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Stories and Revolution: A Symbiotic Relationship

Cuba and Venezuela went through great changes as a result of the efforts of Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and Hugo Chávez. These men, backed by the people of Cuba and Venezuela, worked to make their countries prosper by helping those that had been exploited since the very beginning. This political shift of the people in power forged a new revolutionary culture that took shape in many ways, especially in the songs sung and the stories told about the events that came from the struggle for the liberation of the people of Cuba and Venezuela. Even decades later, this same revolutionary culture is just as present in Cuba and Venezuela today as it was then. Eric Selbin wrote in his book *Revolution, Rebellion, Resistance: The Power of Story* that “the crucial factor in explaining how and why revolution persists is the stories of revolution, rebellion, resistance we tell” (Selbin, 14). The stories told about the Cuban and Venezuelan Revolutions keep the revolutionary spirit very much alive.

In 1950s Cuba, Fidel Castro led the revolutionary organization named Movimiento 26 de Julio, or 26th of July Movement, as an opposition group against the Fulgencio Batista dictatorship. In the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution, which ended in 1959, the revolutionary spirit was omnipresent throughout Cuba. Songs and stories about the revolution and the brave leadership of Fidel Castro were written and heard all across the world. Castro’s relationships with other important figures from around the globe, such as Nelson Mandela, Malcolm X and Nikita Khrushchev, helped connect him to the communities that they led. Because of this unity and the fact that they shared similar political ideologies, communities all over the world adopted Castro as a symbol for social justice and rallied behind him and behind Cuba. In the documentary *Fidel: The Untold Story*, Castro visited Bolivia and enjoyed a very warm welcome

from the Bolivian people. A group of Bolivians took up the chant “Fidel, hermano. Ya eres Boliviano,” which translates to “Fidel, brother. You are now Bolivian.” Though this chant may be short, it packs a very important message. By saying that Fidel Castro is Bolivian, the people chanting are saying that they accept Castro as one of their own. Of course, it must be made clear that patriotism is ubiquitous in Latin America, so much so that many Latin Americans believe that their country is superior to any other Latin American country. Therefore, for Bolivians to say that Castro is an honorary Bolivian is quite a big deal. Beyond that, this chant also shows that they agree with his political stance and support the work he has been doing in Cuba. These five simple words carry with them a lot of sentimentality and a lot of love. By having a short and simple chant such as this one, adding on to the fact that it rhymes, makes it easy to learn and remember it in order to make their message known.

In 1999, Hugo Chávez was elected as president of Venezuela as the leader of El Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela, or United Socialist Party of Venezuela. During Chávez’s campaign, Venezuelan musician political activist Alí Primera played concerts and supported Chávez throughout his journey to the presidency. Many of Primera’s songs were political in nature, which allowed him to engage a group of people with similar political beliefs, which helped grow the popularity of Chavismo in Venezuela. In April of 2002, a military coup was attempted by an anti-Chávez movement; however, it failed and only lasted for about 36 hours. During those 36 hours where Pedro Carmona had been sworn in as Acting President, protests broke out among the Venezuelan people. Protestors chanted their support for Chávez as well as their objection to having someone they did not vote for as president. These chants were most definitely reminiscent of Bolivians’ chant for Fidel Castro mentioned earlier, and they also had a similar sentiment behind them. The Irish documentary *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*

shows the events of the 2002 coup as well as the protests that the attempted coup sparked. During the credits of the film, a young man was improvising a rap, accompanied by another young man beatboxing, about the failed coup and Chávez's resilience in the face of the opposition. Hugo Chávez and El Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela regaining power gave the Venezuelan people a sense of hope and victory against all odds, which is clear even two decades later through the documentary as well as the songs and stories that are continuing to be told.

In 1961, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara started La Campaña Nacional de Alfabetización en Cuba, also known as the Cuban Literacy Campaign. By the end of the year, Cuba had reached a literacy rate of nearly 100%. In the documentary *Maestra*, the young women, now adults, that took part in the campaign as literacy teachers talk about their experiences teaching Cubans how to read and write, whose students' ages ranged from young children to adults with grandchildren their own ages. The documentary films *Fidel: The Untold Story*, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* and *Maestra* chronicle the events of these revolutionary movements that took place in the middle of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. However, despite the fact that decades have passed since those events, the documentaries themselves ensure that the revolutionary spirit remains alive, even in the year 2021. The songs, the chants, the films created during and about these monumental struggles for liberation allow the revolution to live on. Though these revolutions ended in 1959 and 2002, they will never end so long as people continue to sing those songs, watch these films and create many more.

As Eric Selbin said, the stories people tell are what ensure revolution persists because, at the end of the day, revolution is more than the act of rebelling. Revolution begins and ends in the stories we tell about them. So long as people continue to tell stories about revolution, the revolutionary spirit will never die.