

Fidel Castro's Childhood - the untold story

By Steven Walker

Contents

Dedication

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Chapter 1- Birth

Chapter 2-Infancy

Chapter 3- Childhood

Chapter 4- Youth

Chapter 5- Echoes

Bibliography

Dedication: To my brother Allan

Acknowledgements

My profound thanks to all the authors, researchers, journalists, academics, friends and individuals and other writers whose work I have drawn from to add to my own extensive research into what is an elusive subject. All material has been properly cited and referenced, and any omissions or errors are my responsibility and should be brought to my attention for correction. Because of the nature of the evidence knowledgeable readers will easily spot differences in factual matters between parts of this text and others on Fidel Castro. I am aware of these but it is a fact that in many scholarly and seminal books on Fidel Castro there are contradictions and differences. We must tolerate some uncertainty about History in general but in

particular about a man who has not revealed much about his early years, and has been subject to wildly divergent speculation. My thanks must also go to Jeremy Thompson, Sarah Taylor, and Amy Chadwick at Matador/Troubador Publishing for their thoughtful and first class help and support in this project. Final thanks go with heartfelt love, respect and admiration for *los pueblos cubanos* for their strength, fortitude and resilience.

Introduction

The history of Cuba is sometimes written with a biblical reference to David and Goliath, with Cuba playing the role of David to America's Goliath. In the Bible David defeated Goliath, so the similarity ends there, but it is noteworthy that Cuba, a small poor Caribbean island, has not been defeated by the American Goliath. The untold story of Fidel's childhood will help you understand partly why this has happened, but it will reveal much more about what made the man who has been central to Cuba's story.

Most people accept that childhood experiences for good or bad influence the adult we become. Psychologists and Psychotherapists generally aspire to excavate childhood memories, examine early experiences, and study close attachments in order to begin to help a person understand themselves. Dreams can be analysed, behaviours interpreted, and relationships dissected in order to help a person gain personal insight. Fidel's reticence on the subject of his childhood by many people who have gained personal access is intriguing.

Does this reveal an unhappy childhood, one concealing a hidden traumatic experience, ambivalent feelings towards his parents, or the overt repression of early internal conflicts that could explain his later life? Or is it of little or no significance to what followed in his adult life? Everyone is entitled to keep themselves to themselves and talk only about matters that they feel are not off-limits. But it is my thesis that this reticence and the little we know from those who have tried hard, and from official

papers, points to a childhood that is for Fidel a sensitive subject for whatever reason - and deserves investigation if only to complete, or at least add to the picture of one of the iconic political figures of the 20th Century.

What you will discover is not intended to explain every action he took in his adulthood, it will not reveal the reason behind particular events, or the motivations that drove him to eventual success. No, what follows is simply evidence and appropriate conclusions, with some reasonable speculation about the making of the man, and tentative explanations for some of his later actions. The human mind is far too complex to draw a linear connection between a childhood event and a later adult action, there are many influences on the developing child and young person, external and internal experiences and a multitude of variables, luck, chance happenings and random circumstances that go towards how we develop.

I have used the available evidence, testimony of close friends and many other sources to assemble material to provide facts, analyse, interpret and draw conclusions from. The reader will of course draw their own conclusions as well, which is right and proper. Fidel's self-professed influences focus strongly on his Catholic upbringing and in particular the strict Jesuit college tutors, whom he cites as the source of his own personal self-sacrifice, absolute dedication to his ambitions and relentless perseverance in the face of adversity - more so in fact than any ideological mantra of Marxist-Leninism.

Fidel has offered some insight into his early psychological development, describing his childhood and providing hints at troubling experiences. He also acknowledges the apparent contradictions between his Marxist-Leninist political perspective and that of an Orthodox religion which is adverse to the concept of dialectical materialism, and atheism. But as we shall reveal, most of his formative political ideology relied very little on the Communist Manifesto, but more on the writings and actions of heroic revolutionary Cuban Nationalists.

Lenin wrote about the role of the individual in history and Fidel would have been conscious of the Marxist concept that individuals cannot change the objective course of history at will, but admit that the individual plays no small part in social

development. “*The idea of historical necessity,*” Lenin noted, “*does not in the least undermine the role of the individual in history: all history is made up of the actions of individuals, who are undoubtedly active figures*”.¹ So by extension Fidel in his later youth who was by then a voracious reader of Marxist-Leninist ideology, would have begun to create a personal internal credo where he could meld his Catholic beliefs with an Atheistic belief system, but also within his developing Marxist construct he could challenge the superficial criticism that a strong leader was somehow contradictory to Marxist- Leninist orthodoxy about the momentum of revolutionary change being a spontaneous uprising of the masses against the ruling minority.

The few details Fidel has shared about his early memories show a child playing happily in the fields, rivers and hills of his father’s sugar cane estate. He talks of his joy at being able to run free with plantation workers’ children, his friendships among Haitian immigrant labourers’ children and the Cuban children descended from slaves. His love of the outdoors began very early in his life, riding horses or climbing mountains; the joy in his words as he describes those early images and memories is palpable. To the enquiring mind this is interesting but it also can tempt superficial, shallow conclusions and interpretations - from his supporters or his opponents.

An idealised childhood, growing up with privilege on his wealthy father's sugar cane estate. It's easy to see how some commentators have described him as spoilt, privately educated and the ultimate poor little rich kid who became the very opposite to his background due to guilt, or to spoil his parents' ambitions for him, or to indulge himself as a revolutionary *dilettante*. I aim to offer a balanced, non-judgemental investigation of his childhood experiences using my accumulated skills in working with a myriad of children and young people from all walks of life, and knowledge of child development and psychology. Naturally my work is not immune from my own biases and prejudices gained via knowledge and training and experience which can only be in the end subjective.

But my training as a psychotherapist has taught me to raise my awareness of my own beliefs, feelings and subjectivity in order to get as near to objectivity as it is

¹ Lenin, V. I. (1894).

humanly possible. The death of Fidel Castro is eagerly awaited by some, and feared by many who perceive him as symbolic of an outdated, totalitarian ideology, stubbornly continuing to offer an alternative way of organising society. His demise will be anticipated with sorrow and sadness by most Cubans and those millions around the world who have felt inspired, empowered and encouraged to challenge the inequalities built into economic orthodoxy and capitalism's hegemonic grip.

Castro's name is synonymous with egalitarian, humanistic struggles for liberation by the many from the few in power. His death will cause a flurry of interest in this towering figure of modern political history, the inevitable forensic examination and retrospective analyses of his political life, his relationship with Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, and his active support for people suffering under the yoke of colonial and imperialist oppression. This book is not what many will expect. It will not list his achievements, the heroic story of Cuba's liberation from military dictatorship or his resistance to USA - backed counter-revolutionary coup attempts, CIA assassination and Cuba's ability to resist the longest economic blockade in modern history by the most powerful country in the world, by a tiny impoverished Caribbean island surviving in conditions of extreme deprivation.

This book in fact will attempt to tell the story of Fidel Castro's childhood - roughly up to the age of 18 and of necessity a little beyond. The majority of biographies and other books mention his birth and brief details of childhood, but they concentrate, albeit briefly, on his schooling, university and the origins of his active political development prior to the 26th July 1953 attack on the Moncado barracks which many pinpoint as the start of the revolutionary struggle culminating in the liberation of Cuba from the Batista dictatorship in January 1959.

Castro himself is regarded as a private man, reserved about his early childhood and reticent to discuss his family, parents and family relationships. His recorded speeches rarely mention any influence from his parents, immediate or wider family. And in interviews with journalists, biographers and researchers he has made it clear that this subject is not to be pursued. Despite these obstacles to my research, there is sufficient material from a wide variety of reliable sources to gain evidence about

his childhood, early years, family relationships and all the major and minor events that came to shape the emerging man.

Was he embarrassed and feeling guilty about his wealthy, privileged background which enabled him to attend elite schools to the extent that he swore to eradicate such inequality? This is far too simple an explanation, but it will form part of the mosaic I will construct to provide the reader with deeper understanding, perhaps even sympathy - whatever one's political or ideological position towards Castro. His story is of a materially wealthy background but one that was physically and psychologically tough, both at home and school, with frequent changes and disruptions in his schooling, and long periods away from home.

My task has been to sift through his rare intimate reflections, place them in his psychological development and then in the context of the wider sweep of world historical events, and interpret their less obvious meaning and significance. In addition there are fragments of evidence in many of the biographies and other books about Fidel Castro and others who joined him in their revolutionary activities. Some members of his family have publicly shared their thoughts and memories of him, and as we shall see, these are not always flattering, but they can equally be described as subjective.

So the indulgence of a degree of speculation and interpretation about his journey from birth to adulthood is necessary. From whatever personal or political perspective you come it is difficult not to admire his tenacity, determination and humanitarian principles, rather as most people admired David's stand against Goliath. As we shall see in terms of material advantage *Commandante* Castro had more financial stability and family wealth than most of his contemporaries, but he chose to use this privilege to the advantage of others and his own political agenda.

This book is not a superficial comparison about wealth, opportunity or how these explain or contradict his later political consciousness. No, this book will focus on the family dynamics, parental relationships, sibling rivalries and developmental milestones or life events that had an impact on his inner self up to the age of eighteen, and some significant events a few years later. Political books in general, or

more precisely books about political figures, rarely enter the territory of the person's soul, their feelings, emotions, ambiguities, paradoxes and irrational behaviours. These texts tend to concentrate on the big issues of War, Economics, and Power whereas in this book I am putting Castro's early experiences under a psychological microscope, or at least examining them through a different lens than usual, if you will.

If you are intrigued by the prospect of gaining some insight, new information and accessing a different narrative about Castro, then my aim is to offer you the opportunity to enter into the world of Castro's childhood, to reflect on what you discover and make your own mind up about what made him the man he became. The publisher has agreed to pay ten per cent of my personal royalties from sales of this book direct to the children's orphanage: *Hogar para Niños sin Amparo Filial Bayamo, Reparto Antonio Guiteras, Bayamo, Granma, Cuba.*

Steven Walker 2012

Family Tree (insert diagram here.....)

Chapter 1: Birth

When Fidel was asked what he thought had informed the development of his personality he replied:

A certain privilege and a certain luck. I was the son of a landowner, not the grandson. Were I the grandson, I would have been born into an aristocratic setting and all my friends, all my culture would have been marked by a feeling of superiority over others. Where I was born, everyone was poor: children of agricultural workers and extremely poor campesinos. My own family on my mother's side was poor, and

*a few of my father's cousins, who had come from Galicia, were poor; and my father's family in Galicia were poor.*²

Fidel Castro was born on August 13th, 1926 on his father's wealthy estate in the small community of Biran in the Oriente region of Eastern Cuba. Or was he? It has been suggested that his actual birthday was a year later in 1927 and that his birth records were altered by a year to enable him to enrol in high school a year early. So begins the enigma. He was by all accounts a large, healthy, lusty baby. His father Angel was from Galicia in North Eastern Spain, himself born to poor peasants working as miners and agricultural workers. Angel was traumatised at the age of eleven when his mother died, and when his father re-married these years were very emotionally difficult where he had to cope with a father grieving the death of his wife and Angel had to adjust to a step-mother and her behaviour towards him.

These relationships are renowned to be difficult and especially so as Angel was entering puberty, the beginning of adolescence when youngsters normally have enough troubles on their minds. They are experiencing rapid changes physically and emotionally and beginning the formation of an identity. A time of storm and stress even in the most placid, untroubled family environment. In his early teens Angel joined the Spanish army, probably as a way of escaping the impossible family dynamics where he was torn by loyalty to his deceased mother and a step-mother who he was under pressure to accept as his 'new' mother. She would like any step-parent react by either over-compensating in kindness or using cold rejection to try to establish her place in a new family. In addition the sheer poverty and hardship of

² Castro, F. (2008).

family life meant that the certainty, regulations, and strict paternalistic culture and income as a soldier provided a neat escape route. This pattern of recruitment from the poorer classes in all societies still prevails today.

Angel was sent to Cuba to fight in the second War of Independence but following defeat he returned to Spain in 1898, only to return to Cuba a year later, finding work as a labourer for the American United Fruit Company. In 1898 America was embarking on a period of imperial expansion and some American politicians had always coveted Cuba's natural resources, potential for wealth and the continuation of slave labour which had ended in America.

As hostilities moved from diplomatic to military, America sent a battleship, *The Maine* to anchor in Havana harbour where it blew up in a huge explosion in suspicious circumstances. This provided the pretext for open hostilities between Spain and America. An economic blockade and seizing complete military control of the country enabled the Americans to oust the Spanish but also bring the Cuban rebel forces under their command. Jose Marti, who was the rebel leader and later to be an enormous inspiration to Fidel, had been killed in the same year fighting the Spanish colonialists. In one of his last writings Marti is quoted as saying: *I have lived in the Monster (referring to America) and I know its entrails: my sling is that of David.*³

So he too envisaged the struggle with America as that between David and Goliath. This seemed to knock the stuffing out of the rebels and soon America had negotiated a Treaty known as the Platt Amendment which in effect shackled Cuba to America,

³ Marti, J. (1971)

allowing them to intervene militarily at will, set up military bases (the remaining one being the infamous Guantanamo Bay) and welding Cuba's economic and financial institutions directly to America. In 1902 after a period of uncertainty and political turmoil American troops withdrew after helping to install Tomas Estrada Palma as the first President.⁴ Palma was pliable and a safe pair of hands for the Americans who could rely on him to make sure that their interests were always the priority.

A letter to President Theodore Roosevelt from General Leonard Wood, military governor of Cuba at the time, perhaps best sums up America's attitude to Cuba: *There is little or no real independence left to Cuba under the Platt Amendment, she is absolutely in our hands, and I believe no European government for a moment believes that she is otherwise than a practical dependency of the United States. With the control we have over Cuba, a control that will soon undoubtedly become a possession, we shall soon practically control the world sugar market....I believe Cuba to be a most desirable acquisition for the United States.*

Angel, meanwhile established himself in the province of Oriente in the far east of Cuba which was dominated by the American United Fruit Company, and where gangs of bandits and corruption were still rife late into the 1950's. It was sugar cane country peppered by shanty-built villages populated by poor peasants subservient to the monopoly employer which had its own private railways and shipping wharves in the nearest large city of Santiago de Cuba. The company had its own militia and private police force to maintain its' control over the territory.

⁴ Bourne, P. (1986)

Shortly before Fidel's birth, Angel became friends with a local politician and businessman called Fidel Pino. Angel lent money to Pino who had lost his fortune in speculation. Angel was shrewd enough to see that Pino could help him out in return and cemented the relationship by naming his third son Fidel and Pino accepted the role of godparent. This was a time when who you knew mattered more than what you knew and money was the arbiter of everything - the key to securing success.

By all accounts Angel worked hard, saved and prospered, so that by 1911 he was financially secure enough to be able to marry Maria Argota y Reyes, by whom he had five children - a son Manuel who only lived one year after his birth in 1913, a daughter Maria born in the same year as Manuel, then a son Pedro in 1914, a daughter Antonia in 1915, and another, Georgina in 1918. They lived in a comfortable *Hacienda* named *Manacas* which stood out against the local poor structures, which typically had no toilets or bathing facilities inside, inhabited by sugar cane workers and where poverty, and squalor was widespread with unemployment and disease endemic in the province.

The death of a first born child, perhaps especially in the macho culture of Latin America at the time, where boys would be considered natural heirs, would have hit Angel very hard and hurt incredibly painfully. Memories of his profound grief after the death of his mother would have resurfaced. An emotional echo that would have seemed like torture. But the man we know would have found it difficult to express his feelings, seek solace or probably was unable to comfort his distraught wife. He was not unusual, and according to tradition his wife became pregnant immediately and

was able to bear another male child in the same year who went on to live nearly eighty years.

But the unexpressed feelings of grief, loss and bereavement for that first precious child would have found their outlet. Typically for a man like Angel this would have meant throwing himself into hard work, averse to discussing intimate matters or ruminations. This is where the popular sketches of his character derive from, where we are provided with the picture of a reticent, sullen man with an explosive temper. Angel was rather, clearly a man suffering intolerable emotional pain from the experience, not uncommon in developing countries today, but not unusual in developed countries as well. Nowadays the impact of such painful bereavements is better understood psychologically, there is more official support and a large network of informal groups of parents and volunteers who have suffered in the same way who offer an insight, genuine support, and understanding which is unique to them.

So we need to bear this in mind when we come to see how this affected attitudes and relationships in the first Castro household, where the parents separated, and particularly how this impacted upon his second relationship in which Fidel was born out of wedlock. Principally the fear of death of a child could produce an over-protectiveness of new-borns, but as they grew older these feelings may have turned into self-blame, guilt and anger - especially towards the male children who would always carry the ghost of Manuel with them, and remind Angel of what might have been.

The outbreak of world war in 1914 presented an opportunity to add to Angel's growing estate of sugar cane fields as the price of sugar increased dramatically. It also brought more people flocking to the province in search of work as production increased to match demand. His wife Maria was from a wealthy background and was a local school teacher, both therefore in their own ways very different from the local Cuban population, he a Spanish immigrant who through sheer hard work had made good, while she was from a completely different class background.

Angel was a strong man in physique and character, determined to better himself and his family and take advantage of the turmoil and uncertainty of the end of Spanish rule, the American takeover and the coming of the Republic. In particular he was noted for an almost violent hatred towards the Americans who he regarded as opportunist cheats and thieves who bought vast tracts of rich agricultural land at a fraction of their real value. One can imagine his dealings trading with the American United Fruit Company were fractious but Angel was reliant on them to sell his sugar, so they could ultimately extract the bargain on their terms as the monopoly trader, leaving Angel frustrated and feeling powerless.

Fidel was thus privy to his father's constant complaints about the *Yanqui* interlopers who were ripping him off. It's not hard to imagine the family culture of resentment towards American exploitation and domination. So an early impression was of an enraged father who felt hard done by and with a notoriously fiery temper which could easily be turned on his family out of frustration fuelled by the anger of economic impotence. It is not hard to detect in later life Fidel treading in this respect in his

father's footsteps, obviously influenced by some of his most passionately held attitudes and beliefs.

Fidel's mother Lina was 28 years younger than his father Angel, who by now had separated from Maria Reyes. Lina worked in his house as a cook, having found work as an internal economic migrant from the tobacco producing province of Pinar del Rio, drawn to the increasingly prosperous East. But she and Angel were suited - both refusing to socialise with the other wealthy landowners and maintaining their frugal lifestyle. Lina was often found in the kitchen pitching in with the Afro-Cuban maids, chatting easily with them, and running the household directly but not arrogantly. It is said she would insist on the whole family sitting down to evening supper, announcing the time by firing a shotgun out of the kitchen door!

The date of Fidel's birth suggests he was conceived around November. The birthday of us all is significant and celebrated universally, but I am also intrigued about the circumstances and context of his conception. Why? Because we know that there can be special circumstances around the conception of children - for example many births occur in September in Western countries where nine months earlier Christmas is a season of holiday, relaxation and celebration, emphasised by some with more alcohol than usual.

It is also said by midwives that when a national football, baseball, ice hockey, or soccer team win a prestigious competition, then invariably there is a spike in the usual pattern of births nine months later. It is also the case that some births are not planned, some are yearned for, and determined to some extent by family planning,

contraception or a woman's sensitivity to her reproductive cycle. There are circumstances when another mouth to feed is dreaded, or in areas of high infant mortality an excess of births in order to increase the chances of some surviving to older age. And there is also the historical and cultural context to consider. Family sizes have declined over the past century in countries where economic growth, welfare provision and birth control have advanced. But in the early part of the 20th century, with few exceptions large families were not unusual.

So what was happening in the Castro household around November? The weather at that time of year is the start of the dry season and the end of the wet, hurricane season and it would be a time when the annual *zafra* or sugar cane harvest had been gathered. A good season meant more income, security and could prompt Angel to invest in more land. It would be natural for him to feel relief, satisfaction and a sense of power if the crop was good and sold highly. On the other hand a poor harvest might augur a sense of anxiety, failure, foreboding or depression. In either state of mind Lina would naturally have wanted to comfort him emotionally and physically, or join in the celebratory mood with the potential consequences nine months later. What other events can provide us with a sense of this couple and how they were experiencing life in Cuba in the early 1920's and at the time of Fidel's birth?

On an International scale these were the inter-war years; for the Americans they were the 'roaring twenties' with organised crime involved in bootleg alcohol during prohibition, the start of Mafia dynasties lasting to the present day, with Cuba a favourite getaway location. Havana was the arrival destination as a relatively modern

city, with civic amenities and institutions and notoriously decadent hotels and bars, where prostitution and gambling was rife. But for Angel and Lina these were far distant in both geographical and cultural terms. Oriente province was their location from which they rarely moved, busying themselves with a growing family and growing the business in rough, agricultural terrain.

Catholicism was a big factor in Fidel's family, first in his father, Angel's first marriage to Maria Reyes who was reportedly a firm Catholic and again in Fidel's mother's life. Fidel's mother Lina Ruz Gonzalez was apparently a very strict, sombre Catholic, but there is evidence that she was also influenced by *santeria*, a specific Afro-Cuban devotion to the saints who would be prayed to every day to fulfil her wishes. In Oriente province it was common-place for Afro-Cuban religions and cults to flourish with the slaves who brought with them their own spirituality, cults and voodoo ceremonies. Attempts by the Catholic church to suppress these heretical beliefs were managed creatively by the locals. They would often take over Christian saints and attach them to their own gods or *orishas* as exemplified by *Chango* who became Saint Barbara.

To Fidel then he was well aware of the mysticism linked with *santeria* in the local community and among his Haitian and African friends from whom he heard stories about spirits and ghosts. He acknowledges later in life his superstitions about the number 26 - double the number of his birth date 13th August, his alleged birth in 1926; he was 26 when he began revolutionary activity, and the attack on the Moncada barracks was on 26 July, giving rise to the 26th July movement. So the image of the Communist ideologue, driven by scientific socialist philosophy is

confounded by a man who is quite happy to talk openly about superstitions and his lucky number 26.

Lina must also have been troubled about the illegitimate status of her children, by the fact that Angel did not marry her until Fidel was fourteen and his father at retirement age. How did this affect her relationship with Angel and in turn how did this affect her relationship with the rest of the family? Did she feel ashamed that her children were somehow less than Angel's first two who were born in wedlock? Did Angel make her feel that she was somehow unworthy of marriage? It seems that Angel was not a devout Catholic nor particularly religious in any sense and it may be that after the early death of his mother and of his very first child, as is not unusual, any religious faith was crushed by the anguish and pain of these premature bereavements.

Observing this as a youngster Fidel probably felt sympathy for his mother and harboured more resentment towards his father for treating her in this way and making Fidel the object of derision among his peers as an illegitimate child, and the harsh disapproval of the Catholic church. Few of the rich families who sent their children to the best schools and colleges in Havana would have been unmarried, thus reinforcing Fidel's sense of difference later in his childhood. We can conclude therefore that his father was not overtly religious and did not marry Fidel's mother until 1940, which is not to say that he may have harboured very private religious convictions. Why then marry in 1940?

The most compelling reason seems to be the question of inheritance and Angel's thoughts of retirement, and perhaps legal advice about the potential confusion of his eldest children's legal priority to claims on his estate following his death and the predicament this would place his other children in, and consequent financial vulnerability. In general Angel distrusted bureaucrats and officials and had little time to attend to accounts, bookkeeping or administration. But his own awareness of mortality would have concentrated his mind on the potential mess he would leave behind after his death. As we shall see later, specifically in relation to Fidel there was also an instrumental reason for the marriage.

The diagram of his family tree above shows something of the background, ancestry and family connections into which Fidel was born. Note his position as a middle child. This is traditionally seen as a difficult position to be in because there are always older siblings and younger siblings with developmental needs that can distract parents from a child who seems to be in-between all the others. Neither old enough to be left alone to be more independent, nor young enough to be looked after in the same way as the younger ones. There is evidence that middle children gain a sense of loneliness early in their psychological development. Their needs are experienced as less important, and they can be useful to busy parents to look after the younger children, yet are seen as a nuisance, not mature enough to fit in with the older siblings who can reject them.

Six years before Fidel was born the Cuban economy crashed as the First World War ended and sugar prices collapsed, devastating Cuba with its mono-agricultural base. What little Cuban-owned commerce and industry existed was taken over by

predatory American corporations so that by the time Fidel was born 75 per cent of the sugar industry passed into American hands.⁵ Recurrent political instability, and the feeling that Cuba's destiny had been wrested from its people's hands by American big business and corrupt local politicians, caused a cultural shockwave.

The people felt powerless and impotent to influence the direction Cuba was taking. It was also very confusing because eventually increasing prosperity meant improvements in road transport, schools and access to health care. This only added to the sense of frustration experienced by many Cubans made to feel grateful for improvements yet resentful of the price this cost them in terms of self-determination. The older people who had lived under Spanish colonialism were perhaps more sanguine than those born in the early years of the republic after the Spanish defeat in 1898. This new generation were lost in the sense of any national identity or capacity to influence events.

But a consciousness of some sort was developing, partly as literacy rates improved, enabling young people to comprehend their own history and conclude the need for the creation of a self-consciousness, an awareness that would bind Cubans together as a nation and transcend the legacy of dependency and fatalism. This transitional generation was fascinated by the concept of 'culture' because cultural criticism was considered a necessary precursor for engaging in future political activity.⁶

Culture in the anthropological sense has come to mean the way of life followed by a people. This concept developed as the history of Western expansionism and

⁵ Veliz, C.(ed) (1967)

⁶ Ichaso, F. (1952).

colonialism encountered manifestations of difference around the World. These encounters prompted a reaction at several levels of consciousness. Politically there was a need by the West to justify the appropriation of native land and resources, economically the imperial explorers required raw materials to service industrialisation, but psychologically there was a fear of difference that had to be rationalised.

Hence the early attempts at racial categorisation and efforts to construct order from diversity and chaos in human lifeways. Haitians and *Mulattos* (dual heritage offspring from Spanish whites and black slaves) would be considered the lowest of the low in a Cuba already divided by the growing bourgeoisie consisting of Spanish immigrants and American colonists in a higher class status than first-generation Cubans.

Thus the bearers of a culture are understood to be a collectivity of individuals such as a society or community. However, the cultural patterns that shape the behaviour of children and young people in groups should not be confused with the structure of institutions or social systems, even though there is a link between them. Young Cubans were in that sense a blank sheet, they didn't have a pre-history of how things were under Spanish colonial rule or American-backed stooge politicians. Culture in one sense can be thought about as the organisation of experience shared by members of a community including their standards for perceiving, predicting, judging and acting. This means that culture includes all socially standardized ways of seeing and thinking about the world; of understanding relationships among people, things

and events; of establishing preferences and purposes; of carrying out actions and pursuing goals.⁷

The problem for a country like Cuba was that it had no culture other than as a place of occupation by overwhelming military and commercial force, with slave labour imported to service the need of a colonial power. As the history of the past three centuries demonstrates, the impact of Western imperialism has reproduced its economic and political structures worldwide, resulting in the development of industrial societies in former agrarian countries that have disrupted cultural patterns with negative psychological effects.

Immigrants and refugees from former colonial countries or asylum seekers are nowadays part and parcel of how the world is evolving. They arrive in an alien destination where cultural norms are, in many cases, extremely different. Parents cope worst, but children and young people are doubly confused as they are brought up in a household where traditional values, religious affiliations, festivals and community relationships are very different from those they experience as they enter the host country's education, health and social system. For some young people this can be psychologically overwhelming and lead to mental health difficulties or anti-social behaviour. So as a new generation of children were born into a different Cuba, free from hundreds of years of Spanish imperial rule, their experiences and search for identity was forged in an era of change, confusion and possibility.

⁷ Walker, S. (2005).

The term 'race' is now generally accepted to be redundant as a meaningful scientific category, however, the idea of race as a general descriptor of assumed national, cultural or physical difference persists in society today and would have reached its apotheosis in the early 20th century. Earlier scientific work in the 19th century had attempted to conceptualise race and classify people in different countries according to their supposedly inherent superiority or inferiority.

Skin colour, language and religion are still interpreted as signifiers of more profound differences in abilities and outlook, as well as being used to justify discriminatory practices or outright racism. For some people today the notion of white superiority is barely below the surface, and is protected under the American Constitution for white supremacists such as the Ku Klux Klan and openly Nazi organisations. This was especially the case in the context of colonial history, slavery and immigration where in Cuba in the 1920's it would have been open, widespread and cruel. Desperation for work and competition for jobs would have created conflict, fights and perhaps a semi-official pecking order with *Mulattos* and Blacks at the bottom.

Similar comparisons were made on the basis of gender and class which permitted the tolerance of inequalities based on innate biological differences. A eugenics movement was inspired by these findings whose aim was to improve the genetic stock of the human race by eradicating people with less than perfect genetic dispositions. In the latter part of the 20th century advances in genetic research were able to dismiss these earlier notions of racial hierarchies, classifications and the supposed link between biology and behaviour.⁸ So Fidel was born into a society

⁸ Walker, S. (2005).

where power and control had been exercised by non-indigenous people who brought an alien culture and exploited Cuba's natural resources to export wealth abroad.

Where Cubans felt powerless, victimised and oppressed and where gangsterism, corruption, and lawlessness reigned.

Chapter 2: Infancy

There is virtually no evidence from Fidel's early years about the circumstances of his earliest, formative experiences. Was he breastfed by his own mother or was there a wet nurse? These primitive early bonding experiences are critical for a new born infant. Perhaps as he grew he might have been cared for by a servant in his father's increasingly wealthy household? His earliest emotional attachments therefore may not have been to his parents. As her third child, Fidel may not yet have been as physically and emotionally draining to Lina. It is reasonable to assume she cared for him in those earliest primal moments between mother and baby. We know that his older brother Ramon was about two when Fidel arrived and then when his younger brother Raul was born, Fidel was five years old.

So Ramon would have been toddling around and the subject of much attention, first steps, speaking words and if the *cliché* is meaningful in the Castro family's context, he and his parents were experiencing the 'terrible two's'. This is recognised as a challenging, exhausting time for families when a two-year-old begins to test various physical and emotional boundaries, to find out where the limits of parental tolerance are and to try to please them, as in the case of learning to use a potty for his bowel movements.

Physically two-year-olds can be fast and parents can quickly lose sight of them; they can sleep poorly, resulting in exhaustion to parents with a full day's work ahead of them, and they begin to learn defiance. Lina would like any new mother have learned much by the time Fidel was born, so in many ways she was better prepared to handle a baby and now another son. Fidel would have caught the after effects of the experiences and knowledge gained by his mother and father - good or bad. Every infant is different so it is difficult to generalise, but patterns of parenting are learned even if they do not really apply to a new, different child.

So Fidel's older siblings, Angelita and Ramon, could have been easy infants to rear, producing relaxed parents who felt at ease with looking after infants, and had established routines, techniques and methods that worked for them. On the other hand they both, in their own way, could have been handfuls, awkward, difficult, demanding and requiring a lot of physical and emotional effort. Either way a template would have been established by the time Fidel was born, with expectations and fixed strategies for coping with whatever Fidel threw at them.

But Fidel was not a duplicate in as much as any new infant is, he was born with unique characteristics, predispositions, genetic variables, physical attributes and his own temperament. So Angel's and Lina's style of parenting might not have synchronised with what Fidel needed or how he should be managed and cared for in a way that was best for him. Not forgetting of course that Angel had already had five children with his first wife Maria and therefore brought to this new union knowledge of parenthood. He might have had fixed ideas about child rearing, feeding, bedtimes and family routines which he expected Lina to carry out. This might have caused

tension between them as she would naturally draw from her own family experiences and he from his.

Most new parents arrive with knowledge, opinions and methods which don't always synthesise very well. But in a position of a very much younger partner and former servant Lina is likely to have demurred to Angel's way of doing things. From the little we know this would have meant a household where strict rules governed behaviour, punishment was meted out and physical methods of control used, rather than persuasion or encouragement. She was highly dependent on Angel, both economically and emotionally, probably quite vulnerable and with the age difference he could easily use his various life experiences to thwart any attempt by Lina, however small, to influence the household routine.

Fidel does recall a very early memory from when he was about three years old when an Aunt - his mother's sister Antonia - died in childhood, a young woman. He recalls the palpable sense of death and loss that hung around the house for days, the crying of the women and the strong feelings of sadness. Lina's loss of a beloved sister would have affected her at a deep emotional level which because of their bond, Fidel would also have felt powerfully, perhaps thinking that he had done something wrong to cause his mother such anguish.

What this means is that Fidel may have been to a certain extent neglected; babies want to feed and sleep mainly so developmentally he was no bother- at least for a while. But Ramon would have experienced Fidel's birth as a major catastrophe. Until then he was the only male, his father's pride and joy, his son and heir - a powerful

position in the family pecking order even with an older sister, Angelita. Female emancipation was a relatively new idea in developed countries where literacy and education among women was relatively advanced although only for the wealthy, and rights of succession were still masculine.

So to Ramon, Fidel was a threat, especially when we note that there was a five year gap before the next child was born when Ramon was seven and Fidel five. He had five years to compete with Fidel for attention from his parents and vice versa. It is inevitable that Fidel would have felt second best, probably third best as his older sister would have been closest to her mother who had a prized daughter with whom she could develop that most unique of relationships between mother and daughter that has endured through eons of time and culture. No matter how clever, how strong or who had the most physical likeness to which parent, Angelita was her mother's princess, and Ramon his father's prince.

Sibling rivalry is a generally accepted phenomenon, but Ramon knew he was different to Angelita, so her being older was of no concern. He would have become increasingly aware that he was the number one son, but a new son posed a threat. At a primitive and unconscious level he would have hated Fidel and wanted him to die. Ramon is likely to have pushed Fidel around, bullied him, avoided him and shown him little real affection. It would have been worse for him because he would have been expected to look after his younger brother, keep an eye on him as Fidel began to walk and talk, demand amusement or want to play. Ramon's resentment towards Fidel would grow in parallel to Fidel's developmental growth.

Early secure attachments are critical for an infant. Attachment theory is linked to Bowlby who considered a descriptive, explanatory framework for helping understand interpersonal relationships between children and parents/carers⁹. Bowlby focused on the period when a child is between six months and two years of age and suggested that the developing infant becomes attached to adults who demonstrate sensitivity and responsiveness in social interactions. Towards the age of two years the child begins to use attachment with these familiar people as a secure base to explore from and return to. Other child development experts¹⁰, progressed this concept and introduced the notion of attachment patterns or styles.

Attachment theory has been subject to criticism because of its early link with the concept of maternal deprivation where critics of the theory suggest it places all the responsibility for caregiving on the mother and thus the fault of any problematic behaviour from the child later. Depending on your point of view this makes Fidel's mother Lina a heroine of the revolution or the person guilty of creating the man who would impose a dictatorship on a troubled Caribbean island. The following are some of the important assumptions underpinning attachment theory.

Human attachment behaviours and emotions are adaptive and derived from human evolution that evolved selection for social behaviours that enabled survival. There is a critical period - when the child is between six months and two years of age, where personality and psychological foundations are laid. Attachment to familiar people is easily developed in children even under stressful conditions, leading to robustness. Infants have no innate preference for their parents over strangers. They will attach to

⁹ Bowlby, J. (1979)

¹⁰ Ainsworth, B. *et al*, (1978)

anyone who is kind and friendly but they learn preferences for some adults who provide continuity over time.

Experience enables the child to construct a system of internal beliefs, expectations and emotions about themselves and others. This helps them handle new social situations with peers and teachers for example. So from what we know about his later childhood it is reasonable to conclude about this aspect of his development that Fidel enjoyed safe, secure and sustained love and comfort from his mother. He was the youngest for 5 years and could benefit from what his parents learned from the older two *ninos*. The foundations of his later legendary robustness, adaptiveness, survival instinct and sheer determination seem to have their origins in his infancy.

To go further, we can conclude also that in these critical early years when the infant brain is growing rapidly and neural pathways are being generated, Fidel's actual brain and its psychological architecture were being constructed, providing him with inner tools to use in his future. This is the plus side of being a middle child - there are a multitude of stimulations from older siblings, a busy household where there was never a dull day. And he had a rich, verdant, expansive playground to explore around the plantation where he could observe workers, machinery, horses and enjoy a simple yet exotic environment. All of this stimulation would have allowed his brain to develop biologically to its maximum potential.

Parents and main carers of secure infants tend to be good at reading their children's signals. There is synchrony between them involving mutual reciprocal interactions. Clear patterns begin to be perceived by infants that help them to make sense of their

own and their parent/carer's behaviour. A parent/carer who is available emotionally, responsive and comforting can generate a soothing, comfortable environment.

This helps infants locate and support their own understanding of their own and others' emotions and behaviour. It also enables the child to access, acknowledge and integrate their thoughts and the full range of their feelings. This allows the child to acknowledge the power of feelings to affect behaviour as well as how their behaviour can affect other people's. While many of his later speeches and writings were influenced by his Marxist-Leninist ideological self-education, it is not unreasonable to suggest that unconsciously a part of Fidel's psyche was aware of what his actions, choice of words, passionate oratory and personal example were capable of, and consciously designed to influence others. He had after all, been party to how his father's rants and ferocious temper could have a significant effect on those around him.

Chapter3: Childhood

Fidel has referenced early as a young boy his admiration for military generals and quotes Alexander the Great, Hannibal and Napoleon as historical figures he identified with. It's not untypical for boys to do this and nowadays we recognise the sexist and prejudiced way history has negated female and black achievements, written them out of important world events or diminished their contribution to momentous events. So it's not unusual for a child brought up in a local rural school with limited resources, reflecting the way history was taught, to be told stories of

these heroic, masculine iconic figures, achieving the almost impossible, and being great leaders of armies of men.

The local primary school In *Marcane* was attended by twenty local children mostly from labourers' families who worked on Angel's estate. Fidel attended from the age of four in 1931 along with his older sister Angela and older brother Ramon. As the youngest in a mixed age class Fidel was placed at the front, and the evidence tells us he did not take to formal education easily and would quarrel with the female teacher Miss Felieu sent from Santiago, the regional capital. He would often run home after shouting at her, defiantly missing lessons. Various orthodox interpretations of these early signs of defiance in the face of authority are used to justify his later political attitudes.

However, another explanation, rooted more in the context of his personality development, is that Fidel would have felt acutely embarrassed constantly as the older children were naturally more advanced in their understanding of the basic maths, and reading and writing skills. In any tests he would come bottom not because he wasn't able or clever, but simply because in a class with an older average age range, he could not possibly keep up. In those days the concept of streaming on the basis of ability or extra support for children with special needs did not exist. There was one small school for all ages of children with one teacher, using one very restricted curriculum.

The history books would probably contain little of women's achievements and nothing of black people's contributions. This is not to say that the modern world is

noted for equal opportunity between men and women, or that women are equal in terms of the distribution of wealth and power - far from it even in so-called developed countries. However, not all boys growing up in the 1930's aspired to be warriors. Fidel's closest *companero* Che, for example, was motivated early on in his life to be a doctor and tend the sick, and poor, only later transferring his energy to armed revolutionary struggle.

So what does this tell us about Fidel's early development and the forming of his character, values and moral perspective - key issues in childhood psychology. Obviously he would have been influenced by the education curriculum, written by men about men with the conventional focus on striking, notorious, almost extravagant figures who were exceptional or did truly exceptional things. His father Angel was not interested in education but because of his mother Lina's intuition, perhaps she in her own way influenced the decision to send him at the age of six to be fostered with his teacher's older sister Belen.

But she was poor even with a teacher's salary and Fidel often felt hungry, complaining openly. She eventually married Luis Hibbert, the Haitian Consul in Santiago who brought with him the customs and manners of France and its imperial influence. Fidel was physically abused at this time in this home and at school. Nowadays the evidence overwhelmingly supports the conclusion that constant physical abuse or punishment leaves psychological scars that remain after the bruises and wealds have vanished.

The teacher had persuaded Fidel's parents that he was actually clever and would benefit from personal tuition in her sister's house. But to Fidel this rejection (as he would have felt it) by his mother of all people would have been deeply wounding. It's a familiar reaction for modern-day children who, sent to boarding school away from familiar things, friends and comforting surroundings, can suffer psychologically.

Parents mistakenly emphasise the positives and the quality of private education the privileges are emphasised to the point where a child is placed in an impossible position of turning down or rebelling against parents who might use emotional or financial blackmail to thwart any objections. Thus began a new period in Fidel's life where he suddenly found himself uprooted from the primitive, rural environment where his early, basic education was gained locally, and where he so enjoyed the freedom to roam around in the hills, to experiencing the busy, noisy, urban regional capital.

Fidel's experience at this time is crucial in understanding him and the formation of his personality. In the context of the Castro household, by now his younger brother Raul had just been born and a year later a younger sister, Juanita was born. So Fidel would have felt a very strong sense of being displaced by new siblings and rejected by his parents in the most painful manner of being sent away from home to live with a teacher with whom he had previously clashed. No wonder he is cited as saying he disliked intensely being away from home, particularly as the teacher's house was overcrowded, food was meagre and he was physically disciplined.¹¹

¹¹ Coltman, L. (2003).

A poignant memory he later recalls is having to spend Christmas away from home with the foster-family in Santiago de Cuba. This is most unusual for Cubans and maybe gives a clue to marital troubles back home, or perhaps his parents felt they could not cope with his temperament which was not improving. This deteriorating spiral of cause and effect is familiar to psychotherapists where destructive patterns in relationships can develop. However, he recalls spending three consecutive Epiphanies away from home, where as is customary Santa Claus was not popular so children wrote letters to the three wise men asking for presents:

I wrote when I was five and asked them for everything- cars, trains, movie cameras, the works on January 5th. But these were disappointments. The first present was a small cardboard trumpet, my second present a year later was a trumpet that was half aluminium, and the third year's present was a small trumpet made completely out of aluminium with three keys.¹²

After tuition in the teacher's home, he eventually attended a specifically Catholic school *Colegio La Salle* to complete his primary education, which apart from being an elite place of education for the wealthy, no doubt in his teachers' and parents' minds it was also a place where the tempestuous Fidel could come under a harsh, disciplined regime for which the teachers were renowned. Or perhaps there was some genuine insight into the potential the young Fidel possessed?

Fidel's change of schools from a rural simple setting to the posh, wealthy private *Colegio La Salle* would have been a tremendous shock. However, such sudden and

¹² Skierka, V. (2004).

stark change in the development of an adolescent comes with a psychological price - especially for one who was not from the upper-class circles of *Santiago de Cuba*. He, a farmer's son from the wild, unsophisticated, undeveloped province of Oriente would have stuck out from the mannered, genteel urbanised sons of government bureaucrats, accountants and lawyers. Fidel did not speak 'posh', he displayed no artificiality or airs and graces, and he had learned some crude language and phrases from his friends.

Fidel would have been bewildered, feeling out of place, unfamiliar with the local boys and their customs, habits and social characteristics. He would have experienced profound feelings of loss and bereavement and one can imagine him secretly crying at night alone, trying to adjust to the abrupt and extreme changes in his circumstances. The best evidence to support this is from his younger brother Raul who followed his older brothers to *Colegio La Salle*, who is quoted¹³ as saying that Fidel succeeded in everything.

He excelled in sport, in particular baseball and athletics, but also at his studies. More revealing is Raul's description of Fidel fighting with others every day, with an explosive nature that got him into fights with boys older, bigger and stronger where he inevitably lost. But he never gave up, developing a determination that was to embed itself in his personality long into the future. This is behaviour consistent with a troubled personality, one who is suffering internal pain that the only way of dealing with his sense of loss, and perhaps rejection by his parents, was to translate those

¹³ Thomas, H. (1971).

fragile feelings of vulnerability into angry, violent, rage. It is also the reaction of a young person who was taunted, mocked for his rough country manners and bullied physically and emotionally.

Another often forgotten influence on Fidel's political development occurred in a most benign and subtle way which on reflection is highly instructive. Fidel at the age of nine would return to Biran and the family home during holidays, and because he was one of the few local boys or adults who could read and write, a disabled man named Manuel Garcia brought him newspapers to read to him. The Spanish press was vividly reporting the Spanish Civil War and the struggle between the Nationalist fascists and the Republican leftists. Garcia was a supporter of the Republicans, although there were also Nationalist sympathisers in Biran. Every twist and turn of the Republican struggle was conveyed by Fidel to Garcia who displayed a powerful sense of passion for the Republican cause and distaste for Franco. When Garcia felt despondent Fidel would report later of an advance by the Republicans to cheer him up.

In order to meet the conditions for the enrolment of Ramon and Fidel at the *Colegio La Salle* which was run by the Catholic *Marianist* brothers they were required to be baptised and confirmed. It seems Angel pulled some strings with an old friend from Galicia who was now the Bishop of *Camaguey* to enable this to happen, and it helped that by then his first wife Maria had not been seen or heard of and had possibly died. Fidel was thus baptised and confirmed at the insistence of the school registrar, for a senior school where only the wealthy were able to send their children to an elite and privileged establishment.

So Fidel attended *La Salle* school along with Ramon and later Raul. But he still lived with the teacher who he despised, and as relationships between her and her new husband deteriorated into arguments and open hostility, Fidel engineered the fulfilment of her threats to send him to *La Salle* as a boarder away from her home. However, the pattern of Fidel's behaviour towards authority figures was forming and soon he was in trouble, arguing and assaulting teachers and other students. Ramon also acquired a reputation as a troublemaker and would often fight with other boys.

At this time Fidel was being taught near to a small high school where the students and teachers were openly protesting against the Machado dictatorship - a particularly cruel and sadistic President who ruled from 1925 to 1933. This led to frequent incursions by Machado's troops into the high school where Fidel is said to have witnessed the brutal military repression of free expression and protest, with students and teachers physically beaten with rifle butts. This sight, which would have been frightening for any child to witness, might have triggered a memory Fidel later recalled from his first school days, where he was beaten with a ruler, made to squat holding weights on outstretched arms and kneeling on hard corn.¹⁴

After three tempestuous years at *La Salle* and a poor report from the staff, Angel refused to send the boys back after the school holidays. Ramon didn't much care as he was more interested in working on the sugar cane estate and had a local Haitian girlfriend. But Fidel's reaction was volcanic, blaming the teachers and claiming to be the victim of injustice. Angel was forced to agree, or at least allowed himself to

¹⁴ Castro, F. (Hurley trans). (2008).

agree, to Fidel's demands to be sent back to school in Santiago de Cuba after he threatened to burn down the family home.

This is obviously a pivotal moment in Fidel's personality development. This is quite a provocative and dangerous strategy to achieve his aims, but it at once vividly captures his relationship with his father whereby he had to meet Angel's resistance to spending money on an education which he never required to better himself, by upping the stakes to such a degree of audacity, that clearly Angel feared that Fidel would carry out his threat to burn the house down. Or perhaps he gave in out of feelings of guilt at having sent him away in the first place, and was aware this had been very unsettling for Fidel. Angel might just also have caught a glimpse of himself in Fidel's personality which he secretly admired. Here is another example of the titanic struggle between father and son which both illustrated and bred further enmity between them.

However, fire-setting is today classified as a strong indicator of a disturbed young mind and in a very visceral sense captures the fiery rage inside a young person's mind and an impossible internal conflict being struggled with. He never carried out the threat but the psychological consequences of even imagining the threat of such action would have troubled Fidel, as instinct told him it was wrong to defy your parent and particularly in the *machismo* culture of Cuba, which privileged the paternal head of the family. His superficial feelings of elation at getting his own way would have soon transformed into guilt and the fear of further rejection and retribution already existing inside him.

Other interpretations of Fidel's relationship with Angel observe that he indulged Fidel, perceived as a spoilt child who easily got his way and who soon cottoned on to the fact that his father was wealthy so could not claim lack of money to deny Fidel's demands for favours. Perhaps also there was a secret bond between them - each recognising the striking similarities in their personalities; for Fidel some admiration for his Father's perseverance and early hardships, recognising the hard work which provided the family's rare comforts. And Angel perhaps saw a mirror image of himself as a youngster, a fiery character full of verve and with a powerful will which could not be broken.

When he did return to Santiago this time he stayed at the home of a wealthy store owner, a man called *Mazorra* who was not averse to physically punishing Fidel and whose wife Donna Carmen demanded Fidel achieve the highest grades. With the pressure on, Fidel managed to acquire another report book, claiming (falsely) that he had lost the original. But he kept both - the real one with mediocre grades and the one he forged with Excellent grades, which Carmen was delighted to sign. Fidel was learning how to manipulate situations and people to his advantage and to gain praise and respect which he must have craved.

Fidel later moved on to senior school at the *Colegio Dolores* run by the Jesuits who received him into their prestigious school attended by the sons of wealthy businessmen and politicians, all of whom were white despite the high proportion of Black and *Mestizos* children (those born to Haitian and indigenous Cubans) in Oriente province. At first Fidel attended as a day boy but yet more troublesome relationships with the new guardians where he stayed, and a three month stay in hospital following an appendectomy with subsequent infection, provided the gap

which allowed him to persuade his father to pay more for him to become a full-time boarder at *Colegio Dolores*.

To a developing child three months in hospital is an eternity, particularly in the context of a serious illness and subsequent infection, which in those days was life-threatening. Sweating and delirium would have frightened him provoking dreams and nightmares. He would have endured much isolation, generating feelings of abandonment and despair, while surrounded by medical staff and family visitors, all of whom would have conveyed a sense of anxiety. His developing mind would have thought the worst, probably even contemplated his own death which he may have witnessed in other children.

These frightening thoughts would have been very difficult to contain, and he was denied the distraction of proper schooling, so had too much time for reflection and exaggerating his worst fears and terrors. The loneliness, and separation from normal day to day life would inevitably form a strong sense of self-reliance and a capacity for coping with solitude, even finding some comfort in his own private thoughts and imagination. But he would of necessity have to harden his external persona, to wear a mask of coping, and appear to be managing psychologically. This outer shield is recognisable universally and almost always hides an inner, frightened, vulnerable character.

Taking stock of his recent past we can now see a picture emerging of a young person who had experienced a disjointed development in terms of physical location, education and socialisation. Lots of change is not the pathway to a settled,

harmonious and integrated personality where Fidel could have been comfortable in his own skin, relaxed and at ease with himself. Instead he would have been constantly on his guard, defensive and socially awkward, especially with girls. Fidel would develop a thick skin - to an outsider a hard, angry teenager with a temper and easily provoked into fist fights. Yet underneath was a little boy, fragile, vulnerable, frightened of change and feeling that he had little control over his life.

The Jesuits boast of the powerful influence they claim to exert over children in their care. Their capacity for indoctrination is legendary. But perhaps they were the making of him as well, even with a harsh regime, discipline and physical punishment for which they were notorious. His education would have been the best available at the time and he seems to have responded to the discipline, rules, strictness as do many children with disrupted, unsettled backgrounds. Recent revelations of the past sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests, must also beg the question of whether he was sexually abused?

The three early examples of heroic historical figures he admired accomplished many things as military strategists, politicians, and leaders of armies and nations. They achieved almost impossible feats, and Fidel began to include references to Mussolini and Hitler as important figures who could influence millions of people, noted especially for their oratorical skills. So we have early role models consisting of towering, heroic male figures who make their mark on history, fight audacious battles against the odds, are feared by their enemies, live harsh, militaristic lives and are to some extent worshipped by the people they lead. If he was aware of the

mesmerising qualities of these new political figures, then an opportunity to compensate for his sense of worthlessness was there personified.

What motivates a child to identify with these characteristics, seek to emulate them and in later life quote them as his early inspiration? They certainly weren't recognisably socialists as we would understand the term today so I think the key to this aspect of Fidel's development was that they were single minded, respected, even feared. This suggests a child who felt the opposite of these qualities, a child who was not a particularly noticeable member of his growing family. The third child of seven in his father's second relationship (or the eighth in a group of twelve in chronological order) he found himself in the middle of a large sibling group where it's not unusual for a child in this position to feel relatively ignored, even invisible as the needs of older children and new infants required extra attention.

Jung's concept of archetypes¹⁵ fits in with this early evidence of how Fidel was negotiating the formation of his personality. The prime archetype is the *persona* - the classical Greek word given to the masks worn by the actors of antiquity to signify the role they played. Jung theorised that everyone wears a mask in order to fit the role they choose or have been allocated by society and circumstance, in order that they may fit in and conform to expectations. The opposite to the *persona* is the shadow, what Jung described as the inferior being within ourselves, the one who desires the opposite, those things we deny ourselves and even dislike.

¹⁵ Jung, C.J. 1953).

It is the primitive, uncontrolled, animal part of the personality which is repressed into unconsciousness. At least most of the time. Sometimes it is revealed in rage or an overwhelming emotion. It can also be personified in the figure of someone we don't like, because we are trying to reject and dislike a quality of our own which we find in the other person. This begins to echo the relationship between Fidel and his father - what Fidel hated in himself he turned onto his father initially and as we shall see later onto individuals and nations.

Middle child syndrome has long been recognised in the psychological literature where it is said in reliable studies that such children report feeling ignored by parents, having to do a lot for themselves, growing up quickly, and feeling they were treated differently than the others. So Fidel would have harboured grudges and jealousy towards some of his siblings, and resentment towards his parents. This resentment, even anger, would have been quickly followed by strong feelings of guilt, unhappiness and a troubled mind. One way of coping with these troubling feelings would be to focus intently on his studies and throw himself into physical exertion, leaving no time for morbid ruminations or self-pity.

Early child development includes a natural desire by a male child to replace his father in his mother's affections; at the unconscious level this raises violent feelings even murderous thoughts towards the father. Freud¹⁶ coined this phase in human growth the Oedipus Complex, referencing the classical Greek myth of a baby who is rejected and left to die on a mountain by his royal parents. A sage had predicted that one day Oedipus would return to the royal family, kill his father and marry his mother

¹⁶ Freud, S. (1924).

- which is exactly what happened (although Oedipus had been raised by peasants and was unaware of his relationship to the royal family). Classical Greek scholars have a different take on the play Oedipus Rex (the original source of Freud's psycho-sexual theory) in particular Dodds¹⁷ who understands the author Sophocles's intention thus:

"Certainly the Oedipus Rex is a play about the blindness of a man and the desperate insecurity of the human condition: in a sense every man must grope in the dark as Oedipus gropes, not knowing who he is or what he has to suffer; we all live in a world of appearance which hides us from who-knows-what dreadful reality. But surely the Oedipus Rex is also a play about the human greatness. Oedipus is great, not in virtue of a great worldly position - for his worldly position is an illusion which will vanish like a dream - but in virtue of his inner strength: strength to pursue the truth at whatever personal cost, and strength to accept and endure it when found."

We must of course add to this Fidel's awareness that his father had a previous marriage which produced two half-siblings - Pedro and Lidia. When did he find out? What was the effect upon him? How was the situation explained? Was there contact between the two groups of children? We know that at some time Fidel met his step-brother and sister because of reference to their relationship. In the case of Pedro virtually no regular or significant contact was reported, in the case of Lidia there was rapport but of a limited nature.¹⁸

¹⁷ Dodds, E. R. (1966).

¹⁸ Szulc, T. (1986).

Fidel has recalled his early school days in Oriente province when he noticed that most of his peers were barefoot - too poor to afford shoes. This is the adult Fidel speaking, at the time most children in early childhood are unaware of such differences and evidence of social status. They would know who was fun, who could tell jokes, who ran faster, who was upset sometimes. This is Fidel telling us as an adult that he later became uncomfortable with the huge difference in wealth between him and his neighbours and the labourers on his father's estate. His propensity to feelings of immense guilt, magnified by the Jesuit experience, cannot be underestimated as a powerful motivating factor, consciously or unconsciously driving his ambitions to create greater equality.

In Oriente province the prevailing climate in Fidel's childhood was one of stark simplicity where there were few medical or welfare facilities, where the American influence and power was most dominant via their monopoly of sugar production. The memory of slavery was not prevalent among those close to him and the prevailing customs, festivals and traditions that formed his earliest impressions were more Spanish than Cuban.

From the available evidence it seems as if in his middle childhood Fidel, influenced by his father's distancing and brutal personality, together with a mother who had the distractions of older and younger children, learned to cope and adapt to his family circumstances by developing an avoidant-dismissing attachment pattern.¹⁹ Avoidant children are less likely to seek support from their carers/teachers. Their attachment style becomes more detached, cool - even socially acceptable. They have learned

¹⁹ Ainsworth, B. *et al*, (1978).

that their carers feel more comfortable with behaviour that is low in emotional content. Achievements are valued more highly than emotional closeness.

Avoidant personalities tend to modify their own behaviour as a way of defending against social rejection. Some children may become compulsively compliant with high anxiety levels in getting tasks 'right'. If parents or teachers display unhappiness or disapproval the child feels responsible, unsettled, ashamed or guilty. As the child increases in age it can raise the level of demands and persistence. A parent may request the child to be looked after by others. This only further increases the child's levels of distress, anger and despair. Alternatively, where severe physical neglect occurs a child may lapse into passivity, helplessness and depression. Fidel himself acknowledges his forthright and quarrelsome nature and disruptive behaviour at home and in all his schools.

So Angel's later decision to send him to Santiago, which some have interpreted as the privilege of a wealthy person to access the best education, also contains within it a feeling of rejection and a way of dealing with Fidel's angry behaviour. However, this was later on in Fidel's childhood. In the meantime he had to put up with his older brother Ramon's irritation at the little brother who would naturally want to follow him everywhere, imitate him, play with his toys and look up to him for help and guidance when they were outside playing.

Whether he got much help and support when he encountered other children and inevitable disagreements broke out we don't know, but it would not be unusual for Ramon, in seeking his own revenge on a newcomer to the family system, to ignore

Fidel's pleas for help when he was ganged up on, or even join in the bullying himself at times. By the time Fidel was five his brother Raul was born. This presented a dilemma for him. At his stage of development Fidel would by now be forming certain moral concepts and the capacity to empathise with a child who was upset or angry or being victimised in some way by their parents, friends, or siblings. Perhaps Fidel decided he would not want Raul to suffer in the way he had by the behaviour of an older brother.

As the fourth child, the available emotional support and comfort from his parents was rationed even further, the house was busier with the various demands of an eight year old sister; and two older brothers aged seven and five. Fidel might have been allocated the job of looking after Raul, either as a way of keeping his temper distracted, or following cultural expectations. Fidel might have treated Raul differently and found satisfaction, pleasure and a sense of pride in being the older brother. This would have been reciprocated by Raul who would have adored his big brother Fidel who dealt with any bullies, and behind whom he could be shielded from children his own age.

Fidel thus became Raul's protector; this was appreciated and a close bond would develop between them. Extrapolating this through future events it is therefore no real surprise that Raul joined with Fidel and the small group of revolutionaries, remained loyal and close throughout many dangerous events, was part of the first post-revolutionary government, effectively second in command - and was Fidel's chosen successor when illness prevented Fidel shouldering the responsibilities of President in 2009.

But the *Marianistas* brothers could only cope with so much of the tempestuous Fidel, and they arranged for him to be moved to the *Colegio Dolores* where he completed primary education, in Santiago where the Jesuits were renowned for their particular brand of strict Catholic teaching and unquestioning religious orthodoxy.

It is noteworthy that during this phase of his childhood Fidel would at some level have been aware - especially at school in Santiago de Cuba, that in 1933 when he was seven the terrorism of action groups and popular opposition to the prevailing Machado regime was increasing. As ever divisions opened up between those who favoured the Americans to intervene and remove Machado, and those who demanded non-intervention, preferring self-determination and major social changes.

Amid the disagreements and confusion with increasing civil unrest, a group of military officers led by Fulgencio Batista staged a *coup d'etat* and seized power. The American Ambassador Sumner Welles formed an alliance with Batista, shrewdly recognising his influence from behind the scenes and his ability to control the Army (a key ingredient in American choice of backing which persists to this day). They installed President Ramon Grau San Martin on September 10th, 1933, who was seen as a figure of reconciliation and with the capacity to unite disparate forces through subtle diplomacy. Typically, the Americans sent thirty warships to surround Cuba mistakenly assuming that the takeover was communist inspired, but all this did was fuel resentment and must have left another powerful image in the growing mind of Fidel of the *Yanqui* predilection to interfere with Cuban internal matters.

Chapter 4: Adolescence

Fidel would have been very conscious that there was a big age difference between his father and mother and perhaps especially affected by the fact that they did not marry until he was an adolescent fourteen-year-old. It is well established that the Castro household was not a cradle of affection and open display of love. Angel was a reticent character, a self-made rich immigrant man, hardworking and violent. He was not prone to talking intimately with his children. The violence is unspecified in the evidence available but it is reasonable to assume that while there were exceptions to the *machismo* of Latin-American culture, given what we know Angel probably beat his wife and his children, and corporal punishment would not have been unusual within the local social culture.

Adolescents witnessing domestic violence are known to feel enormous psychological distress, sometimes even attempting to intervene - at the cost of a thrashing to themselves. If they don't intervene they feel guilty at having allowed their mother to be physically harmed. Living in a household where one strong, violent man ruled without question would have invoked feelings of fear, insecurity and the anticipation of a beating for the slightest misdemeanour. Fidel's early Oedipal complex would have been unconsciously re-energised by his conscious pity for his mother and translated into the behaviour which is featured in books describing his early years.

Indeed perhaps the most vivid of these attempts to displace his father was when he organised a strike of the estate labourers for higher wages and better terms of employment against his father at the age of thirteen. The orthodox explanation for

this rebellious and potentially dangerous act against his father is cited as evidence of his emerging sense of justice and political personality. In retrospect this was an enactment of the Oedipal myth of the son 'killing' his father and the shadow revealing itself in anger towards his father whom he, at some level, recognised within himself.

However, a further complication is added to this narrative when we learn that his mother apparently changed, becoming fond of money and possessions, having risen from being a kitchen maid in the Castro household to being the *matriarch*, naturally appreciating and enjoying the trappings available to a man of some wealth. In 1957 while Fidel was fighting a guerrilla war in the hills of Cuba, she allegedly visited Mexico to demand that his supporters living there arrange for the family sugar cane fields to be spared arson attacks by guerrilla forces because she was losing money.

Adolescence is a difficult time for every child who is facing rapid physical and emotional changes, and developing moral ideas of right and wrong. Technically he had spent fourteen years as an illegitimate child. In his early childhood this would not have been an issue for him, but as he grew into adolescence, where moral development and existential questions arise, he would have become aware through his own knowledge, or worse, this would have been used against him as a means of attacking him by other children from married parents, leading to feelings of humiliation, shame and perhaps worthlessness.

His self-identity as an outsider, of not fitting in somehow is a great difficulty for the growing older child who desperately wants to blend in and be the same. There is no doubt that other adolescents would have been aware of his very different

background - a father who was a rough, unmannered farmer, who did not circulate in the wealthy Cuban social circles, his much younger mother a mere cook who gave birth to illegitimate children. All of this was rich fodder to use to humiliate and bully Fidel, provoking feelings of shame and guilt. Schoolchildren rarely miss an opportunity to create a scapegoat, someone who can always provide a focus for their venom, born of insecurities and a wolf-pack mentality.

Fidel recollects being called a Jew by older boys which was probably not so much evidence of overt anti-semitism, rather a form of address which was a popular term of abuse used by adults. Yet there is also ironically strong evidence that the Castro name and lineage in Galicia, Spain has Jewish origins. In the same way the term gay was used to insult young people among themselves in England in the early 21st Century, without the children involved fully understanding the homophobic connotations.

It was a popular and short-lived fashion with no more sinister meaning than in preceding years when children called each other Dufus or Minger. Having said that, the recent historical events of the time would easily have filtered through to a section of Cuban society who were not unsympathetic to blaming Jews for causing economic meltdown preceding the outbreak of world war and the Fascist credo of anti-semitism, racial purity and Jewish inferiority.

But much worse was that when Fidel did return to his home in Biran he didn't fit in there either because the other local children were poor, illiterate and worked for his father. Now instead of a mate running free and playing innocently they were old

enough to discern his privileges and status. Any friendships must have been tainted by suppressed envy and a degree of obsequiousness to the employer's son, who they dare not displease. Such an in-between existence must have been unbearable and unsettling for the adolescent Fidel, the idea that he didn't really belong anywhere and was not acceptable to any of his peers.

So the solution to combat this sense of inferiority was for Fidel to over-compensate via his athletic and scholarly achievements in which he excelled at the Jesuit boarding school *Colegio Belen* in Havana, where he started as a senior in 1942 and graduated in 1945. Fidel says that he was not a good student and often left studies late before exams, but he did well academically and in particular he gained a formidable reputation as an athlete, so much so that he was proclaimed the best high school athlete in the whole of Cuba in 1944. And his passion for baseball was spotted by American baseball team scouts to the extent that he was offered a prestigious and lucrative contract to sign for a major league team back in America - which he turned down to the astonishment of the team representatives.

Adolescents, already consumed by hormonal changes, physical development and cognitive skills, quickly learn to spot weakness or vulnerability or they create this by drawing attention to a person who is different, in size, hair colour or weight.

Adolescents crave acceptance and need to feel they blend in as part of a group. The absolute nightmare for an adolescent such as Fidel who, was already carrying a not inconsiderable amount of psychological baggage from his family experiences, was to experience a sense of rejection from his peers.

What might have also been obvious and psychologically difficult for him, as he grew older and more aware of the complexities of human relationships, was the knowledge that his mother was only ten years older than the first of Angel's children, his older step-brother Pedro. Angel was 51 years of age when he fathered Fidel, and given the life expectancy rates in those days, the medical limitations of the time meant that Fidel would have by his adolescent years a growing awareness of his father's mortality.

The strict Catholic culture within school of harsh discipline, obedience and absolute concentration on factual matters would have amplified this sense of continual anger, because the teachers would have no comprehension of the psychological and developmental needs of Fidel. Pastoral care was very likely to have been in the form of punishment for wrongdoing and prayer to the almighty for help and guidance. Neither of course worked and only served to harden Fidel's character making him defensive, thin-skinned and ready to vent his rage at the slightest chance.

He had no solace or chance to express his innermost feelings of vulnerability, fear and depression to a sympathetic teacher or peer. He thus attracted a gang of followers, either through sheer intimidation or as a protective strategy by them to ally themselves with someone who more often than not came top in the pecking order.

It is a fact that at this time Fidel wrote to the American President Franklin D. Roosevelt congratulating him on his re-election and requesting he send back a ten-dollar bill. Roosevelt was the architect of the 'New Deal' that helped lift America and the rest of the world from the economic depression, by redistributing wealth,

improving welfare provision and investing in huge infrastructure projects to energise the economy, reducing unemployment and raising living standards among the poorest. His own political description was 'left of centre', a liberal with a strong sense of social justice; perhaps the young Fidel read about this man and saw merit in what he was doing. And what do we make of the request for ten dollars?

Money is more symbolic in this case as Fidel was always assured of finance from his wealthy father. So was this a conscious or unconscious demand for the return of Cuban wealth and resources appropriated by the American dominated Cuban economy? The sub-text of the request seems to be '*as you are such a liberal and decent man why not return some of what your country has taken from mine.*'

Ironically, barely twenty years later Fidel would seize many million times more than those ten dollars (which he never received by the way) when American assets were seized in the aftermath of the 1959 revolutionary victory.

By 1939 the world was at war, Fidel was in a school and living in a city where news, current affairs and communication meant it would have been the most prominent topic of conversation. Spain, the mother country for many Cubans, was part of the Fascist axis with Germany and Italy. The Americans retained their neutrality until late in the Second World War when they could see which direction favoured their economic interests, joining the allies against the fascists. When they emerged on the winning side the Americans, along with Britain and the then Soviet Union wasted no time in carving up the post-war world into spheres of influence. America then quickly formed an anti-Communist bloc as the political map of the world began to be redesigned, threatening Capitalist hegemony.

Fidel was absorbing these events and their implications for Cuba and Latin America in general and drawing his own conclusions as he approached his youth and higher school and university education. He seems to have been particularly engaged by the works of *Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera*, founder of the *Falange Espanol*, a Nationalist party inspired by fascism. Fidel could quote Jose Antonio's speeches made as he built on his training as a lawyer and spent more energy in politics and challenging Franco's position as the leading Spanish fascist.

But perhaps what grasped Fidel's attention most was Jose Antonio's Nationalist fervour and his contempt for orthodox political institutions and the liberal illusion of democracy. He did not hesitate to justify other means for liberating the majority as this extract demonstrates: *And in closing, that if what we want must in some circumstance be attained through the use of violence, that we demur not before the prospect of violence. For who has said, when they say, "Every available means except violence," that the supreme hierarchy of moral values resides in kindness? Who has said that when our feelings are insulted, rather than react like men, we are called upon to reply amiably? Dialogue as a first step of communication is well and good. But there is no option left except fists and guns when someone offends the precepts of justice or the fatherland.*²⁰

Jose Fernando was imprisoned by the then Spanish dictatorship against whom he had clashed and conspired, including forming armed militia to fight the government. He was executed in 1936 after charges of conspiracy and fostering armed

²⁰ Diaz-Plaja, F. (1933).

insurrection were proven. Little wonder that Fidel drew inspiration from a person who never stopped, was imprisoned for his beliefs and was prepared to pay the ultimate price for what he believed in, but who also had no qualms about resorting to armed conflict to further his political aims. By now Fidel was likely to have become aware that his father Angel had arrived in Cuba the first time as part of the Spanish army who were fighting the likes of Jose Marti, the revolutionary who fought and died for Cuban independence, and on the second return to Cuba Angel effectively became subservient to the American United Fruit Company and was ultimately able to enrich himself.

Secure autonomous adolescents acknowledge the value and impact of attachment relationships. The influence of such relationships on personality development is recognised. They can tolerate imperfection in themselves, their parents and those with whom they are currently in close relationship. When describing attachment experiences they are able to provide specific, concrete examples that are coherent and reflective. They remain constructively engaged with a problem rather than attempting to avoid it or becoming angry at its apparent intractability. They feel comfortable with closeness, and enjoy good self-esteem. These characteristics do not seem to tally with what we know of Fidel's adolescent years.

In fact, what are described as avoidant-dismissing patterns can be demonstrated in Fidel's personality ranging from being socially reserved to being compulsively self-reliant. Such adolescents tend to minimise the emotional effects that relationships have on them. There is if anything a systematic avoidance of negative experiences and memories. The adolescent has a strong need to keep focused on practical

tasks. Anything or anybody who distracts them will make this adolescent feel agitated, anxious or angry. Aggressive behaviour is likely to erupt at these moments, and Fidel was well known for his troublesome behaviour. Equally, this adolescent is keen to keep to the rules and seems over-vigilant when other people appear to break them.

Thus a heightened sense of justice, right and wrong can be observed. This does fit with the evidence we have of Fidel's transition from childhood to adolescence. The influence of his Catholic teachers, especially in his adolescent years, would reinforce these foundational character traits derived from his early childhood experiences. The teachers' emphasis on strictness, compliance, hard work and a rigid hierarchy, although testing his inner impulses would have in some ways suited his temperament. So he could survive as a bit of a loner, apply himself to his studies and excel at sporting achievements.

In adolescence the more extreme coercive behavioural strategies become increasingly disruptive, attention-seeking and difficult to control. Life is lived at a heightened pitch of dissatisfaction and anger. Antisocial behaviour, conflict, control problems and poor concentration are observed. Feelings of guilt and personal responsibility are largely absent. A middle child who would have sometimes felt invisible to his parents, combined with rejection and bullying from other school children, was a recipe for an adolescent to make sure he came to people's attention.

Parents and peers can be subjected to threats and intimidation to make them respond and provide. There is a struggle taking place between anger with, and

seeking approval from, parents. These adolescents exhibit a need to be close, but to be dependent on someone who may abandon them; arouses strong feelings of anxiety. They feel a strong sense of powerlessness and describe parents/carers and practitioners as either wonderful and loving or hateful and cruel - there are no shades of grey. And Fidel could hardly be described by now as a 'grey' figure, he was standing out and becoming noticed, even notorious.

Chapter 5: Youth

Fidel had spent eleven years in Catholic boarding schools, seven of them in Jesuit institutions in those most formative years of a child's personality, so it is little wonder that a Cuban government official is reported to have said in the early 1980's that Fidel was a Jesuit first, a Revolutionary second and a Marxist third. As Fidel approached the transition between youth and young adult we still find evidence of his tempestuous personality. It is striking to note that his anger towards his father had not abated and in one example²¹ he is quoted as saying to his father's face in a violent argument: '*you are one of those who abuse the powers they wrench from the people with deceitful promises*'. It is noteworthy that his elder half-brother Pedro had ceased contact with their father Angel at about the time that Fidel was sent to the Jesuit *Collegio Belen* in 1942 and in the immediate years afterwards Pedro broadcast a denunciation of his father as a thief on radio from Santiago.

Pedro also became an *Autentico* politician in Oriente province, so there is strong evidence of some influence on Fidel by Pedro, or to put it another way, someone

²¹ Thomas, H. (1971).

who Fidel could identify with and who could serve as a role-model. Pedro was thirteen years older and someone who in Fidel's subconscious could assume the role of a father-figure more like the one he would have preferred, even yearned for. Fidel was also feeling more resentful towards his father as his advanced education taught him of the heroic struggle for Cuba's liberation by Jose Marti, the rebel his father was enlisted to fight against by the Spanish military.

Fidel began to absorb the history of Cuba as an island of slavery, occupation and exploitation by the Spanish *colonia* and then the Americans. In later speeches and writings Fidel would more and more come to revere Marti who is often cited as the most important figure in the start of Cuba's march to independence. It is he rather than Hannibal or Napoleon who figures prominently in Cuban history education nowadays and his name and image are nowadays found everywhere in Cuba.

Children and young people face considerable challenges in maintaining their cultural integrity and emotional well-being in the face of institutional racism, economic inactivity or enforced migration patterns. These experiences would have been familiar to Fidel where he saw around him discrimination against *mulattos* and Haitian economic migrants facing obstacles to their attempts to gain employment, find decent housing, and education. At the time he schooled in Santiago he never went to fiestas or carnival or visited the poor black neighbourhoods known as *barrios*. The American backed elite and mafia establishment lived privileged lives and as in all colonial countries indigenous people would suffer humiliation and impoverished economic and social circumstances.

But in later recollections²² Fidel as the man is clear that one of his early memories from Catholic teaching was that the Jesuit teachers said that the offspring of one of Noah's sons, Ham, would be born black as a punishment for mocking his father. In the Genesis chapter of the Bible, Ham's first son Canaan would become the direct ancestor of the people of Egypt, Ethiopia and Arabia who are dark-skinned. So Fidel would in his early years have associated black people with a punishment from God.

Fulgencio Batista seized power in Cuba in 1940 and was President for four years until 1944. Ironically, although his administration was no less corrupt than others he did usher in health and social changes for the majority of people, one of which was to relax the political constitution which enabled the legalization of the Cuban Communist Party, actually admitting two of its members into his Cabinet and extending recognition to the Soviet Union.

So Fidel's enrolment at *Colegio Belen* came at a time of political flux, apprehension about the outcome of the Second World War, and frenzied political activity. Add to this his own internal turmoil at yet another dislocating move, it is not hard to understand how these external events had consequences that could easily lead to significant emotional and psychological problems expressed, for example, by high rates of school exclusion, anti-social behaviour and aggression. Fidel was quite familiar with these strategies of survival and protest. Modern research illustrates how the cultural assets of minority children regularly go unrecognised, denied or devalued within the wider ruling establishment, as a kind of double discrimination.²³

²² Betto, F. (1987)

²³ Newman, T. (2000).

Later in his young adulthood knowledge of the segregation practised in the USA, the visceral discrimination, segregation and racist abuse of the 1950's and 1960's would have affected Fidel, and reminded him of what it felt like to be perceived as an outsider, shunned and not really belonging. His natural empathy with oppressed people and particularly black African Americans was already a part of his internal self image that was beginning to solidify as he approached the cusp of adulthood.

It is argued that children do not have one essential identity, but switch identities in different situations and, subject to a diversity of cultural influences, can produce new identities. This is the case with Black and Asian children and young people influenced by the cultural norms of their white peers in developed Western countries, whilst feeling pressured to maintain religious or cultural practices from family elders. Thus for Fidel he could easily internally switch identity in order to further empathise with the dispossessed and impoverished victims of American imperialism, while still wearing quality clothing and enjoying a privileged university education, mixing with the other teenagers and young heirs to stolen wealth and the oppressive political establishment.

An examination of the experience of childhood around the world today shows how greatly varied it is, and how it has changed throughout history. Contemporary children in some countries are working from the ages of eight and independent from the age of fourteen, whereas in other countries some do not leave home or begin work until they are twenty-one.²⁴ The developmental norms employed nowadays show how adults construct childhood and therefore how they measure children's

²⁴ Bilton, T. (2000).

progress and detect psychological issues or personality characteristics. They are however set down as solid absolutes and are based on notions of adults' fears about risk, lack of confidence in children, and rooted in adults' own childhood experiences.

These modern theories have had positive effects but they have also restricted the field of vision required to fully understand children and adolescents. In Fidel's childhood and in the context of colonial rule, even cruder and much more limited capacity was available to understand the emotional and psychological needs of children. The options available to Fidel's teachers and carers would have been restricted to physical punishment, admonishment and probably public humiliation in an educational context 'to set an example to the others'.

Returning to his parents in Biran with a brilliant leaving certificate from the Jesuits at Belen in 1945, his father rewarded him by purchasing the eighteen-year-old Fidel a brand new Ford Cabrio. Perhaps a bitter-sweet present to try to make up for the absence from his family, a present that made him stand out in such a rural poor province reminding him of his privileged position, and of all cars an *American Ford*, symbolic of the production-line, monotony of workers whose labour enriched a commercial dynasty. This probably fed the local cynicism and envy towards the children of rich families such as Fidel, expressed as *hijos de papi* (sons of daddy) who got whatever they demanded.

The central developmental processes during youth, apart from obvious physical changes, are the critical process of development of self, the search for identity, the development of relationships and the changing nature of relationships. And the

evidence here is intriguing. Fidel attended the University of Havana in 1945, still in his teens and with a reputation as a troublesome character which he quickly proved in fights and arguments with others. His sense of desire to triumph over any odds and at all costs was now embedded firmly in his fiery personality. He was renowned for having difficulty forming friendships with girls.

This can relate to his earliest psycho-sexual feelings as an infant, or the after-effects of Jesuit teachings about celibacy, sex, carnality, illicit sexual relations, and his well-documented abhorrence of homosexuality. His loathing for the *maricones* (transsexuals) of Havana's Velado district is documented.²⁵ He was more comfortable with macho, masculine, men and when he became sexually active with women these seemed to be brief encounters - these are all the traits of a person who craves approval but fears rejection.

Religion and Spirituality are dimensions of emotional well-being for many people and young people are especially prone to the influence of its teaching while already harbouring a sense of something outside of themselves of importance. *Meaning* - the significance of life and deriving purpose in existence; *Transcendence* - experience of a dimension beyond the self that opens the mind; *Value* - standards and beliefs such as value truth, beauty, worth, often discussed as ultimate values; *Connecting* - relationships with others, God or a higher power and the environment; *Becoming* - a life that requires reflection and experience including a sense of who one is and how one knows.

²⁵ Quirk, R. (1993).

These spiritual needs can be understood in psychological terms as well. The conventional literature can be used to explain these ideas in many ways using evidence from orthodox science and theories that have stood the test of time and served professionals well. Yet there is a lingering doubt perhaps that on deeper reflection the concepts of faith, purpose and the search for meaning are inadequately quantified in the language of scientific certainty that asserts they are just thought processes or embroidered survival needs.

It is suggested that religion and spirituality can be equated together or seen as quite distinct concepts. Spirituality, it is argued, refers to one's basic nature and the process of finding meaning and purpose whereas religion involves a set of organized, institutionalized beliefs and social functions as a means of spiritual expression and experience.²⁶ There is also the view that religions typically act to increase anxiety rather than reduce it, or they are an instrument of oppression and control over women and the poor.

The anxiety stems from particularly orthodox religions such as Catholicism, in which Fidel was being steeped. The idea of sin, guilt and punishment loom large in the Catholic lexicon and if taught in an uncompromising way such as the Jesuit style, Fidel would not be unusual in developing anxieties about the consequences of his behaviour, or deviation from the 'true path of Catholicism'. Any small misdemeanours would probably have been magnified in his mind out of proportion to the transgression from any rules or regulations. This would have heightened his sense of right and wrong to the level of internal psychological persecution.

²⁶ Carroll, M. (1998).

While modern-day critics of Catholic teachings regarding female fertility, abortion rights and invisibility in the Church hierarchy, argue for modernisation, it is worth noting that the work of Socialist priests in Latin American dictatorships were inspired by their Liberation Theology to fight for the emancipation of oppressed people. Indeed there are many examples of Catholic priests organising rebel cadres and taking up arms to fight colonial or American-backed dictatorships.

Jung, for example, believed that people needed to recognise the relevance of spirituality and religious practice to the needs and workings of the human psyche. He suggested that a psychological problem was in essence the suffering of a soul which had not discovered its meaning - that the cause of such suffering was spiritual stagnation or psychic sterility.

*“Religions are psychotherapeutic systems in the truest sense of the word, and on the grandest scale. They express the whole range of the psychic problem in mighty images; they are the avowal and recognition of the soul, and at the same time the revelation of the soul’s nature”.*²⁷

Jung's concept of archetypes suggests that unconscious components of the psyche are revealed through dreams and Fantasies at critical points of internal conflict. This transcendent process mediates between oppositional archetypes in order to produce a reconciling symbol. This experience enables children and young people to achieve gradual individuation and the revelation of the self. Some of the central experiences

²⁷ Jung, C.G. (1978).

of individuation such as the hero's journey, the metaphor of death and rebirth or the image of the divine child are paradigms of religious experience.

They migrate into myths, fairy stories and legends and are therefore accessible for understanding with troubled children and adolescents. There is no doubt that Fidel was a troubled adolescent and as an emerging young man in his youth he would have been able to draw from this well of knowledge, faith and belief that had been instilled in him all his life. It probably kept him from becoming mentally ill and provided an inner platform from which he could embark on his quest for justice with a powerful sense of purpose.

The evidence from modern research does suggest that spirituality has a protective function against developing psychological problems. Children and young people who possess such a sense of spirituality are considered more resilient in the face of traumas including abuse and less prone to mental health and adjustment problems in adolescence.²⁸

Fidel chose to study Law at the University of Havana in 1945 on the advice of those who noted his propensity for argument, persuasion and full participation in debates. There was much to debate in 1945 as the aftermath of World War Two led to a world divided ideologically between Capitalism and Communism, stimulating a febrile political atmosphere in university. Two of his earliest university friends belonged to the Communist Youth and Fidel made his first overtly political speech in 1946,

²⁸ Hildreth, G. (1993).

criticising the dictatorship of Machado. In late years Fidel would be quoted reflecting on those university days thus:

The political atmosphere in the University of Havana had been contaminated by the national disorder. My impetuosity, my desire to excel fed and inspired the character of my struggle. My straightforward character made me enter rapidly into conflict, with the milieu, the venal authorities, the corruption and the gang-ridden system which dominated the University atmosphere. The pressure groups of corrupt politicians made the gangs threaten me and led to a prohibition on my attendance. This was a great moment of decision. The conflict struck my personality like a cyclone. Alone, on the beach, facing the sea, I examined the situation. Personal danger, physical risk made my return to the University an act of unheard-of temerity. But not to return would be to give in to threats, to give in before bullies, to abandon my own ideals and aspirations. I decided to go back and I went back, with arms in my hand.²⁹

Fidel is recorded as being aligned with two main political groupings at university - the *Movimiento Socialista Revolucionario* (MSR) led by Rolando Masferrer and the *Union Insurreccional Revolucionaria* (UIR) led by Emilio Trio. This was his revolutionary apprenticeship being refined, where he learned much about the nature of Cuban institutions and how steeped in corruption and violence they were.

The two groups quarrelled and jostled for prominence on campus, while outside the corrupt President Ramon Grau San Martin, who seized power from Batista in 1944 when Fidel was eighteen ensured they were brought under his patronage where they gained a reputation as common guns for hire or *pistoleros*.

²⁹ Castro, F. (1998).

Two of the key historical and political events dominating students at Havana University and influencing their beliefs, ideas and perceptions of Cuba's past and future were the independence struggles of 1868 to 1898; and the revolutionary movement of 1927 to 1933 that had led to the overthrow of Machado. But Fidel recognised that these were incomplete shifts in fundamental power - simply replacing varieties of colonial rulers and corrupt dictators. Fidel vowed to succeed in creating a truly independent Cuba, a proper self-determining country led by those on the side of the many rather than the few.

In 1948 the Presidency passed to Prío, who with the influential army officer Batista, gave unparalleled freedom to the American Mafia who accelerated the degeneration of Cuba into what became widely renowned as America's brothel, where casinos, gambling and gangsterism flourished and the proceeds of organised crime were stashed away from mainland American tax authorities. So Fidel joined in with the university political culture which echoed the adult outside Cuban society of gangsterism. It is alleged that he allied himself with Manolo Castro (no relation), an ambitious and powerful President of the University Student Federation who engineered the shooting of a rival in which Fidel was associated.

In early 1947 Fidel became increasingly politically active openly criticising President Grau and Batista for their failed leadership and corruption; his political profile was growing and he was seen prominently as a leading mourner at the funeral of the much-respected Communist labour leader Jesus Menendez, who had been shot dead by an army captain in Manzanillo.

Fidel was sent with a group from the MSR when he was twenty-one years old to assist in the insurrection in the Dominican Republic, then under the ruthless American-backed dictator Rafael Trujillo. The Cuban insurgents failed and most were arrested but Fidel managed to escape by swimming across the shark-infested waters of the Bay of Nipe to make his way to his father's estate. Back at university in Havana Fidel swapped allegiance to the UIR and was nominated to the Presidency of the University Special Committee on legal affairs. By 1948 Manolo Castro was Secretary of State for Sports and a close friend of Education minister Aleman. He was assassinated and Fidel among several others was implicated in the murder.

Whether directly involved in the shooting or indirectly associated as part of the conspiracy to undertake the task has never been fully established. However, the pattern of Fidel's journey to later overthrow the Batista dictatorship in 1959 was being hardened. A little while later in 1948 Fidel joined a group of students from different parts of Latin America to stage a protest at the Pan American Conference in Bogota, the capital of Colombia, where America sought to tighten its grip on those countries dependent on and economically and politically controlled by America. The student delegations harassed those attending the conference, with demonstrations, marches and leafleting delegates, attacking American colonialism.

During the frantic atmosphere and growing tensions the Colombian President, Jorge Eliecer Gaitan was shot and killed at a demonstration, enraging the poor majority of Colombians who supported his attempts at liberal social reform. This triggered a wave of riots, violence, killings and bombings in Bogota. The Americans blamed Communist agitators but there is no conclusive evidence they were particularly

successful in organising what was in effect an expression of mass outrage against the murder of a much-admired President.

A police inquiry named Fidel as a Communist agent sent to deliberately stir up discontent. Fidel managed to reach the Cuban embassy under Argentinian diplomatic protection and was flown back to Havana on a cargo plane. Fidel must have absorbed much from these two events, where he saw with his own eyes and participated actively in an insurrection with an intoxicating mix of violent struggle, the actions of massed crowds and the inspiration of Gaitan's oratory and mesmerising personality.

Fidel was by now immersing himself in student politics and actively supporting the fight for independence in Puerto Rico and demonstrating solidarity with other student movements in Argentina, Venezuela, Colombia and Panama, which were demanding an end to American colonial rule via financed puppet dictatorships. Eduardo Chibas left the *Autentico*, the Authentic Revolutionary Party of Cuba, and in 1947 when Fidel was twenty-one, founded the *Partido Popular Cubano* (PPC- Cuban People's Party) quickly becoming better known as the *Ortodoxo* party. Fidel joined immediately finding in Chibas yet another hero who he followed with great enthusiasm, regarding him as a man of the future destined to pave the way to Cuba's independence.

The *Ortodoxo* party soon established itself as the first serious opposition to the government, fully adopting the principles and values of the martyr Jose Marti:

'Nationalism, anti-imperialism, socialism, economic independence, political liberty

*and social justice.*³⁰ What is striking about this period in Fidel's life is his ability to identify with and follow charismatic male figures who had the capacity and personality to grasp the attention of the masses. Thus his political personality was being melded with his underlying psychological personality, creating a formidably strong union.

Fidel was by now by no means an avowed Marxist, he distanced himself from the UIR and had little contact with his Communist friends. He later tells of the influence of Marxist-Leninist ideas and reading a part of *Das Kapital*, but implies that these were not forming part of any coherent political ideology, rather he found them interesting, arousing his curiosity. What seems to have been of much more significance, and resonates with the evidence of his childhood experiences and youthful enthusiasm for violent struggle, was to identify with those fellow students and historical Cuban heroes such as Marti, and satiate his appetite for revolution and insurrection. In 1961 he candidly admitted: *'What made us revolutionaries? First the vocation of being a revolutionary, and perhaps revolution for revolution's sake, not any particular revolution.'*³¹

Certainly his political life up to adulthood was full of uncertainty, inconsistency to the point of being almost chaotic. His understanding of economics was elementary and he is not recorded as saying anything about the African slave trade, which was pivotal in any comprehensive understanding of Cuba's development. He was first and foremost a Nationalist, with a capacity to lead and inspire others, and driven by the hypnotic attraction of power. In his later youth there is no doubt that he risked

³⁰ Skierka, V. (2004).

³¹ Thomas, H. (1971).

death, took enormous risks with his own life, and had enemies who were known to be plotting to murder him.

He participated in political activity and direct action that put him in harm's way. So it is reasonable to suppose that at an unconscious level Fidel had a death wish, what Freud would term the death instinct *Thanatos* the Greek word for death. Freud's theories can be used to explain Fidel's tendency to carry on regardless, in an almost suicidal way against the odds, pitting himself against superior, bigger or better armed opponents. No setback, whether imprisonment or exile in Mexico, prevented him from repeating in an almost compulsive way his quest, his goals.

What Freud termed repetition-compulsion was the theory that an initial unpleasant or frightening unexpected experience can be so shocking to the psyche that retrospective anxiety is created as a way of reliving the painful memory again and again until sufficient defence has been built up in order to mitigate the inner pain. Paradoxically the death instinct can serve to prolong life, as with animals that spawn new life at the point of their own demise. *Thanatos* can also be harnessed to confront external objects and threats with aggression, and the evidence for this characteristic of Fidel's is legion.

Fidel has rarely been photographed laughing, which is not to say that he never laughed or exhibited the notorious Cuban *joie de vivre*; perhaps he was a melancholic which he expressed in seriousness, almost obsessional behaviour to achieve his aims. Or he deliberately and consciously adopted the serious persona, complete with always being seen wearing military fatigues in order to project an

image of a warrior, engaged in or ready for combat, to show the Cuban people he was never at rest in protecting them and the Revolution. Whatever the real reason the effect was to create a leadership figure, an almost paternalistic father-figure on whom the people depended and had complete faith in.

Chapter 6: Echoes

In this chapter I will pick up on some significant events that happened in Fidel's adulthood which have relevance to the overall narrative arc of this book. It is necessary to stray into his adulthood in order to make the connection with his childhood which is the focus of the book. As most of us know, childhood experiences stay with us throughout life in vivid detail or submerged within the unconscious. They reveal themselves in Freudian slips of the tongue, or unexpected reactions to seemingly innocuous events. The birth of grandchildren is a classic example where comparisons and connections are instantly evoked, and the long term memory improves with age compared to younger years. Deaths of parents and other significant life events in adulthood can provide an echo of childhood. The following is a selection that have caught my attention and which may make some kind of sense to readers who witnessed or have read about Fidel's behaviour and actions at certain times in adulthood.

These may have puzzled or concerned people and appear to defy logic, reason or have been explained through a narrow political prism. Thus their inclusion is to add to the orthodox explanations and analyses, not to substitute for them or even to suggest that particular actions were motivated solely by his childhood experiences.

That is simplistic and misleading. The aim is in a way to complete the circle of investigation and enquiry started at the beginning, to shed light on certain events, add another dimension, provide food for thought and invite your curiosity.

Columbus was the first European to set foot on Cuban soil in 1492, reporting back to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain of its stunning, verdant lushness and spectacular flora and fauna which he acknowledged overwhelmed him. But he wasn't a tourist sending back the 15th Century equivalent of a postcard, his task was to conquer and acquire land and wealth for the growing Spanish empire. This poetic description of purity and natural beauty did not prevent the start of a history of colonial rule, and exploitation of the island's natural resources which would include the British in 1762 and the USA in 1899. To understand Fidel is to understand the history of Cuba, in particular his reverence for the first notable Cuban freedom fighter Jose Marti.³²

Fidel clearly idealised Marti and makes numerous references to him as the figure who most influenced and inspired him. He saw himself as Marti reincarnated, a revolutionary who moulded the different groups opposed to Spanish colonial rule into a single movement. A man who Fidel perceived as a heroic enemy of tyrants and incorruptible renewer and whose image appears everywhere in Cuba today, and more than that, there is a touch of Fidel bearing the weight of more than 500 years of oppression.

³² Thomas, H. (1971).

Marti was also unable to settle down in his relationships with women, especially during his exile from Cuba where his parents were also not of poor class; he wrote prolifically and also spent time in Mexico organising rebel forces before setting sail from Santo Domingo in 1895 with a few comrades. It's almost as if Fidel was copying the political and physical journey that Marti undertook, even down to being captured and incarcerated for the crime of revolutionary activity on the prison on Islas de Pinas by government forces.

In 1961 the first real test of Fidel's fragile and chaotic governance of Cuba took place with the Bay of Pigs invasion - a motley group of American trained and financed mercenaries and Cuban exiles who landed in secret on the Cuban shore. Fidel and the armed forces under his command defeated this attempt at a counter-revolutionary adventure and humiliated the Americans. But to place this well-known event in another context, we know that his partner Dalia was pregnant with their first child, his mother Lina was ill and would die within two years, so as well as the obvious threat to the embryonic revolution, Fidel would have had deeper, instinctual, protective instincts that would drive his determination to repel the invading force. Just as a lion defends his mates and cubs, this external threat would have energised powerful unconscious forces within him. This echoes his early reverence for his mother, dashed by her seeming rejection of him by sending him away to boarding school, and now his partner; both conjured up within him the feminine, caring side of his personality which had been brutalised out of him by his father and the Jesuits.

The death of Fidel's mother in 1963, coming seven years after his father's, must have been completely devastating for Fidel in many ways. It came at a time of

heightened anxiety and paranoia about American plans to continue to plot the overthrow of the Cuban government after the CIA's humiliation over the bungled Bay of Pigs operation, the notorious nuclear weapons crisis throughout 1962, and the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963. And to cap it all in late 1963, barely a few months into Fidel's grieving his mother's death, Cuba was hit by the worst hurricane in its' history. It was the longest, most destructive hurricane moving away and then returning for days on end, shattering an already fragile agricultural economy, destroying precious crops and killing many thousands of Cubans.

The little Jesuit educated boy, inside the 36-year-old man, must have thought that God himself was against him, using the natural elements where the most sophisticated and powerful country in the world had failed with economic, political and military weapons to destroy the nascent revolution. How did Fidel cope with and manage his grief, the most profound loss of a mother and his last living parent? His religious convictions had never deserted him, so did he attend church, meet with a priest, or keep those painful feelings locked up inside him? Was his mother a cold, introverted person, possibly resentful at her husband's brutality and insensitivity? Did she project these feelings onto her children? We know she was keenest to send them away to boarding school and how rejecting this would have felt to Fidel. So his mourning the death of his mother would have probably been very complex, confusing, even tormenting.

At a time when his fledgling revolutionary government was being tested to the very limits he must have resolved to further reinforce that thick, outer skin and resolution to show his toughness, courage and dedication to the Cuban people. There could

not possibly be room for any outward display of distress, sadness or depression as is natural for everyone. What enormous power this must have taken, his formidable inner strength overpowering any feelings of weakness or vulnerability when he was actually suffering acute psychological pain.

In 1985 the writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez wrote tellingly of his impressions of Fidel: *'One thing is certain, wherever he may be, however and with whomever, Fidel Castro is there to win. I do not think anyone in this world could be a worse loser. His attitude in the face of defeat, even in the slightest events of daily life, seems to obey a private logic: he will not even admit it, and he does not have a moment's peace until he manages to invert the terms and turn it into a victory.'*³³ This characteristic of Fidel's picked up throughout his childhood and repeated here by Marquez is revealing. A person who has this attitude of never accepting defeat could be seen as someone who learned early on the humiliation of defeat and was never reconciled to it. To lose with grace is considered a virtue but to be a 'bad loser' is not. Why did he have to overcome every obstacle, presumably not just with real political and military enemies but in all things, even among friends? One interpretation would cite this as determination, discipline and courageous behaviour or more succinctly the actions of an egotistical personality. This itself can be seen as a defence mechanism, protecting a fragile part of the personality with anger and rage. Others would cite this trait as evidence of a dictator in the making, a man who would stop at nothing to grasp and retain power and control.

³³ Marquez, G. G. (1987).

But the trends that we have more certain evidence for are there throughout his childhood - harsh, controlling and rejecting parents, physical discipline by Jesuit priests, a strong sense of injustice which in later life was transferred onto the Spanish and American stranglehold on Cuba. His aggressive, compulsive desire to win can also be seen as the behaviour of someone who grew up with a sense of powerlessness, a fragile, vulnerable personality which had to be protected by relentless fighting, conflict and struggle. Not a happy state and his contemporaries testify to his sullenness, seriousness and lack of relaxed humour, but if there was a model personality to lead Cuba to liberation, then Fidel had it.

In 1953 when Fidel was 27, in a letter to Carlos Franqui³⁴ he is quoted as writing: *'I feel my belief in sacrifice and struggle getting stronger. I despise the kind of existence that clings to the miserly trifles of comfort and self-interest. I think that a man should not live beyond the age when he begins to deteriorate, when the flame that lighted the brightest moment of life has weakened.'* This was the year of the first unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the Batista regime when he was imprisoned and had seen many of his *companeros* executed in cold blood. He had time to think in the many months of incarceration, so what did this glimpse into his soul tell us about his childhood influences? His father at the time was 78 years old and died three years later on October 21st 1956 shortly before Fidel landed in the coastal area of *Los Cayuelos* from the boat *Granma* to begin the revolutionary struggle for freedom. Fidel was thus unable to be present at his Father's death and is said to have received the news in 'stoic silence'.

³⁴ Franqui, C. (1980).

How did he spend those weeks before returning to Cuba, and even when he did, not to be able to visit his father's grave? People deal with death, loss and grief in many ways and it is especially hard to be absent from the death of a parent. But if the relationship with that parent was an unhappy one then the grieving process would have been very complex. Fidel would have been in turmoil emotionally battling his anger towards his father, both for the poor quality of their relationship but also for cheating him of the chance to have an ending to their relationship where matters could have been spoken about, perhaps resolved or at least communicated in some way, however painful and uncomfortable.

There is one way he was able to discharge these complex and confusing feelings, with reliable evidence that in that year he fathered three children with three different partners in 1956. Releasing sexual energy is one primitive, physical way of obtaining satisfaction as well as the release of tension. Perhaps it was also an unconscious desire to fulfil his ambition to replace his father in the affections of his mother. In Fidel's case the sheer number of relationships again demonstrates an insatiable desire to seek intimacy and acceptance from female figures who were representative of his Oedipal instincts, combined with an uncanny ability to eventually father exactly the same number of children as his father.

On the other hand, it is not an unusual phenomenon for soldiers before embarking on hazardous operations, in whatever era or political context, to spend as many intimate moments with their partners or spouses as possible. Consciously or unconsciously both or one of them may be ensuring that if the soldier does not return having been killed in action, then there is something of their body growing inside a

woman, a reminder of him just in case of his death. News images of soldiers returning from tours of duty in recent British and American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, if you notice, often include a proud father holding up a new baby, hugging their offspring for the very first time.

Fidel's stubbornness and capacity to achieve his aims naturally inclines a superficial comparison of him with modern socialist icons who tackled inequality and imperial power. But Lenin lived comfortably in Zurich at the beginning of the soviet revolution, and Ho Chi Minh was unable to lead troops into battle when the uprising against the colonialist French began in Vietnam. Fidel was very different - his concept of guerilla warfare and his own *guerrillero* personality means he cuts a unique figure in the wider pantheon of revolutionary figures. Fidel was a man of action and bravery but also a strategic thinker and fired more by Nationalism than Marxism.

Fidel visited supreme humiliation on America the *Yanquis* who were used to getting their own way through corruption and overwhelming military force, in thwarting the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 and by agreeing to the stationing of Soviet missiles in Cuba in 1962, almost starting World War Three. He seized over \$100 million in American assets such as hotels, businesses and banks following the 1959 victory, to help finance the new Cuban state. His Caribbean model of socialism is 'Castroism' or 'Fidelism' as Cubans prefer - a unique blend of Marxist-Leninism, Che Guevara, Jose Marti and the complexity of Fidel's religio-political credo, coupled with his distinctive personality.

Another, poignant echo from the past reveals itself when in 1992, for the very first time, Fidel visited the small farmhouse where his father was born in Galicia. This journey is well known to human and other animal species. It is called a homing instinct, or a desire to connect with the past, especially deceased parents, or ancestral locations. It speaks of a desire to understand oneself, so we can imagine Fidel at the age of sixty-four seeking something that could explain himself to himself, to answer questions he had been asking for decades, to make some sort of sense of himself. It is often forgotten that just before this 'pilgrimage' both his step-siblings Pedro and Lidia had died and we know that the death of older relatives is a reminder of one's own mortality that can stimulate someone to undertake such a long-harboured mission.

He is quoted at the time of this almost spiritual journey as reflecting on his father's character, recalling the kindness he showed his estate labourers, his father's homesickness, and of course his violent temper, reprimands, and perhaps most poignantly his father's sadness.³⁵ Fidel was no doubt quite consciously identifying with his father, revealing as much insight about himself as his understanding of Angel. This may have been a cathartic journey for Fidel and it is probably no coincidence that in the same year he removed the Atheistic absolute from the Cuban constitution culminating in the first Papal visit to Cuba by Pope John Paul II in 1998. These events as echoes from the past can be perceived as Fidel tying up loose ends, trying to resolve long-held internal conflicts, perhaps reconciling within himself as far as he was able, matters of great, yet hidden importance.

³⁵ Coltman, L. (2003).

The more privileged and comfortable strata of Western societies, as well as new urban communities in former agricultural economies, are facing the reality of desperately poor people who feel more and more marginalised and neglected. Resentment is a feature of the reaction of wealthier nations to inflows of dependent people and the realisation among refugees that they are not universally welcome.

Fidel has criticised globalisation and its vehicle *Yanquii* imperialism, arguing that its impact is to maintain unequal power relationships between the richer and poorer countries so that patterns of wealth and consumer consumption in Europe and North America can be sustained. This involves the exploitation of labour and other resources in poorer countries thereby preventing them achieving a diverse and equitable economic and social structure within which health and social welfare programmes can develop to support the many rather than favour the few.

The consequences of globalisation are being noticed in the way traditional social care systems are taking on the characteristics of business ethics and commercialism - in stark contrast to Cuba's renowned excellence in medical, social and educational development. For example, a lower infant mortality rate than every comparable country and better than some developed countries. One of the side effects of the globalisation process is the standardisation and conformity required for consumer consumption patterns in order to maximise profit. The consequence is the steady and inexorable erosion of traditional markers of indigenous cultural identity combined with the elevation of global branding. This is anathema to Fidel and the very opposite of his passion for National self-determination.

Fidel's critique of the latest phase of capitalist development echoes earlier concerns about the impact on economic growth and subsequent erosion of traditional government policies of full employment and social welfare, combined with a desire for freedom from colonial or imperial powers. The 1910 Mexican revolution, the 1917 Russian revolution and Mao Zedong's establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, demonstrated that the masses could seize power and have more control over their destiny. These ideas would filter through to influential political agitators in Cuba and be very fresh in Fidel's mind when he was a young man, learning about these momentous events.

The great depression of the 1930's when Fidel was in childhood would have had some impact; even if he could not understand the economics behind it he would have witnessed the effects socially and psychologically on his and other families. The most recent capitalist financial crisis which began with the crash of the American Lehman's Bank in 2008 - the fourth largest investment Bank - is still reverberating around the globe. As I write, a whole country - Greece, is on the verge of bankruptcy. Fidel would be the least surprised at the inevitability of this failure of a flawed, inherently unstable and contradictory economic model.

A failure to fully develop social welfare services, or to have them privatised for profit, subjected to the gyrations of speculative global financial markets, invariably corrodes the quality and the depth of services designed to reach children and families in personal and culturally appropriate ways. This book has been about one man's childhood but it also represents a vision of how early experiences can affect growing

youngsters, and where they look for inspiration and the ways and means to improve society for the majority.

This excerpt from a letter sent from prison in 1954 by Fidel offers something of his own personal awareness and an almost Quixotic determination to achieve his aims at whatever cost: *I am inspired by the grand spectacle of the great revolutions of history, because they have always signified the triumph of aims embodying the welfare and happiness of the vast majority as opposed to a tiny group of vested interests. Do you know what episode really moves me? The revolution of the black slaves in Haiti. At a time when Napoleon was imitating Caesar and France resembled Rome, the soul of Spartacus was reborn in Toussaint L'Ouverture. How little importance is given to the fact that the African slaves who rebelled set up a free republic, defeating the greatest generals Napoleon had! It's true that Haiti has not progressed very much since then, but have other Latin American republics done any better? I keep thinking about these things, because, frankly, how pleased I would be to revolutionize this country from top to bottom! I am sure that all the people could be happy - and for them I would be ready to incur the hatred and ill will of a few thousand individuals, including some of my relatives, half of my acquaintances, two thirds of my professional colleagues, and four-fifths of my former schoolmates.*³⁶

As Fidel drew from revolutionary writings and personalities it is inevitable that a new generation of young people living under inequality and colonial exploitation will draw from the example of Fidel as a beacon of what can be achieved. His actions, words and deeds will also be used to illustrate to some, how an iron-will and totalitarian

³⁶ Franqui, C. (1980).

governmental system can smother individuality, creativity and entrepreneurship. My own core summary would be a picture of a troubled youngster whose family suffered loss and bereavement before Fidel was even born and whose personal story is shrouded in loss, rejection and separation. I believe these are the foundations of his personality - a painful inner world he has protected, but could not stop being leaked out unconsciously in a variety of actions and behaviours. He clearly found strength in his Catholicism in his own quiet, secret thoughts so there is much more to his acknowledgement of the Jesuits than he references. Perhaps it is fitting then that the final words in this book should be left to those whom Fidel cites as being amongst the most significant influences on him: his final school report from the Jesuit teachers at *Collegio Belen*, Havana 1945:

Fidel Castro Ruz 1942-1945

He always distinguished himself in all subjects related to arts and letters. An excellent student and member of the congregation, he was an outstanding athlete, always courageously and proudly defending the school's colors. He won admiration and affection of all. He will study Law, and we have no doubt that he will make a brilliant name for himself. Fidel has what it takes and will make something of himself.

About the Author

Steven Walker, BA, MSc, MPhil, is a psychotherapist whose career has specialised in child development, psychology and the emotional and mental health of young people. He has worked as a social worker in some of the poorest areas of London. His grandparents and great grandparents were coal miners in the North East of England. He is an alumnus of the London School of Economics and Political Science (MSc Social Policy and Social Work).

Bibliography

Ainsworth, M., Blehar, M., Waters, E., and Wall, S. (1978) *Patterns of Attachment: a psychological study of the strange situation*. New York. Erlbaum.

Balfour, S. (1990) *Castro*. London, Longman Group.

Betto, F. (1987) *Fidel and Religion - Castro talks on revolution and religion*. New York, US. Simon & Schuster.

Bilton, T; Bonnet, K; Jones, P; Lawson, T; Skinner, D; Stanworth, M; and Webster, A. (2002) *Introductory Sociology*. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

Bonaches, R.E. & Valdes, N.P. (1970), (eds) *Revolutionary Struggle: from the selected works of Fidel Castro*. Cambridge, US. MIT Press.

Bourne, P. (1986) *Fidel: a biography of Fidel Castro*. New York, Dodd, Mead & Co.

Bowlby, J. (1979) *The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds*. London, Tavistock.

Butts, E.R. & Schwartz, J.R. (2005) *Fidel Castro*. Minneapolis, US. Lerner Publications.

Carrol, M. (1998) Social work's conceptualisation of spirituality. *Social Thought: Journal of Religion in the Social Sciences*. 18,(2) 1-14.

Castro, F. (1953) *History Will Absolve Me*. Cuba. Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, La Habana (trans 1975).

Castro, F. (1998) *My Early Years*, Melbourne, Aust. Ocean Press.

Castro, F. (2006) *Che - a memoir by Fidel Castro*. Melbourne, Aust. Ocean Press.

Castro, F. (2002) *War, Racism and Economic Justice: The Global Ravages of Capitalism*. Melbourne, Ocean Press.

Castro, F. & Hurley, A.(trans) (2008). *Fidel Castro - my life*. London, Penguin.

Coltman, L. (2003) *The Real Fidel Castro*. New Haven, US. Yale University Press.

Connolly, S. (2002) *Castro - A Beginners Guide*. Abingdon, UK. Bookpoint.

Díaz-Plaja, F. (1933): "Discurso de José Antonio Primo de Rivera exponiendo los puntos fundamentales de Falange española, pronunciado en el Teatro de la Comedia de Madrid, el día 29 de Octubre de 1933"

Dodds, E. R. (1966) *Greece and Rome*. London, Oxford University Press.

- Dubois, J. (1959) Fidel Castro - Rebel, Liberator or Dictator? New York. Bobbs-Merrill.
- Elliot, J.M. & Dymally, M.M. (1986) Fidel Castro - Nothing Can Stop the Course of History. New York, US. Pathfinder Press.
- Franqui, C. (1980) (ed) Diary of the Cuban Revolution. New York. Viking/Penguin.
- Freud, S. (1924) Collected Papers vol 4. London, Penguin.
- Hildreth, G. H; Boglin, M. L; & Mask, K. (2000) Review of Literature on Resiliency in Black Families: Implications for the 21st Century. Department of Family Studies, College of Human Environmental Sciences. Kentucky, University of Kentucky.
- Ichaso, F. (1952), 'ideas y aspiraciones de la primera generacion republicana' in: Guerra, R et al: *Historia de la Nacion Cubana*. Havana, Editorial istoria de la Nacion Cubana.
- Jung, C. G. (1953) Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, in: The Collected Works of C.G. Jung. eds: Adler, G, Fordham, M & Read, H. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Lenin, V. I.(1894) "What the 'Friends of the People Are' and How They Fight the Social Democrats", Collected Works, Vol.1.Moscow, Progress Publishers.
- Leonard, T.M. (2004) Fidel Castro - A Biography. Westport, US. Greenwood Press.
- Mandela, N. & Castro, F. (1991) How Far We Slaves Have Come! South Africa and Cuba in Today's World. New York, Pathfinder Press.
- March, A. (2002) (ed,) Che Guevara - Global Justice, Liberation and Socialism. Melbourne, Aust. Ocean Press.
- Marti, J. J. (1971) cited in: *Marti y la primera revolucion cubana. Biblioteca Fundamental del Hombre. Cuba*.
- Martin, L. (1978) The Early Fidel - Roots of Castro's Communism. New York, Lyle Stuart.
- Matthews, H.L. (1969) Castro. London, Pelican Books.
- Newman, T. (2002) Promoting Resilience: a review of effective strategies for child care services, Centre for Evidence Based Social Services, University of Exeter.
- Quirk, R.E. (1993) Fidel Castro - the full story of his rise to power, his regime, his allies and his adversaries. New York, W.W. Norton.
- Ramonet, I. (2006) My Life Fidel Castro. London, Penguin Books.
- Skierka, V. (2004) Fidel Castro: A Biography. Cambridge, UK. Polity Press.

Szulc, T. (1986) Fidel - A Critical Portrait. London, Hutchinson.

Stone, E. (1981) (ed) Women and the Cuban revolution. London, Pathfinder Press.

Taber, M. (ed,) (1983) Fidel Castro Speeches, Vol ii. Our Power Is That Of The Working People - building socialism in Cuba, New York, Pathfinder Press.

Thomas, H. (1971) Cuba - The Pursuit of Freedom. London, Picador.

Veliz, C. (1967) (ed,) The politics of conformity in Latin America. London, Oxford University Press.

Walker, S. (2005) Culturally Competent Therapy - working with children and young people. Basingstoke, UK. Palgrave Macmillan.

Williams, W.A. (1962) The United States, Cuba, and Castro - an essay on the dynamics of revolution and the dissolution of empire. New York, MR Press.

Blurb suggestion

Fidel Castro is either loved or loathed but he cannot ever be ignored and has carved himself a place in modern political history as one of the most iconic figures identified with liberation, socialism and nationalism. Or as a ruthless dictator and megalomaniac.

This book provides an insight into what made the man he became as the revolutionary leader who overthrew a corrupt dictatorship and defied 50 years of economic sanctions by America. There are plenty of books about Fidel Castro and his adult revolutionary journey, but very few have focused on his early childhood and adolescence. This is because he has declined to speak much about his early life, and given the impression this is an off-limits area.

However there is evidence and enough authentic information to enable me to piece together the remaining parts of the jigsaw and draw reasonable conclusions in order to offer you the chance to make your own mind up about the boy who became the man.