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THE PORTRAYAL OF RACE AND GENDER IN REVOLUTIONARY CUBAN CINEMA

By
Sarah Bartley

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of Mississippi in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

University, MS
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Approved by

Advisor: Professor Diane Marting

Reader: Professor Robyn Wright

Reader: Professor Heather Allen

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ABSTRACT

SARAH BARTLEY: The Portrayal of Race and Gender in Post-Revolutionary Cuban Cinema

(Under the direction of Dr. Diane Marting)

Cinema has been one of the most useful tools to portray the political and social beliefs prevalent during a given point in history. Following the Cuban Revolution, once-marginalized communities were given far more opportunity to participate in education, in the workforce, and in society. Institutionalized racism and sexism were combatted as Fidel Castro's major areas of focus after the Cuban Revolution's 1959 victory. Class issues were improved as the wealth inequality that had defined pre-Revolutionary Cuba was minimized following the nationalizing of private property. Despite these improvements, however, there remained sentiments of dissatisfaction regarding social issues in Revolutionary Cuba, including continued racism and sexism. Films produced after the Revolution give insight into these social issues that certain communities still faced while also highlighting the Revolution's vital role in reversing some issues of pre-Revolutionary Cuba. The importance that the Revolutionary government placed on cinema cannot be overstated. It founded the state-run production company, the Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC) as a means to promote the Revolution through film in order to reach a large audience. Tomás Gutierrez Alea, founding member of the ICAIC and lifelong loyalist to the Revolution, makes his opinions regarding issues of race and gender in Cuba known through his films *La última cena*, *Hasta cierto punto*, and *El arte de tabaco*. Likewise, Afro-Cuban filmmaker and member of the ICAIC Sara Gómez portrayed race and gender relations in Revolutionary Cuba in her films *Iré a Santiago* and *De cierta manera*, and reflects her beliefs through these films. The Revolutionary government's response to these two filmmakers varies dramatically, and it reflects the level of criticism that the government deemed

acceptable as filmmakers highlighted the shortcomings of the Revolution. This thesis aims to analyze the careers of Alea and Gómez, the social issues that they address, and the Revolution's response to the criticism or praise that we see in these filmmakers' works. The Revolutionary government was much more accepting of Alea's criticism of Revolutionary social issues, whereas Gómez's criticism resulted in censorship by the government. The role of the ICAIC in the censorship of Cuban cinema filmmakers' freedom to call attention to certain social issues.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
Research Questions.....	3
Cuba Pre- and Post-Revolution.....	5
CHAPTER II: TOMÁS GUTIÉRREZ ALEA.....	16
Role in the ICAIC.....	17
Selected Films and Analysis.....	22
CHAPTER I: SARA GÓMEZ.....	64
Selected Films and Analysis	66
ICAIC's Response to Gómez's Filmography.....	76
CONCLUSION.....	81
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	87

INTRODUCTION

Because media has the unique ability to strongly and quickly influence its audience, the production of film, music, and theater oftentimes has sociocultural implications that go beyond what is seen at the surface of a movie, the tune of the song, or the lines of the actors. Social issues, especially race, gender, and class, are under constant scrutiny by artists who seek to inspire change. The inequities that exist between those in positions of authority and minority groups have allowed works that are critical of a given society's flaws to gain immense popularity. Socially critical works of music, film, and theater allow the issues that minority groups face to be broadcast to a much larger audience than would be reached otherwise. Artists throughout history have attempted to depict the societal issues that arise when we ignore the problems that minority groups face, and cinema is one example in which we can observe the breadth of this criticism.

The policies of the Cuban Revolution made strides towards expanding the rights and privileges of minority groups in Cuba that had suffered before the Revolution. Resolving the hardships that the lower-class, women, and Afro-Cubans faced in Cuba before the Revolution were major focuses of the Revolutionary government. However, the Revolution did not solve all of the social issues that existed pre-Revolution. When the frustrations of a specific group go unnoticed by those with the power to enact tangible change, artistic individuals who do recognize the problems take it upon themselves to voice these hindrances in an effort to inspire

change. In the case of Revolutionary Cuba, some filmmakers undertook this responsibility when they felt that the Cuban government was not doing all that could be done to improve the lives of Cubans. However, the unique position of Cuban filmmakers as proponents of the Revolution put them in a difficult position when they desired to acknowledge shortcomings of the Cuban government.

The topic of this thesis is the instances of political and social criticism in Revolutionary cinema. Directors Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Sara Gómez made their marks on Revolutionary Cinema, but for quite different reasons. Tomás Gutierrez Alea was a staunch supporter of the Revolution throughout his life. However, he remained skeptical of the government's action, or inaction, in addressing social issues, and his films reflect the duality of Alea's opinion. On the other hand, Sara Gómez, an Afro-Cuban woman, is well known for her legacy as the first Black female director in the Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC), as well as her criticism of the Revolutionary Cuba and the instances of racism and sexism that remain. She directed *De cierta manera* (1977; *One Way or Another*) and *Iré a Santiago* (1964; *I'm Going to Santiago*), two films that provide examples of social criticism. Her criticism would earn her film years of censorship, like other Cuban filmmakers who contradicted the Revolutionary government.

An analysis of the works of these two directors reveals the ways in which they call attention to certain social issues that Cuba had yet to address. The response of the Revolutionary government and the Cuban public to these films is discussed in this thesis because it reveals the Revolution's discomfort and intolerance of social criticism by Cuban artists. The government's unwillingness to accept criticism indicates that it believes there is no work left to be done in correcting racial or gender inequality, a belief that is contrasted by the themes seen in the films

of this thesis. My analysis of the careers of these filmmakers requires discussing some context regarding the history of Cuba, the policies of the Revolution, and the dissatisfaction that continued despite the Revolution's significant improvements in the economic and social spheres. In order to fully define and contextualize the research questions of this thesis, it is important for readers to understand Cuba's history. This history includes: the distinct eras of the Cuban government, the longstanding racial issues in Cuba, and eventually the radical changes during the Cuban Revolution. The Revolution focused on improving Cuba for the disadvantaged on the basis of race, gender, and class. But it also focused on the arts, most notably with its founding of the *Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos*, or ICAIC. In an effort to contextualize the careers of Gómez and Alea, a more thorough explanation of Cuba's history and how it pertains to filmmakers is beneficial.

Research Questions

Cuban filmmakers during the Revolution took it upon themselves to address the social issues of Revolutionary Cuba. The Revolutionary government attempted to silence the assertions that racism, inequality, and discrimination were still realities of Cuban society, opting instead for a counterproductive narrative of "racelessness" that diminished the contributions of Afro-Cubans and their importance in Cuban society and culture (Ebrahim 108). If an Afro-Cuban expressed a hesitation toward Revolution's intentions or an opposing political stance, he or she would be deemed unappreciative of the Revolution's strides towards racial equality ("Owning the Revolution" 8). Similarly, women's issues were overlooked by the Revolutionary government as it instead pushed for women to participate in the Revolution. The interplay of race and gender in Revolutionary Cuba can be seen in the fact that the government overlooked Afro-Cuban women

in two ways, and that they are part of two marginalized groups in pre-Revolutionary and Revolutionary Cuba.

This thesis will focus on two filmmakers who used their platform to portray this history of racism and sexism in Cuba: Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, who helped to establish ICAIC, and Sara Gómez, ICAIC's first female filmmaker and one of two African filmmakers that were members. Films by Alea and by Gómez, in conjunction with the establishment of the Revolutionary government's ICAIC, showcase the various factors that had to be considered as filmmakers addressed the issues of race, gender, and class, and the role that the Cuban government plays in these issues. These factors include portraying the Revolution's accomplishments in a positive manner, a necessary responsibility of a filmmaker in the ICAIC, but also addressing the social issues that the Revolution had inadequately attempted to resolve. Filmmakers had to find a balance between praise and criticism, or else they risked censorship of their works.

This thesis' object of investigation is the portrayal of social issues in Cuban film during the Revolutionary Period, through the lens of the works of Alea and Gómez. The government's approach to social issues across its history varies dramatically, and as a result, so does the sociocultural sentiment towards addressing tensions that remain in Cuban society. I argue that the filmmakers' creation of cinema was dramatically affected by the power shift following the 1959 Revolution, especially given that the foundation of the ICAIC meant the industrialization of cinema and nationalization of media, and it also meant stricter regulations on Cuban cinema and the content within it. As a result, the filmmakers' content focused primarily on the positive attributes of the Revolution, but ultimately also bore the responsibility of calling attention to Cuba's enduring imperfections.

This thesis aims to answer the following questions regarding the portrayal of race and gender issues in Revolutionary Cuban cinema: 1) How do the policies of Revolutionary Cuba affect the creative freedom and thus the ability for filmmakers to influence an audience's opinion of the political climate and developments in Cuba?; 2) How did Cuban filmmakers react to and address the post-1959 government's regulations of the arts ?

This thesis aims to answer these questions, and also to highlight how filmmakers addressed the social issues that remained in Revolutionary Cuba, after researching and analyzing selected works from Sara Gómez and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea that either contain criticism of post-Revolutionary Cuban society or provide insight into the day-to-day life of a Cuban after 1959. It also examines the life and careers of these filmmakers as contributing factors, considering what might have inspired them to create these works, as well as the responses the works received from the Cuban government. Before beginning to answer these questions, however, it is necessary to contextualize Cuban politics and society before and after the Revolution.

Cuba Pre- and Post-Revolution

The cinema of Cuba is particularly interesting due to the unique position of filmmakers as a result of the Cuban Revolution. Pre-Revolution Cuba and post-Revolutionary Cuba are vastly different countries, as reflected by the multitude of policies of the Revolutionary government that were attempting to reverse the harmful realities of pre-Revolution Cuba. President Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship, the last presidential term before the Revolution, was characterized by a loyalty to the United States, and with this loyalty came discrimination in places that were frequented by American tourists ("Pre-Castro Cuba"). Because Batista emphasized tourism as a vital aspect of the Cuban economy, this meant that racism was widespread on the island as a

result of the influx of American tourists bringing American ideas of racism to the island, in addition many Cubans' existing racist attitudes ("Pre-Castro Cuba). Sexism also permeated pre-Revolution Cuba as women received far less opportunity for work and often bore all domestic responsibilities (Hernández-Truyol 185). Post-Revolutionary Cuba was defined by Fidel Castro's vision for his country: one in which the United States would not be the primary influence of Cuban culture, economy, and politics, and one in which the social issues that plagued pre-Revolutionary Cuba would be eliminated. The events leading up to and following the Cuban Revolution reveal the social issues that the Revolutionary government was tasked with addressing.

Following the country's independence from Spain in 1902, Cuba was faced with a new, unstable government and a weak economy, issues that were compounded by the United States' involvement in Cuba's affairs shortly thereafter ("Pre-Castro Cuba"). The Cuban population democratically elected Fulgencio Batista in 1940, after decades of struggle to establish leadership in this unstable government ("Pre-Castro Cuba"). This early stage of Cuba shed light on the issues that plagued Cuban society from the country's birth in 1902 until the Revolution in 1959.

Despite the tumultuous beginning of the new country, Cuba under Batista flourished in terms of tourism, sugar cane production, and overall income distribution (Geiling). Cuba's prosperity in these areas, however, also resulted in some of the worst aspects of Cuban society—inequities on the basis of race, class, and gender. With the success of the tourism industry came another manifestation of racial discrimination, as Afro-Cubans were segregated from exclusive white clubs and venues ("Owning the Revolution" 3). Similarly, the success of the sugar cane industry left rural workers in a state of abject poverty, as field workers were only employed

seasonally—a mere four months out of the year (“Pre-Castro Cuba”). Thus, the praise-worthy income distribution that Batista’s Cuba boasted only accounted for the large size of the middle class, leaving lower-class Cubans left to deal with their problems with little help from their government (“Pre-Castro Cuba”). Furthermore, pre-Revolutionary Cuba’s educational opportunities were limited to those who could afford private schools, effectively alienating poor, often non-white Cubans from receiving adequate education, if any at all (“Owning the Revolution” 3).

In addition to the failure to include minority groups in Cuba’s economic achievements, Batista’s presidency was also characterized by a level of corruption that further enraged a growing number of revolutionaries (“Pre-Castro Cuba”). Batista operated Cuba’s economy almost entirely to appeal to United States economic interests, as evident in the fact that forty percent of Cuba’s sugar cane export went to the United States (Geiling). The US’s influence also seeped into Cuban culture, causing prostitution and gambling to be normalized as popular aspects of the tourism industry during Batista’s reign (Geiling). Batista’s prioritization of US interests over the interests of his constituents, not to mention his 1952 military coup and resulting dictatorship, caused the Revolution to gain supporters of every class and rank as they opposed the corruption that had come to define Batista (“Pre-Castro Cuba”). Violent demonstrations from revolutionaries became more and more common after Batista’s coup, and Fidel Castro soon emerged as the figure to inspire the Revolution (Vilaboy and Vega 84). Finally, on January 1, 1959, after years of fights led by Castro and other guerrillas, Batista and his followers fled Cuba, and Castro and fellow revolutionaries succeeded in their attempt to put an end to Batista’s dictatorship (87).

Fidel Castro's position of power in the new Revolutionary government quickly came to be defined by his complete opposition to Batista's policies, as well as his desire to create a better country for all Cubans. Castro's policies benefitted those who had been disadvantaged by pre-Revolution policies, including rural and lower-class Cubans, women, and the Afro-Cuban community. In early 1960, Castro and the USSR began forming a formal alliance in which the USSR would essentially replace the United States in terms of economic support; this alliance prompted the US trade embargo against Cuba ("Post-Revolution Cuba"). Thus, the relations between Cuba and the US that had thrived under Batista unraveled rapidly as Castro allied Cuba with the Communist Soviet Union. We see evidence of the distaste that Castro has for the US as a whole in many of his future policies and addresses, notably in his nationalization of all formerly-US-owned properties in Cuba ("Post-Revolution Cuba"). Castro's anti-US attitude would come to characterize many of his actions as prime minister.

Despite the very unfriendly relationship between the US and Cuba, which left many wealthy and white Cubans feeling like they were worse-off than they had been under Batista, the social policies that Castro spearheaded greatly benefited the minority groups that Batista's government had marginalized ("Owning the Revolution" 4). His policies reflected a commitment to agrarian reform and education reform, both of which would improve the lives of Cuba's lower-class and rural citizens (Vilaboy and Vega 87). In one of his first actions as prime minister, he passed the Agrarian Reform Act, which took land from foreign corporations and reallocated it to rural Cubans ("Post-Revolution Cuba"). This was Castro's first step to addressing the poverty that rural workers had faced, and it would foreshadow further action by the Revolutionary government to rectify class issues that had arisen under Batista.

Similarly, from the earliest days of the Revolution, Castro had aimed to improve race relations that, under Batista, mirrored the United States' Jim Crow era separate-but-equal practices ("Owning the Revolution" 3). Black and mulatto Cubans were frequently banned from white clubs, venues, and beaches, instead utilizing separate "Black" and "mulatto" versions of these facilities (Cole 6). In a 1959 speech, "Proclamation against Racial Discrimination," Castro detailed the Revolutionary government's official campaign to combat racial discrimination ("Owning the Revolution" 5). The Revolutionary government enacted policies that made discrimination on the basis of race illegal in all regards: venues, careers, housing, education, etc. (Cole 11). This campaign, coupled with the agrarian and education reforms, would give Cubans of African descent a multitude of opportunities that pre-Revolution Cuba had kept from them, including equal access to education, improved economic and social positions, and more career options (5). Castro's declaration of equality on the basis of race, however, also caused some white Cubans and wealthy mulattos to oppose the Revolution even further, as they feared that their economic and social positions would be threatened by this policy of racial equality ("Owning the Revolution" 9).

As another step to counter pre-Revolution Cuba, Castro created a number of Revolutionary organizations aimed at instilling and normalizing the ideology of the Revolution in the Cuban population (Vilaboy and Vega 92). These organizations gave attention to the many social groups that had been disadvantaged by the policies and norms of pre-Revolution Cuba. They included the Asociación de Jóvenes Rebeldes, the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas, and the Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños, among others (92). The foundation of these organizations thus gave young people, women, small farmers, and many other groups the means to participate in the Revolution.

Only 13.7 percent of working-aged women were involved in the workforce before the Revolution (Lutjens 103). The Federación de Mujeres Cubanas aimed to expand women's involvement in Cuba's economy and society by dramatically increasing their educational and labor opportunities, and the 1976 Cuban Constitution explicitly banned unequal work and education opportunities on the basis of sex ("Women and the Cuban Revolution"). The 1976 Constitution also codified paid maternity leave and the sharing of domestic responsibilities between husband and wife, as well as many other expansions to women's rights (Lutjens 104).

With a goal of popularizing the Revolution's ideology, Castro's government also reformed education policies, beginning with the *campana de alfabetización*, a state-led effort to combat the illiteracy that many poor and non-white Cubans faced (Vilaboy and Vega 93). Thanks to this campaign, Cuba soon had the lowest illiteracy rate and highest test scores in Latin America ("Post-Revolution Cuba"). Whereas the illiteracy rate before the Revolution was around twenty-three percent, and nearly double that amount among rural Cubans, the illiteracy rate after this campaign dropped to only 3.9 percent (Gomez; Vilaboy and Vega 93). Castro also nationalized the country's private schools, which had been segregated. Afro-Cuban children could not previously receive the same quality of education as wealthy white and mulatto children ("Owning the Revolution" 8). These changes in Cuba's education system thus allowed considerably more opportunities for Afro-Cubans, women, and the lower-class people of the communities marginalized by Batista's government among others ("Owning the Revolution" 7; "Women and the Cuban Revolution"). The motive behind these beneficial educational policies, however, was the constant promotion of the Revolution's mission within the classroom and thus, the creation of a society that was overwhelmingly loyal to the Revolution (Gomez and Hare).

The improvements that Castro's policies made in the lives of the members of these communities were vast, and statistics reflect that. In Cuba's revamped education system, loyalty to the Revolution was ingrained in children through schooling, and this loyalty seeped into all facets of Cuban life (Gomez and Hare). Through labor unions, propagandist materials, the aforementioned organizations, and the arts, the Revolution promoted its mission and expected Cubans to conform to its ideas (Cole 11). Oftentimes, the communities in question were enthusiastic to support a government that had taken concrete steps toward bettering their situations, but Cuba was not entirely without flaws.

Unfortunately, many Afro-Cubans and women continued to face problems that other groups did not. The government's insistence on citizens' loyalty to the Revolution, which resulted in a lack of emphasis on correcting the remaining issues because the government instead focused on ways to rally Cubans to become ideal revolutionaries, has been the cause of much of the dissatisfaction that remains in these populations ("Owning the Revolution" 3). Revolutionary Cuba, both the government and the general public, often deemed those whose ideas slightly opposed or criticized the Revolution's ideology as "counterrevolutionary" (3). Merely acknowledging any remaining tensions in Cuba became an issue.

Notably, Castro's government dealt with race in such a way as to erase race as a factor by which individuals could be limited in society; but, in so doing, this government established an attitude of "racelessness" that diminished the veracity of negative individual experiences of Afro-Cubans during the Revolutionary Period ("Owning the Revolution" 7). After 1959, Afro-Cubans and white Cubans alike tended to hold on to pre-Revolution attitudes toward race, as members of both communities were cautious of, if not completely objected to, the changes that the new government introduced (8). Some Afro-Cubans were wary of the Revolution's intentions

and of the Black community's seemingly insignificant opportunities for participation, and some white Cubans were fearful that the Revolution would cause their status in society to crumble as it gave Black Cubans equal opportunities ("Owning the Revolution" 8; Cole 18). The government's attitude of finality following the national anti-discrimination campaign sought to silence conversations regarding remaining racial tensions in Cuba, and this would contribute to the criticism of Cuba that some Afro-Cubans made even as participants of the Revolution ("Owning the Revolution" 7).

In a similar manner, the issues of women were not entirely erased because of the government's pro-woman policymaking. Indeed, women's involvement in higher education, the workforce, and the Revolution certainly increased as a result of government policy and the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas's mission, but like the plight of Afro-Cubans in society, the predicament of women in society was not completely relieved. Women continued to face sexism, prejudices, and the widespread *machismo* (aggressive masculinity) on the island (Lutgens 104; Persall). The attitude of machismo that prevails in much of Latin America, including Cuba, dictates that the man is the head of the household, the primary breadwinner, and the authority figure over women, and that the woman is precisely the opposite (Hernández-Truyol 185). This machismo manifested in the workplace, where women faced discrimination and continued inequality in the "gendering of occupations" throughout the Revolution (Lutgens 104). That is, although women were given equal access to opportunities for work, they were frequently underrepresented in historically male-dominated sectors such as agriculture and leadership roles (Hernández-Truyol 191). Additionally, the traditional social constructs dictating that women should be homemakers did not end as a result of the Revolution's policies, and women were often expected to attend to domestic responsibilities after they had spent a full day at work (192).

A more extreme manifestation of machismo was sometimes seen at home, where women faced domestic violence and received little to no relief from government officials or police (Persall). Despite intervention from the United Nations and growing demands from women, the Cuban government has yet to pass legislation criminalizing domestic violence (Fuentes).

Clearly, the expansion of women's rights facilitated by the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas provided women with far more opportunities for labor and education, but it left much to be desired in terms of women's treatment in society. The FMC operated primarily as a means of promoting the Revolutionary government by pushing for women's participation. Thus, the complaints that women voiced—including addressing sexism in the workplace and incidents of domestic violence—were treated with less urgency compared to the urgency with which the FMC pushed for the advancement of women's Revolutionary participation (Lutjens 108; Persall). Therefore, the Revolutionary government still left something to be desired in the protections it guaranteed women.

The government after the Cuban Revolution, as we have seen, went to great lengths to correct the inequities that existed before 1959. Much of the Revolutionary government's policy succeeded in combatting the economic inequality of Batista's Cuba, including laws such as the Agrarian Reform Act, the Urban Reform Act, and nationalization of private properties ("Post-Revolution Cuba"). Several state-led campaigns combatted the racism that existed before the Revolution, such as Castro's 1959 declaration that Cuba would be free of any and all discriminatory practices and subsequent legislation to enforce this. The foundation of the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas and the explicit expansion of women's rights in the Cuban constitution allowed women far more opportunities for employment and education and guaranteed the equality of the sexes in these areas. Accordingly, the Revolution introduced a new

and better reality for much of the population. However, the issues that remained on the island and the unwillingness of the government to address them gave rise to an increasing amount of dissatisfaction among the minority groups that experienced them, including, but not limited to, women and Afro-Cubans. Criticism of the Revolutionary government was looked down upon, and in some cases, punishable by official measures like imprisonment, as the Cuban constitution dictates (“Cuba’s Repressive Machinery”). The Revolutionary government sought to discourage citizens from addressing any shortcomings of the Revolution, especially in such a way that could be viewed as “counterrevolutionary,” a label used by the Revolutionary government as a means to silence criticisms. The issues that continued after 1959, like remaining ideas of racism against Afro-Cubans, sexism against women, and the conflation of the two among Afro-Cuban women, were largely unaddressed by the post-1959 government, but Cuban citizens pushed for the government to pay attention. One of the modes that both the Revolutionary government and Cuban citizens used to promote their ideas and concerns was cinema.

From the very beginning of Revolutionary Cuba, Castro had asserted that cinema was one of the most valuable tools to promote the Revolution (Ebrahim 2). In early 1959, shortly after the Revolutionary victory, the Cuban government established a state-run film production company designed to expand the Revolutionary ideology by making it more accessible to the general public through film; thus, the *Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos* (or ICAIC) was established (Ebrahim 107). In his speech *Palabras a los intelectuales* (*Words to Intellectuals*; 1961), Fidel Castro outlines his vision for the creative ventures of Cuba, stating: “Y al igual que nosotros hemos querido para el pueblo una vida mejor en el orden material, queremos para el pueblo una vida mejor también en el orden espiritual, queremos para el pueblo una vida mejor en el orden cultural” (Castro).

The Revolutionary government's goal in industrializing cinema was to establish Cuba as a cultural hub for cinema production that would rival that of Hollywood. As mentioned, a resounding sentiment of the Revolution was a distaste for the influence that the US had held over Cuban culture and politics. Castro attempted to distance Cuba from Americanized trends in every facet of his reign (Snustad 14). As result, he wanted Revolutionary cinema to reflect the day-to-day lives of Cubans, to promote a sense of national unity, and to promote the Revolution as films addressed the social issues that Revolutionary Cuba had confronted, rather than focus on aesthetic aspects of cinema—an approach that contrasted completely with that of American cinema (14). Renowned Cuban filmmakers Tomás Gutierrez Alea and Julio Garcia Espinosa were requested by Commander Camilo Cienfuegos to help see the Revolutionary government's plans of cultural transformation via cinema to fruition (Santos Moray 58). Thus, Cuban cinema became of vital importance in order to praise the Revolution's progress, but in several instances, filmmakers used their art to voice their frustrations over remaining social issues.

CHAPTER I:

TOMÁS GUTIÉRREZ ALEA: ICAIC FOUNDER AND REVOLUTIONARY FILMMAKER

Arguably Cuba's most internationally well-renowned filmmaker, Tomás "Titón" Gutiérrez Alea (1928-1996) was born into an upper-class family in Havana, Cuba. He graduated from University of Havana with a law degree in 1951, but never practiced law (Levin). During his time as a university student, Alea cofounded the Nuestro Tiempo Cultural Society, a student organization of "leftist intellectuals" aiming to speak out against the totalitarianism of Fulgencio Batista's government, whose practices were notoriously anti-communist (Santos Moray 57). After graduating from law school, Alea immediately left for Rome to study filmmaking at Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, where he graduated in 1953. While in Rome, Alea's voice as a rising film director was inspired by the Italian Neorealism film movement, which was defined by its focus on the social struggles of the working class. Alea's first film as a professional, *El Mégano* (1954; *The Charcoal Worker*), was created in this neorealist style (Levin). This documentary, coproduced with fellow Cuban filmmaker Julio García Espinosa, received harsh backlash from the pre-Revolutionary government because of its criticism of the Cuban working class's social conditions under Batista's dictatorship, and it was eventually seized by police ("Tomás Gutiérrez Alea").

Alea's early life and career is marked by staunch pro-communist ideals. The success of the Cuban Revolution in January of 1959 led naturally to the government's involvement in the arts, and in March of 1959, Alea became one of five filmmakers to serve as founders of the state-run the ICAIC. Alea began producing works according to the ICAIC's foundational purpose—

promoting Revolutionary principles and spreading Revolutionary ideas to all Cubans—and in 1960, he released his first feature-length fiction film, *Historias de la Revolución* (1960; *Stories of the Revolution*) (Levin). Throughout Alea’s career, he produced notable feature-length films that would further solidify his place as one of Latin America’s most influential filmmakers, including *Las doce sillas* (1962; *The Twelve Chairs*), *La muerte de un burócrata* (1966; *Death of a Bureaucrat*), and *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968; *Memories of Underdevelopment*). Toward the end of his career, Alea made his well-intentioned criticism of Revolutionary policies, as seen in many of his works, undeniable upon the release of *Fresa y chocolate* (1993; *Strawberries and Chocolate*), which dealt with the injustices that Revolutionary Cuba imposes on members of the LGBTQ+ community (Smith). *Fresa y chocolate* would go on to receive Cuba’s first nomination for an Academy Award, in the category of Best Foreign Film, and it remains Alea’s most popular film internationally (“Strawberries and Chocolate”). Alea died of cancer in 1996, leaving behind a legacy of the filmography that encouraged the Cuban public to be critical of Revolutionary Cuba’s shortcomings and appreciative of its successes (Gassow).

Role in the ICAIC

Because Tomás Gutiérrez Alea acted as a key figure in the establishment of Cuba’s state-run film production company, an analysis of Alea’s works cannot be complete without considering the filmmaker’s role in the ICAIC and the resulting privileges he might have enjoyed that other ICAIC filmmakers might not have. Alea’s career has been defined almost exclusively by his involvement in the ICAIC. His responsibilities as a founding member of this state-run production company directly contributed to the company’s successful realization of Castro’s

Revolutionary goals for the arts. Alea acted not only as a filmmaker and director in order to produce Revolutionary films, but he also held administrative positions in order to solidify Cuban cinema's new trajectory toward cinematic recognition on a global scale. No matter the position he held, Alea's contributions to the ICAIC in every capacity were defining aspects of post-Revolutionary Cuban cinema.

As a founding member of the ICAIC, Alea made this aspect of Castro's philosophy the foundation of his career, which in turn consolidated his status as a prominent figure in this new industry (Santos Moray 58). His responsibilities at the ICAIC included contributing greatly to the discussion regarding the policies the ICAIC would implement from its birth and throughout its development in an effort to preserve Castro's original intention in creating pro-Revolutionary educational material and make it accessible to all Cubans (Wood 513). These policies addressed such actions as the critical review of the films the ICAIC produced before the films' release, the prioritization of some films over others determined by the value of the educational content the film contained, and the censorship of films when they conflicted with Revolutionary ideology (Castro). Another purpose of the ICAIC's establishment was to produce more Cuban filmmakers, who in turn would produce more films and thus bring Cuban cinema closer to rivaling Hollywood as a cinematic superpower. As such, the ICAIC considered itself an apprenticeship program in which young filmmakers learned from experienced Revolutionary members (Johnson 5). With this intention in mind, Alea mentored several young Cuban filmmakers throughout his career, including such notable figures as Sara Gómez and Sergio Giral (West 18). He advised the creative processes of his mentees, and he also taught workshops for ICAIC filmmakers (18).

Taking on still more responsibilities in order to promote Revolutionary cultural actions, Alea served as a member of other state-run organizations established to incorporate the ideals of

the Revolution into the creation of the arts, the Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba, (UNEAC), an organization for Revolutionary Cuban artists, and he also served on several ICAIC sub-committees (Wood 512). One such sub-committee oversaw the production of *Noticiero ICAIC Latinoamericano*, a weekly news segment that ran from the very foundation of the ICAIC until the 1990s when the Special Period's economic crisis slowed film production significantly. This newsreel intended to spark conversation among the Cuban public on the topic of national and world events, and in particular, events surrounding the Revolution (Johnson 3). The frequent purpose of the *Noticiero* was, unsurprisingly, to serve as pro-Revolution and anti-imperialism propaganda. Alea's involvement in the *Noticiero* as a director is an important but lesser-known contribution to Cuban cinema that reflects Alea's dedication to promoting the Revolution via filmmaking (6).

In addition to his administrative roles, Alea's responsibilities in the ICAIC also included his creative role as a filmmaker, in which he pursued his own artistic ventures and further popularized Revolutionary rhetoric. Notably, Alea was the director of the first film to be produced in Revolutionary Cuba: a documentary short entitled *Esta tierra nuestra* (1959; *This Land of Ours*), which confronts the issue of land inequality faced by *campesinos* and pushed for policy change in this regard (Wood 512). His career as a director and producer was defined by the pro-Revolution attitude that prevailed in the majority of his works. In one of his most famous works, *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968; *Memories of Underdevelopment*), Alea's protagonist, middle-class Sergio, is plagued by the memories of (and longing for) pre-Revolutionary, US-influenced capitalism (Kernan 46). With Sergio's characterization as bleak, pathetic, and living in the past, as well as the carefully worded title, Alea makes his feelings regarding pre-Revolutionary Cuba clear. However, as Sergio longs for life before the Revolution, he is unable

to decide how he feels about the Revolution, and thus Alea's character's purpose is to force the Cuban audience to form their own opinions of the Revolution (49). Alea's combination of the pro-Revolutionary ideology expressed in *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, as well as the intentional open-endedness of the internal conflict Sergio faces, represents the ideal product of Revolutionary Cuban cinema because it served to educate the public on the events of the Revolution, to allow open discussion of Revolutionary issues and policies, and to promote the ideals of the Revolution, such as the opposition to capitalism. This artful integration of Revolutionary ideas and creative stories defined much of Alea's work throughout his career as a filmmaker for the ICAIC.

Alea's role in the ICAIC was divided between his administrative and bureaucratic tasks, including the influence he enjoyed over ICAIC policies, and his artistic and creative tasks, wherein he produced both films that promoted the Revolutionary government's ideas and films that shed light on issues he thought could still be improved. The occasionally conflicting nature of these responsibilities, along with the fact that Alea never faced real backlash from the Revolutionary government when he expressed less-than-Revolutionary sentiments, makes the Alea's influence in Cuban cinema clear. Where other filmmakers would be punished for their criticism of the shortcomings of the social policies (or lack thereof) of Revolutionary Cuba, Alea would only become more popular on the national and global scale for comparable criticism (e.g., with the release of *Fresa y chocolate*, which garnered international recognition). Under the Revolutionary government, creatives whose work dealt with themes that could be interpreted as undermining Revolutionary developments—especially the portrayal of discrimination of marginalized groups in post-1959 Cuba—were met with harsh punishment from the government. After the unexpected censorship of *PM* (dir. Orlando Jiménez Leal and Sabá Cabrera Infante,

1961), a film focusing on the nightlife of Afro-Cubans, Castro explained that the government's censorship served only to protect the Revolution and Cuban citizens, stating, "en realidad no hay derecho fundado para desconfiar del espíritu de justicia y de equidad de los hombres del Gobierno Revolucionario," (Castro).

Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's contribution to the ICAIC, and thus to the new era of Cuban cinema following the Revolution, cannot be overstated. He was instrumental in the foundation of the organization that would allow the realization of Castro's vision for the creative and sociopolitical future of Cuba, as well as in the production of the films that popularized this vision. His role as a founding member of the ICAIC who influenced policy also allowed him freedoms that other filmmakers did not enjoy. Rather than being met with official displeasure, the films in which Alea dealt with controversial issues that permeated Revolutionary Cuba received international support where other artists faced censorship or worse. For this reason, an analysis of Alea's portrayal of the issue of race in his filmography is useful in order to adequately assess the portrayal of race in Cuban cinema as a whole.

We will now look at several of Alea's works and analyze them for themes of race, gender, and class. Given that Alea was an overall supporter of the Revolution, we will look at how he emphasizes these themes while maintaining his status as a Revolutionary filmmaker.

Selected films and analysis

Despite Alea's reputation as a supporter of the Cuban Revolution and the majority of its principles, many of his films reflect his criticism of the Revolutionary government when necessary. Since the beginning of his career as a codirector of *El mégano*, in which he focused on the hardships faced by the working class, Alea's work has represented his strong political,

social, and cultural beliefs. He managed to serve as both a promotional figure of the Revolution—though, notably, his work was never considered to be propagandist, as he used cinema as a means of promoting sociopolitical action rather than promoting conformity among Cubans—and as an advocate who emphasized social issues that the Revolution still needed to confront (Wood 520). His career was characterized by this balance between blindly adhering to the Revolutionary government and criticizing it.

Among the social issues that remained problematic in Revolutionary Cuba that Alea addresses in his films are sexuality, gender, and race. It is likely that Alea's criticism of the government's policies is harshest in *Fresa y chocolate*, the story of the friendship between a gay artist, Diego, and a macho, very communist and revolutionary university student, David. The major plotline follows Diego's struggle under a regime that discriminates against the LGBTQ+ community, discrimination that would eventually cause him to leave Cuba (West *et. al.* 16). In *Hasta cierto punto* (1983; *To A Certain Point*), Alea addresses the well-known shortcomings in Cuban society regarding gender equality by exposing the *machismo* of the film's protagonist, Oscar. This plotline follows the romantic relationship between Oscar and Lina in Revolutionary Cuba, through which Oscar develops an internal struggle between maintaining a sense of male superiority and reflecting inwardly to reveal an ever-growing distaste for the *machismo* that he has displayed throughout his life (Baron 358).

Through both of these films, Alea prompts viewers to understand that even if Revolutionary rhetoric regarding these minority groups—women, members of the LGBTQ+ community, the working class—promotes equality and fairness in theory, in practice Cuban society tells a different story. Alea maintains his devotion to Revolutionary principles, as he clearly believes in the validity of the Revolution as a socially progressive endeavor, but he does

not attempt to shroud the social volatility that Cuba has faced throughout its history, even during and after the Revolution.

For the purpose of this thesis's analysis of the portrayal of race in Cuban cinema, I will discuss three of Alea's works in which the theme of race is prevalent: *La última cena* (1976; *The Last Supper*), *Hasta cierto punto* (1983; *Up to a Certain Point*), and *El arte de tabaco* (1974; *The Art of Tobacco*).

La última cena

Alea's *La última cena* is a feature-length historical fiction notable for its direct confrontation of Cuba's long history of racial inequality. Where other works by Alea indirectly address the issue of race as a theme or secondary plot, the driving force behind the plot development of *La última cena* is race. In this film, Alea addresses the deeply flawed character of Cuban slave owners, the brutality of the institution of slavery, and the use (or rather, misuse) of Christianity as a guiding principle. Throughout the film, the interconnectedness of these elements gives rise to the themes of race and discrimination, religion, and authority, which play vital roles in Alea's creation of a film in which the audience is made acutely aware of the horrors that Cuban slaves faced on a daily basis in eighteenth century.

La última cena tells the story of a sugar cane plantation over the course of five days, from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday. Immediately, Alea introduces scenes of religious iconography, contrasted sharply with the first word of dialogue in the movie: a racial slur exclaimed by Don Manuel, the slaves' overseer, because of the escape of a slave named Sebastián. Viewers are introduced to the three wealthy white men who play important roles in the plot: Don Manuel; the Count, who owns the plantation and its slaves; the Priest, who is

characterized by his demands for the plantation to honor the sanctity of Holy Week; and Don Gaspar, who oversees the sugar cane mill and invents techniques that will increase production. Upon the introduction of the Priest and Count, we see that their relationship will become the basis of many of the conflicts in the film. As the Count is being bathed by his house slave, the Count and the Priest discuss Holy Week, and the Priest states, “the Blacks don’t understand Christian doctrine...you should spend more time with God and less time drinking with slave women” (00:06:40). The Priest goes on to criticize the Count’s obsession with ever-increasing productivity and resulting apathy for practicing religion, so the Count orders Don Manuel to pause production for the observation of Holy Week. Don Manuel argues that in order to make up for the lost days of production, he will have to whip the slaves more, and in a notable contradiction between the values of Christianity and those of capitalism, Count responds, “Well that’s your business; you’re the overseer, but respect the Church” (00:08:09). This statement would set the tone of the remainder of the film.

The scene that follows serves as another example of the tendency for the white plantation owners and workers to conflate race and religion, and capitalism?. Don Gaspar explains the process of turning sugar cane into table sugar, and states, “What will be white must first be Black... [the sugar] was purged by the fire like souls” (00:11:35), to which the Priest responds, “Not all souls turn white in Purgatory” (00:11:43). Though this conversation explicitly discusses the purification process of cane sugar, in which the material turns from black, to brown, and eventually pure white, the symbolism in this scene is rich with racial undertones; the white plantation workers suggest that the dark, raw sugar material is only valuable if purified, a statement surely meant to be interpreted with race in mind. Don Gaspar suggests to the Count that their expected production increase will require more cane, which means it will require more

slaves. He notes that once more slaves are brought to the plantation, the slave population will outnumber the white population. The Count responds, “Don’t worry, we can control the Blacks” (00:12:43), and the implications of this statement contrast significantly with the Count’s interactions with the slaves for the majority of the film.

The following day, Holy Thursday, Alea establishes not only the inequality between the white slaveholders and the Black slaves, but also the inequality that exists between house slaves and the rest of the slaves. The audience is shown graphic images of hysterical slaves being whipped and put in the stocks, contrasted with images of well-mannered Edmundo, the Count’s house slave, dressed in clean clothes. However, this distinction soon becomes indiscernible, as the Priest calls the slaves together so that he can preach to them in the hopes of converting them to Christianity. It is here that we also see a glimpse of Alea’s communistic ideals as a proponent of the Revolution, as the Priest states in his sermon, “In Heaven, no one says ‘this is mine, that is yours,’ because everyone has enough” (00:18:50). In a clear effort to subdue the slaves while also doing his Christian duty of attempting to convert them, the Priest states, “In order to gain access to Heaven, you must abide by the Commandments. A slave must show respect to his master and serve him, because that’s what God says, to love your master very much” (00:19:15).

In a church service later that day, the Count washes and kisses his slaves’ feet, including Sebastián’s, which infuriates Don Manuel. Don Manuel goes to see Don Gaspar, and Don Gaspar predicts that a slave revolt is looming, noting that the slave revolt in Santo Domingo was successful even when the white and mulatto population outnumbered the slave population. This scene serves as foreshadowing, and also a revelation of the inappropriateness (in eighteenth-century Cuba, that is) of the Count’s desire to convert his slaves and honor Holy Week, because

in doing so, he puts himself in a position of submission and humility beneath his slaves, per the Christian scripture in which Jesus washes his disciples' feet.

The following scene begins the lengthy recreation of the Last Supper by the Count and twelve of his slaves. At the very beginning of the feast, the Count begins to discuss the history of the sacrament. He asserts (misleadingly) that the disciples served as Jesus's slaves, and explains that Christ dies, to which a slave exclaims, "No, no, no! My master cannot die. My master is very good" (00:27:14), indicating that the Count treats his slaves (at least some of them) well enough that they care for him. Again, we see the juxtaposition between house slaves and other slaves as Edmundo's table etiquette is contrasted with the unrefined way that the rest of the slaves eat with their hands. Thus, Edmundo serves as a representation of the seemingly perfect slave, as preached by both the Priest and the Count: one who loves and enthusiastically serves his master. Alea's slave named Bangoché serves a similar purpose. Bangoché was a king in Guinea before he was sold into slavery and brought from Africa to Cuba, and he himself had sold his subjects to Europeans, including to the captain of the ship on which he would eventually be transported. Bangoché's air of refinement, as well as his and the Count's shared identity as royalty, gives a jarring but necessary perspective into a variety of the slaves' personal histories before their abduction and servitude.

The conversation between the Count and Bangoché is interrupted by the fainting of Sebastián, whose ear had earlier been cut off by Don Manuel after his attempted escape in order to teach the slaves a lesson. The Count calls Sebastián over to him, and he blames Sebastián's preventable injury on his disobedience and pride. He demands Sebastián answer "who am I?", but after a long period of silence, Sebastián spits in the Count's face. Instead of calling Don Manuel to punish him, the Count preaches that Christ humbled himself before his disciples, so he

will follow Christ's example as a master. After comparing Sebastián to Judas (a comparison which holds little validity), the Count describes Christ's torture, stating, "He [Jesus] knew [of Judas's betrayal], but couldn't prevent it. He accepted his fate" (00:38:05). This serves as another example of foreshadowing of the impending slave revolt, and Alea also suggests, through the Count's somber recitation of the scripture in which Christ was tortured by the Romans, that the Count will be tortured by his slaves.

When it comes time to perform the sacrament of communion, the slaves are immensely confused by the Count's use of bread as "the body" and wine as "the blood," and they think that the disciples ate Jesus in a literal sense. They cite the Afro-Cuban secret society and religious group, Abakuá, which the slaves claim practices human sacrifice. This purely Afro-Cuban society speaks to Alea's knowledge of the traditions of the Afro-Cuban community and how they are perceived in society. Since none of the slaves claim to be members of Abakuá, Alea makes it clear that the practices of this society are not representative of the African community of Cuba as a whole by the slaves' sense of shock upon considering that the disciples might have performed similar rituals. After the Count and slaves take communion, the Count begins asking the slaves about how they like being slaves, since he considers the slave barracks roomy and sufficient. The slaves argue with the Count, claiming that they prefer their huts in Africa to the poorly lit, dingy barracks. Count retorts, "There must be good things about the mill. What do you like?" to which one slave responds, "Freedom" (00:42:18). Although this comment is swiftly brushed off as the slaves and the Count make jokes, Alea leaves a pause before the comedic relief, no doubt so that the audience is forced to ponder the realities of the lives of the slaves, which Alea has so aptly and fully illustrated. Quick comedic relief may also act as a means of diminishing the deepest

desires of the slaves into nothing more than the punchline of a joke, and a trend which is repeated in the following scene.

As a more extreme repetition of the aforementioned desire for freedom, an old slave named Pascual hesitantly requests freedom from the Count. He explains that he has less than a year left of work, and very little time before he dies of old age. The Count grants Pascual his freedom, seemingly in an act of generosity and grace. However, as soon as the slaves begin singing a song of celebration for Pascual, the Count asks Pascual where he will go from here. Of course, Pascual has nowhere else to go as his entire life in Cuba has been one of subjugation and being considered less than a person, and he has no property or options for work or relocation. Instead of acknowledging that the plantation owners and slave traders created this reality for Pascual, Count uses this opportunity to preach that “freedom cannot bring happiness” (00:50:21). He launches into a parable about St. Francis, with the moral that the only way to be truly happy is to accept your life as the will of God, even in suffering. The Count states, “of all the good things Christ gives us, the best is to suffer... Sorrow is the only thing that’s truly ours, and the only thing we can give to God with joy” (00:56:21).

The sense of moral superiority, by which the Count essentially urges the slaves to be appreciative of the horrors they have endured, gives way to his next misinformed belief: that Black people are “naturally better fit to endure suffering” and that they were “practically born for the fields” (00:56:21). At this point in the feast, the obviously intoxicated Count is unabashedly revealing that his racism is founded in his misinterpretation of Biblical text. When asked why the white men refuse to help in the fields, he exclaims, “It’s God’s will, God’s punishment! God is merciful, but not to the disobedient” (00:59:18). He also notes that although the Priest claimed that Don Manuel is like Jesus, he is a sinner. As the recreation of the Lord’s Supper comes to an

end, the Count says, “This is what paradise is” (01:06:15), drawing a parallel between Christ’s communion with his disciples and the Count’s communion with his slaves. Alea’s religious imagery in *La última cena* serves as a warning against false parallels such as these. The Count’s insistence on comparing himself to Christ represents the idea of superiority that white plantation workers and slaveowners fabricated and believed to be true by citing scripture without the necessary context.

The third part of *La última cena*, Good Friday, serves as the rising action and climax of the plot, and the pace of the movie quickens dramatically. Don Manuel forces the slaves to work even though the Count promised that the holiday would be observed. This enrages the Priest and the slaves alike, and as just Don Manuel raises a whip over his head, Sebastián and another slave take him hostage, and they kill another white plantation worker who stood in their way. Unaware of the chaos in the fields, the Priest comes to Count, urging him to enforce the observation of Viernes Santo, and the two men argue about which of them should bear this responsibility. By the time a white plantation worker informs the Count of the disturbance at the mill, the slaves have kidnapped Don Manuel’s wife. Bangoché begins to act as a general, giving other slaves orders, making threats against the Count, and demanding justice as a condition for Don Manuel’s release. When the white plantation workers and Count are making their way to the mill, they cross paths with Don Manuel’s wife as she attempts to run; two slaves accidentally kill her as they attempt to recapture her, and one slave is consequently shot. Before the Count arrives at the mill, Bangoché decides to burn it, and in a very symbolic act of revenge, the slaves kill Don Manuel as he is in the stocks.

Finally, the plantation workers and the Count arrive at the mill, greeted by the body of Don Manuel arranged in the shape of a cross. Count asks the Priest, “What time did Christ die?”

and the Priest responds, “At this very hour” (01:33:10). When the revolt is contained, the Count orders the execution of all twelve slaves who dined with him, assuming that their taste of freedom from the dinner is what prompted this revolt. He does not allow the priest to recite the quotation often used at memorial services, “in death, we are all equal.” The Count’s complete refusal to even hear the phrase uttered represents a total change in character from a once-merciful (even if his mercy was for show) and respectful master, into a vengeful owner who has been scorned by his ungrateful Black servants. *Sábado Santo* consists of scenes of three escaped slaves—Bangoché, Antonio, and Sebastián—and how all but Sebastián meet their end.

Alea makes the Count’s character shift even more evident on Domingo de Resurrección, as the Count claims that he refuses to rest until “God’s temple is cleansed of those who defiled it” (01:46:24), and as he advocates for the “victory of Christianity over bestiality and savagery” (01:47:00). In one of the final scenes of the film, we see three slaves erecting a cross in the center of a circle of stakes, on which are the heads of the slaves who attempted to escape, with one stake empty in anticipation of capturing the only slave who successfully escaped: Sebastián. The Count’s assertion that Christianity is the opposite of brutality and that his slaves defiled the house of God makes clear that he believes the slaves incapable of being Christians, and thus incapable of reaping any of the rewards that God gives to his believers.

The deep-seated racism stemming from the Count’s intentional misinterpretation of scripture is the basis of Alea’s development of all of the themes in the movie: race and discrimination, religion, and authority. Alea illustrates these elements in such a way that they are almost indiscernible. The Count’s desire for authority over production conflicts with his strong faith, as one always comes in the way of the other. Similarly, the Count’s strong faith conflicts with his extremely racist beliefs, and an accurate reading of the Bible would reveal the Count’s

moral discrepancies. However, the count manages to serve as a representation of all three of these themes: an authoritative figure who white plantation owners and Black slaves alike answer to, a devout Christian who cites scripture or asks the Priest for advice whenever presented with conflict, and a slaveowner who exploits African slaves even as he knows how seriously their situation affects them emotionally and physically. Despite becoming familiar with the inner thoughts of twelve of his slaves, the Count still feels betrayed by the slave revolt because the feast has given him the false impression that his slaves enjoyed his company. It is obvious that the recreation of the Lord's Supper served an ulterior purpose of subduing the slaves and prolonging the onset of the revolt, but the Count still equated himself to Christ and his slaves to Judas and the enemies of Christianity. Thus, apart from being a racist and manipulating scripture to fit his narrative, the Count is the manifestation of the pride that is seen in white slaveowners throughout history.

Hasta cierto punto

Let us now look at another one of Alea's feature-length films that addresses Cuban social issues, *Hasta cierto punto* (1983; *Up to a Certain Point*). *La última cena* dealt with race relations before the Cuban Revolution, and thus the film did not criticize Revolutionary society. Instead, it provided viewers with the uncomfortable history that Afro-Cubans faced in slave-era Cuba, a reality that starkly contrasts with the progress of Revolutionary Cuba. Thus, *La última cena* is an example of Alea's identity as a loyal supporter of the Revolution. *Hasta cierto punto*, on the other hand, takes place during the Revolutionary government's rule after the passing of policies that leveled the playing field for minority groups of Afro-Cubans and women. This film represents Afro-Cubans as integrated and welcomed in Cuban society, and the film's focus is on

the women's issues that persist despite the Revolution's policies. However, as *Hasta cierto punto* progresses, Alea shows scenes of Afro-Cuban women as the victims of much of the women's issues in Revolutionary society, suggesting that Afro-Cuban women might be disproportionately affected by the social issues that remain on the island. Both films depict the hardships of minority communities, as *La última cena* focuses on Cuba's early history with racial inequality, and *Hasta cierto punto* focuses on Revolutionary society's gender inequality that is worsened by Cuba's history of racial inequality. Although *Hasta cierto punto* was not as internationally successful as some of Alea's other works, its focus on the intersectionality of class and gender allows viewers to gain valuable insight into the realities of life post-1959 Cuba for working-class women. Alea's characterization of the two protagonists, Oscar and Lina, the development of their relationship, and the resulting problems that arise during the movie call attention to the issues of race that persist in Revolutionary Cuba. As a result, *Hasta cierto punto* forces spectators to think critically about the progress that Revolutionary Cuba still needed to achieve in order to make equality possible among all Cubans, regardless of gender, class, or race. Alea calls these issues to viewers' attention through the film's focus on *machismo*, or hyper-masculine pride, specifically in terms of the traditional gender roles dictating that a man's role is to be the head of the family and breadwinner. Alea's representation of several Afro-Cuban women in the film as victims of this machismo indicates that the intersectionality of race and gender causes Afro-Cuban women to be at an even greater risk of experiencing sexism both at work and at home. Gómez's *De cierta manera* suggested a similar interconnectedness between race and gender as factors that contribute to continued inequality in Revolutionary Cuban society.

In the opening scene of the film, viewers are shown an interview of a working-class man asserting that if he is expected to conform to the new societal standards of Cuba—that is, if he is

expected to accept the equality of men and women—that he will only do so “to a certain point” (hence the film’s title). He states that he will change his beliefs “eighty percent” but never “one hundred percent” suggesting that a complete and progressive shift in attitude is neither achievable nor desirable for him. To the extent that he represents working-class Cuban men, his assertion also suggests that a progressive shift in attitude is still unpopular among the majority of working-class Cuban men. Thus, this scene introduces the message that Alea will develop over the course of the film, as the man states, “a woman is correct, but only to a certain point” (00:00:53).

In the following scene, filmmakers Oscar and Arturo discuss their idea for creating a film that focuses on the pervasive sentiment of machismo among working-class men and how it affects women’s roles in Revolutionary Cuba. The men discuss “Revolutionary conscience” as they commute to a trade union meeting, and it is at this meeting that Alea introduces the first female character, Lina. As Lina condemns the infrastructure of her workplace—citing potholes and leaky and deteriorating roofs—and demands that the people be provided with materials for repairs, Oscar takes a photo of her because he is attracted to her, a subtle example of machismo that exists even among those who are aware of it . Lina will soon become Oscar’s muse and the face of working-class women negatively impacted by an intrusive sense of machismo among male coworkers.

As the plot progresses, Alea includes instances of machismo both explicitly through the development of Oscar’s film, and implicitly through the relationships between Oscar and his wife and between Oscar and Lina. In a fashion similar to Alea’s films, Oscar includes documentary-style footage of his subjects. In the first example of this footage, Oscar interviews a female dock worker, asking her to describe the machismo she experiences in her day-to-day life.

She explains that her boyfriend demanded that she pick between their relationship and her career, and she picked her career. Oscar then interviews a male dock worker, who explains that he feels comfortable seeing other women while still in a relationship with his girlfriend, but that “she has no right to do the same ... that’s machismo, isn’t it?” (10:05). These interviews draw a clear contrast between the desire of working-class women to simply hold a job while maintaining a relationship and the demands of working-class men to be the center of their partner’s attention, and this idea becomes the basis of Oscar and Arturo’s creative venture.

However, Oscar and Arturo’s film becomes increasingly less important when Oscar introduces himself to Lina after the labor union meeting in which he subconsciously chose her to be his muse. He explains to Lina that he wants to learn everything he can about female dock workers’ experiences and problems, and he wants Lina to help him do so. Lina obliges, and she tells Oscar her life story and explains that when she completes her degree in port management, she plans on returning to her hometown of Santiago, where she will have more career options and a better housing situation. Oscar asks about Lina’s experiences with her male coworkers, and she explains that men treat her as though they have “never seen a woman before” (12:53). The chemistry between Oscar and Lina is evident from their initial introduction, and when Lina invites Oscar to her apartment for coffee, we see this chemistry progress. At her apartment, Lina asks Oscar why he chose to focus on dock workers, and he states that the docks are where machismo is particularly prevalent. Lina disagrees, arguing that machismo is the same everywhere, and makes her point by asking Oscar why there is not a woman working on his film. The exchange between Oscar and Lina in her apartment serves also to draw attention to the class inequality between the two, as Lina has classes to attend and an eleven-year-old son to parent after a full shift at work, and Oscar is a successful playwright with no children to provide for;

This class inequality is visualized in the physical difference between the homes of the two protagonists—Oscar’s home is much bigger and more luxurious than Lina’s small, run-down apartment.

Oscar finally leaves Lina’s apartment after giving her two tickets to his play, and later that evening we see that Lina brings another man as a date. Viewers can tell that Oscar is jealous, and when he and his wife return home, we see further instances of his own machismo. Not only is Oscar already displaying possessive tendencies over a woman he has just met, but he also shuts down his wife Marian’s complaints about her boredom. Marian explains that she wants to start working so that she can fill the time while Oscar is out working on his movie, but Oscar says she can wait until he finishes his script (precisely the scenario that viewers see in the first interview of the female dock worker). For the second time in the plot, the growing strain in the relationship between Oscar and Marian becomes obvious, despite Marian’s honest interest in Oscar and the success of his career. This strain is contrasted immediately in the following scene, as Oscar meets Lina to commute to the docks, and she explains the personal details of her past with her son Claudio’s father. She describes the conflict that arose from her pregnancy at age seventeen, her father’s callousness given that Claudio’s father was not white, and her being forced to move in with her aunt. Thus, Alea draws another blatant contrast, this time between Oscar’s disinterest in his own wife’s problems and his complete interest in Lina’s troubled past, indicating that Oscar’s disloyalty and dishonesty with his wife is becoming an increasingly problematic example of his machismo. Alea also makes a subtle reference to the racism that persisted in the early years of the Revolutionary government, as Lina’s father essentially cuts contact with her for having a child with a non-white man.

In the next clip of documentary footage for Oscar and Arturo's film, another female dock worker describes the treatment she receives from men on the basis for her career choice. She says that men think that female dock workers are "easy" and "trash," to the point that it becomes necessary to lie about her career choice when first meeting someone. Upon watching this footage, Arturo begins discussing the necessity of including visuals of these women in order to support the movie's argument against machismo and for true equality. Oscar, however, suggests that the film focus on one single, working mother and the development of her love story with a sexist male worker, who caves to social pressures and asks her to stop working so that he can be the true bread winner. In this exchange between Oscar and Arturo, Alea foreshadows Oscar and Lina's relationship when Arturo states, "careful, artists fall in love with their models" to which Oscar's wife retorts, "I'd like to see him with a longshore woman!" (24:06). This is a clear display of the sexism and classism that exists even among Cuban women. Marian clearly believes Lina to be beneath her, both in social class and in allure, as she thinks the prospect of Oscar and Lina's relationship is laughable.

We see this difference between Marian and Lina develop further in the following segment when Oscar introduces the two women at Lina's place of work and then leaves them alone together to discuss the film. There is tension between the two women, and between each woman and Oscar. When Marian leaves the docks, Oscar responds to Lina's cold attitude by beginning to hint at his feelings for her and admits that she is his muse. Later, Oscar and Arturo attend another union meeting and interview a group of male workers regarding their opinion on machismo and women's place in the workforce. These workers are significantly more progressive than the others, and they describe their near-dependency on their partners' salaries in order to afford expenses necessary for the family. They describe that the downfall of a "macho"

man is that he values his pride over his work-life balance, citing instances in which a “macho” man’s obsession with work causes irreparable damages to a relationship. These workers also show a sense of class consciousness, and when they discuss the impossibility of a comfortable work-life balance, one worker states, “we’re human to a certain point, but it has a direct bearing on production” (32:00). Using the dialogue between these workers, Alea draws attention to the financial issues among the working-class even in Revolutionary Cuba, and he also sheds light on male workers who refuse to subscribe to the overwhelmingly common idea of machismo among working class men.

After the exchange between the male workers, Alea returns to the storyline of the developing romance between Oscar and Lina. The two discuss Oscar’s film and the importance of portraying in cinema real problems that people face so that viewers are made aware of issues they might otherwise ignore. In a possible reference to Revolutionary cinema as a whole, and Alea’s work in particular, Lina says, “if you don’t see your problems, you can’t solve them” (36:19). This discussion about the value of film soon becomes an allusion to the mutual attraction between Oscar and Lina, which results in Oscar accompanying Lina to her apartment. In Lina’s kitchen, Oscar explains the symbolism of a bird whose wings are clipped by someone who wants to keep it from leaving; he equates the bird’s wings to a woman’s career, and the person who clips them being the person with whom the woman has a relationship. Oscar says he wants to use this symbolism in his film. Before Oscar leaves Lina’s apartment, Oscar makes his feelings for Lina undeniably evident, and the two sleep together. This officially begins the affair between Oscar and Lina, and Oscar’s marriage quickly deteriorates from this point on.

For the remainder of the film, Alea continues to develop the relationship between Oscar and Lina and the simultaneous demise of the marriage between Oscar and Marian. Oscar’s

infatuation with Lina causes him to lose sight of the original purpose of his film—to call attention to the harmful machismo of the working-class—and he becomes distracted by the desire to create a love story. Marian confronts Oscar for staying the night with Lina and for the emotional cheating that led to it. During the confrontation, she also calls Lina derogatory names, further pointing to the class differences that are so evident between the two women in Oscar's life, and which are illustrated through Marian's distaste for Lina. Thus, Oscar's life—perfect in the beginning of the film when he was held in high esteem by his wife, business partner, and audiences—has become uncontrollable as both his marriage and career fall apart.

Near the end of the film, Oscar and Lina gradually spend more time together, and it seems as though Oscar will leave Marian to pursue a future with Lina in due time. Oscar and Arturo seem to mend their business relationship, and when they analyze the progress of their film as it explores the theme of machismo, Arturo notably claims real machismo no longer exists among workers, making their film all the more difficult to produce. Alea contrasts this idea in the scene that follows, as viewers are introduced to Lina's ex-boyfriend who drives her home from work in a rainstorm, invites himself into her apartment, and proceeds to rape her after she denies his sexual advances. This intentional and direct contrast between Arturo's disbelief in the existence of "real" machismo and the display of the worst kind of machismo by Lina's ex-boyfriend demonstrates Alea's dedication to the task of creating a film that explores the lasting machismo in Revolutionary Cuba that permeates all facets of a woman's life.

Hasta cierto punto concludes with a tone of uncertainty. Oscar passes Lina's ex as he leaves her apartment, and he finds Lina sobbing after her brutal violation. Instead of asking Lina why she is in hysterics, he accusatorily asks why her ex was in the apartment and then leaves Lina to continue crying by herself. Oscar is essentially removed from his role in his and Arturo's

film as Arturo is unappreciative of the insight that Oscar gives. The final scene depicts a bird flying away, an allusion to the previously mentioned symbolism for a woman free of the social burden of a relationship with a “macho” man, which Oscar wanted to use in his film with Arturo. Thus, Alea leaves unanswered questions as *Hasta cierto punto* concludes; he gives no indication as to the future of Oscar’s relationship with Lina nor Oscar’s partnership with Arturo. With this intentional uncertainty, the themes of feminism and machismo in Alea’s film are also left uncertain, and perhaps this is a purposeful choice by Alea in order to force his audience to think critically about the future of feminism and machismo in Revolutionary Cuba.

Through *Hasta cierto punto*, Alea focuses on issues that the Revolutionary government committed to rectifying and indicates that there is work still to be done. Oscar and Arturo begin the process of filming a movie with the intention of calling attention to the machismo that persists in the home and workplace and how it affects working women, and in the end, they decide that machismo is no longer a real problem in Cuba. However, the situations that Alea includes in the film draw a contrast with this conclusion. Not only is Oscar’s marriage deteriorating as a result of his disloyalty and false belief that he is undeserving of Marian’s anger, but his relationship with Lina is also suffering because of his inability to treat her with the respect she deserves, especially in the case of his jealousy of her ex-boyfriend and consequential disregard for her wellbeing. Oscar’s actions, as well as the facts that there are no women working on Oscar’s film, that Arturo’s wife is well aware of his occasional infidelity, and that Lina’s coworkers treat her “as if they’ve never seen a woman before,” all negate Oscar and Arturo’s assertion that machismo is a nonissue in Cuba. The only perspective the two filmmakers take into account in order to draw this conclusion is that of a small group of labor unionists who claim that their wives’ salaries are necessary to support their children. This interaction alone is not

enough to conclude that every working-class Cuban man is free of the antiquated beliefs that men are superior to women, but it is enough for Oscar and Arturo to essentially give up on their project.

The fact that Oscar and Arturo's film centers around the persistence of the issue of machismo in *Hasta cierto punto* is also an interesting inclusion, as the two filmmakers can easily be interpreted as reflections of all male Cuban filmmakers. In the beginning of the project, their dedication to uncovering the reality of machismo as it affects Cuban women is a noble goal. But as Oscar and Arturo progress through the research and interviewing stage, their opinions regarding the importance of combatting machismo become warped by several factors, including Oscar's affair and a few uncharacteristically progressive male workers. Alea uses Oscar's and Arturo's gradual changes in opinion to display the reality of machismo both in the workplace and at home, and he creates irony as Oscar and Arturo remain blissfully unaware of the machismo that they themselves exude despite their involved research into the topic, perhaps speaking to the attitudes the many Cuban men hold toward the issue of machismo and their ignorance to how they prolong the issue.

Although this film's purpose is to call attention to the warped gender roles and prejudices that exist in Revolutionary Cuba, Alea's execution leaves something to be desired. It is true that *Hasta cierto punto* deals primarily with the intersectionality of class and gender and the social issues that arise from it, but Alea addresses these issues in a way that does not necessarily call for concrete change. Rather than demand political action to address sexism and machismo, and the conflation of these issues with race when considering Afro-Cuban women, Alea tells the story of women's' experience with these issues. He addresses the ways in which society has been improved since the Revolution by including examples of working-class men who do not have

outright sexist attitudes. But Alea's theme of misogyny in Cuban society still sparks conversation about these issues. The protagonist himself is a misogynist, as we see via his disloyalty to his wife and subsequent rage towards her when she confronts him, via his refusal to involve a woman on his project, and in his hesitance to commit to Lina despite the fact that he ruined his marriage to be with her. Because Oscar is a misogynist, Oscar's film must be taken with a grain of salt. Similarly, although Alea's film might be valid in the segments that involve Cuban working-class women directly, the romance sub-plot that eventually becomes the basis of the entire movie is written from the perspective of a man who has a vendetta against his wife and indulges in an extra-marital affair. Therefore, while Alea's *Hasta cierto punto* can be analyzed for its disagreement with the Revolutionary Cuban government in the area of gender and class equality, it cannot be analyzed as a flawless reflection of the feminist beliefs of those in the industry of Cuban cinema.

With *Hasta cierto punto*, Alea has created a film in which the ideas of gender, class, and racial equality in Revolutionary Cuba are questioned, but not so much so that Alea could be deemed anti-Revolutionary. He calls attention to the societal trends that must be rectified in order for working-class Cuban women to be treated fairly. *Hasta cierto punto* highlights what the Revolutionary government has not achieved, including the prevention of domestic abuse, the achievement of fair treatment in the workforce, and the dismantling of decades-long prejudices against married, working women. The issue of race is not overlooked in this film, as the majority of the working-class women that Oscar interviews are Afro-Cuban. This prevalence among the interviewees indicates that the aforementioned problems disproportionately affect Black women, and that the Revolutionary government's insistence that discrimination is no longer an obstacle cannot be true if working-class Black women still face issues that arise from the persistence of

machismo. Furthermore, with the characterization of Oscar, Alea essentially villainizes himself as an affluent, educated white man who prolongs the trend of machismo, and he also criticizes the Revolutionary society as treats educated, white men better than it treats minority groups.

In conclusion, *Hasta cierto punto* is another example of Alea's desire to spark necessary conversation among his spectators in order to address the Revolutionary government's shortcomings. The protagonist Oscar represents the machismo that prevails among upper-class men, and his interviewees represent the machismo that prevails among the working-class. The characterization of Lina and Marian emphasize that women of every economic class are the recipients of the negative effects that machismo has had in Cuban society, specifically regarding the attitudes that men hold against working women in relationships, as well as society's relative disregard of a man's fidelity compared to a woman's infidelity. Furthermore, women themselves can perpetuate classist beliefs, as we see with Marian's scorn and lack of respect for Lina. Alea emphasizes that Black women are overwhelmingly affected by the issues that arise from the popularity of machismo. Overall, Alea succeeds in calling attention to the issues of class, gender, and racial inequality. It is possible, however, that he either minimizes the importance of the issues by including an ambiguous ending so as not to upset the ICAIC and the Revolutionary government and thus maintain his status as a well-respected Revolutionary filmmaker, or that he stresses that Cuban society's sexism is a problem that would be difficult to rectify.

Let us now look at *El arte del tabacco* (1974; *The Art of Tobacco*), one of Alea's documentary shorts. The ICAIC emphasized documentary production in order to make information more accessible to all Cubans and to further the Revolutionary agenda through film. As *El arte de tabaco* was intended to be purely informative, the theme of race is not explicitly addressed. However, in only six minutes of footage without dialogue, this documentary

indirectly exposes the underlying racial tension that permeated Cuba even after the Revolution. This short shares similarities with Alea's previously mentioned feature films because it gives insight into aspects of Cuba's history as well as its present. Like *La última cena*, it alludes to Cuba's history of slavery, and like *Hasta cierto punto*, it emphasizes the importance of women in the workforce. Also like *Hasta cierto punto*, its focus is on Afro-Cuban women and the interconnectedness of race and gender when considering Revolutionary society's continued injustices.

El arte del tabaco

Throughout his career at the ICAIC, Alea contributed to the ICAIC's goal of producing content to both make education accessible for all Cubans and to further the Revolutionary agenda by producing many documentary shorts, one of which is *El arte de tabaco*.

In the first scene, viewers are shown the hands of an Afro-Cuban woman in the process of preparing cigars, followed by similar footage of the hands of more Afro-Cuban women doing similar tasks throughout the factory. This footage of the time-consuming process of turning tobacco leaves into such a valuable product as Cuban cigars indicates that female Afro-Cuban laborers were responsible in large part for the success and popularity of the Cuban tobacco industry. However, in the minutes that follow, viewers are shown the images that appear on the cigar packaging: white monarchs surrounded by royal insignia.

Contrasted with the footage of the Black factory worker women, the content of the drawings on the cigar boxes is representative of the racial tensions that have characterized Cuba since its beginning. In the first image, the white royalty are depicted posing domineeringly on a beach with palm trees in the background. In the second image, a white king and queen, seated in

a more elevated position than the other people in the drawing, are shown accepting offerings from their subjects, two of whom are indigenous Cubans. In the third image, titled “El rey del mundo” (“The King of the World”), a white king rides an elephant through the desert, accompanied by camels, horses, and mules. In the fourth image, titled “El mapa mundi” (“The world map”), several indigenous men, women, and children sit behind two white, regal-looking women. The prominence of the women’s fair skin against the dark background, into which the skin of the indigenous people blends, is undoubtedly an intentional choice of the artist, as it immediately calls attention to the color of the subjects’ skin, as well as the physical positioning of the white women above the nonwhite people.

In the fifth and sixth images of artwork on cigar packaging, several cherubs, all of whom are white, are depicted frolicking among flowers. In the seventh, eighth, and ninth images, portraits of white, high class individuals are the focal points of the artwork. Thus, of all of the images that Alea showcases in this documentary, only one does not contain a depiction of a white person in a position of high status or power; and in fact, this image does not contain a depiction of a person at all.

Immediately following the series of artwork that would appear on cigar packages, Alea cuts back to footage of Black women working in the factory to produce these cigars, only to again cut to another series of cigar packaging artwork. Once again, not a single one of the many images that Alea displays depicts a Black person in a position of anything less than servitude. Only one image includes a depiction of an Afro-Cuban, and in that image the Afro-Cuban serves as a slave to a Cleopatra: a white, high-class, albeit non-Cuban woman. Alea repeats this pattern once more, showing another series of clips of Afro-Cuban women completing the painstaking

tasks required to produce the high-quality cigars that Cuba is known for, followed by images of white subjects on the cigar packaging.

Alea's approach towards indirectly addressing these clear racial tensions is arguably subtle, as race is never explicitly mentioned in dialogue. However, the pattern that Alea employed, wherein he first filmed the process of producing the cigars, followed by the iconic art style used in cigar packaging, makes the contrast between the roles of white people and the roles of Black people impossible to ignore. While every factory worker whose job it was to produce a high-quality product was an Afro-Cuban woman, every subject of the artwork that distinguished a Cuban cigar package was white. As a result, the cigar company is effectively attributing the success of the tobacco industry to the white subjects of the artwork—kings, queens, cherubs, elites in society, literary figures, and historical icons—although they contributed nothing to the process of manufacturing a cigar apart from the colonization of the island hundreds of years prior to this documentary's release. The only depictions of people of color in this artwork—indigenous people and Black slaves—show them in a position of subordination to white people, and indicates nothing of the massive contribution that Afro-Cubans, specifically Afro-Cuban women, make to the tobacco industry on a daily basis as a result of their skilled labor in cigar factories.

Cigar companies' insistence on minimizing the contribution that the Black population makes to society is indicative of a broader issue regarding race in Cuba. As the Cuban tobacco industry is internationally renowned, its approach to social issues reflects Cuba's approach as a whole. Regardless of whether it was Alea's intention to criticize his country, this documentary short calls attention to issues of both race and class in Revolutionary Cuba. Although the Revolution intended to give minority populations the opportunities they had been denied for so long, there still exist social tensions in Cuba despite the governments' efforts to combat them.

Alea's film provides a juxtaposition between the painstaking, tedious process that Afro-Cuban women endure to produce cigars, and the ornate artwork where prominent white individuals are the face of the Cuban cigar industry and the supposed reason for the cigar industry's success. This juxtaposition makes it undeniable that racial injustice, as well as class stereotypes still exist in Revolutionary Cuba.

As a Revolutionary filmmaker who produced this documentary in order to educate the Cuban population, the obvious theme of race that Alea creates is surely intentional. This short encompasses all aspects of Cuban film that the ICAIC promotes: it informs Cubans about the cigar industry, it highlights the increased employment opportunities that the Revolution facilitated, and it sparks conversation among Cubans on the subject of race relations. However, because of its portrayal of racial inequality, *El arte del tabaco* is a prime example of Alea's simultaneous loyalty to the Revolution's purpose and dedication to calling attention to its shortcomings when necessary.

We will now look at the significance of how Alea chose to address social issues in his films.

Issues of race and gender addressed in Alea's works

In the descriptions and analyses of three of Alea's films, a commonality emerges that is reflective of his approach to film production as a whole under the ICAIC and the Cuban Revolutionary government. All three of the works analyzed deal primarily with the themes of race and gender, and the intersectionality of the two. Alea's attitude toward these issues varies depending on the level to which the Revolutionary government has combatted the corresponding inequities that exist in Cuba. Similarly, from the carefulness with which Alea undertakes the

development of these themes in his films, one can infer the Cuban government's likely negative response to criticism of how it handled the inequality of race, gender, or any other social minority group.

As mentioned previously, Alea's career is characterized by his desire to see Castro's vision for the future of Revolutionary cinema through to fruition, and this includes the demand that cinema inspire necessary conversation and criticism of pressing issues among audience members. As Alea focuses on social issues such as race, gender, and class, every cinematic choice augments the development of these themes, therefore bringing these issues to spectators' attention and making critical discussion of society inevitable. Alea's focus on societal problems throughout Cuba's history, even during the height of the Revolutionary government, begs the question of how Alea's works help *further* Revolutionary objectives, and how Alea's films work *against* Revolutionary objectives. Thus, the inclusion of the issues of race, gender, class, and the intersectionality serve two purposes in Alea's films: either to praise the Revolutionary government's action in combatting past issues, or to criticize its inadequate response in combatting these issues and assert that problems in these areas persist even in Revolutionary Cuba. In this section, I will address the social issues that Alea chose to highlight in his films, how he went about highlighting them cinematically, and how the arguments that he asserts in his films fit into the Revolution's objectives.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the social issues that can be observed in Alea's films are abundant, but here I focus primarily on his development of the issues of inequality on the basis of race and gender, as well as the intersectionality of the two. By focusing on these two themes, one can also observe that class inequality often coincides with race and gender inequality.

Social issues in Alea's works

To begin, in *La última cena*, the theme of racial injustice is undeniably the foundation of the film. However, because the film is set in the eighteenth century (the height of the Cuban institution of slavery), Alea's boldness in opting to address the issue of racism in Cuba is dampened as *La última cena* describes a reality for Afro-Cubans that predates the Revolution instead of describing contemporary racial issues that existed during the Revolution. The film depicts the brutality with which white Cuban slave-owners and plantation workers treated Black slaves, and this trend is worsened by the fact that the white slave-owners use of religion to justify the heinous mistreatment of the slaves. Alea develops the slaves' African heritage by citing traditional African religions that some of the slaves practiced even as the slave-owner attempts to convert them to Catholicism, and these African religions give rise to cultural practices such as the Afro-Cuban secret society Abakuá and the Afro-Cuban religion Lucumí (also known as Santería, the blending of African religions with Catholicism). Notably, the film's inclusion of the slaves' spirituality indirectly addresses the Revolution's banning of most religious practices, including Catholicism, but permitting the practice of Lucumí. In the end of the film, the Count's harsh and wrathful language completely dehumanizes the slaves after the revolt. He claims that there will be "Christian victory over bestiality and savagery" (01:47:00), thus indicating that he believes that the Black Cuban population is beyond hope of redemption, and even undeserving of salvation. Through his choice to focus on slavery-era Cuba, Alea also develops the theme of class quite obviously, as the Black slaves were subjugated without real hope of having any sort of economic independence, let alone upward mobility through the Cuban class system. Meanwhile, white plantation owners grew richer by reaping the rewards of the slaves' labor.

Thus, Alea's focus on Cuba's racial tensions in *La última cena*, and consequently the idea of class inequality, is developed primarily by pointing out prejudices that the Revolutionary government was quick to address.

In *Hasta cierto punto*, gender and class inequalities that persist in post-1959 Cuba are the subjects of Alea's criticism. Alea creates a plot that centers around the machismo that exists among working-class men after the Revolution, as well as among more affluent, educated men. We see the theme of sexism and gender inequalities emerge in response to this machismo as the relationship between Lina and Oscar progresses, as the marriage of Marian and Oscar deteriorates, and as the research for Oscar's film is conducted. As Oscar and Arturo develop their film about the prevalence of machismo in the workplace and the problems it poses to working women, the filmmakers' interviews of working-class women allow firsthand accounts of the sexism that these women experience on a daily basis, despite the Revolution's attempt to level the playing field on the basis of gender. However, the attitude of a small group of working-class men that the two filmmakers interview discounts the testimony of the working-class women interviewees, and Oscar and Arturo nearly conclude that machismo is an issue of the past. The entirety of the affair between Lina and Oscar—but specifically, Lina's rape by her ex-boyfriend, and Oscar's instinct to become irrationally angry that another man was in Lina's apartment instead of consoling Lina—reflects that machismo is indeed alive and well in Revolutionary Cuba. Likewise, Oscar's belief that he does not deserve to be the recipient of his wife's rage when she finds out about his unfaithfulness reflects the notion that machismo exists no matter the class to which a man or woman belongs. Thus, the issue of class and gender inequality go hand-in-hand as Oscar and Arturo focus exclusively on machismo among the working-class in their film, and Alea contrasts this by showing that that machismo and sexism surpass class lines in *his*

film. As Alea addresses the machismo that affects working-class Cuban women, he criticizes a trend that exists within Revolutionary Cuba, a task that many filmmakers would never dare doing out of fear that their work would be censored. Therefore, with *Hasta cierto punto*'s focus on the prevalence of machismo in Cuba regardless of class, as well as the detail that all of the working-class women interviewees were Black women, Alea carefully criticizes an undesirable quality of society in Revolutionary Cuba, but he does so in a way that maintains his identity as a proud Revolutionary filmmaker.

In the documentary short *El arte de tabaco*, Alea continues this trend of carefully addressing social issues, focusing on the issue of race in this selection. Although this film lacks narration, Alea's careful choice of the footage and images that he includes forces his viewers to observe the disparities that exist among those involved in the Cuban tobacco industry. He shows several clips of Afro-Cuban women working in cigar factories, carefully handcrafting each cigar. These clips are juxtaposed with the ornate artwork that the cigar companies display on the packaging of the cigar boxes. Alea includes dozens of examples of this cigar box artwork, and in each example, the subject of the artwork is a white person, oftentimes white royalty or an otherwise notable white figure. The message that Alea aims to make is clear: that the individuals directly responsible for the product within the cigar boxes are Black women, and the individuals receiving the credit for the success of the cigar industry via illustrations on the cigar boxes, as well as that the customer the cigar industry has in mind, are white. In only ten minutes, Alea recognizes the integral role that Black women play in the success of the Cuban tobacco industry and then calls attention to the trend in this industry to ignore the contribution of these Black factory workers. Thus, this documentary short is aligned with Castro's idea of good Revolutionary cinema, as its purpose is to educate the public and force spectators to discuss a

problem that needs to be discussed. In the case of *El arte de tabaco*, Alea forces spectators to think critically about a specific issue of race, and like he did in *Hasta cierto punto*, he criticizes an industry that exists within Revolutionary Cuba. Alea's criticism of the racism that permeates the Cuban tobacco industry can thus be interpreted as an indirect but bold critique of the larger problem regarding the subtle racism that permeates Revolutionary Cuban society.

Beyond the films analyzed in the previous section, it is worth noting that Alea's criticism of social issues within Revolutionary Cuba continued in films such as *Fresa y chocolate*, in which Alea asserts that the Revolution has failed Cuban members of the LGBTQ+ community with policies that refuse to consider their needs. As we have seen through the many social issues that Alea chooses as themes of his films, Alea does not allow his identity as an overall pro-Revolutionary filmmaker to completely deter him from creating works in which he emphasizes the importance of social justice and calls attention to the progress that needs to be made.

How Alea highlights these issues cinematically

Alea's intention to create socially relevant films must be observed via the cinematic choices he makes as a director in the filming and production of these films. The characterization of protagonists and supporting characters, the dialogue between these characters, the casting of actors, and the use of documentary-style footage created in his works all reflect the meticulous task that Alea faces in developing the themes of race, gender, and class issues in the context of the Revolution. Alea intertwines these cinematic elements in order to produce a social commentary that he believes to be necessary for the advancement of Cuba.

The characterization of the protagonists and supporting characters is perhaps the most obvious manifestation of Cuban social issues in Alea's works. We see the importance of Alea's

characterization in *La última cena*, as the themes of race and class divisions emerge immediately from the characters' jobs on the plantation. The Count's complex character is particularly notable because his attempt to convert his slaves to Catholicism and save their souls can be misconstrued as empathy, but his thirst for vengeance at the end of the film reveals his true character: a racist, wealthy white man who misuses religion to further his own personal agenda. The characterization of the slaves as, for the most part, uncivilized and unappreciative of the Count's compassion directly reflects the attitude that white slave owners likely held toward the Black race.

In *Hasta cierto punto*, Alea's choice to juxtapose the working-class woman Lina with the affluent and educated man Oscar reflects the large divide between the social status of the two protagonists, both in terms of opportunities on the basis of wealth and on the basis of gender (Crowdus 26). Similarly, as the role of Oscar's wife shifts from near-irrelevancy to near-demonization as Oscar's affair unfolds and Marian realizes that he is unfaithful, Alea sheds light on the attitudes that Cuban men have toward (emotional, nagging) women via Oscar's attitude toward Marian. Alea's apt portrayal of his characters is not seen in such a capacity in *El arte del tabaco* because the film lacks characters. The traits that Alea gives to his characters and the situations into which they are put gives rise to the important social issues that Alea highlights in his works.

Dialogue between the characters is a similarly important cinematic element that reflects Alea's desire to create socially critical cinema. In *La última cena*, the conversation that occurs around the table between the Count and twelve of his slaves serves to build upon the social divisions between the slaves and the Count. The Count teaches the slaves about Catholicism and the teachings of Christ, and the slaves cite the African religion of Lucumí. This creates a distinct

rift between whiteness, associated with the Count's wealth and Christianity, and Blackness, associated with the slaves' subjugation and paganism. As the dialogue continues, the Count describes the innate difference between Black and white and he claims that Black people are naturally better fit to work in the sun, further highlighting the racist beliefs upholding divisions and social inequalities that exist between the Black and white characters of this film.

Dialogue is equally (if not more) important in the addressing of social issues in *Hasta cierto punto*, as we see Oscar's relationships ebb and flow via his conversations. The theme of machismo is seen most clearly in the interaction between Marian and Oscar as Marian confronts him for his infidelity and the two shout at one another; Oscar's lying to Marian and refusal to accept fault reflects his pride and feeling of superiority over his wife (Baron 359). In a similar exchange, the interaction between Lina and her ex-boyfriend in which Lina denies his advances again and again, only to be ignored, call attention to the dismissive attitude that many Cuban men take toward women and their problems, regardless of status. Yet another example of the use of dialogue to create social awareness comes from the interaction between Marian and Arturo's wife, in which Marian reveals Oscar's infidelity and Arturo's wife sympathizes. During this exchange, Marian calls Lina a derogatory name, and this creates a distinction between working-class Lina, who is complicit in Oscar's affair, and upper-class Marian who is the victim of Oscar's machismo. Thus, in both *La última cena* and *Hasta cierto punto*, the dialogue between the characters of Alea's films plays an invaluable role in evoking awareness of specific social issues of Cuba pre- and post-Revolution.

From the importance of Alea's characterization and dialogue between characters, the casting of the actors that play these characters is similarly important in Alea's production of socially critical films. The demographic of the actors chosen to fill these roles indicates Alea's

willingness to make a bold critique of an aspect of Revolutionary Cuba. However, the casting of actors in *La última cena* is not evidence of Alea's social criticism, as the film was set pre-Revolution during the era of slavery and following cinematic norms, Black actors play the Afro-Cuban slaves, and white actors play the Count and other plantation workers. Likewise, because there are no characters in *El arte de tobacco* to be discussed, the documentary short does not reflect the importance of casting in Alea's films.

The casting in *Hasta cierto punto*, on the other hand, is interesting because all of the protagonists are white, but many of the supporting characters, interviewees, and extras are Black. This observation might reveal that Alea's choice to criticize the machismo and sexism of Revolutionary Cuba, especially among working women, is more palpable given that the protagonists and main subjects of machismo in the movie are white women. Perhaps Alea makes this choice so that the audience is able to focus on one or two social issues at a time—in this case, the issue of sexism and class divisions—rather than be introduced to the conflation of social issues that Afro-Cuban, working-class women face. Or perhaps this casting is a reflection of the entertainment industry as a whole, which has a reputation for continually underrepresenting people of African descent. Furthermore, the Alea's decision to cast Black women as interviewees for the majority of the documentary interviews in the film indicates that he is aware that female, Afro-Cuban laborers are even more likely to face machismo and sexism in the workplace and at home. Thus, Alea's casting of primarily white actors allows viewers to see how the actors' demographic (white) would be affected by the social issues of *Hasta cierto punto*, but it also inspires viewers to think critically about how minority groups that play less of a role in the film would be affected differently by these issues.

The use of documentary-style footage that we see Alea include in his films in order to convey a point is an important attribute of Cuban cinema. Alea's inclusion of documentary-style footage in *Hasta cierto punto* and his creation of a nonfiction documentary short *El arte de tobacco* presents Cuba's social issues in a completely new manner. In *Hasta cierto punto*, Alea inserts several clips in which Oscar interviews Afro-Cuban female dock workers and asks them about how the issue of machismo affects their lives. These documentary clips capture the raw feelings that these women have regarding the sexism and prejudices that they face in Revolutionary Cuba simply for being a working woman. The women's interviews are contrasted in several examples of documentary interviews of male workers. In one clip, the man interviewed admits to being a *machista*, but indicates that he has no plan to try to change his antiquated and sexist attitude. In the end of the film, Oscar and Arturo, who conduct these interviews, nearly conclude that machismo no longer exists based on the opinions of a minority of male dock workers. The filmmakers' unwillingness to admit their role in the prevalence of machismo is facilitated by an incorrect notion that the aforementioned progressive male dock works represented the majority of Cuban men. In a 1985 interview, Alea states, "The use of documentary testimony is useful but can also fool you. ... You can tell an enormous lie using real facts" (Crowdus 27). We see the truthfulness of this quotation in Oscar and Arturo's own disbelief in machismo despite firsthand accounts from women.

The documentary short *El arte de tobacco* is clearly representative of Alea's enthusiasm for using documentary footage as an artistic tool to raise awareness of social issues. In this short, the documentary footage deals exclusively with the unfair lack of representation of Afro-Cuban factory workers in the Cuban tobacco industry. Alea carefully selects a number of clips of Black women's hands and deliberately contrasts these clips with the artwork on cigar boxes which

depicts white people exclusively. Unlike the documentary footage in *Hasta cierto punto*, which was fictional for the purpose of Oscar's research, the clips seen in *El arte de tabaco* are real and unscripted, and they thus serve to call attention to a real problem within Cuban Revolutionary society. Alea's nonfictional documentary short highlights the role of Afro-Cuban women in the production of cigars, and he demands that they be recognized for the continued success of the Cuban tobacco industry. It serves to inform viewers about Cuba and then to spark conversation among viewers about a pressing social problem, making *El arte de tabaco* a true manifestation of Castro's idea of what Revolutionary cinema should be.

Therefore, Alea's cinematic decisions give rise to his films' emphasis on social issues. His characterization of protagonists and supporting characters, the dialogue between characters, the casting of actors, and employing of documentary-style footage work in tandem to create the major themes that we see in his works. Alea's deliberate but delicate development of the themes of racial tensions and inequality, machismo, sexism, and class divisions through his cinematic choices reflect that Alea took his job as a pro-Revolutionary filmmaker seriously, but that he also took seriously his responsibility to call attention to problems within Revolutionary Cuba that need to be addressed.

Alea's works and the Revolution's objectives

Throughout the descriptions and analyses of the films that define Alea's career as a Cuban Revolutionary filmmaker, we have seen that films' themes and the way that Alea approaches them can be categorized in terms of the Revolution. That is, Alea's works can either be deemed as furthering the objectives of the Revolution and Revolutionary cinema, or they can be deemed as conflicting with the Revolutionary objectives. As mentioned in earlier sections,

Castro's goal in industrializing cinema was to create an artistic manifestation of the goals of the Cuban Revolution (Snustad 14). That is, cinema should aim to distance Cuban culture and politics from previous American influence, and it should help create a national identity among members of this new Cuban Revolutionary society by depicting the lives of individuals, educating the Cuban public, and highlighting the issues that the Revolution sought to eradicate (14). Indeed, many of Alea's productions fit within these parameters, as Alea was, for the most part, a truly pro-Revolution filmmaker. However, we have seen that certain elements of Alea's films address social issues that persist despite the Revolution's policies. Alea's delicacy regarding criticism of Cuban society in his works reflects his personal opinions of aspects of the Revolution, as well as the ideas he wishes to communicate to his spectators.

As a founding member of the ICAIC, it is no surprise that Alea's cinematography would maintain his reputation as an overall staunch supporter of the Cuban Revolution. The majority of Alea's career is defined by praising the progressive and beneficial changes that the Revolution enacted in Cuba after 1959. Alea was the embodiment of the kind of filmmaker that Castro hoped to represent industrialized Cuban cinema. Alea's long history of producing documentaries that aimed to educate the Cuban public reflects this. But an aspect of Alea's films that plays an even larger role in reflecting the Revolution's objective for cinema is in the creation of a national identity in his productions. All three of the films analyzed previously have created an undeniable sense of Cuban-ness, whether it be overt Cuban pride or more subtle inclusions of distinctly Cuban details—such as Lina's *mojito* in *Hasta cierto punto*. Alea's works range throughout all of Cuban history and thus touch on a multitude of possible Cuban identities. *La última cena's* emphasis on the issue of slavery and racism promotes a national identity by calling attention to the fact that the film's focus is no longer a reality. He thus describes a Cuba of the past that

differs almost entirely from Revolutionary Cuba. One of the major focuses of the Revolution is to address the issue of discrimination and racism, and *La última cena* succeeds in highlighting that indeed, race relations in Cuba post-1959 are much improved when compared to Cuba in the eighteenth century.

Similarly, *Hasta cierto punto* creates a sense of national identity by its focus on the plight of a minority group of Revolutionary Cubans: working-class women. Alea directly follows Castro's intention for Revolutionary cinema in this film, by following the lives of the rather unremarkable Cubans who represent various groups of Cuban society and addressing the problems they face. Lina's character represents working-class women of Cuba, Oscar and Arturo represent well-off and well-educated men, and Marian represents higher-class homemaking women. The focus of Oscar and Arturo's film is the machismo that women face at the workplace indicates one accomplishment of the Revolution: the expanded number of opportunities for women to work. Likewise, the attention that the film gives to labor unions indicates that the Revolution has made it easier for workers to have their concerns addressed by the government. In *El arte de tobacco*, a sense of national identity is created as the short educates viewers on a very Cuban product, Cuban cigars, and the issues within the tobacco industry.

Thus, Alea's loyalty to the Revolution and the objective of Revolutionary cinema is quite evident in the three works we have analyzed, and even more so when considering his entire career as a filmmaker. He excels at creating a sense of national identity by including details that are specific to Cuba, by creating protagonists that are representative of large demographics of Cuban society, and by addressing the problems that these demographics once faced that the Revolution has since addressed.

Despite Alea's pro-Revolution attitude that we see reflected in his works, however, we also see elements in which Alea is critical of Cuban society during the Revolution, which directly contradicts the Revolution's goal for cinema, that cinema should highlight the *successes* of the Revolution, not its shortcomings. *La última cena* is almost entirely aligned with the objectives of the Revolution, as Alea intends to contrast the reality of racism pre- and post-Revolution. *Hasta cierto punto* and *El arte de tabaco*, however, emphasize issues that persevere in spite of the Revolution's progressive policies.

Firstly, *Hasta cierto punto*'s development of the themes of machismo and sexism within the workplace indicates that the Revolutionary government has played some part in the longevity of these social issues. The Revolution drastically expanded women's rights, including giving women much more opportunity for employment as well as protection from discrimination (Meade 250). Despite this fact, women's issues—including sexism at work and home, domestic violence, and prejudices against working-class women—persisted after 1959, and Alea's highlighting of these issues contradicts the Revolution's claim that it has effectively eliminated discrimination on the basis of gender. Secondly, the film draws a sharp distinction between groups of economic classes. While Oscar, Arturo, and Marian are members of a higher class, Lina and the majority of the supporting characters and extras are members of the working-class who struggle financially. Although Oscar is arguably empathetic with regard to Lina's financial situation, the inequalities that exist between Lina and the rest of the protagonists are impossible to miss. Lina works tirelessly to support herself and her son, making Oscar's work look like leisure. This contrast between the working-class Lina and the affluent Oscar calls attention again to the reality that the Revolution did not put a total end to inequality. Alea emphasizes that issues on the basis of class persist and often compound the issues of minority groups.

Unlike Alea's other films, *El arte de tabacco* serves primarily to address an imperfection of society in Revolutionary Cuba. Although we see evidence of Alea's pro-Revolution core via his focus on the success of the Cuban tobacco industry and this short's educational purpose, the main objective of the creation of this short is to highlight the injustices that exist as a result of this industry's success. Alea depicts Afro-Cuban, female cigar factory workers exclusively in this documentary short, and contrasts it with the images that credit white Cubans with the popularity and prosperity of the Cuban cigar industry. Without dialogue, Alea manages to suggest that the refusal to acknowledge the contribution of these women reflects a broader social issue within Cuban society: that Afro-Cubans remain the victims of discrimination and racial injustice despite the Revolution claiming otherwise. Thus, this film conflicts with the Revolution's objective for cinema by pointing out the existence of race issues in a Cuba that prides itself in Revolution's progressiveness.

Thus, *Hasta cierto punto* boldly criticizes the gender and class inequalities that exist within Revolutionary Cuba, and likewise, *El arte de tabaco* criticizes the racial injustices that can be found in spite of the Revolution's policies against discrimination. The social commentary included in these films cause Alea's role to shift from that of pro-Revolutionary filmmaker to that of a personally critical artist. This is not to say that Alea is against the Revolution, but rather that he makes it a personal responsibility to remain critical of the Revolution's contradictions whenever necessary.

In conclusion, the social issues that Alea has addressed throughout his career as a filmmaker can be interpreted as his personal opinions of the Revolution's responsibility to combat these issues. His reputation as a groundbreaking Cuban Revolutionary filmmaker undoubtedly stems from the effectiveness with which he employs cinematic devices such as

characterization, dialogue, casting, and documentary footage in order to convey these social issues. The majority of his films serve to further the objective of Revolutionary cinema by creating a national identity and emphasizing the ways in which the Revolution improved lives for Cubans of many minority groups. However, his addressing of themes of race, gender, and class inequality in many of his works, including *Hasta cierto punto* and *El arte del tabaco*, works against the objective of Revolutionary cinema in some part as they highlight the Revolution's shortcomings.

The Revolutionary government did not impose censorship on Alea's films. The examples that the Revolutionary government made of films with "counter-Revolutionary" sentiments, specifically considering the censorship Gómez's documentaries dealing with race, naturally leads one to question why the films of Alea's that dealt with themes of inequality and discrimination did not cause the filmmaker to face such repercussions. Alea himself influenced and contributed to the policies regarding the ICAIC's review and censorship process, so he was well aware of the repercussions that he could have faced for the production of films such as *Fresa y chocolate*, in which he confronted the anti-LGBTQ policies of Revolutionary Cuba, and *Hasta cierto punto*, in which he confronted the harmful machismo and gender inequality that persisted despite Revolutionary Cuba's commitment to gender equality. The themes of these films directly conflicted with Castro himself, who was publicly and vehemently intolerant of the LGBTQ community (going so far as to claim that the LGBTQ community would "never embody the Revolution"), and whose Revolutionary promise was that Cuba would be free from discrimination of any kind (West 16). But instead of facing censorship for addressing the Revolutionary government's broken promises, many of Alea's works were allowed to be distributed to the US (a privilege few Cuban filmmakers enjoyed, thanks to the US and Cuban

governments' mutual intolerance), and were nominated for Golden Globe awards (*Fresa y chocolate* being the first in Cuban cinema's history) (Kernan 45). The exceptions that the ICAIC and Cuban government make for Alea must then be attributed to the balance that Alea maintained throughout his career, wherein his works served primarily as a means of promoting the Revolution, and when he did decide to criticize the Revolutionary government, he did so in moderation. Alea's productions reflect that he maintained the opinion that the Revolution was an honorable pursuit, but he makes his audience aware that he is not blind to the Revolution's inadequacies, nor is it immune to occasional criticism.

The duality that we see in Alea's career is indicative of his personal opinion regarding the responsibility he has as a Revolutionary filmmaker. In his 1969 essay "Respuesta a Cine Cubano," Alea perfectly summarizes a Cuban filmmaker's role in the Revolution and the manner in which his career reflects it. He states:

Our participation [as filmmakers] is, in the first place, through our works. In the second place, we express our point of view regarding the problems that pertain to culture in general, and their implication within the Revolution. We've made equal works exalting the Revolution as works criticizing it. Both have the same significance for the Revolutionary artist, that if we cannot help but feel the greatness of the Revolution, we also cannot help but feel the necessity for a permanent spirit of criticism. (Alea 26)

Thus, Alea's social criticism, in his view, is not an anti-Revolutionary quality, but rather a quality that is necessary for the endurance of the progressiveness of the Revolution.

I will now analyze the life, career, and selected films of Sara Gómez to gain insight into the ICAIC's response to how she addresses race and gender issues of Revolutionary society. Because Sara Gómez's life was short, her career was also relatively short and thus there is less

material to discuss in comparison to the career of Alea. Regardless of the difference in length of the two filmmakers' careers, Gómez made a great impact on cinema. Her perspective as an Afro-Cuban feminist filmmaker in Revolutionary Cuba makes her works valuable when exploring race and gender relations of Revolutionary Cuba. The shorter length of Gómez's chapter does not reflect that her career was less important than Alea's.

CHAPTER II:

SARA GÓMEZ: POLITICAL ACTIVISM THROUGH CINEMATOGRAPHY

Thanks to the overwhelming emphasis on social issues in her works, one of the most notable Cuban filmmakers and directors is Sara Gómez Yera (1942-1974). Born into a middle-class family, Gómez grew up in a predominantly Afro-Cuban neighborhood of Havana called Guanabacao, where she was raised by her grandmother and four aunts, and where she grew familiar with her identity as an Afro-Cuban woman (Sara Gómez *Afrocubana* 137). The presence in Gómez's childhood of Afro-Cuban adults of Guanabacoa—including some who played for the Havana Philharmonic Orchestra and others who frequented Black social clubs—would have a strong impact on the filmmaker, as becomes evident through her cinematography (137). Gómez received formal training in piano from the Conservatory of Music in Havana, and she also studied ethnology and literature extensively (Martínez-Echazábal and Martiatu 241). After completing her schooling, she worked briefly as a journalist for *Revista Mella*, a youth magazine, and *HOY*, the weekly newspaper of the Communist Party (“Sara Gómez”).

Sara Gómez had been exposed to the realities of life as an Afro-Cuban woman from many angles—through her upbringing, education, and work experience—and one can observe how she enters the field of cinematography asserting herself as someone with an informed perspective to speak on racial and social issues. Gómez began her apprenticeship at the Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC) in 1961 as an assistant director to Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, who saw her zeal for artistic expression from the very beginning of her career

(Vargas). She was the first female filmmaker to join the ICAIC, the first female filmmaker in Cuba's history, and one of three Black filmmakers that the ICAIC employed in the 1960s ("Sara Gómez: *Afrocubana*" 137). She remains the only Black woman to have been directed a full-length film produced by the ICAIC (137). During her career as an assistant director, Gómez worked under several other directors, including Jorge Fraga and Belgian filmmaker Agnès Varda. This assistantship at the ICAIC coincided with her own endeavor to create short documentary-style films that highlighted those social issues that Gómez considered necessary to address, and she began filming these in 1962. By the end of her career, she had directed eighteen documentary shorts ("Sara Gómez"). Evident from the creation of these documentaries is Gómez's strong identity as an Afro-Cuban woman with a passionate sense of cultural pride, as well as Gómez's resulting feeling of responsibility to address the racial and social issues that permeated post-Revolutionary Cuba (Vargas).

Her direction of these short films throughout the majority of her career as a filmmaker paved the way for Gómez to eventually direct her own feature-length film, *De cierta manera* (1977; *One Way or Another*) (Vargas). This full-length documentary-style film is the work Gómez is known for, and the film solidified her standing as the first female filmmaker to have her work produced by ICAIC ("Sara Gómez"). However, midway through the production of this film, Gómez died in June of 1974 of an asthma attack at age 31 ("Sara Gómez"). Although she was able to complete the filming for this project before her unexpected and tragic death, Gómez was unable to oversee the film's postproduction through to completion. Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Gómez's colleague of thirteen years at this point, took it upon himself to complete the production of the film according to Gómez's original plan (Vargas). Gómez's *De cierta manera* was released posthumously in Cuba in 1977 ("Sara Gómez: *Afrocubana*" 137).

Sara Gómez is crucial for understanding the cinematic treatment of themes of race, class, and gender, as well as how these themes are seen by the progressive government in Revolutionary Cuba.

Selected films and analysis

Sara Gómez's career as a filmmaker and director was motivated by her identity as an Afro-Cuban woman (Martínez-Echazábal 18). Benson writes, "As a part of a group of Black intellectuals, Gómez ... worked to develop a Black consciousness on the island by inserting Afro-Cuban history, culture, and politics into the revolutionary narrative" ("Sara Gómez: *Afrocubana*" 138). From her introduction to the industry of Cuban cinema as an assistant, to her emergence as a talented and outspoken filmmaker, the works of Sara Gómez have aimed at drawing attention to the communities that Cuba's post-Revolutionary government undervalued, including Afro-Cubans and women ("Sara Gómez: *Afrocubana*" 139) Author Devyn Benson, in her biography of Sara Gómez entitled "Sara Gómez: *Afrocubana* (Afro-Cuban Women's) Activism after 1961," writes, "Gómez was a member of the small but highly educated Black middle class, and she focused her films on how the Revolution affected Afro-Cubans, especially Black women" ("Sara Gómez: *Afrocubana*" 138). The emphasis of these social identities is evident throughout Gómez's works, both in her many documentary shorts and in her full-length film *De cierta manera*. Although she produced a series of documentaries focusing on social issues, I discuss one documentary short, *Iré a Santiago (1964; I'm Going to Santiago)* and the full-length docufiction *De cierta manera (1977; One Way or Another)*, as emblematic of her production as a whole.

To begin with a brief summary of the nonfiction documentary short *Iré a Santiago*, the film depicts the everyday life of the Afro-Cuban population of the important port city of Santiago de Cuba. It begins with several shots of Afro-Cuban men, women, and children going about their days throughout the city. The narrator, Gómez, explains the daily customs of Santiago Afro-Cubans, such as trips to diners, funeral traditions, and recreation activities like music and dance. She indirectly illustrates the history of the Afro-Cuban population of Santiago and how this history continues to influence culture. Gómez explains the influence of the French who fled from Haiti to Cuba amidst the Haitian Revolution on the customs of Santiago's Afro-Cuban population, illustrating this influence by documenting a funeral procession of Afro-Cubans who boast their Haitian-French roots. The film then depicts old drawings of slave ships, presumably drawn by Cuban slaves, and Gómez explains that "por Santiago, llegan los primeros negros a Cuba" (00:07:11). She also notes that Santiago is the birthplace of Antonio Maceo, an Afro-Cuban general renowned for his service in the Cuban War of Independence. Gómez then states, "la historia ha comenzado de nuevo en Santiago" (00:08:28), and the film cuts to a scene of a performance by a marching band comprised entirely of women, the majority of them Afro-Cuban. A series of scenes capture moments of routine activity of Black Cubans in the streets of Santiago, and then the film follows a Black Cuban couple throughout their date at a diner. Gómez then gives several recommendations for tourists visiting Santiago, including the cathedral, the local university, and carnivals. *Iré a Santiago* concludes with several minutes documenting Santiago's carnival, depicting thousands of Santiago residents, many dressed in extravagant costumes, as they perform and participate in traditional songs and dances.

The overwhelming sentiment portrayed in this documentary short is that Santiago de Cuba is proud of the city's Afro-Cuban population even in the seeming monotony of the day-to-

day. Gómez creates a film that depicts the Afro-Cuban community of Santiago in a way that allows viewers to gain a deep understanding not only of the city's history and attractions, but also of the city's minority. The film serves almost as an advertisement for Santiago tourism, but more important than Gómez's promotion of Santiago's potential tourist attractions is the manner in which she portrays the Black population. By following these Afro-Cubans in moments that many would deem too dull to include in a film, Gómez depicts the Afro-Cuban community as unified by their shared experiences under the governance of Revolutionary Cuba ("Sara Gómez: *Afrocubana*" 140).

In *Iré a Santiago*, Sara Gómez focuses not on the hardships that the Afro-Cuban community has faced under the Revolutionary government, but rather on the Afro-Cuban experiences that have enriched the culture of Cuba. She could have opted to focus on the lasting implications of Santiago's history as a port city that brought the first African slaves to Cuba—that is, the consequential decades of enslavement, mistreatment, and discrimination that Afro-Cubans would endure—but instead, she briefly addresses this aspect of the city's history and then highlights at length the vibrancy that the Afro-Cuban population has brought to the culture of Santiago. Thus, the theme that Gómez emphasizes in *Iré a Santiago* (in addition to her obvious focus on the theme of race alone) is the sense of pride in one's racial identity as means of establishing unity among Santiago's Afro-Cuban population.

We see this theme manifest itself via Gómez's interest in capturing the seemingly mundane activities of the minority population of Santiago and doing so in a way that makes the viewer admire this seeming mundanity. Thus, Gómez romanticizes the mundane; that is, her portrayal of Santiago idealizes every aspect of daily life in the city. She captures what might appear to be an unremarkable daily life of this Afro-Cuban population, and she converts it into

images of a rich culture and tradition, seeping into every aspect of daily life for the Afro-Cuban subjects of the film. By romanticizing Santiago, Gómez causes a funeral procession to become a representation of the French-Haitian heritage of a subcommunity of Santiago's Afro-Cubans. A row of houses along the water becomes the representation of the introduction of the first Africans to Cuba by way of Santiago's ports by slave ship; thus, these houses along the water allude to the beginning of Afro-African tradition in Cuba. Similarly, she causes the musical performances at a carnival to become a manifestation of the unified sense of cultural pride among Santiago's Afro-Cuban population. Thus, Gómez uses the idealization and dramatization of these otherwise unremarkable aspects of Santiago life to assert Santiago's value in Cuban culture, especially Afro-Cuban culture. *Iré a Santiago* was censored by the Revolutionary government until 2007 because, according to many scholars, it emphasized rather than ignored racial differences among Revolutionary Cubans, which opposed that Revolution's declaration of a "raceless" Cuba ("Sara Gómez: *Afrocubana*" 137).

The social themes of Gómez's only feature-length film, *De cierta manera*, are similarly related to racial pride. This film follows Yolanda, a middle-class teacher, and Mario, a factory worker, navigating through their adjustment to life in the poor, marginalized communities of post-Revolutionary Cuba. In the very beginning of the film, Gómez defines "marginalized" as the members of the community who were "denied the opportunity to participate in production by a capitalist society ... confined to the squalor and poverty of large cities." (00:07:05). The majority of the marginalized individuals depicted in this footage are Afro-Cubans living in Havana's slums. Like much of Revolutionary cinema, *De cierta manera* uses a combination of fictional film footage and documentary-style nonfictional information to convey its themes and apply them directly to real Cuban society.

Yolanda's plotline details her relocation to this Havana community and her attempt to provide necessary support to the students suffering from the worst conditions of life. As a teacher, Yolanda witnesses abusive home life and parental neglect that result in students' poor performance and increased misbehavior in school. In an attempt to set her underperforming students back on a path to success, she intervenes by having harsh discussions with the parents of these students. However, Yolanda fails to acknowledge that the parents' absence is often unavoidable given the demanding and time-consuming nature of being a worker in Revolutionary Cuba, so she is met with disagreement and anger as a result of her insensitivity to the harshness of the life that the parents, too, face.

Mario's plotline details his change in character as a result of his relationship with Yolanda. Mario describes his upbringing in Havana's slums: his lifelong disinterest in school, his inability to hold a job, his identity as a womanizer, and his subscription to the ideals of the Abacua secret society, which is comprised predominantly of Black men. The Abacua secret society preaches that women are traitors, and Gómez's distaste for this group's emphasis on machismo is immediately evident when she states that it "generates marginality ... and is the antithesis of social integration" (00:17:41). Yolanda's perspective catalyzes a significant change of heart in him. Whereas he was once an apathetic, aimless womanizer, Mario becomes a dedicated worker who appears uncomfortable with his coworker's womanizing and dishonesty at work. Mario eventually reports his friend to the workers' council for his lies and work absences, a clear illustration of his shift in principles; but his subsequent feelings of regret illustrate that Mario still struggles with his shifting beliefs. The film ends without clearly defining what will come of Yolanda and Mario's relationship, without answering whether Yolanda is successful in

advocating for the marginalized students who struggle in her classroom, and without addressing how Mario dealt with his inner struggle.

Intertwined with this fictional story of Yolanda and Mario, are documentary-style nonfictional information and statistics relevant to her attempt to educate Cuban society about various themes of Revolutionary Cuba. Gómez provides information about divorce rates, crime rates, and school failure rates among these marginalized communities, implying that the Revolution is not a miracle automatically and completely fixing society's issues. Through her creation of the fictional characters of Yolanda and Mario, Gómez is able to give context to issues and struggles that minority and marginalized groups face in their daily lives, regardless of whether or not the Revolutionary government had taken steps to rectify these issues. In so doing, Gómez makes clear the sociocultural conditions that inspired this film: gender, class, and race in poor communities of Revolutionary Cuba. Gómez implicitly emphasizes that the subjects' identity with regard to these three factors directly affects their opinion of their country.

In order to portray the marginalized community of Havana in *De cierta manera*, Gómez's film centers around two necessary themes. The theme that Gómez develops explicitly, through dialogue and the progression of the plot, is gender inequality, a social issue which lasts even beyond the Revolutionary government's attempt to create a society free of discrimination. We first see this theme in Yolanda's introduction as an educated, middle-class woman who lacks confidence in her ability to adequately teach marginalized students. We see that her worries are not unfounded, as she is initially unable to understand her troublesome student Lázaro. Further contributing to the theme of gender inequality, midway through the film, Yolanda expresses her concern for her students' future endeavors, contrasting the security of the boys' futures with the uncertainty of the girls' futures. Although her fellow teachers claim that girls have options if

their desire is work, Yolanda's longing for better options for the girls after their schooling ends in the sixth grade, and this preoccupation characterizes the protagonist throughout the film.

The theme of the permanence of gender inequality in Revolutionary Cuba is made evident during Yolanda's meetings with her students' mothers. These women are single, poor, uneducated mothers of many children, and they are forced to choose either to work countless hours a day in order to provide for their children, meanwhile leaving the children without supervision, or to be unemployed but present, leaving the children without resources. The contrast between educated Yolanda and the poor, marginalized women represented by Lázaro's mother calls attention to the class identities that divide Revolutionary Cuba, but this was not Gómez's only goal. Gómez includes statistics specifying that the majority of the heads of household of the poor communities of Havana are women because the divorce rate is so high among these communities, and she also explains that 28% of the children in these communities perform poorly in school. The theme of gender inequality is emphasized by illustrating the severity of the conditions that the women of these communities are forced to endure as they are expected to work long hours, provide a perfect home life for their children, and serve as a tutor regardless of the level of education that they themselves have received. Men were excluded from Gómez's narrative surrounding the parents' role in the children's success, with the brief exception of a man that appears to be a father figure to Lázaro who thanks Yolanda for her efforts to correct Lázaro's misbehavior. The situation of the women in Gómez's film is reflective of the situations of so many Cuban women who, despite the Revolution's expansion of women's rights, suffered from immense pressures to attend to the needs of their jobs, their children, their homes, their husbands, and the Revolution (Hernández-Truyol 192).

The second theme that Gómez emphasizes in *De cierta manera*, albeit implicitly, is the racial inequality that persists in Revolutionary Cuba, which is clear upon observing the demographic breakdown of the marginalized communities of the film's focus. By looking just at the race of the protagonists, both light-skinned, in *De cierta manera*, it may appear that Gómez underrepresents Afro-Cubans, but Gómez asserts that this casting was a purposeful decision because of the criticism she would expect to receive by casting majority Afro-Cuban actors (Ebrahim 113). She states that this combination of Afro-Cuban and female characters in the film would be met with disapproval by the ICAIC, which remained overwhelmingly white at the time of Gómez's career (113). Regardless of this obstacle to addressing the theme of racial inequality directly, Gómez still nevertheless manages to develop the theme fully by employing carefully selected shots of Afro-Cuban individuals going about their daily lives in the slums of Havana. Especially in the beginning of the film when Gómez is defining marginalized communities, we see shot after shot of documentary footage of poor, undereducated Afro-Cubans who Gómez describes as the representation of the "culture of the sector created in the neighborhoods that were divorced from production" (00:07:51). In other words, the individuals that Gómez employs as examples of the marginalized communities still struggling in post-Revolutionary Cuba are the same ones that found themselves on the brink of poverty before the Revolution: Afro-Cubans. As an outspoken advocate for racial justice and an Afro-Cuban herself, Gómez made this artistic choice not by coincidence, but by a desire to show what Revolutionary Cuba truly looks like for the lower-class Afro-Cubans of Havana (Ebrahim 112).

She further develops this unspoken but important theme of racial inequality through one character in particular: Mercedes, the Afro-Cuban woman whose son is failing second grade for the third year in a row. Yolanda calls Mercedes in for a meeting to discuss what needs to be done

in order for her son to advance to the third grade, and in this discussion, Yolanda blames Mercedes' absence as the reason for her son's poor academic performance. Mercedes then explains that she leaves for work every morning at 5 AM, works until nighttime, and returns home to cook and clean for her eleven children. Mercedes represents the tedious life of an Afro-Cuban, lower-class mother, which has been a reality for women of this social identity for all of Cuba's history. The necessity for lower-class women to choose between being a satisfactory worker or mother is magnified if that woman is an Afro-Cuban, as evidenced through Gómez's casting of primarily Afro-Cuban women to play the marginalized mothers in *De cierta manera*. Gómez intentionally films the intersection of the conditions of being a woman, a member of the lower-class, and an Afro-Cuban to create a character representative of this marginalized community of Havana (Ebrahim 116).

Despite the criticism Gómez knew she might receive by addressing such controversial topics as gender and racial inequality in Revolutionary Cuba, *De cierta manera* is defined by Gómez's bold and thorough development of gender, race, and class intersectionality. *De cierta manera* is undoubtedly a criticism of the Revolutionary government's ignorance and/or denial of racial and gender issues. The characters in the movie represent those on the fringe of society before the Revolution, defined as "marginalized communities" by Gómez. Gómez's film asserts that, although the class condition of these marginalized groups has somewhat improved under the Revolutionary government, racial and gender inequality have by no means disappeared.

In conclusion, by analyzing both *Iré a Santiago* and *De cierta manera*, we are able to see the variety of ways in which Gómez approaches social issues like race, gender, and class, as well as her interpretation of how these issues relate to the Revolution. In *Iré a Santiago*, we see the rich cultural tradition of Afro-Cubans and are given context to the history of the Black

population on the island, thus learning the important contributions that Afro-Cubans bring to Cuban culture. Oftentimes, however, the Revolution opted for these contributions to go unacknowledged in the government's hopes of creating a raceless, and thus discrimination-free, Cuba. Although the Revolution made great strides in correcting the racial tensions that had thrived before 1959, it still had its shortcomings when we consider its silencing of the significance of Afro-Cuban culture. As much as the Afro-Cuban population has helped shape Cuban identity, they rarely receive credit for doing so in Cuban film.

In *De cierta manera*, we see the issues of race, gender, and class in relation to Revolutionary Cuba. Gómez's commentary in this film focused on the remaining issues that Revolutionary minority communities faced. Although women and the Black community had far more opportunity under the Revolutionary government than they had previously, women still suffered from lower pay rates than men, and Afro-Cuban women were still the victims of decades-long discrimination. We see this most strongly in Gómez's focus on the housing inadequacies in urban Cuba as they relate to lower-class Cubans, many of whom are Afro-Cubans. Gómez calls attention to gender issues through Yolanda's relationship with Mario in which we see incidents of Mario's machismo, an attribute that plagued many Cuban men despite Revolutionary Cuba's efforts to ensure gender equality. We also see it in Yolanda's worry that her female students will have a harder time holding a job in the workforce than their male counterparts. By focusing on race and gender, the issue of class also arises. Yolanda's struggle to teach her marginalized students effectively reflects the separation between Yolanda and the lower-class experience. The students misbehave and act out, have poor grades, and often cannot rely on their parents for academic or emotional support as the parents work long hours and many of the students are without fathers. This combination of pre-existing factors that are detrimental

to student performance at school is not uncommon for many lower-class students, and Gómez aims to emphasize that it is often out of the hands of either the parent or the student to fix their social situation. This contributes to Gómez's argument that inequities still exist in Cuba despite the Revolution's legal efforts to change them. The cultural element of inequality on the basis of race, gender, and class remains prevalent in Cuban society.

In the following section, we look at the Revolutionary government's response to Gómez's emphasis on social issues after 1959, an emphasis that some might perceive as criticism of the Revolution and thus deem counter-revolutionary.

ICAIC's response to Gomez's filmography

As a filmmaker working under the government entity of ICAIC, the release of Gómez's films was contingent upon the ICAIC's production, as is the case for any filmmaker relying on a production company. Unique to the Cuban state-sponsored production of cinema, however, was the government's ability and willingness to censor material as it saw fit. Castro justifies this censorship of Cuban artwork that posed a threat to the carefully maintained Revolutionary Cuban ideology, when he states, "We have the responsibility to lead the people and to lead the Revolution, especially in the midst of a revolutionary struggle" ("*Sara Gómez: Afrocubana*" 138).

Sara Gómez operated under the knowledge that if her work were to face government criticism, it would likely be censored and left almost completely unacknowledged by the ICAIC and by Cuban society as a result. Throughout her career, she had to make the choice between her sense of personal responsibility to speak on Cuban social issues that persisted into the 1960s, and her sense of responsibility to the Revolutionary government, who claimed that that all real social

issues had been solved by Revolutionary policy (Ebrahim 111). The ever-present possibility of government censorship became an issue for Gómez as her career as a director at ICAIC gained its footing. When Gómez began creating documentary shorts that dealt with the aspects of Cuban society that the Revolutionary government deemed “counter-revolutionary”, as in the case of *Iré a Santiago*’s focus on African influences in Cuban culture, her documentaries were censored (“Sara Gómez: *Afrocubana*” 137).

The Revolutionary government’s prioritization of maintaining a society committed to the Revolution allowed incidents of strict penalization against artists who addressed the inadequacies of Revolutionary Cuba to serve as a warning to other artists (Benson 112). In most cases, punishment entailed that the artist’s works would not be shown or distributed (this is a major theme in *Fresa y Chocolate*), but in extreme cases, it meant the artist’s arrest and even exile (111). Instead of angering the Revolutionary government and facing a similar fate, even pro-Revolution individuals who suffered directly from its inadequacies chose to address social issues in a roundabout way, opting to focus on issues that permeated pre-Revolutionary Cuba and only alluding to their continuation (111). Filmmakers who disregarded the government’s warnings and still chose to produce films that focused explicitly on the racial or gender inequality of Revolutionary Cuba were met with official censorship, including several of Sara Gómez’s documentaries, which remained censored until the mid 2000s (112).

The ICAIC had a well-documented intolerance for Gómez in particular, and in the government’s eyes, her series of documentary shorts undermined the image of the Revolutionary government’s social progress; it disapproved of the films’ anti-Revolutionary topics such as persisting inequality on the basis of race, class, and gender (Ebrahim 111). Known for her boldness and strong sense of identity as an educated Black Cuban woman, Gómez opted to

ignore the ICAIC's demands that post-Revolutionary social issues not appear. She produced eighteen documentary shorts on exactly these topics, and the Cuban government censored all of them until 2007 ("Sara Gómez: *Afrocubana*" 137). Although there is little to no documentation of the ICAIC's exact reasoning for censoring Gómez's works, likely to motivate filmmakers to air on the side of caution when criticizing Revolutionary society, clauses of the Cuban constitution might explain the government's intolerance of Gómez. The Cuban constitution states that anyone who "publicly defames, denigrates, or scorns the Republic's institutions, the political, mass, or social organizations of the country, or the heroes or martyrs of the nation" will face imprisonment or censorship ("Impediments").

The only one of Gómez's projects to be spared this censorship was *De cierta manera*, perhaps because of Alea's role in its release after Gómez's death, or perhaps because Gómez made intentional casting choices to minimize the films' direct focus on race issues. Interestingly, despite her awareness that her films were being censored, Gómez continued creating documentaries that dealt with the issues frowned upon by the Revolutionary government and ICAIC. Gómez continued to work as a filmmaker with the knowledge that her films would not reach the audience of the time period in which they were produced. She could hope that they would instead serve as valuable, informative documentation of the opinion of Afro-Cubans in Revolutionary Cuba if her works were ever released to the public ("Sara Gómez: *Afrocubana*" 152). Scholar and friend of Gómez, Inés María Martiatu Terry describes Gómez's films as "political cinema that reflected the extraordinary moment that they lived in and the political tensions of the time" (138). If we are to believe Martiatu, the ICAIC's severe censorship of Gómez's documentaries was a response that Gómez expected and simply chose to disregard.

The ICAIC's distaste for Gómez's cinematic portrayal of the less-than-ideal social situation of Afro-Cubans, women, or lower-class populations resulted in the filmmaker being censored for the majority of her professional career. The Cuban Revolutionary government saw the artistic expression of these ideas as a direct attack on the Revolutionary ideals the government aimed to integrate into every aspect of Cuban life after 1959. Benson writes, "Importantly, this lack of public acknowledgment about Gómez's work is not indicative of her influence during the period, but a reflection of the limited distribution of certain types of Black art and the narrowing space for public debates about race in the 1960s" ("Sara Gómez: *Afrocubana*" 138). The ICAIC censored most of Gómez's work for almost 50 years until 2007, when Cuban scholars advocated for her documentaries to be digitalized (137). Notably, even in 2007, Gómez's films were not acknowledged as a promotion of Afro-Cuban issues during the Revolution, nor as a criticism of the Revolution's idea of a "raceless" Cuba (138). Although these films were not screened to the general public of Cuba during the 1960s and 70s, they serve today as valuable reminders of the Revolutionary government's refusal to acknowledge racial and gender hardships, as well as of the artistic suppression that artists and critics of the Revolutionary government faced so strongly following the Revolution. ICAIC's decades-long censorship of Gómez's films only adds to the filmmaker's assertion that life in Revolutionary Cuba still left something to be desired in terms of racial, gender, and class equality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Sara Gómez has earned her reputation as an advocate for social change, and this can advocacy can be seen throughout her career as a filmmaker. In her first and only feature film, *De cierta manera*, Gómez emphasizes the ways in which the Revolution improved

social conditions for women and Afro-Cubans by expanding access to education, labor opportunities, and adequate housing so that all Cubans received the same opportunities. However, another focus of her film was the issues that persisted despite the Revolution's progressive policies, including the widespread attitude of machismo among Cuban men, as well as the disproportionate number of Afro-Cuban women in the lower class. Gómez makes a point to emphasize the contrast between the Revolution's policies and reality in the beginning of the film, when the narrator states, "Even after radically changing the conditions that gave rise to marginalism ... we can notice certain inertia and lack of interest in those with a marginal background that explains the persistence of certain anti-social attitudes within the Revolution" (00:08:25). Thus, even though Gómez addresses the Revolution's progress, *De cierta manera* depicts the injustices that outlive progressive policy.

Gómez's identity as advocate for social change is further emphasized when she highlights the contributions of the Afro-Cuban population in *Iré a Santiago*. This short film details the importance of African traditions and influence in Cuban culture. The Revolution's hopes of a "raceless Cuba," although noble in its efforts to end institutionalized and societal racism, has another effect of overlooking the ways in which Cuba is shaped by African influences— influences that we see in *Iré a Santiago* in the form of music, dance, and historical traditions. Therefore, *Iré a Santiago* explains the rich history of people of African descent in Cuba, details the important Afro-Cuban traditions in Santiago, and indirectly calls attention to the damage that comes from the Revolution's policy of ignoring race.

Sara Gómez's films are direct examples of the value of Afro-Cuban contributions in Cuban society. She embodies what it meant to be a revolutionary filmmaker who also strives for an even better Cuba. Despite her loyalty to the Revolution, the pattern of voicing criticism of

Cuban society under the Revolutionary government was met with the decades-long censorship of her works. The policies of Revolutionary Cuba thus created an environment in which the creative freedom of filmmakers was limited by the level of criticism that the Revolutionary government would accept. In Sara Gómez's case, her criticism exceeded the government's tolerance, and thus the Cuban public was unable to consume Gómez's films and therefore unable to be influenced by her counter-revolutionary opinions. Regardless of the censorship that Gómez received, her films remain valuable portrayals of race and gender in Revolutionary Cuba as they highlight the ways in which the Revolution helped minority groups, and the ways in which it overlooked them.

CONCLUSION

As evident in the careers of Gómez and Alea, Revolutionary filmmakers willingly highlight the ways in which the Revolution rectified many socioeconomic issues in Cuba, but they also chose to address the social issues that persisted after 1959 despite the government's strides to combat institutionalized issues of race, gender, and class. Alea's films have a strong focus on portraying race throughout Cuba's history—from the era of Cuban slavery until the issues that Afro-Cuban working-class women face during the Revolution. Gómez also emphasized on issues of race as she focusing her camera on the routine activities of members of the Afro-Cuban community in her documentary shorts, including *Iré a Santiago*. In this short, she portrayed Afro-Cuban communities as integral to the creation of a Cuban identity, which the Revolutionary government boasted so highly of, by focusing on a funeral march, a carnival, and the history of people of African origin on the island. She also focuses on Afro-Cuban issues by including Black women as a large portion of the marginalized communities of Revolutionary Cuba. Both Alea and Gómez emphasize the importance of Afro-Cuban tradition from Cuba's beginning as a Spanish colony through to the Revolution by including examples of music, dance, and religion that have their origins in Africa.

Both Alea and Gómez focused on Revolutionary gender issues in the selected films of this thesis. Alea's *Hasta cierto punto* emphasizes the sexism and machismo that women of all social and economic classes of Revolutionary Cuba experience, but especially Afro-Cuban working-class women. *El arte de tobacco* also addresses intersectionality of race and gender issues as it emphasizes that the contributions of Afro-Cuban women are overlooked because of

the Revolution's goal of a raceless society. Similarly, Gómez's *De cierta manera* focuses on gender issues as the protagonist experiences machismo, and also as Gómez illustrates the demands of being an Afro-Cuban marginalized mother.

Let us now summarize the answers to the research questions posed in the introduction of this thesis. First, the Revolutionary government's policies did indeed limit the creative freedom of Revolutionary filmmakers. The intention of Revolutionary cinema was to promote the Revolution, and therefore films that criticized aspects of Revolutionary Cuba were deemed "counter-revolutionary" and were often censored per instruction by the Cuban constitution. Although the government claimed to be willing to hear criticism, the censorship of Sara Gómez's works, as well as films such as *PM*, which focused on the culture of the Afro-Cuban community, proves otherwise. However, pro-Revolution filmmakers such as Alea treaded more lightly in order to avoid negative repercussions. Gómez, thus, reacted to the restrictions introduced by the Revolutionary government by choosing to voice her frustrations regardless of the censorship she knew she would receive. Alea, by contrast, was very deliberate in his criticism of Revolutionary Cuba in order to maintain his status as a respected Revolutionary filmmaker. He did not criticize policies of the Revolution in the same capacity as Gómez until *Fresca y chocolate*, in which he overtly portrayed the harm that came of the Revolution's anti-LGBTQ policies. Thus, filmmakers were able to voice criticism of Revolutionary Cuba in moderation, and were only able to influence their audience when they struck a balance between praise of the Revolution and acknowledgement of its faults. This limitation caused the majority of the films analyzed in this thesis to contain many aspects acknowledging the progress that the Revolutionary government has made to correct issues of race and gender inequality.

As a result of the films of Gómez and Alea, social issues that persisted in Revolutionary Cuba were brought to light, such as the disproportionate marginality that characterized many Afro-Cuban women, the machismo that all women faced, and the diminishing of Afro-Cuban contributions to Cuban society. Although Gómez's films were censored for their counter-revolutionary content and thus could not influence the Cuban public as strongly as they would have otherwise, Gómez remains an influential advocate for social change. In her status as the first Afro-Cuban woman to be a member of the ICAIC, the frustrations that she voices regarding issues of race and gender in Revolutionary Cuba are validated because she herself lived the experiences that she portrays in her films. Thus the cinema that she produced helped call attention to the inadequacies of the Revolutionary government when it was ultimately released in 2007, thereby catalyzing further progress to mend social issues. Alea's *La última cena*'s focus on Cuba's history of racial inequality highlighted the Cuban society has made in terms of race relations, thus addressing Cuba's racist past while avoiding the mention of race issues in the present. In *Hasta cierto punto*, Alea works to address and mend social issues of Revolutionary Cuba by creating a film inside a film with the theme of machismo in the workforce. Through the characterization of Lina, viewers are able to see the machismo that Lina experiences, and by extension, the machismo that all Cuban working women face. Thus, *Hasta cierto punto* works to address the dangers of machismo and the reality of sexism in Cuba in hopes of reversing these trends.

To conclude the first research questions of this thesis, (1) How do the policies of Revolutionary Cuba affect the creative freedom and thus the ability for filmmakers to influence an audience's opinion of the political climate and developments in Cuba), my research found that filmmakers had to tread lightly when dealing with topics that the Revolutionary government

deemed counter-revolutionary, especially race relations. Alea's career is an example of the balance that Revolutionary filmmakers were tasked with striking. My research also found that the Revolutionary government's policies greatly limited the expression, including artistic expression, of contradicting opinions. Therefore, it limited any conversation that might have been among audience members regarding issues in Revolutionary society by censoring any content that opposed the Revolution or that was considered "counter-revolutionary."

To conclude the second research question of this thesis (2) How did Cuban filmmakers react to and address the Revolutionary government's regulations of the arts?), my research found that Alea and Gómez took different approaches. Alea made deliberate creative choices that would make societal criticism of the Revolution more subtle, such as the casting of white actors in *Hasta cierto punto* in order to focus on gender issues rather than race issues, as well as the focus on pre-Revolutionary race issues. Alea embodied a Revolutionary filmmaker by creating a distinct national identity and by highlighting the Revolution's progressive policies throughout his cinematography. Gómez, regardless of the Revolution's threat of censorship, continued to create documentaries about race and gender identity in order to convey that injustice still existed during the Revolution. However, in *De cierta manera*, she made deliberate casting choices—picking lighter skinned actors—to focus more on gender than race in her film and thus to minimize her risk of censorship. She also found a balance between criticism and praise of the Revolution in *De cierta manera* by highlighting the Revolutionary government's beneficial policies, such as improved housing for the marginalized community, as well expanded educational and labor opportunities for women.

Some limitations of my research in this thesis included difficulty finding specific Revolutionary government and ICAIC policies to cite as reasons for Gómez's censorship. This

could be due in part to the unfriendly relations between the US and Cuba, as well as to Cuba's use of internet censorship. For these reasons, I also faced difficulty finding academic literature regarding how the ICAIC decided to censor films.

In conclusion, this thesis has analyzed Revolutionary cinema in an effort to understand the impact of the Cuban Revolution on Cuban society, especially as it affected racial and gender issues. Through an analysis of the works of two notable Revolutionary filmmakers, Sara Gómez and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, we saw that Cuban Revolutionary film focused both on the Revolution's achievements and improvements in the social conditions of Afro-Cubans, women, and the lower class, but it also focused on social issues that remained in Revolutionary Cuba.

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