middle of some small structures and a new building that was built to become a dormitory. In the main building there are these rooms: one classroom, called Frank País.

In this dynamics, we can notice how the CDR, despite their close connection to the Cuban State, politicized their role in the revolution oriented towards *inside* (i.e. as an organization that *could create its own cadres*) and towards *outside* (i.e. as an organization that *promoted socialism from below*), giving rise to new collective identities of Third World solidarity, Latin American dignity, and anticolonial resistance. Following this rationale, their version of Cuban socialism did not have to necessarily be State socialism. There was, at least in the early days of the organization, a truly popular project that shaped its everyday politics.

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<sup>3</sup> This text is a collection of first-hand interviews conducted by CDR members in the first half of the 1960s. It is the main primary source for this article. All translations are ours.

Anyway, to become a cadre, a CDR member had to go to the ENIR to receive revolutionary instruction. So, the ENIR is key to grasp the political formation of a CDR member. Blas Sergio (1965, p. 29, our translation) goes on with his description:

[...] there are also a dining room, a kitchen, and some rooms that are used as temporary dorms by the students; a library, the office of direction, and some stores. In the three small buildings, close to the main one, there are two more classrooms, one of them used, also, as a dormitory.

Blas Sergio (1965) provides us with a clear idea of where revolutionary instruction took place in Cuba. As a consequence, the author creates a representation according to the socialist spirit that inspired the ENIR. He adds:

[...] some blocks down the road, in the same highway to Guatao, there is a line of palms that take you to the pavement road, to a white cozy house, two floors, converted in the dormitories of the women who study in the ENIR Juan Ronda (BLAS SERGIO, 1965, p. 30, our translation).

The CDR cadres, who became the leadership of every front, had to go to the ENIR described by Blas Sergio (1965). However, we are going to see that this was just one step in the political formation of a CDR cadre.

Blas Sergio (1965, p. 30, our translation) points out that in the first class of the ENIR, in 1962, “there were 215 students, 44 women and 171 men. These students came from all over the place in the island: Pinar del Rio 25, Havana 49, Matanzas 26, Las Villas 41, Camaguey 28 and Oriente 46.” Almost all of them were leaders of Provincial Offices, Districts, Sectionals, and local committees. The ENIR had a 3-month program, in which these students received formation

[...] mainly in political economy and philosophy. The school program has a rigorous internship, with a free day just each 15 days, an a “semi-military discipline,” in order to establish order and a better functioning in the classes and other activities that happen over there. (BLAS SERGIO, 1965, p. 31, our translation).

As we can see, in their relation with the ENIR, the CDR, through their Circles of Revolutionary Instruction, worked as a socializer, promoting and organizing political education and ideological instruction along with their cadres.

Discipline was a major component in the ideological formation of CDR members. The ENIR, a key element in the political formation of CDR cadres in charge of the fronts, had the following schedule:

6 a.m., the students had to get up; 6:25 a.m., they had to be ready for the list; from 6:30 a.m. to 7 a.m., military physical exercises; from 7 a.m. to 7:45 a.m., breakfast. At 7:45 a.m. there was another list, this time in the classroom; from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m., lecture; from 10:15 a.m. to 12 p.m., individual study; from 12 p.m. to 1 p.m., lunch time; from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m., circle of study, newspaper discussion (*Granma*, the official newspaper of the revolution); from 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., discussion of the early lecture through circle of study; from 4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., work (mostly agricultural); from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., shower; 6:30 p.m., dinner; 7:45 p.m., gathering in the classroom again; from 8 p.m. to 10:30 p.m., another circle of study to discuss the last lecture; from 10:30 p.m. to 11 p.m., time to go to bed; 11 p.m., absolute silence (BLAS SERGIO, 1965, p. 31, our translation).

This was the exhausting schedule adopted in the ENIR – the organization created by the revolutionary project relying on the participation of the CDR – in order to promote revolutionary instruction. As we can see, this is a military, discipline-oriented schedule. Also, most of the time was spent in the classroom and in the circles of study. The main goal was providing the Cuban youth with political and ideological formation. There was a willingness to discuss everything until it was not possible to keep going on. Every CDR member, like any member of a mass organization created during the revolution (e.g. the Federation of Cuban Women – Federación de Mujeres Cubanas [FMC]), spent many hours in lengthy, not always fruitful, meetings.

The school organization was characterized by a high degree of self-management (autogestión). According to its documents, the ENIR did not have any kind of cleaning employee. There were 4 cooks, but all the other activities were done by students, in teams, taking turns after a certain amount of time, thus “all participate equally in the house chores” (BLAS SERGIO, 1965, p. 32, our translation). Even the building work needed before the opening of the school was done by them. Painting, installing the beds, gardening, repairs, etc., everything was done voluntarily by students from the very beginning, at the two abandoned ‘fincas,’ “creating a comfortable place, functional, clean, and appropriate for the

school's needs" (BLAS SERGIO, 1965, p. 32, our translation). As a result, CDR cadres became indispensable players in the daily organization of the ENIR.

Ideological debate was a relevant part of the activities occurring at the school. The school documents point out that, at that time, October 1962 (the month of the missile crisis between the United States of America [USA], the Soviet Union, and Cuba which almost led to a nuclear war), there was a cycle of talks "between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m., delivered by a group of revolutionary leaders of the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations (Organizaciones Revolucionarias Integradas [ORI]) and the CDR, like Cesar Escalante, José Matar, Radamés Mancebo, Jose Simón, and others" (BLAS SERGIO, 1965, p. 34, our translation). These names constantly appeared in CDR publications. They were members of the CDR National Office. One of the students who participated in these circles of study, Félix Tomás Valdés, coordinator of the CDR Sectional No. 1 from the Candelaria District, in Pinar del Rio, reported that he was there, studying,

[...] due to the votes of the masses, they chose me, although I am a 50-year-old man. Despite the favorable opinion to choose young men, I accepted as a good revolutionary man to come here, because I am enthusiastic about my formation. (BLAS SERGIO, 1965, p. 34, our translation).

As we can see, the cadres were not necessarily young students. Many middle-aged adults participated in the school. Motive was indispensable. This cadre proudly assured that "therefore, I will be able to convey to my comrades, there in Candelaria, the lessons learnt here and, at the same time, become a better leader" (BLAS SERGIO, 1965, p. 34, our translation). Having these interviews as a basis, we can see the hegemonic capability of the CDR. During the 1960s, the organization was quite successful in persuading and convincing Cuban people to take certain actions within the revolutionary project.

## The CDR beyond Cuba: anti-colonial fraternity

There was a transnational dimension in the revolutionary instruction provided by the CDR. The political formation of CDR members had a significant space for raising a Third World awareness. After all, the Cuban Revolution had a

major impact on the decolonization of Africa (GLIEJESES, 2013). A matter of surprise in my research was finding a CDR beyond the national boundaries of the island. As stated above, the CDR usually worked in the neighborhoods within the towns, but they also worked in companies, ‘haciendas,’ and factories. I found evidence about a CDR operation overseas, organized on a Cuban merchant ship. The CDR member Gonzalo Lines, a ‘motonave’ sailor, describes the work of this particular committee. This CDR operation and the ship worked in the Mediterranean Sea, specifically in Spain, Turkey, Italy, and Tunisia. The CDR also participated in some mass acts in the Port of Oran. Gonzalo Lines reports that the ship

[...] used to return full of Christmas gifts coming from Alicante and Oran. In this Algerian port the time coincided with the anniversary of the Algerian revolution, November 1<sup>st</sup>, and the crew was invited to participate in the event and the march. (VILLARES, 1965, p. 85, our translation).

The enthusiastic CDR member goes on with his description highlighting that “we got saluted with the Algerian anthem and the claps from the representatives of the government, when we passed in front of the main tribune.” (VILLARES, 1965, p. 85, our translation). One of the most interesting remarks of his description is that “next to our Cuban flag there was the Spanish flag (this is during Franco’s times), led by the antifascist organizations from Oran, a city where thousands of Spaniards lived who had been deported by Franco and the Falange” (VILLARES, 1965, p. 86, our translation). The 51 workers of that modern ship of the Cuban merchant navy joined the surveillance, voluntary work, and circle of study of the CDR overseas (VILLARES, 1965, p. 86, our translation). The text was published in January 1964, just a few years after the triumph of the Algerian revolution over the French colonizers. This demonstrates the international links between 3 anti-capitalist projects: a) the Algerian revolution; b) resistance to Franco’s dictatorship; and c) the Cuban Revolution.

Tania Díaz Castro (1965) wrote an interesting article about the CDR operation in the merchant Cuban navy. She highlights Arnaldo Groning, who worked in the machine section of this ship. He describes how, just after

constituting the crew, they realized the need for a CDR operation in the ship. According to his narrative:

[...] we would soon have our CDR, the Circle of Study, the Claims Commission and the Union Section, because this is a center of work on board and for that reason must work according to the mass organizations in the island, for everything that matters” (DÍAZ CASTRO, 1965, p. 210, our translation).

The idea was that the CDR had to work, they had to organize the defense of the revolution, in every place that it was needed, in every location around the world where there were some revolutionary Cubans. The CDR had to be omnipresent, because the defense of the revolution was the main goal, even beyond the geographic national boundaries. After all, the revolution had a global nature. For CDR members, the enemies of the revolution could be anywhere around the world. According to them, it was not just a struggle against capitalism; it was also an international struggle against the forces of colonialism and imperialism. Transnational solidarity was needed in a context of shared anti-colonial and anti-capitalist battles.

### Social recognition through socialist emulation

However, the defense of the revolution started at home. First, the socialist project was supported on the streets of every Cuban town. Ricardo Villares (1965) provides us with other descriptions of the social dynamics produced and reproduced by the CDR in their defense of the revolution. Such new dynamics produced, as a result, new subjectivities in the revolutionary process. One aspect of this dynamics concerned the concept of socialist emulation. The latter constantly appeared in CDR documents during the 1960s. How did socialist emulation work? In the CDR, every district challenged another one in terms of meeting the annual goals. Then, there was a continuing competition to win socialist emulation. Such emulation did not have a profit-related capitalist sense of competition. Instead, it was more related to the Hegelian idea of *recognition* (although, perhaps, CDR members did not have

Hegel's philosophy in mind)<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, this was another expression of an enthusiastic revolutionary attitude. We can see the inner rationale of socialist emulation in the context of a meeting between a CDR from Cienfuegos and a CDR from Marianao. Melba Paneque, coordinator of the CDR Sectional No. 20, District 2, gives us some clues to grasp the concept of socialist emulation: "emulation is an engine that drives us; if we take advantage of that push and make every front move forward, I am sure that we will win" (DÍAZ CASTRO, 1965, p. 102, our translation). In her approach, the emulation was something to win; so, there were people who eventually were going to lose. She adds: "for us, it is important that Marianao wins, that our sectional wins, that one of our local committees reaches the first position" (DÍAZ CASTRO, 1965, p. 102, our translation). Indeed, every CDR wanted to win. However, the motive was not economic profit (the main goal in a capitalist sense of competition), but gaining recognition among their community. Then, CDR work was in need of social recognition. So, there was a 'struggle for recognition' – a classic concept proposed by Georg Hegel.

Nonetheless, socialist emulation in revolutionary Cuba was more complex than it seemed. Melba Paneque argues that, eventually,

[...] this kind of work has a higher purpose and a bigger meaning; the first place would be for a district, a sectional, and a committee. We will take a big step forward in the role of our organization if we make the choice of winners harder. (DÍAZ CASTRO, 1965, p. 102, our translation)

We can see a collective popular identity behind socialist emulation. She argues that "this will mean that more than a district, a sectional, or a committee, the real winner is the revolution. And that is, simply, what we want" (DÍAZ CASTRO, 1965, p. 102, our translation). In socialist emulation, the one and only winner was the revolution. In other words, socialist emulation was a method to improve productivity in the revolution. It must be understood in terms of collective merits. But it was also an ideological engine, because it worked as an

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<sup>4</sup> For in-depth understanding of the concept of recognition in Hegel, see his *Elements of the philosophy of right* and, above all, his *Phenomenology of spirit* (Chapter 4, "Self-Consciousness").

ideological motive, a psychological force to push the masses. Furthermore, socialist emulation was a disciplinary apparatus, a power technology, or in Foucault's words a political technology adopted by the CDR and Cuban State to mobilize the masses in that remarkably successful mobilization power that the Cuban Revolution had until the mid-1970s (FOUCAULT, 2003, 2004). Here, the CDR plays the role of mobilizer. The State and the CDR were consciously using competition to mobilize the masses with revolutionary purposes. It was different from competition in the marketplace, which only leads to individual profit. It is also worth highlighting that, in socialist emulation, if we lose the contest for recognition, we still enjoy the benefits of the revolution; we do not lose our place (or die in destitution and debt), just as in the case of capitalist competition.

The bases of socialist emulation in Cuba also encompassed specific duties that every CDR member should fulfill: first of all, every CDR member should have an organizational ID. But the most important task consisted in recruitment and proselytism to bring more members into the organization. In this case, the CDR role as integrator was remarkable. Every CDR member had to bring more Cubans into the organization. Also, there were surveillance and patrol: participation in nightwatch patrols was key to be acknowledged in socialist emulation. In other words, this is the role played by the CDR as protector. Moreover, cooperation for every task in the Year of Economy (1964) was one of the main duties to fulfill<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, cooperation in the CDR magazine *Con la Guardia en Alto*, trying to increase the number of subscriptions, was also a goal to achieve. Besides, organizing leisure acts, popular libraries, and groups of amateur artists was needed to reach a successful socialist emulation. Anyway, in spite of the relevance of such duties, voluntary work and the defense of the revolution (nightwatch patrol) were by far the most relevant activities related to socialist emulation in the early 1960s.

Therefore, voluntary work was a must for socialist emulation. Voluntary work was a requirement in order to be acknowledged by 'merits.' Furthermore,

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<sup>5</sup> In revolutionary Cuba, every year had a specific name related to the main goal of the revolution for that year; for instance, 1964 was the 'year of the economy' and 1961 was the 'year of education,' i.e. the Year of the Literacy Campaign. Every name of the year became a revolutionary slogan; so, it took part in the revolutionary propaganda.

participation in mass vaccination campaigns was crucial. The same happened concerning participation in blood donations. These activities were part of voluntary work. As mentioned above, emulation was completely linked to the defense of the revolution. Surveillance and nightwatch patrols in every district was not enough, the number of members participating in the Circles of Study was also relevant (DÍAZ CASTRO, 1965). Winning socialist emulation was a chance to gain social prestige in the Cuban revolutionary society. However, social prestige was above individual vanity. Instead, it was linked to collective work and class solidarity. As for the CDR, emulation was ‘a fraternal struggle’ to defend the socialist project and the international revolution.

Then, voluntary work is a key concept to grasp the CDR. Julio Hernández (1965) describes CDR work in the towns of Guisa and Manacal, rural villages in the Sierra Maestra, in the eastern island. His description illustrates the nature of voluntary work in the CDR – it had many faces in the Cuban Revolution. The CDR from Manacal has accomplished a major task: the harvest of coffee beans. The daily report in September 1963 assures that “from one committee 3 CDR members collected 8 cans; from another committee the comrades collected 26 cans” (HERNÁNDEZ, 1965, p. 116-117, our translation). The same people also worked to build a school. The president of the CDR Antonio Guiteras, named after the Cuban revolutionary leader of the 1930s struggles against Gerardo Machado’s regime, said: “you can see the things that we do here, in the mountains, so far from the city” (HERNÁNDEZ, 1965, p. 117, our translation). According to Julio Hernández (1965, p. 118, our translation), the journalist who interviewed the CDR member, “his eyes were full of pride, but a healthy pride, without vanity.” Therefore, in the romanticized narrative built by the reports, although there was a social recognition expected for voluntary work and socialist emulation, the general population’s welfare was the main motive in the CDR. These narratives provided the CDR with a basis to build representations of collective identities, fraternal solidarity, and popular dignity.

The successful socialist emulation determined which committees were classified as ‘exemplary’ by the CDR National Office. Thelvia Marín (1965) describes the work done by an exemplary sectional in 1964: the CDR Sectional

No. 1, from Luis Carbio Servia in the Arroyo Apolo District. Related to the Public Health Front, this sectional was remarkable in terms of blood donations and vaccination campaigns. When Hurricane Flora came, this sectional sent many items of clothing and shoes to the people affected by it<sup>6</sup>. This sectional was also successful in mobilizing its voluntary labor, mostly focused on collecting bottles and stamps, i.e. recycling activities. They pursued agricultural and factory work, as well as local street cleaning. In terms of political work, this sectional organized successful circles of study and meetings, with a high participation level, fulfilling the CDR function as integrator and socializer. According to Thelvia Marín (1965, p. 124-125, our translation), the secret of this successful CDR sectional consisted in the organization's vertical hierarchy: "the fundamentals of its success are the total fulfillment of the goals and suggestions that come from the National Office, and the achievement of understanding, interpreting, and engagement of these goals with enthusiasm." This text was originally published in January 1964. The CDR narrative shows they constituted a hierarchical organization: according to their representation, this sectional was successful due to the guidelines provided by the CDR National Office. The concept that they adopted to conciliate this hierarchy with the goal of equality was *democratic centralism*. This concept may be a key component of the theory named *dictatorship of the proletariat* proposed by the Marxist tradition and the revolution leadership and later reproduced by CDR members in their Circles of Study and Circles of Revolutionary Instruction.

Working in sugar cane harvesting used to be a target of voluntary work. This work did not consist only in cutting sugar cane, but also protecting it from various parasites. In August 1964, in a local committee, Orlando Carvajal, a 17-year-old CDR member from Batey El Mabú, in Camaguey, pointed out that "from cleaning 'worms' to cleaning the sugar cane, we will keep on the campaign, like every Cuban" (VILLARES, 1965, p. 128, our translation). They had to fight against worms to protect the sugar cane. In the same committee, Luis Prieto, delegate to the Brigade of Administrative Issues, highlighted that "it does not matter how many mosquitoes, parasites, are looking for blood; if we crush the big ones, we

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<sup>6</sup> Flora was the hurricane that shook Cuba in the last week of September and the first week of October 1963, leaving behind more than 1.750 dead, affecting mostly the eastern provinces of Camaguey and Santiago de Cuba.

will defeat the small ones...” (VILLARES, 1965, p. 128, our translation). This is an allegory of the enemies of the revolution, where ‘big’ and ‘small’ counter-revolutionaries are the ‘mosquitoes’ and ‘parasites’ that could affect the revolutionary ‘sugar cane.’ Again, the CDR was successful in protecting the sugar cane not only from sabotage and fire, but also from the natural territory conditions. Therefore, the CDR worked to defend the revolution not only from U.S. imperialism and counter-revolutionary activities. Their struggle went beyond that. In this context, analyzing the role of the CDR in Cuba, we may see the Cuban revolutionary process beyond the vanguard. In everyday work, producing sugar and recycling materials, the CDR, by promoting and organizing voluntary work, shaped socialism from below and gave new meanings to the defense of the revolution (GORDY, 2015); such meanings were closely related to daily lives and everyday struggles.

As we can see, local CDR members usually mixed propaganda and facts in their interviews. As a matter of fact, propaganda was a major component in their strategy to build hegemony in the island. Julio Hernández (1965) describes a night in Manzanillo, a fishing town; the aspect he remarks more emphatically is the enthusiasm of local CDR members. He narrates how, on a Sunday in September 1963, “300 voluntary workers of the CDR were waiting in the morning, during the sunrise, the trucks that would take them to the fields, in order to contribute with their best efforts to the production...”(HERNÁNDEZ, 1965, p. 136, our translation) Of course, these stories were embellished to create compelling representations that could persuade fellow Cubans to join the project. He goes on: “however, the trucks did not come. Without any intention to go home, these workers decided to clean the fishing town’s downtown.” (HERNÁNDEZ, 1965, p. 136, our translation) Therefore, the local community’s enthusiasm was beyond the lack of top-down efficiency. He adds: “in another occasion, when something similar happened again, they decided to repair a road that was in bad condition” (HERNÁNDEZ, 1965, p. 136, our translation). Beyond the obvious and clear romantic touch added by the writer who describes CDR work in these events, this is a good example of the attitude of hard voluntary work and collective sacrifice that depicted the daily lives of many Cubans during the 1960s. This attitude, full of revolutionary

enthusiasm, was not just a response to the call for mobilization adopted by the Cuban State, and above all, the *top leader*, Fidel Castro. It was also a result of the hegemonic capability of the CDR and the socialist project in Cuba.

### ‘Vanguardia’ and ‘revolución’

‘Vanguardia’ is a key concept to grasp the social and political dynamics in the Cuban Revolution and the CDR. According to CDR members, ‘vanguardia’ was not a word to define only the leadership in the Sierra Maestra that became the revolutionary government in 1959. A ‘vanguardia’ refers to a cadre, a militant of the hegemonic party or a member of one of the several mass organizations, whose actions as revolutionary subject is and has been remarkable among his/her comrades. As the word implies, a ‘vanguardia’ was somebody who was ahead in the revolutionary process. She/he is somebody who was ‘more advanced,’ ideologically and politically, than his/her ‘compañeros.’ In the CDR, a ‘vanguardia’ was also, and above all, an excellent worker, an example of solidarity and sacrifice for the revolution and the socialist project. In other words, a ‘vanguardia’ was somebody potentially recognized due to socialist emulation. Julio Hernández (1965) describes a ‘campesino de vanguardia,’ a vanguard peasant, as a CDR member. The author highlights that “due to his productive and social activity, Miguel Rodríguez was chosen [as a] vanguard peasant.” (1965, p. 203, our translation). In October 1964, Miguel Rodríguez was president of the committee Frank País, named after the young legendary leader of the revolution in Santiago de Cuba, when Fidel was still in the Sierra Maestra. This committee was located in a ‘finca’ belonging to the peasant association created by the revolutionary government, the National Association of Small Farmers (Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños [ANAP]). According to Hernández (1965, p. 203, our translation), “Miguel Rodríguez has brought to his CDR more than 100 neighbors who live around the ‘finca.’” His work of proselytism made possible the success of the CDR as integrator.

The words of Hernández (1965, p. 200, our translation), although romantic, are still useful to grasp how and why Miguel Rodríguez became a ‘campesino de vanguardia’: “the rain of the last days benefited the sugar cane, it was stronger

and heavier. Miguel looked to the still-dark horizon and wished that winter would come soon in order to stop the rain; on the contrary, the sugar cane would absorb too much water and this affects yield.” Again, productivity was at the core of the revolutionary struggle deployed by CDR members. He goes on:

[...] and he, who was chosen as a ‘campesino de vanguardia,’ could not get less than 300 ‘arrobos por cordel.’<sup>7</sup> How could that happen to him if in the last harvest he cut 61 thousand ‘arrobos’ in just 218 ‘cordeles?’ (HERNÁNDEZ, 1965, p. 200, our translation).

In his mind, this situation was potentially dangerous for the future of the socialist project. After all, productivity was the first step before wealth redistribution. A ‘campesino de vanguardia’ had to find a way to tackle this problem: “this year, he cleaned sugar cane in May and he added a good fertilizer, something he did not do a year before.” (HERNÁNDEZ, 1965, p. 200). Here, we have a representation of modernity (fertilizer) affecting the daily lives of Cuban peasants. The author finishes pointing out that “now, his son was not at home to help him doing the work. They did not have to talk too much in order to convince him to get a scholarship to study in a school of artificial insemination.” (HERNÁNDEZ, 1965, p. 200). In this representation created by the CDR, the revolution provides new opportunities for the younger generations. Anyway, according to a ‘campesino de vanguardia,’ “it did not matter, now Miguel has other mechanical means and help (from the CDR), that he did not have before” (HERNÁNDEZ, 1965, p. 200). Therefore, Miguel became a ‘campesino de vanguardia’ because he was highly productive during the last sugar cane harvest. Thus, he became an example of efficiency, sacrifice, and hard work. That was exactly what the revolutionary government expected from Cuban workers. The best way how they could be revolutionaries was being the best workers they could be. Being a ‘campesino de vanguardia’ meant a social prestige that many workers appreciated in revolutionary Cuba. It was usually linked to socialist emulation. Nevertheless, it was also a social pressure, the pressure of being competitive, successful, a role model, getting better and better every year, not for individual benefit, not for economic profit, but for the collective well-being of

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<sup>7</sup> 1 arroba equals 25 pounds (or 11.3 kg) in Cuba.

the Cuban people. As a result, the concept of 'vanguardia' took new meanings through CDR work.

Another example of 'trabajador de vanguardia' is the story of Fortún Hernández Domínguez, a 'vanguardia nacional' in 1964. Fortún was in charge of the Cultural Front in the district of the CDR in Boyeros. For this reason, this front was in the first position in the province. Moreover, Fortún was in charge of the local militia at the H-7 zone of the Popular Defense Front. Furthermore, he did voluntary work in the collective farms of the surroundings and organized cultural events for the peasants at the zone. Roberto Ramos, administrator of the factory where Fortún worked, said:

[...] one time the factory stopped producing in one day the 400 pairs of shoes that it usually did. That was a consequence of a problem affecting one of the machines. At that moment, Fortún took the issue in his hands, and he found the solution to this and further problems. (DÍAZ CASTRO, p. 247, our translation).

With the effects of the economic embargo organized by the U.S. government, replacing pieces of industrial machines became harder. And Roberto Ramos adds: "if I told you about all the American pieces that he had rebuilt and reproduced; the innovations that he had made and the machines that he had repaired, I would not stop talking" (DÍAZ CASTRO, p. 248, our translation). The ability to find spontaneous solutions to everyday problems was indispensable to a vanguard worker.

At the end of 1961, when the currency exchange happened in Cuba (the currency of the old regime was replaced by a new currency introduced by the revolutionary government), the currency office where Fortún worked was the best in Santiago de las Vegas. At that time, Fortún was a member of the Buró Municipal of the ORI (an agency built by the revolution in order to bring together all the mass organizations created after 1959). Months before, due to the Bay of Pigs Invasion, Fortún actively participated in CDR organization at the zone and he was named coordinator by the Provincial Office. There, Fortún organized 12 sectionals, strengthening the organization and the ANAP. As we can see, Fortún was an outstanding revolutionary subject, a 'vanguardia nacional,' with multiple skills. According to the interview, his highest aspiration was visiting the Popular

Republic of China. He said that he would not die “without walking on the main square of Beijing” (DÍAZ CASTRO, p. 251, our translation). His story was useful to create revolutionary representations that were indispensable to raise enthusiasm among fellow Cubans and to build a new cultural hegemony in the island.

Fortún pointed out that “sometimes it is hard for me to fulfill all my tasks in one day, because what I do here, in the factory, is very different from what I do in the district” (DÍAZ CASTRO, p. 251, our translation). After all, his work brings together two different activities, both technical and artistic. However, that was not a problem for him: “but I have found a system: when I leave my workplace, I forget about my pieces [from the factory], I forget about the pieces to reproduce, the pieces to replace, I forget about Roberto [his boss]...” That is, he transitions from one social activity to another. And he adds: “later, when I leave the district to come to the workshop, I forget about the art, the culture, the plays written by Anton Chejov that we are rehearsing, I forget about my work harvesting fruits, the militia...so, I can focus in each of the tasks that I take...” (DÍAZ CASTRO, p. 251, our translation). This took place in February 1965. A vanguard worker, Fortún Hernández was a cadre with multiple dimensions. He challenges the conventional idea of the revolutionary subject in Cuba as a one-dimensional subject. He was an artist and a worker; an organizer and a militia man; a revolutionary player and a bureaucrat who worked for the State. Undoubtedly, he was an outstanding subject in the CDR. As a consequence, his status in the vanguard was justified.

### Governmentality: the CDR and the Cuban State

The CDR took a role that the Cuban State could not play. When the Cuban State was not able to find a solution for the community’s everyday problems, the CDR, without any kind of confrontational project, without any kind of counter-hegemonic motive, occupied the space open to them. There was not any struggle between the CDR and the Cuban State, because the CDR unofficially worked along with the State. However, the CDR also constituted, in the 1960s, a genuine expression of popular power in the Cuban Revolution. They were a result of the extraordinary capacity of the Cuban State in general, and Fidel Castro in particular, to mobilize a large part of Cuban society. So, they were mobilized, but

they also mobilized fellow Cubans. That was what Michel Foucault named as *governmentality*: the State's capacity to govern, to be effective, even under the most adverse circumstances (FOUCAULT, 1994, 2003). In order to govern, the Cuban State needed the CDR. They were, sometimes, an instrument of the Cuban State – the latter knew that incorporating the masses into the socialist project was the only historical road that could make possible a successful revolution. Nonetheless, the CDR were also substitutes of the State, whenever it was needed. They played their role with loyalty to the socialist project and voluntary revolutionary commitment. After all, this is the nature of governmentality, i.e. when individuals and organizations outside the State voluntarily engage in acts of governance.

Nevertheless, this inseparable relationship with the Cuban State was also an obstacle to become a political and ideological counterpoint at the base of the Cuban socialist project. This cooperation relationship with the Cuban State was a hindrance to the CDR. The CDR could have been another voice in Cuba when the country needed another voice more than ever. They could have been a critical voice within the revolution. But they did not want to be; they did not try. The CDR chose to become both ideological and repressive State apparatuses. Anyway, in spite of their cooperation with the Cuban State, CDR members helped to shape Cuban socialism from below by means of their actions, enthusiasm, and revolutionary praxis.

However, governmentality, is something more complex than building bridges and roads. It is a sophisticated system of domination where the State governs by relying on the cooperation of a significant part of the masses. It resorts to political technologies that make it possible to rule a country: control of territory and population. Rogelio Camuzzo describes some events in East Havana, the CDR Sectional No. 11, that help us understanding this point. In September 1961, the CDR created the first sectional in 'La Habana del Este,' one of the largest working class neighborhoods in the capital, with just 25 workers. One of the first problems they had to tackle consisted in the "gangs with criminal tendencies formed by young boys" from the same territory. This problem did not have an easy solution. However, "after the organization of the 'Brigades on Guard,' we put

the same young boys engaged in more dangerous behaviors in charge of surveillance tasks. This neutralized the threat and solved the problem” (CAMUZZO, 1965, p. 188, our translation). The report highlights that “the CDR, as the first revolutionary force organized in ‘La Habana del Este,’ created the bases for the feasible organizations that came later.” Moreover, the revolution, according to the documents, brought concrete “benefits for the neighborhood: they made possible the opening of a commercial center, they found solutions to the transportation problems, a hospital was built there, along with elementary schools and a secondary school” (CAMUZZO, 1965, p. 191, our translation). For the Cuban State, governmentality became much easier with the CDR working for the revolution, because the CDR took functions that were usually taken only by the State. They worked as a protector and an implementer; as a mobilizer and an integrator.

In the same neighborhood, ‘La Habana del Este,’ one of the most densely populated in the Cuban capital, the revolution, through the work of mass organizations like the CDR, brought other material benefits. “Before the existence of the National Dairy Corporation (Corporación Nacional de Lácteos [CONLAC]),” – says Garcia Riestra, coordinator of the CDR Sectional No. 11 – “the old milk company of Cuba asked us to find a solution for the problem of bottles to store milk” (CAMUZZO, 1965, p. 191, our translation). The CDR found a solution and organized their members. After this, “we used to wait for the truck in the morning on the Via Blanca, we distributed the containers and, when the truck came back later, we already had many empty bottles to be returned” (CAMUZZO, 1965, p. 191, our translation). Again, through their documents we can see the CDR as implementer of social services, finding solutions to everyday problems of the local population. Nonetheless, this was also an expression of spontaneous ability to find voluntary solutions to local problems. As we can see, the CDR involved both spontaneity and organization.

Those who lived in the surroundings remember that building a tunnel under the bay in Havana during Fulgencio Batista’s regime increased the value of some properties that were useless before. This tunnel was another symbolic achievement of modernity in Cuba, although it has been built before the

revolution; it became an emblematic symbol of progress and development. Batista's administration built it in order to create a "big business that could mean a lot of money for some people during that regime. Then, close to the fancy new residences, some brothels emerged, disguised as night clubs, the beauty parlors were the early escort houses, there were some casinos and even Kingdom Halls of Jehovah's Witnesses" (CAMUZZO, 1965, p. 186, our translation). The CDR wrote this report in January, 1965. It is quite interesting that this piece of writing by CDR members put in the same sentence the building of mansions for the rich, night clubs, casinos, and a temple managed by Jehovah's Witnesses. This specific religious group was one of the institutions suffering from more serious social harassment by the revolutionary process in general and by CDR members in particular. The Jehovah's Witnesses were the target of many prejudices during the early revolution. The CDR expressed a continuing intolerance towards this specific group. The primary reasons are hard to find. There was, among CDR members, a general contempt against religious institutions in the island. However, in the case of the Jehovah's Witnesses, there was evidence of animosity related to the American background of this particular institution. In CDR documents, I managed to find several pejorative comments like the one quoted above, which provides evidence of this negative attitude against that specific religious group. Thereby, revolutionary modernity in Cuba worked as an alternative modernity; a modernity against (and despite) the USA, a progress and development project where the American influence had to be fought through discourses and practices.

## Conclusions

In the last part of our analysis, we can see that the CDR had a cooperation relationship with the Cuban State – which was even more intense when they had to deal with Fidel Castro. Through such a relationship, the CDR has built a narrative to defend the revolution in various ways. Surveillance, discipline, revolutionary instruction, and public safety are constant themes in CDR documents. Indeed, they appear almost as much as the calls to support 'el máximo líder,' Fidel Castro. In the case of the CDR, their relationship with Fidel has involved consent. However, this does not mean that CDR members did not

have the ability to find solutions to their everyday problems. They did not wait for Fidel or the Party to build a bridge, a road, or a school when they needed it. Therefore, CDR members truly understood that a successful revolutionary project passed through their ability to push the revolution from below.

The dynamics was not necessarily the same for other Cuban people who were not CDR members. The organization was usually subtle enough in justifying political surveillance. After all, their main goal has always been the defense of the revolution. Euphemisms were a constant feature in their writings about the topic. In the early days of the revolution, they avoided working along with ‘el compañero equivocado,’ the fellow who was not aware of socialism or the revolution. They looked for those who were sure. The CDR had a condescending way of dealing with those who did not share their ideas and their loyalty to the revolution. Those who had a different opinion were usually put away as ‘confundidos,’ people who confuse ideas in their minds. The person who did not repeat their slogans was a ‘desconocedor,’ a person ‘unfamiliar’ with the Marxist-Leninist doctrines. Despite it all, the CDR became successful as *implementer* and *socializer* in the Cuban project. They helped to implement some of the changes they thought the country needed (governmentality) and were among the most important socializers, bringing fellow Cubans into the socialist project. In other words, they built consent among Cuban people in order to participate in their own governance.

However, we may see by means of these interviews that the CDR, in the mid-1960s, were more worried about persuading those Cubans who were still skeptical about the revolutionary project rather than repressing those who did not believe the project. One of their main goals was ideological. It consisted in convincing the community outside the CDR. Therefore, the defense of the revolution, their main aim, was not just about surveillance and nightwatch patrol. It was also about the ideological defense of the revolution. In the struggle for hegemony, CDR members were one of the most important players in the Cuban Revolution. The CDR worked as ideological weapons against the vestiges of the old regime and its capitalist hegemony. In this rationale, the defense of the revolution was the defense of a specific narrative, i.e. socialist progress and

development (SALDAÑA-PORTILLO, 2003). The struggle against the enemy was also fought with ideas, stories, and representations. So, the CDR underwent a transition in the early 1960s, coming from a mass organization for the defense of the revolution through political surveillance to an organization with more concrete ideological goals related to the political formation of the Cuban people.

The history of the CDR in Cuba allowed us to see the revolution beyond the traditional vanguard, i.e. a party, a government, or a State. The CDR gave different meanings to what they saw as a vanguard. Some of their members actually regarded themselves as a revolutionary vanguard. This ‘vanguardismo’ was quite different from that shown by some left-wing political organizations in Latin-America, where the masses go behind somebody – they follow, but never lead. The history of the CDR demonstrates that, in a revolutionary context, the masses can rethink their role in the process, take the initiative, lead. In other words, the masses have their own historical rhythm. Sometimes, the revolutionary masses go beyond the boundaries imposed by the revolutionary leadership. Although the CDR never challenged directly the Cuban government (after all, they saw the Cuban government as *their* government), their members still sought and found new ways to express their revolutionary agency. Their enthusiasm pushed the revolution from below, helping it to shape Cuban socialism in a unique way. This opened new possibilities to see political participation, in order to build a new radical democracy, i.e. a new way of understanding democracy. Their failures and mistakes cannot erase their efforts to build a better Cuba.

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Socialist governmentality: political formation, revolutionary instruction, and socialist emulation in the CDR, Cuba, 1961-1965

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