

From Middle Class to Petit Bourgeoisie: Cold War Politics and Classed Radicalization in Bogotá, 1958–1972¹

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As part of a transnational politicization of everyday life during the 1960s in Colombia, many professionals, white-collar employees, and small business owners experienced a radical political change in their lives. Although intimately connected with developmental programs such as the Alliance for Progress, they began to question their political and social identifications as middle class in an effort to redefine what they thought their role should be in a changing society. Some of these radicalized members of the middle classes recall the second half of the 1960s as the moment when they became aware of who they really were, the moment when they drastically changed what they thought, felt, and dreamt.² They began to discuss relentlessly what they now remember as one of the most important questions of their generation: they were very much part of a petit bourgeoisie *and*, in seeming contradiction, wanted to participate in revolutionary movements. Marta Jaramillo, a sociologist who first worked for the Agrarian Reform Institute in Colombia and then as a professor at the *Universidad Nacional* from the late 1960s, remembers this experience as a vital moment for her professional career. In a very long discussion, she tells me,

I had always thought I was very much part of the middle class. . . . Although I had seven siblings and I had to get a job to support them because my father died too soon, I got a really good education. My parents wanted me to be educated and I worked hard to get where

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I am right now. I really wanted to be a professional woman so I had to work and go to college at the same time. Then I realized that I was part of the *petit bourgeoisie*. Well, you know, it was the 1960s and the world was politically boiling [*en ebullición*]. I read the old guy—Marx—and I realized that I was, in fact, as *petit bourgeois* as one could get! I was *petit bourgeois* to the core. . . . Later, I joined the *Comandos Camilistas*, engaged in liberation theology, and dreamt of a revolution. . . . We kept discussing who we were because we knew all too well, but perhaps too few dared to recognize it, [that] we were *petit bourgeois*. What else would we be? We read Marx, Lenin, Mao, the Bible and so many other [books] and we discussed the so-called *petit bourgeoisie*'s “vices” and “virtues,” what we should, and should *not*, do for the revolution, everything about the *petit bourgeoisie*, our participation in the radical transformation of society. . . . It was during the boiling . . . and exciting 1960s that I became politically radicalized. I became part of the left. I then became a woman from the left. I, along with men and women like me, wanted a radical social change. At first, I was very naïve, I am not going to lie to you but then I radicalized myself [*me radicalize*]. Yes, I was *petit bourgeois* and I radicalized myself . . . this is what happened to me in the 1960s.³

These class memories raise critical questions about the political radicalization of certain historical actors during the 1960s in Bogotá. What does Jaramillo remember as middle class? Why does she remember the 1960s as a radical, if abrupt, transformation from middle class status into a *petit bourgeois* radical position? How and why did she radicalize herself? And, perhaps more importantly, what did it mean to be “*petit bourgeois* to the core” during revolutionary times?

Several scholars have identified the important role played by the middle classes in the process of political radicalization and polarization of the 1960s and 1970s in Latin America. There are historical studies that offer detailed descriptions of the participation of certain historical actors who are usually labeled as coming from a “middle class background.” Such social description is then used to conclude that whatever these social actors say or do must be inevitably connected with a middle class political agenda.⁴ Eric Zolov, for instance, argues that in order to understand the cultural politics of the Cold War, it is imperative to recognize that the New Left was “more socially diverse . . . and ideologically complex” and thus one must include in the historical analysis “the vast sectors of largely middle class youth that took no direct part in armed revolutionary activities, yet who were deeply impacted by the cultural and political trends of

their time.”⁷⁵ Other authors concur that, in the context of revolutionary politics, “most New Left activists were indeed middle class.”⁷⁶

In so doing, scholars have assigned the middle classes a crucial political role in the consolidation of several revolutionary movements, counter-cultural practices, and social mobilizations that accompanied armed rebellions in Latin America during the 1960s and 1970s.⁷ In most of these studies, however, at least two crucial questions remain unanswered: What was middle class or petit bourgeois about *that* political participation? What were the historical conditions and experiences that provoked certain middle class subjects to mobilize themselves as part of a new and left-leaning radical political project?

Although this article is very much part of these recent studies on the Cold War in Latin America and the Global Sixties, it also argues against a prevalent assumption running through these studies that posits political radicalization as a product of radicalization itself. That is to say, in a tautological and circular explanation, there is an inclination to understand a revolutionary temporality—usually the long 1960s—as generating successive forms of radicalizing events. Yet simultaneously there is an assumption that such radicalizing events ignited the radicalization and polarization of society during the 1960s.⁸ As a result, historians and social scientists alike often think of the Cold War society as already politically polarized in which the middle class was very much coming from outside of such polarization/radicalization and was thus forced to choose political sides either by forming class alliances with popular groups to support a revolutionary project or by joining forces with the oligarchies to advocate for a counterrevolutionary one.⁹ Political radicalization is thus understood as a progression through which members of the middle class experienced a process of proletarianization whereby their (middle) class interests vanished from a radical and revolutionary position. In these historical narratives, revolutionary politics *and* middle class formation is fundamentally historicized as a contradiction in terms—indeed as an oxymoron—precisely because members of the middle class participated in revolutionary politics by joining forces with peasants, working classes, and the urban poor consolidating what is usually historicized as a cross-class, coherent, unified, left radical project.¹⁰

In contrast, this article draws on the Colombian case to put class and gender subjectivities at the center of the paradoxical experiences of political radicalization during the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹¹ As part of a larger research endeavor about the politics of radicalization, I aim to historicize how and why certain middle-class actors re-located themselves as part of a left radical political project they usually referred to, consciously *and* unconsciously, as petit bourgeois.¹² By tracing the trained lives of some professionals who labored for development programs under the umbrella of the Alliance for Progress, I con-

tend that becoming politically radical did not mean the erasure of middle-class interests but rather the remaking of a classed and gendered project whereby new interests, motivations, dispositions, practices, desires, and passions developed *within* a new left revolutionary movement. I historicize how, as suggested by Jaramillo, they transformed themselves from middle class status into a radical petit bourgeois position.

The Alliance for Progress, the National Front and the Idea of the Middle Class

Although it was a clear response to the Cuban Revolution of 1959, the Alliance for Progress intensified, multiplied, and expanded already existing programs of economic and political modernization that were crafted from at least the second half of 1940s across the Americas. And far from being only a U.S. invention, it was a truly transnational project of governmentality.¹³ Global policy makers, Colombian state welfare program representatives, private elite-sponsored program spokespersons, politicians, professors from elite universities, and representatives of the Catholic Church across the Americas critically participated in such a program. They put into policy different forms of knowledge—from political science to anthropology to history to economics—in order to activate a political rationality that was usually oriented toward several interrelated projects of economic development, social welfare, and proper political preparation so that the so-called “underdeveloped world” could profitably and democratically participate in their own rule.

Moreover, as a product of a constant transnational discussion on how to exercise democratic rule in a context of political radicalization, decolonization, economic insecurity, and real and imagined concerns for the spread of communism, the Alliance and its expansive programs of development envisioned at least three mutually inclusive visions of democracy in Colombia. First, as more Colombians gained access to secondary and higher education, participants in these developmental programs sought to link a vision of democracy with the formation of a professional middle class that could exercise what was considered an objective, neutral, and, above all, legitimate form of state rule.¹⁴ Indeed, these programs of development connected an idea of political stability and social harmony among classes—conceived as natural requirements for democracy—with the constitution of a professional middle class. Second, policy makers across the Americas venerated the notion of entrepreneurship and the consolidation of a small-business class as the paragon of economic independence and democratic freedom. Finally, given the structural and transnational expansion of the service

economy during the late 1950s and early 1960s in the Americas, these scholars, policymakers, and political leaders valued the middle class white-collar worker as the expression of a social democracy. Public and private white-collar employees working in urban offices would stand in stark contrast to factory workers and agricultural laborers. They would consequently carry the potential to replace—and “overcome”—the struggle between capital and labor, conceived as the main cause of backwardness and political chaos in the Americas.¹⁵

Conscripts of Democracy

These visions of democracy were by no means empty rhetoric meant to mystify or obscure the realpolitik of U.S imperial politics and the National Front policies of exclusion during the 1960s.¹⁶ These political projects of development did not merely envision a middle class as an anti-political force in an already radicalized and politicized society.¹⁷ The developmental programs, and the visions of democracy they promoted, were every bit as powerful as the better-known programs of U.S military imperialism. Although I am not able to fully develop this argument in this article, I argue that, rather than weakening democracy in the region, developmental programs such as the Alliance for Progress sought to legitimize a particular *classed* definition of democracy. By allocating social power, economic resources, and political capital neither to the elites nor to the popular groups, these developmental programs quintessentially linked the sovereign right to rule in democracies with—indeed, hierarchized democracy as a possession of—a middle class.¹⁸

It is in this context that Colombia, the second highest foreign-aid recipient in Latin America after Brazil during the 1960s, received \$761.9 million dollars in U.S economic aid between 1962 and 1969.¹⁹ By 1973 that amount reached \$1.396 million dollars. Those economic resources translated into an unprecedented expansion of educational programs (from elementary to higher education), agrarian reform initiatives, urban and rural housing projects, community development programs, and unparalleled growth of local and national states promoted by different policies by the National Front. Preliminary research shows that 90 per cent of the money Colombia received between 1962 and 1963 was channeled as economic aid. The other 10 per cent was used as military assistance. Elementary education expanded 100 per cent between 1938 and 1964. In the same period, private education growth reflected a 500 per cent increase.²⁰

It is at the core of these new developmental programs that professional middle classes were conscripted as representatives of democracy. Appropriating modernization theory, policy makers, university professors, and politi-

cians envisioned a professional middle class who would transform a two-class society—conceived as the main cause of the spread of communism and the consolidation of populism, as well as the origins of political/social unrest across the Americas—into a three-class modern and hierarchical society.²¹ Harvard historian and White-House adviser Arthur Schlesinger Jr., captured this vision in a famous 1961 memorandum to President Kennedy. Schlesinger argued that, above all, the Alliance should engineer

a middle class revolution where the processes of economic modernization [would] carry the new urban middle class into power, and produce, along with it, such necessities of modern technical society as a constitutional government, honest public administration, a responsible party system.²²

But this vision was not just a U.S creation. Though he may not have recognized it, Schlesinger was appropriating ideas, practices, and programs that already were taking place in Latin America. In the Colombian context of the late 1950s and early 1960s, one of the main political projects of the National Front—a political coalition between the Liberal and Conservative parties for national reconciliation, peace, and democracy—sought to overcome the main causes of *la Violencia* of the prior decade. Such political preoccupation, as a state policy, joined forces with the transnational interest of “overcoming” class conflict, the putative cause of political unrest in the region. U.S and international developmental agencies soon hired a generation of Colombian elite intellectuals trained in Europe and the United States in the concepts of modernization theory during the late 1940s and 1950s—Camilo Torres Restrepo, Orlando Fals Borda, Virginia Gutiérrez de Pineda, Maria Cristina Salazar, Héctor Abad Gómez, among several others—to materialize the creation of this professional middle class. Thus, these elite intellectuals crafted different developmental programs of agrarian reform, community development and housing initiatives. They worked with private and public universities and advised the consolidation of new majors in different disciplines and, with the financial support from the United States and other international bodies, sponsored the expansion of educational institutions, vocational schools, and training.²³ For instance, Orlando Fals Borda, a sociologist educated at the University of Florida and director of the Minister of Agriculture in the late 1950s, and Alberto Lleras Camargo, the first president of the National Front, discussed extensively in public and private meetings the role that professionals could play in bringing democracy to the nation. As a result of these discussions, Lleras Camargo wrote, during the early 1960s, a public

letter to some professionals in Colombia in which the president quite explicitly invited these state professionals to become

... a new generation of professionals committed to the nation. Every Colombian must serve in efficient cooperation with the great enterprise of the reconquering the dignity of life, peace, and democracy. ... If *La Violencia* has brought 200,000 dead per year ... it is even more important to know what we are going to do with the 400,000 new people that remain alive. ... *We know it is harder to live in a state of violence and we have just done that ... so it is not difficult to see how we can coexist peacefully with one another ... your job [as professionals] is exceptional ... exceptional in the sense that it can make the difference between a democratic future and a dictatorial one ... [exceptional] because it can make the difference between violence and peace. There is a satisfactory solution for all the problems we suffer ... to give the humanity of the fatherland a new birth by saving society from falling deeper into an abyss that is currently widening the gap between the few who act against the interests of Colombia and the many who are becoming poorer which each passing day. ... [As a professional you] have everything in front of you to uplift us up and away from *La Violencia* to a period of peace, democracy, stability, and tranquility. [You] just have to revive and vitalize every member from the base of society to its summit ... you are the future of democracy.*²⁴

After a decade of violence, as ordinary people became aware of their oppression and elites had shown no interest or sympathy regarding Colombia's social problems, Lleras Camargo insisted that the middle class was the only path to a democratic and peaceful future. They, as proper professionals, would "go down to the level of the peasants ... or workers" to be "sympathizers" while at the same time they would "travel" to the "upper classes" to become "well-informed [and] knowledgeable counselors [*consejeros*] for the elites."²⁵ Lleras Camargo and Fals Borda were hardly alone in promoting this vision of democracy centered on a professional middle class. Before he founded the *Frente Unido* and joined the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN) in the middle of the 1960s, Fr. Camilo Torres Restrepo seemed to have wholeheartedly concurred with the policies of the National Front: a professional middle class could potentially make the difference between a "violent and non-violent path to democracy." Torres Restrepo, who served as Dean of the Social Administration Institute at The School of Public Administration (ESAP), a sociology professor and chaplain at

the *Universidad Nacional*, and as a member of the Agrarian Reform Institute's board of directors, declared that the success of the new developmental institutions founded and sponsored by the Alliance for Progress would depend upon the consolidation of a "democratic ... professional class." Only then, he argued, would a peaceful and democratic society at last emerge. Furthermore, on a very optimistic note, he predicted that

A democratic ... peaceful revolution will come neither from the oligarchies nor from the laboring classes but from the middle class ... a middle class ready to change a society full of feudalism, bossism, violence ... political division ... a middle class that will transform a backward society into a caring ... humanist [one] ready to embrace democracy.²⁶

Thus, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, John F. Kennedy, Alberto Lleras Camargo, Camilo Torres Restrepo, Orlando Flóres Borda, from different positions across the political spectrum, shared a preoccupation with promoting a new social and political subject—the professional middle class—which could accomplish a democratic rule. It is in this context that a group of historical actors were conscripted and empowered to labor as representatives of state rule and democratic governance. Through a meticulous process of schooling and selection—materialized in new curricula developed in private and public universities, in state developmental offices training workshops, in job interviews, in letters of recommendation, and in conferences—the classed link between democracy and a professional middle class at the core of modernization theory became common sense. A generation of professionals, furthermore, was constantly taught to think of themselves as the representatives of democracy: they would hold the potential to raise Colombian society above and beyond *La Violencia*, by creating the necessary conditions for social harmony and political peace. On the one hand, they would help the oligarchies to undergo a process of "self-renewal," and in so doing, would invite those oligarchies to "transform their own social principles." As professionals, furthermore, they would "rehabilitate" the oligarchies into modern elites. On the other hand, this professional middle class would also "channel the energies, capacities and capabilities of the poor" in order to create conditions for the development of "stronger relations with the elites."²⁷

But who were these historical actors to be conscripted—or empowered—as representatives of democracy?²⁸ A careful reading of the Curriculum Vitae (CVs) of those who were part of housing, agrarian reform and community development programs in Bogotá, suggests that the majority (68 per cent) of 70,000 professional men and women between 1957 and 1965 came from urban families. Those

families had migrated to the capital during the late 1940s and 1950s. The other 32 per cent lived in small cities surrounding Bogotá.

These CVs also indicate that this was an already privileged group precisely because, despite the expansion of education opportunities created by the National Front policies and the Alliance for Progress, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, these women and men were among the few who could have schooling beyond secondary education. By the early 1960s, almost 30 per cent of the people who were 15 years old or older were illiterate.²⁹ And given their urban location, these professionals received or were studying for degrees from the most important universities in Bogotá.³⁰ In 1964, for instance, around 9 per cent of professional men working for the state had only secondary education while 45 per cent had received university schooling. Others, almost 35 per cent, had “intermediary” education in commercial private institutes that were often a step toward securing entrance in colleges and universities. The other 11 per cent were educated in normal teaching schools where most candidates would secure jobs as teachers, but in some cases such education would also translate into jobs in developmental programs. Professional women also had privileged status but, in comparison to men, there were some crucial differences. In 1964, almost 35 per cent of these women working for the state had received a degree from normal teaching schools, 33 per cent had a university education, 20 per cent commercial instruction, and only 2 per cent secondary schooling.

These numbers indicate certain gender dynamics that, although impossible to analyze at length in this article, are important to keep in mind. For women applicants, schooling beyond secondary education was required in order to secure a job with the state whereas male candidates could compete for a position with only a secondary education. But the careful reading of these CVs also suggests that women’s participation in state jobs increased significantly. While in 1958 35 per cent of the professionals were women and 65 per cent were men, in 1963 state jobs were almost equally distributed—47 per cent women and 52 per cent men. Why was this gendered distribution in place? These changes were definitely the product of new transnational discourses and ideas about scientific management and customer service theories that celebrated “the need” to hire women in the belief that they, unlike men, could accomplish the state work more efficiently. According to different hiring policies, these professional women had a “natural tendency” to avoid politics as they were “driven by sentiments of tranquility in moments of difficulty ... and they [were] less rational.” Within the particular context of the late 1950s where *La Violencia* was seen as a problem of hatred and animosity to be overcome, state officials celebrated women’s participation in different development programs to be re-educated to develop the proper sentiments for a peaceful society. Given their “feminine nature,” professional

women would cultivate passions, sensibilities, and emotions of society at large by “depoliticizing” the relationship between oligarchies and working class society.³¹ These discourses legitimized the participation of professional women as state representatives without transgressing or undermining, at least at first, class or gender roles, because these hiring policies reflected familiar discourses that associated femininity with sentiment and masculinity with rationality.

But we can also contrast these numbers with some oral histories and other documents to see how professional men and women experienced these important changes. Some of these professionals recall that their parents had migrated to the city either because of *La Violencia* or because of the strong belief that the city, unlike the countryside, would offer the material conditions for some of these actors to achieve a middle class status. Marta Jaramillo, for instance, remembers that her parents came to Bogotá precisely to give her opportunities to achieve professional status since education was

...the best inheritance a father could leave to a daughter. I was from Bogotá and my father was from the north of Tolima. He came to the city to search for better opportunities. She migrated to Bogotá because of *La Violencia*. Once in Bogotá, they supported my brothers and me ... so we could be somebody in life ... to be professionals, to get ahead, and to become independent. In the countryside it was not possible to get ahead and become a professional. Everything was happening in the city. All the good universities were here in Bogotá. I am very thankful for them, but I studied hard and worked all the time to be where I am ... and here we are.³²

Thus, for the parents of this generation of professionals, education offered a possibility to find a well-paid job that could provide middle class status. And although these ideas and beliefs were neither unique nor new,³³ the National Front and the Alliance for Progress developmental policies celebrated a notion of middle-classness as the representation of democracy. Such ideas and programs became a breeding ground for certain professionals in Bogotá. Indeed, these professional women and men consented—at least at first—to the Alliance and the National Front precisely because the very association between democracy and middle class legitimized practices of class belonging and gender subjectivity.

In 1961, for example, Eduardo Dávila, a professional who was educated at the housing programs sponsored by the Organization of American States channeled through classes at the National University, wrote a long letter thanking Alberto Lleras Camargo for the opportunity to work for the state. In it, Dávila made evident how working for the state would indeed allow him to become a

“successful professional.” He, as a proper middle class man, would “serve the nation,” and in so doing, Dávila felt entitled to claim possession of class distinction and gendered respectability. As he stated in the letter

It is good to know that, after so many years of hard work and studying, I can dedicate myself to ... serve the nation. I feel proud of belonging to a generation ready to work for resolving the social problems of the nation. [I also thank you] for the opportunity to get a well-paid job that [allows] me to be a respectable and productive man for my society.³⁴

For professional women, these developmental programs offered very specific labor and educational opportunities. Although these discourses about femininity, sentiment, and democratic rule did not undermine traditional gender roles, these women were mobilized by the very same discourses to carve out some possibilities for economic independence and new forms of class distinction. Indeed, these women re-thought what they, as middle class professionals, were supposed to do in order to bring peace to what was considered a violent society. Perhaps this is why some professional women laboring as state professionals during the early 1960s remember the Alliance for Progress as the most important moment of their lives. Marta Jaramillo, for instance, recounts those experiences as the moment when

I was economically independent. Imagine that! I did not have to rely economically on my family. That was a huge thing for me ... I became conscious [*me concientize*] of who I was. I became a professional woman. I worked hard to make a difference, I had my money and although I had to help my brothers I had my economic independence. I felt I was doing something important. The Alliance for Progress was very important to me ... The Alliance for Progress awoke my passion for the popular sectors and I was a little bit naïve and I wanted to apply all I learned in the classrooms and in those training seminars. I was ready to go.³⁵

But this initial and fragile consent for the Alliance for Progress and the National Front programs soon dissipated as these professional men and women began to practice what they were supposed to do as conscripts of democracy: to educate and uplift both the laboring classes and the elites to coexist harmoniously—that is to say, hierarchically—in what was defined as a democratic and peaceful society. Once they encountered the “other classes,” specific contradictions emerged

among some of these professional men and women and their very notions of being middle class. Some professionals working with agrarian reform found that the Alliance produced an intimate experience with the “painful situation in Colombia for peasants and indigenous communities.” And other professionals who were involved in housing programs and developmental initiatives argued that “the reality of the working poor [was] there to stay.” And many others who were selected and educated to work in professional programs for elite educational development programs encountered “the real face of exploitation ... wealth ... selfishness.”³⁶ Thus, if, at first, some of these professionals embraced and even consented to the programs promoted by the Alliance for Progress, once they began to practice what they were supposed to do, these developmental programs became a crucial moment for political awakening, social awareness, political radicalization, and above all, new gender and class identities. As Jaramillo recalls,

The Alliance put me very close to the popular groups: with the workers, the peasants, the proletarians. And I went there and met the working mother, the working child, the working father who lived in poverty. It was only then that I realized I had to defend the people, that I had to support them. I am not going to lie. I struggled with myself. I struggled with who I was. ... The Alliance also put me in contact with the *finca* owners who were despots and at that moment I began to wonder why people could be so mean. I wanted to understand why people could actually be that mean. I was part of the programs implemented in the *cinturones de miseria* with the people coming from the countryside. That was a very difficult experience. And I started to think: What is this? Why do people live like this? Just collecting data did not fly for me. It was not exciting. It was boring but I did not know what to do. Then, I started reading Marx. And that changed my life.³⁷

At first glance, this would suggest that the Alliance for Progress squarely dictated the political radicalization for some of these professionals. Far from it—such an argument would assume that the policies promoted by development programs had hidden sources of radicalization that professionals themselves would eventually realize or discover. Rather, the process is contradictory. During the first half of the 1960s the very operation of developmental programs such as the Alliance was supposed to put professionals, as conscripts of democracy, in intimate contact with what were considered the main problems or causes of polarization, violence, and radicalization—oligarchies and laboring classes. Yet those class encounters simultaneously provoked unforeseen contradictions,

frustrations, and dilemmas for middle class professionals. They began to question who they were, what roles they should play in society, and above all, how they could bring about democracy as they were supposed to do as state representatives. Indeed, as so many of them were conscripted for—and consented to do it—the task of democratization simultaneously challenged their very mission.³⁸ Some of these professionals turn to their diaries to remember this moment of radicalization. They read out loud their personal diaries, ethnographic notes, and describe their constant clashes and conflicts with *other* classes who, they insisted, behaved in a “very unpredictable way.”³⁹ These class diaries and ethnographic notes indicate, furthermore, that in contrast to what these professionals were supposed to do, how little they were able to achieve. They were, in a word, at odds with themselves precisely because it was suffocating to comply with the very democratic role they were supposed to put into practice when both laboring classes and elites reacted “capriciously.”⁴⁰

It is at the core of these class struggles that these professionals experienced a political and social awakening. These frustrations and anxieties critically mediated how these professionals experienced major national and global events to make sense of what was going on in their training. It was the intimate relationship between certain class frustrations, indignation, and anger at not being able to comply with the democratic role assigned by the Alliance, on the one hand, and a politicization of everyday life during the 1960s, on the other, that led some of these professionals to shape, and be shaped by, the revolutionary politics of the Old and the New Left. In the process, this political and social awakening became the very source of collective class questioning and the political basis for a radical call for transforming society as well as for reconfiguring their class subjectivities as part of a *petit bourgeoisie*.

In our conversation, Cecilia Serrano, a teacher educated in a public but religious school (*Colegio Superior de Cundinamarca*) during the late 1950s, remembers how only “rich girls would attend” the Catholic school where she was “lucky” to find a job. Cecilia taught for almost six years in this school where, as part of the development programs, she was subject to an intense process of training on how to teach for a “democratic future.” She recalls how hard she tried to find different ways to talk to schoolgirls and make them aware of their “privilege.” “I was a really good teacher,” she reiterates in our conversation. But with her students who were from “the cream of the oligarchy’s crop (*crema y nata de la oligarquía*),” the task was impossible. Those girls did not want to know anything about other members of society. As part of a larger project promoted by the Alliance that sought to rehabilitate “the oligarchies into modern elites,” Cecilia was supposed to teach geography, history, civics, and world problems with the hope, she now remembers, that “the oligarchies would realize the role they had to play

... that perhaps these girls could tell their parents they had a role to play in the modernization of the nation."⁴¹ She assigned, her lessons plans attest, Eduardo Caballero Calderón's 1954 classic *Siervos sin tierra* (Landless Peasants), presumably to provoke questions about the "real [social] problems" in Colombia.⁴² Although she was not supposed to assign that book, she was definitely complying with the task of making the elites more sensitive to Colombia's social problems.

Or so she thought. Cecilia recalls how reality hit her hard when these "rich girls" responded with a sense of class entitlement that did not afford any attention to the problems of society. Her students, she insisted, lived in "another world," a world alien to the realities of Colombia. She received complaints from parents who said that she was indoctrinating their daughters with "dangerous ideas."⁴³ The principal lectured her about the unavoidable need to be neutral and objective in her teaching. Her professional diaries and notes suggest that such experiences made Cecilia wonder what to do with her life: either continue to work in such as school, getting paid a decent salary, going on with a "middle class life [and] perhaps finding a good husband" *or* do "something important ... make a real change in society."⁴⁴ Although there were no good prospects of finding a job, Cecilia made what she now remembers as the most important decision of her life. In 1964 she resigned from the private school, applied for jobs in public schools, and began to volunteer in literacy programs in working class neighborhoods in Bogotá. Before she did all of this, she made sure that at least her school principal heard her voice of frustration. In her letter of resignation she complained that the privileges, egocentrism, and selfishness, which characterized the social sector represented by her students, made her job unbearable, despite, or precisely because of, her high commitment. Indeed, in a threatening tone, she predicted that this social sector, "the selfish oligarchies," would not prevent violence but rather provoke it. This situation encouraged Cecilia to raise a very important question to the principal: "how do we promote lasting change in a democratic society[?]" Perhaps because she did not get a response, she found it imperative to offer an answer for herself: "education will be key ... but change will come *by any means* necessary."⁴⁵

Although this answer might look like an imminent and foreordained decision during the mid-1960s, a careful reading of Cecilia's professional diaries as well as her lesson plans suggest otherwise. Cecilia struggled to "move toward the left" and to redefine her women's role in what she considered the need for social change. Such a task was always difficult precisely because she thought that, by working as a proper democratic professional women as envisioned by the Alliance, the "oligarchies" would eventually change their ways. She was very much struggling to put into practice modernization theories that advocated for the "rehabilitation" of the oligarchies into modern elites. Evoking Fals Borda's

perception about the Colombian oligarchies, Cecilia was expecting that they would become proper modern leaders and consequently would create the necessary conditions for a peaceful society to emerge. But frustrations with this modernization theory predicament proved impossible to avoid. Since at least the mid-1960s, professional women like Cecilia began to question who they were and what they were supposed to do as conscripts of democracy. In so doing, they constantly blamed what would soon become their continuous source of frustration, struggle, desire, knowledge, and above all, classed otherness: the oligarchies, those who Cecilia constantly referred to as “a caste in formation [*una casta en germinación*].”⁴⁶

In both her diaries and professional reports, Cecilia complained about this *casta* and described them as embodying an “animal instinct” for injustice, and possessing souls that were “buried in the dark past.” Indeed, Cecilia attempted to de-humanize those elites and present them as useless members of society because, she wrote, these oligarchies had developed a sentiment of disgust toward the popular classes. They were “money lords who consider[ed] development as the indefinite growth of their own money and want[ed] all the wealth for themselves ... they eat and eat, not because they need to eat but because they eat.”⁴⁷ How different, she wondered, these attitudes and behaviors could be “from those of animals that eat because they eat ... animals who do not care for the poor, thirsty for money because they do not develop at all their capacities to think.” Cecilia concluded that what distinguishes humans from animals is precisely the capacity to think, to be rational, to make decisions for “a better future.”⁴⁸ It was, Cecilia complained, the oligarchies that prevented professionals like her from completing what they were supposed to do as conscripts of democracy—creating a harmonious, that is to say hierarchical, society in which laboring classes and elites could get along. This is the historical context through which a generation of professionals experienced the radicalization of their everyday lives from the mid-1960s, if not earlier, in Colombia.

It is through these class frustrations, furthermore, that major events like the Cuban Revolution became a political inspiration/education to realize specific political actions—actions that redefined class and gender subjectivities. Although quite sketchy and disorganized, Cecilia’s professional notes and diaries indicate that the ideas and arguments of Che Guevara were of some influence soon after she resigned her teaching position at a private school and got involved in literacy programs in poor neighborhoods in Bogotá. It is clear that by 1966 the classed meaning of the Cuban Revolution fully entered into her gendered petit bourgeoisie self, as she constantly pondered the meaning of democracy and how change would actually happen. Once she volunteered to work on literacy programs and found a job in a public school in a working class neighborhood,

she met a group of professionals with whom, she, like many other professionals, became familiarized with different books from the Left. After hours of teaching working class kids and mothers, Cecilia would join discussion groups where university students, state professionals, and white-collar workers pondered about their role in a changing society. She remembers this moment, saying: “I learned a lot at the university when I was a student, but I was just a good student ... good grades and everything, you know, a perfect student but I learned a lot more in the working class neighborhoods with friends who, like me, wanted to make things different.”⁴⁹

Among several other readings, *Guerrilla Warfare* was a book she borrowed from a close friend who was working in the literacy program and was “very much involved in the questions of the Left.” Drawing on what she considered the Cuban model for revolution, she summarized in her professional notes Che’s *Guerrilla Warfare* discussion by highlighting three main points for revolutionary change in Latin America. First, she described the very possibility that “people’s forces can win a war against the army.” Second, she recounted the reality that it was not “necessary to wait for all conditions favorable to revolution to be present” as “the insurrection itself can create them.” Finally, she reported in her professional diaries that “in the underdeveloped parts of America, the battleground for armed struggle should be the countryside.”⁵⁰

What is interesting here is that, at least at first, Cecilia saw no importance in whether the armed struggle would occur in the countryside or in an urban setting.⁵¹ Eventually, Cecilia elaborated—however partially and disorganized—the very role of the oligarchies in Latin America was a way to legitimize her participation in revolutionary politics and the mandatory need to participate in armed struggle to bring about “meaningful change.” The language is quite telling as Cecilia wrote, following Che’s arguments, how the oligarchies wanted to maintain a “feudal system” whereby an alliance between “bourgeoisie [class] and land owners” would maintain a “traditional society” oppressing “the masses of Latin America.” Adopting Che’s words, she concluded that, unless a change is brought very soon, “oligarchical dictatorship” would be perpetuated in Bolívar’s land. Through this reading of Che’s *Guerrilla Warfare* Cecilia began to define the National Front, the very policies that had empowered her as a conscript of democracy, as products of oligarchical rule that excluded “everybody else in society.”⁵² Although it would take five more years for Cecilia to join the *Movimiento Guerrillero 19 de Abril* (M-19) in the middle of 1970s, her professional diaries attest that the very notion of oligarchy—the class Other—was specifically rethought through Che’s writings. In fact the very notion of the oligarchy—appropriated from the modernization theory through which she was trained as a professional in the late 1950s—gave way to what would soon become the common language used

to criticize the ruling classes: the bourgeoisie. Furthermore, this new language and these definitions shaped how Cecilia identified herself, not just as a middle class professional woman working for the state, but rather as a petit bourgeois revolutionary woman who could play a pivotal role in transforming the society as a whole. To be a petit bourgeoisie woman meant, contrary to what development programs expected, to think “collectively,” to politicize the society by making “people aware” of their “exploitative status.” This social transformation would now take place through education *and* violence, because, she wrote, the bourgeoisie was a historical failure as they, instead of creating the conditions for modernity to emerge, implemented a “feudal system [...] making Latin America’s peaceful change impossible.”⁵³

Cecilia likewise found the professional role embodied by Che as the source of classed and gendered inspiration and radicalization that definitely eased some of those anxieties. Cecilia’s diaries described a mimeographed document Che Guevara supposedly wrote—*Change: the Role of the Professional*.⁵⁴ She remembers this piece as a crucial one precisely because Che discussed his role as a physician who could play a central part in making revolution possible. Cecilia wrote in her professional diaries that her role as a “rational being” would make a difference because, unlike the bourgeoisie, her class, now defined, following the language of the Left, as the petit bourgeoisie rather than a middle class, had the important role of becoming the “consciousness of a society.” A good example of this consciousness was embodied by Che, a man whose (class) privilege had been “put at the service of revolutionary change in Latin America.”⁵⁵ At the very same time, Cecilia now sees herself as a professional woman who could exercise not only economic independence to achieve a middle class status or professional prestige but also as a woman who could use the very same professional status for a revolutionary cause. Thus, Che and the Cuban Revolution further fostered a classed identity through which professional women like Cecilia saw a possibility to work for radical change as members of a petit bourgeoisie. Cecilia wrote in the late 1960s,

I cannot stand their sense of entitlement. History will judge me, but I have seen with my own eyes what they have done and we will have to do this through different means. The oligarchies ... the dominant classes ... the bourgeoisie have reduced to natural law the failure for a better society. They will never change. And now I have all my [professional] preparation ... my job ... my independence to make change possible.⁵⁶

If for some middle class professionals developmental programs put them in intimate contact with oligarchies, for others the encounter with the laboring classes changed their self-image and their vision of what they should do in a rapidly politicizing society. Although some of these professionals, most of them first as students and then as state employees, remember this as a self-evident truth of radicalization, their diaries, ethnographic notes, and memories also suggest that those experiences were more the product of class doubts and contradictions. It is not a coincidence that in some of the professional diaries, from when they worked under the Alliance for Progress, one finds constant complaints about the peasants, workers, popular sectors who were frequently described as “unteachable, unpredictable ... aggressive ... naïve.”⁵⁷ Furthermore, during the early 1960s some of these professionals went as far as to say that their relationships with the popular sectors were defined both by love and by hatred. It was this conflicting relationship that provoked a classed self-questioning that soon translated into the need to redefine social change. After extensive work with peasants and workers as part of development programs, teachers and professionals wrote in their journals about “the good and the evil struggle within myself.” Indeed, they asked: “what [were] we supposed to do? Who will prevail within [us]: the evil or the good?”⁵⁸ It was a question to contemplate because, after witnessing how the popular sectors lived and how different their reality was from what professionals had been “taught in the classroom,” it was impossible to remain politically passive before “the reality of poverty.”⁵⁹

These class encounters provoked a conflicting experience of radicalization. On one hand, some constantly debated whether they could “go on with [their] life,” continue being properly middle class, and doing what was expected of them as conscripts of democracy. They concluded they could be happy with “helping the miserable human beings hidden in mountains of the Andes.”⁶⁰ After all, their life “[was] not bad at all” as they had decent salaries and an overall level of respect in society. Indeed, during the first half of the 1960s these professionals (most of whom would later join urban guerrilla movements) contemplated the very possibility of “looking away” from this reality of poverty because taking a more radical and critical stand would definitely mean sacrificing their middle-class status: “the wine days, the reading days, the teaching days, the thinking days ... the money, the house, the savings, the possibility to get married ... the family days will be over.”⁶¹

Alongside this hesitation, professionals simultaneously considered what to do amidst an “overwhelming reality of poverty,” a reality that, at least for some of them, the Alliance for Progress had made so evident. It was impossible to look away, they asserted. Yet once more, they asked themselves whether they would choose the “evil” over the “good” and thus ignore the reality of poverty.

Or would they choose the “good” over the “evil” and “do something for real social change?”⁶²

Carlos Restrepo, a sociologist, described in his detailed diaries—diaries he defined as a personal form of rethinking, revision, and self-critique—the doubts and anxieties of this class conundrum. As a student and then as a professor of sociology at the *Universidad Nacional* in Bogotá, as well as during his years as a member of the Communist Youth, Restrepo wrote, with evident frustration and despair, that the search for an ideal—perhaps the ideal of being the representative of democracy—was an overwhelming, if impossible, task. This sprang primarily from what he felt was the fact that the university as an institution of higher education did not offer any possibilities to make “meaningful change.” Peasants, workers, and some students reminded him of his “boring ... simple ... and jailed life” and of how he did not want to be a “stupid professional” concerned only with his own “professional satisfaction.” Restrepo’s experiences capture the struggles of so many professionals who during the 1960s worked for the state and were celebrated as representatives of democracy but who in their professional lives found themselves haunted by doubts and frustrations precisely because they could not perform the very task they were supposed to perform.

I contend that it was precisely this overwhelming task, and its concomitant frustration, that led some professionals like Restrepo to wonder about what role he would like to play as a professor in a public university, what kind of university the nation would need, and what kind of life he would like to pursue in his near future. In his detailed diaries from the late 1960s, he wrote:

at this moment when one needs to react once and for all I find myself part of a simple, a very simple life, the simplicity of the everyday life without consciousness of what is around me ... I do not want to be a *faithful lover* of the National Front. I do not want to be an office bureaucrat. Do I want to be nobody? I do not want distractions. I think I can begin this reassessment [*replantameinto*] on the basis of the following diagnosis: I have devoted myself, with resistance or without it, to the life of my profession. My position is very concrete. I am now a professor at the national university ... what else can I ask for? I am a professional and I am an intellectual. I could go on and live a normal life, a middle class life, I would search for love, protect my job, and find a woman. ... Should this be my life? ... I cannot do this anymore. I have seen the reality of my country. I want to do something big and important. *I want to be a man superior to all others*. My life would be a failure if I could not become this man. I would be a failure if I did not find a noble

and great trade [*oficio*]. I aspire to the heights [*alturas*] This is the reason for me to live. My profession is transitory. I want to be a *radical de la conciencia* ... and that is why I am petit bourgeois. ... I would sacrifice and renounce any privilege. This must start now. We have to change the world now. I am committed to the struggle ... it is difficult because I am nobody for these peasants but they seem to be sure what they want. I will not quit. ... God, professionalism, and commitment are on my side. I will do new things.⁶³

As this diary suggests, Restrepo had the very class possibility to contemplate what to do with his life. Afraid of becoming a failure as a man and of losing his middle class status, Restrepo himself wanted to become a “radical of consciousness” in society, a being that could satisfy his masculine desire for social change on the one hand and his classed passion for justice on the other. He thought of himself as somebody who wanted to overcome a middle class former self—imagined now as mind-numbing, domesticated, tedious, monotonous, sentimental, faithful lover of a regime, and feminine precisely because it would not play an important role in society—while searching for a clear masculine superiority and class distinction to resolve what he usually referred to as, rather generally, “all the problems that affect man.”⁶⁴ The change in language is quite telling. He did not want to continue to be a feminized middle class but he definitely embraced a masculinized and radicalized identity that he now referred to as petit bourgeois.

What were these professionals then to do? As Cecilia’s and Carlos’ stories suggest, they began to shape—and be shaped by—the New Left. They partially did so through what virtually all those social actors who participated in this political radicalization now fondly remember as “productive study groups” where thick, dense, and foundational readings of the Old and New Left were heavily discussed. Although I cannot do justice to the complexity of this process in this article, it is important to emphasize that for some professionals, these study groups were crucial places to ease some of the class and gendered anxieties produced by the reality of participating in developmental programs. Since at least the second half of the 1960s, knowledge became a pivotal source of inspiration—indeed knowledge became subjectivity—through which new notions of class and gender emerged. These constant readings in city cafes, private and public university campuses, state offices, party meetings, street protests, and union halls became critical public spaces through which these professionals not only acquired a new sense of class selves, but also materialized a groundswell of classed activism. Indeed, in the specific context of politicization, these spaces became critical places through which these men and women further questioned their middle

class role as conscripts of democracy while redefining themselves—consciously and unconsciously—as part of a radical petit bourgeoisie.

Becoming a Petit Bourgeois Revolutionary

In the rest of this article I want to briefly discuss one of the most contested questions that shaped this process of class and gender redefinition happening within the left revolutionary projects during the late 1960s and 1970s: how to *proletarianize* oneself and thus claim a legitimate role in a revolutionary project.⁶⁵ Everywhere from the Communist Party to the Maoist groups, guerrilla movements to liberation theology, Trotskyist positions to counter-cultural politics, one finds countless references to this specific question. The *Partido Comunista Colombiano Marxista Leninista* (PCC-ML,) a Maoist political party founded in 1965, and perhaps the party that most decisively promoted the practice of proletarianization in Colombia, “recognized” from the very beginning that, at least in its urban cells, most of their members were of a “petit bourgeois background” and thus the political party had an “imperfect and faulty social make-up.”⁶⁶ Other political organizations complained that the “petit bourgeois origin” of the revolutionary members had produced some “deficiencies ... *deviations*, abnormalities” in the consolidation of a “proletariat leadership” for the revolution.⁶⁷ Some urban guerrilla organizations also worried that the presence of “too many petit bourgeois members” would put the military preparation for revolution at risk.⁶⁸

These political preoccupations raise important questions once we try to trace those historical actors who participated in the Alliance for Progress and were educated, selected, and hired as the putative democratic subjects par excellence in modern societies. But now in their search for partial answers to their class frustrations and anxieties these actors found themselves in a new discursive conjuncture in which the political imperatives of the New Left—from Che Guevara to Mao-Tse-tung to God—dictated that it was the proletariat, rather than the middle class, who would be the revolutionary subject the *sine qua non*. It is at the core of this paradox of considering oneself middle class and thus imagining oneself in a democratic role while yearning dearly to hold the idea of the proletariat as the source of political radicalization and revolutionary horizon that provoked among these professionals a classed *desire* to become, and represent, the proletariat class. Many of these social actors remember their yearning to be more proletariat in our conversations:

The discussion about the petit bourgeoisie ... and the role of the proletariat ha! What can I tell you? That was *the* discussion of our times, ... that was the only thing we talked about. It was a huge discussion. In classes, in study groups, in every political meeting we had we discussed it. It was like going to a daily mass ... You went there and you were told that you could not be petit bourgeois. To be called petit bourgeois was just an insult. ... I still remember how we said to each other: “*compañera* that is a petit bourgeois behavior, change your ways ... you have to be a proletariat.” So we tried and I tried hard. My mother suffered when I converted myself into a proletariat [*me converti*] and wore boots, ruana and mochila and got lost [*perdernos*] in the shantytowns. I was a petit bourgeois woman, and of course, we were told or I was told that I had to behave like a proletariat and it was not easy but I do not think that it was an option, we had to be proletarians, live in the shantytowns and live *as if* we were poor and marginal ... we had to be revolutionaries.⁶⁹

In this specific paradoxical context, what did it mean to go from middle class into a revolutionary petit bourgeois identity and simultaneously attempt to become proletariat? How could a petit bourgeois person become proletariat? Here the task is not to evaluate whether these professionals were able to succeed in proletarianizing themselves but rather how such a political project created new forms of class subjectivity, desire, and (un)consciousness as part of their radicalization. Indeed, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, both the category/practice of proletarianization and the *desire* to become proletariat was part and parcel of a larger project of class politics to legitimize a classed role as a petit bourgeois revolutionary within new Left revolutionary movements.

Marx, Lenin, Camilo Torres, Che Guevara, Paulo Freire and, above all, Mao Tse-tung, became the source of political education for this classed disciplinary project to adopt for themselves what this petit bourgeoisie considered the genuine virtues, thoughts, practices, and experiences of the so-called proletariat. In so doing the proletariat became a desire of classed and gendered exclusionary otherness through which these petit bourgeois subjects would be able to claim their own hierarchical political recognition and social distinction as proper revolutionaries.

In such daily discussions Left political parties and organizations mandated that, as petit bourgeois, the revolutionary needed to develop a “new moral ... a new ethical and political being” as a proletarian. Precisely because most members of these parties on the Left saw themselves as part of the petit bourgeoisie, this task

was defined as the most revolutionary of all: to transform their classed selves. If a revolution were to succeed, it was imperative to normalize their putative class abnormality and deviation so that their revolutionary potential could be legitimized. The teaching material produced in different Left political parties, university work-study groups, plays, and movies suggests it was mandatory to eradicate “*the original sin* of every revolutionary ... [that is to say] to overcome any trace, mark, or print of a petit bourgeois custom, habit, or pattern” because, it was reiterated that those “vices” prevented them from becoming proper revolutionaries.⁷⁰ As some of these petit bourgeois members of both the Old and New Left envisioned their own proletarianization in the late 1960s,

The internal struggles are often the most difficult ones. Proletarianization does not happen overnight. It is a struggle for our entire life. It is a struggle between revolution and counterrevolution. We have to start locating the enemy within ourselves, inside our own petit bourgeois lives. We need honesty, endurance, patience, persistence, resolution, willingness, high doses of revolutionary ideology, and a great revolutionary virility. This is not an easy enterprise to eradicate the petit bourgeois vices from our minds and our bodies that have been imposed upon us in the family, the school, in religion ... but we need to implant a proletariat life in ourselves. This is the most important struggle of our times and such struggle is composed of small battles but reading Mao and his *tres permanentes* will help us take a proletariat position.⁷¹

Hence, for this petit bourgeoisie it was imperative to proletarianize oneself by both embracing the “proletariat way of life” and adopting a “proletariat ideology.” In order to do so, these professionals imagined themselves as getting away from what in the second half of the 1960s was referred to, in line with the German poet and theater director Bertolt Brecht, as the “seven capital sins of the petit bourgeoisie.”⁷² These sins became a shared discourse among those participating in this disciplinary project. They were usually performed in public spaces, constantly examined in teaching material, and endlessly discussed in everyday conversation. As one of these protagonists remembers,

Are we talking about the seven capital sins of the petit bourgeoisie? I remember those vividly. We went to see the play, but it was all about the proletarian. I remember we had a little brochure [*folletico*] titled, I think, *How to be a Proletariat*. And we read it and we studied it. And, of course, we discussed it. It was our topic of

conversation. You would be embarrassed not to know what these booklets had to say. We evaluated each other about it ... we knew how revolutionary somebody was by referring to those sins. Our ideas had to be proletariat, our behavior had to be proletariat ... our love had to be proletarian. We had to smell and breathe as proletariat.⁷³

Those capital sins, intimately associated with notions of femininity, were the source of classed inspiration on how to behave as an authentic proletariat, that is to say, to define oneself as masculine petit bourgeois revolutionary. The first, and perhaps most important sin of all, was precisely that putative feminine petit bourgeois “preoccupation for ... thinking [and tendency to follow] the subjectivity of abstraction.” Thus by implication the masculine petit bourgeois—that is, the imagined proletariat to be—had to distinguish himself from other classes by his “practicality, thingness, concreteness, and *objectivity* of experience.”⁷⁴ In a twist of the common gendered narratives between thinking and doing, now a feminized petit bourgeois would prefer to abstract—rather than to experience, as the properly masculine revolutionary subject should do—the conditions of revolutionary change. In order to avoid such a capital sin it was mandatory, as Mao dictated, to navigate the masses “as a fish swims in the sea.”⁷⁵ It was necessary to experience the putative concreteness of proletariat life. Such command was taken to heart as most, if not all, of these petit bourgeois revolutionaries went (once more) to meet what they considered the proletariats—those who lived in shantytowns, worked in factories, lived in marginal places and in the country side, and above all, were destined to make the revolution.

All the following capital sins of the improper and thus feminized petit bourgeois emanated from this foundational distinction between abstraction and concrete experience: *laziness* (the preference to stay behind a bureaucrat’s desk instead of finding the practical truth with the proletariat); *pride* (to think of oneself as different from others and thus not being able to “go down” to work with the masses); *silence* (to think, rather than to experience, the injustices in society and thus not to do anything practical about it); *luxury* (excesses in life instead of living “in material scarcity” so central in the life of the masses precisely because the revolution would come from material scarcity); *greed* (those who lose their “brain ... what they think ... for the benefit of money”); *envy* (to “resent the life of others” and not be content with one’s own life).⁷⁶

These cardinal sins, associated with an improper and feminized petit bourgeois self, were central in this disciplinary project of becoming proletariat precisely because they would embrace, as proper masculine petit bourgeois subjects, what they considered the objective virtues of the proletariat revolutionary class—

“simplicity, plainness, bareness, austerity, scarcity, material-driven decision-making, and objectivity.”⁷⁷ Hence, at the core of this disciplined process of proletarianization, this *petit bourgeoisie*, as a class, imagined the proletariat as an alienated Other, relentlessly represented in its hierarchical alterity because the *petites bourgeois* needed to make evident, politically and otherwise, that in order to praise themselves as radical revolutionaries they had to be able to live as the Other—the imagined and *authentic* proletariat. In so doing, the very political desire to proletarianize oneself sought to legitimize—unconsciously, no doubt—a masculinized *petit bourgeois* hierarchical position within these new processes of radicalization.

Yet at the same time it was a mistake, these *petit bourgeois* revolutionaries said, to embrace the life of the proletariat as the only measure to make a revolution possible. It was equally important to “live after the proletariat ideology.”⁷⁸ Following Mao, Marx, and Che, this *petit bourgeoisie* saw itself as revolutionary by assigning their imagined proletariat the most important task of all: to make the revolution. And yet once more they protested that the proletariat could not comply with, let alone carry out, such a task because, they proclaimed, the masses had not accomplished a proletariat position. Indeed, some of these *petit bourgeois* revolutionaries complained, much to their dismay, that sometimes even “the masses embraced *petit bourgeois* values.”⁷⁹ Such cardinal sins were again defined as a feminine deviation precisely because some of the masses were seen as not yet proper proletarians and, who for this reason behaved like women. In professionals’ journals, booklets, and teaching material this *petit bourgeoisie* constantly screamed in masculine frustration: “the men of the masses look very much like women.” The proletariat, furthermore, committed this feminine sin because they acted like political caudillos, unaware of their “real and material interests of [their] proletariat class.” By committing the sins of luxury and envy, those proletarians were not preparing themselves for the revolution but were rather keeping up social appearances. The *petit bourgeois* revolutionaries complained that the proletariat class did not follow their “class objectivity” and instead promoted subjectivism by forgetting the “superior [and universal] interests of the revolution.” Thus, these *petit bourgeois* revolutionaries argued that there was a major (class) distinction between a proletariat *attitude* and a proletariat *position*. The former was structurally embodied by the masses. The latter needed to be educated and cultivated on a daily basis. Such difference explained why these *petit bourgeois* revolutionaries discussed among themselves how the masses, given their structural conditions, had developed a proletariat (feminine) attitude—that is to say they could experience exploitation—while failing to develop a proletariat (masculine) position. That is to say, they could not become aware [*conscientizarse*] of the very exploitation they experienced

so that the revolution would at last emerge—they, in a word, remained in a feminine stage.⁸⁰

As a result, the petit bourgeoisie assigned itself the role to proletarianize and masculinize those masses who would not behave as authentic proletarians. It was these masculinized petit bourgeois revolutionaries, furthermore, who could adopt both a proletariat *attitude* and proletariat *position* who would be ready to raise the masses to become proper—that is masculine—revolutionary subjects. First, unlike the petit bourgeois revolutionaries who could experience their lives as proletarians by living through the proletariat ideology, the masses merely had the tendency to rebel “spontaneously” and usually failed to become the holders of a “universal proletariat ideology.” And this lack of universality and inability to become its own proletariat leadership were the products of the structural conditions that prevented the masses from having access to “the culture, the possibility to travel around the world and know the experiences of other countries and the theoretical elements of socialism.”⁸¹ Proletariat ideology and revolutionary theory had to come from “outside” the masses and to be brought to them by those who structurally had the privilege to have access to revolutionary knowledge. Thus in order to make a claim as proper proletariats these petit bourgeois imagined themselves as members of a revolutionary class who would universalize the proletariat ideology so that a revolution would become a reality precisely because the masses, feminine and not yet actively proletarian, could only experience particular forms of exploitation and perform spontaneous practices of rebellion.

In contradiction to the most important sin of all—that “feminine” tendency to abstract—now these petit bourgeois criticize the masses for being unable to, at least at first, develop the abstraction and universalization of proletariat ideology and therefore assume the leadership for the revolution. The petit bourgeoisie—imagined now as the authentic and masculinized proletariat—could practice what was seen as the revolutionary virtues of the masses—particularity, uncomplicatedness, simplicity, straightforwardness, and concreteness—while simultaneously universalizing, indeed elevating, those virtues as part of a proletariat ideology to teach the very same masses how to achieve a proletariat position.

In this circular argumentation, a class hierarchical subjectivity was perfected at the very center of radicalization processes, for the proletariat was defined as the Other to be desired, to be joined, to be followed, and to be venerated. But this proletariat also had to be socially uplifted and politically masculinized to make the revolution possible. Such desires and obsessions maintained a hierarchical distinction that allowed this petit bourgeoisie to claim to know the authentic proletariat ideology, to achieve a proletariat position, and act as if they were a proletarian. In the process, they desired their proletariat—always

imagined, eternally discussed, endlessly evaluated, constantly written about—as a hierarchical classed and gendered Other in the very process of reclaiming a leadership within revolutionary movements. In a word, in the process of radicalization they created a new gendered and classed position for themselves—the petit bourgeois revolutionary.

Conclusion

What happened when we put these paradoxical and hierarchical practices of radicalization at the center of the Cold War and revolutionary politics? Is it just to preach, as some have done, that radicalization was misguided, indeed erroneous, and thus must be dismissed?⁸² On the contrary, the Colombian case suggests that, by the second half of the 1960s and early 1970s this political radicalization—as hierarchical and exclusionary as it was—infused interest with desire and consolidated a massive petit bourgeois activism. As never before, this petit bourgeoisie joined white-collar unions, founded new professional organizations, further consolidated teachers' federations and private employee associations, shaped Old and New Left political parties, created innovative magazines, challenged the disciplinary canons of the sciences and the humanities, and, yes, participated in mostly urban guerrilla movements. Medical doctors took to the streets for at least fifty-two days to rally for the expansion of health services for “the masses” while white-collar employees constantly demonstrated in public places for better salaries and political recognition. Teachers protested and prepared new lesson plans to teach dissident and alternative allegories of the nation. University professors went on strike to defend public universities and redefine the role of education and knowledge in society. And professionals across the social sciences participated in new research initiatives to produce a dissident form of knowledge about the democratic role of Latin America in the world. By the end of the 1970s, these actors actively played a critical role in the 1977 *Paro Civico Nacional*, a nationwide general strike, to put forward these classed demands, reconfigure their political subjectivities as part of a petit bourgeoisie, and redefine some of the fundamental categories, practices, meanings, and institutions of democracy in the Americas.

Thus, within less than a decade, many of those who were supposed to bring about what was considered a proper, that is to say hierarchical, democracy for the Americas reconfigured their class identities and thus redefined the very revolutionary movements they had been expected to choke off as conscripts of democracy. Given the space at my disposal, I have only shown a small part of this argument. Political radicalization among these middle class professionals,

I argue, was neither politically inevitable nor merely the product of an outside polarization simultaneously fashioned by a decade of radicalizing events. Rather, it was precisely by exercising their cultural, economic, social, and political capital as conscripts of democracy and their simultaneously classed and gendered encounters with the Left that would lead this petit bourgeoisie to pose one of the most radical challenges to the very social and political order that had empowered them in the first place.

This is the complex history, I submit, that would allow us to rethink recent interpretations that explain Cold War politics and the Global 1960s in Latin America as a *dialectical* struggle between revolution and counterrevolution. The revolution, originating mostly from Latin America, is often historicized as vibrant, egalitarian, and unanimously supported by subaltern groups. The counterrevolution, springing from the United States, is usually characterized as illiberal, tepid, and strongly backed by a coalition between middle classes and oligarchies as the main “reactionary force” in Latin America. A study of the middle class that goes beyond identifying certain groups with a “middle class background” as part of revolutionary project to instead analyze class as a social movement would allow us to understand Cold War politics in Latin America, not as a dialectical struggle between two politically unified revolutionary and counterrevolutionary cross-class projects, but rather as a struggle between and among multiple political mobilizations *within* revolutionary and counter-revolutionary movements through which competing class hegemonic positions were formed, challenged, contested, hierarchized, and legitimized.⁸³

Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Lina Britto, Robert Karl, Barbara Weinstein, Marilyn Young, and the attendees at the Cold War Seminar at the New York University Tamiment Library Center for the United States and the Cold War for their critical comments on an earlier draft of this article. I also want to thank the attendees at a conference on the middle class at the Sverdlin of Latin American History and Culture at Tel Aviv University where this article first originated. Anonymous reviewers of EAIL also provided valuable comments. Additionally, Niall Murchú provided advice and help throughout the editing process.
- 2 Several interviews with author, Bogotá, June 2010. All interviewees have requested that I use pseudonyms.
- 3 Marta Jaramillo, interview with the author, Bogotá, June 2010.
- 4 See, among others, Mauricio Archila, ed., *Historia Inconclusa: izquierdas políticas y sociales en Colombia* (Bogotá D.C: Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular, Cinep, 2009). A case in point is the recent special issue on the Global Sixties, *The Americas*, Vol 70, Number 3, (January 2014). James Green, *We Cannot Remain Silent. Opposition to the Brazilian Military Dictatorship in the United States* (Durham, NC: Duke Univer-

- sity Press, 2010). Jaime M. Pensado. *Rebel Mexico: Student Unrest and Authoritarian Political Culture During the Long Sixties* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).
- 5 Eric Zolov, “Expanding our Conceptual Horizons: The Shift from an Old to a New Left in Latin America,” *A Contracorriente* 5:2 (Winter 2008): 51. See also Eduardo Pizzarro Leongómez *Insurgencia sin revolución: La guerrilla en Colombia en una perspectiva comparada* (Bogotá: IEPRI-Tercer Mundo Editoriales, 1996); Mauricio Archila, *Idas y venidas, vueltas y revueltas: protestas sociales en Colombia, 1958-1990* (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia, 2003); Archila *Historia Inconclusa*
 - 6 Gould “Solidarity under siege: The Latin American Left, 1968,” *The American Historical Review* 114, 2 (April 2009): 349.
 - 7 Zolov, “Expanding our Current Horizons,” 48. Drawing on the Mexican case, Louise Walker has called on historians to decentralize the study of “the rebel generation” during the 1960s—not only students and youth participated in radical politics. See Louise Walker, *Waking from the Dream: Mexico’s Middle Classes After 1968* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 43-44. Forrest D. Colburn, *The Vogue of Revolution in Poor Countries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 48.
 - 8 See Greg Grandin, “Living in Revolutionary Time: Coming to Terms with the Violence of Latin America’s Long Cold War,” in Greg Grandin and Gilbert Joseph, eds., *A Century of Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 10. See also Chávez, “Catholic Action,” 461. For an alternative and insightful understanding of revolutionary politics, see Carlos Iván Degregory, edited with an introduction by Steve Stern, *How Difficult It Is to Be God: Shining Path’s Politics of War in Peru, 1980-1999* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012).
 - 9 Grandin, “Living in Revolutionary Time,” 12-13, 23. See also, José Nun, “The Middle Class Military Coup,” in Claudio Veliz, ed., *The Politics of Conformity in Latin America* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 85. Ezequiel Adamovsky, *Historia de la clase media argentina: apogeo y decadencia de una ilusión, 1919-2003* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 2009). For the Colombian case see Daniel Pécaut, *Política y sindicalismo* (Bogotá: La Carreta, 1973); Daniel Pécaut, *Crónica de dos décadas de política colombiana 1968-1988* (Bogotá: Siglo XXI, 1988). Ricardo Sánchez Ángel *¡Huelga!: luchas de la clase trabajadora en Colombia, 1975-1981*, (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2009), 275-315; 317-358.
 - 10 Gould, “Solidarity Under Siege,” 349-350. For a different interpretation see Carlos Iván Degregory, *How Difficult It is to Be God*, 159-172.
 - 11 See Valeria Manzano “‘Rock Nacional’ and Revolutionary Politics: The Making of a Youth Culture of Contestation in Argentina, 1966–1976” *The Americas* 70, no. 3 (2014): 393-427.
 - 12 Let me be clear because the possibilities for misunderstanding are rife. First, it is certainly not my object here to wax a claim for the democratically importance of the middle class and thus conclude that a radical middle class was actually way more democratic that what is usually recognized. Second, nor do I want to reclaim a role for the middle class in the process of radicalization by ignoring the role played by other laboring groups. It is, above all, an attempt to put the dynamics of class formation at the center of the study of revolutionary politics.
 - 13 See A. Ricardo López, “Conscripts of Democracy: the Formation of a Professional Middle class in Bogotá during the 1950s and early 1960s in A. Ricardo López and Barbara Weinstein, eds., *The Making of the Middle Class: Toward a Transnational History of the Middle Class* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 161-195.

- 14 And not anti-politics, as historians and social scientists alike continue to argue, after James Ferguson and his influential work, *The Anti-politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).
- 15 For this article I will focus only on the formation of a professional middle class.
- 16 See Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre*. Archila, *Idas y venidas*, 346-347. Pécaut, *Crónica de dos décadas de política colombiana*; Jonathan Hartylin, *La política del régimen de coalición. La experiencia del Frente Nacional en Colombia* (Bogotá: Ediciones Uniandes, 1993); Marco Palacios *Between Legitimacy and Violence: A History of Colombia, 1875-2002* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).
- 17 See James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*. See also, Marco Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence*, 170-213.
- 18 And the elites did react to the developmental programs promoted by the Alliance for Progress. See Amy Offner, *Anti-Poverty Programs, Social Conflict, and Economic Thought in Colombia and the United States, 1948-1980*, (Phd Diss., Columbia University, 2012).
- 19 Jeffrey F Taffet, *Foreign Aid As Foreign Policy: The Alliance for Progress in Latin America*, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 149.
- 20 Aline Helg *La educación en Colombia, 1918-1957: una historia social, económica y política* (Bogotá, Colombia: Fondo Editorial CEREC, 1987). See also, Aline Helg, "La Educación en Colombia, 1958-1990" in Alvaro Tirado Mejía, ed., *Nueva Historia de Colombia*, Vol 4 (Bogota: Planeta, 1989), 135-158.
- 21 I have found inspiration in David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), and Talal Asad, "Conscripts of Western Civilization," in Christine Gailey, ed., *Dialectical Anthropology: Essays in Honor of Stanley Diamond, vol I, Civilization in Crisis* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1992), 333-351.
- 22 Memorandum, Schlesinger to Kennedy, March 10, 1961, Schlesinger Papers, box Wh14, "Latin America, Report 3/10/61," J.F. Kennedy Library.
- 23 See López, *Conscripts of Democracy*.
- 24 Carta pública de Alberto Lleras Camargo a los profesionales de Colombia, Despacho Señor Presidente, Comité de Relaciones Labores, February, 15, 1960, Presidential Archive, (PA). This letter is part of an exchange between Aleberto Lleras Camargo, Louis Joseph Lebret, and Orlando Fals Borda, Despacho señor president, Comité de relaciones laborales, 1958-1960, PA.
- 25 Alberto Lleras Camargo to Orlando Fals Borda, Febreury 21, 1960. Despacho Señor Presidente, 1958-1960, comite de relaciones laborales, PA.
- 26 Camilo Torres Restrepo, una educación para el mundo, folder: discursos de inauguración, c 1961, Escuela de Admnsitracion Pública's Archive, (ESAPA)
- 27 Letter from Lleras Camargo to Poston, April, 12, 1960, Despacho Señor Presidente, 1960-1961, Folder: Comercio Exterior, PA.
- 28 My sample contained 1,2000 CVS. Most of these CVS contained applicants' sex, age, birthplace, marital status, level of education, or literacy. I'm also following payrolls and official statistics to account for an average number of professionals working for the state.
- 29 Carmen Eliza Florez, *Las transformaciones sociodemográficas en Colombia durante el siglo XX* (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo Editores, 2000), 90.
- 30 These nurses, social workers, architects, sociologists, agronomists, rural specialists, accountants and other professionals came from the following institutions: Escuela Nacional de Contaduría, Colegio Mayor de Cundinamarca, Escuela de Enfermería de la Cruz

- Roja (Colegio Mayor de nuestra señora del Rosario), Escuela Nacional de Comercio, Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Escuela Superior de Administración Pública, among others.
- 31 Propuesta para el establecimiento de un departamento de selección y una comisión de reclutamiento para profesionales al servicio del estado, Febrero 9, 1959, programa de apoyo técnico, (250), s-0175-0334-02, Archivo de las Naciones Unidas
 - 32 Marta Jaramillo, interview with the author, Bogotá, June 2010.
 - 33 At least since the 1940s the association between education and a middle class status was very much in the making. A. Ricardo López, “It Is not Something You Can Be Or Come To Be Overnight”: Empelados, Office Angels, and Gendered Middle Class Identifications in Bogotá, Colombia, 1930-1955,” in Parker and Walker (comps.), *Latin America’s Middle Class: Unsettled Debates and New Histories* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), 151-170; Brian Owensby, *Intimate Ironies: Modernity and the Making of Middle-Class Lives in Brazil* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1999); David Parker, D. S., *The Idea of the Middle Class: White-Collar Workers and Peruvian Society, 1900-1950* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998); Patrick Barr-Melej, *Re-forming Chile Cultural Politics, Nationalism, and the Rise of the Middle Class* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).
 - 34 Carta de Eduardo Dávila a Alberto Lleras Camargo, December, 4 1961, folder: ministerio de educación, 1-2, caja, secretaría general, PA.
 - 35 Marta Jaramillo, interview with the author, Bogotá, June 2010.
 - 36 Here I am summarizing several documents found in personal archives. See, among others, Marta Jaramillo personal archive, (MJPA).
 - 37 Marta Jaramillo, interview with the author, Bogotá, June 2010.
 - 38 Professional notes, Carlos Cruz personal archive (CCPA) and (MJPA); my emphasis. I have found Gary Wilder’s interpretation of the French Imperial Nation-State during the first half of the 20th century quite insightful here. See Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude & Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 43-147.
 - 39 Ibid.
 - 40 Ibid. See Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Thinking Through Colonial Ontologies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 181-278.
 - 41 Cecilia Serrano, Interview by author, Bogotá, June 2010.
 - 42 Lessons plans, 1958-1965, Cecilia Serrano’s personal archive (CSPA)
 - 43 Cecilia Serrano, Interview by author, Bogotá, June 2010.
 - 44 Cecilia Serrano, professional notes, c 1964-1967 (CSPA)
 - 45 Letter to Roberto Cifuentes, June 1967, page 2 (CSPA); my emphasis.
 - 46 Professional notes, c 1964-1967 (CSPA).
 - 47 Ibid.
 - 48 Ibid. See also her personal diaries (CSPA).
 - 49 Cecilia Serrano, Interview by author, Bogotá, June 2010.
 - 50 Ernesto Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*. Professional notes, c 1964-1967 (CSPA).
 - 51 “Revolution Beyond the Sierra Maestra: The Tupamaros and the Development of a Repertoire of Dissent in the Southern Cone”. *The Americas*. 70, no. 3, 2014: 523-553.
 - 52 Cecilia Serrano, professional notes, c 1964-1967 (CSPA)
 - 53 Cecilia Serrano, professional notes, c 1964-1967 (CSPA)
 - 54 I have not been able to locate this piece, nor have I been able to see if, in fact, Che wrote this piece.

- 55 Cecilia Serrano, professional notes, c 1964-1967 (CSPA)
- 56 Cecilia Serrano, professional notes, c 1964-1967 (CSPA)
- 57 Carlos Restrepo, Diaries, 1965, Carlos Restrepo Personal Archive (CRPA)
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 Carlos Restrepo, Diary 1969 (CRPA).
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Carlos Restrepo, Diary 1969 and Diary 1970, 12, 21, 22, 23, organized on VIII 76, 1-2; my emphasis.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 63 I have found inspiration in James Green, "Who Is the Macho Who Wants to Kill Me?" Male Homosexuality, Revolutionary Masculinity, and the Brazilian Armed Struggle of the 1960s and 1970," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Volume 92, Number 3: (August 2012): 437-469. Lillian Guerra, "Gender Policing, Homosexuality and the New Patriarchy of the Cuban Revolution, 1965-70," *Social History*, 35, no. 3: 268-289. Carlos Iván Degregory, *How Difficult It Is to Be God*.
- 66 Partido Comunista de Colombia, M.L *Combatiendo unidos venceremos* (Medellín Editorial 8 de junio, 1975), 45.
- 67 Ibid., 91; my emphasis.
- 68 Encuesta interna del organizacion politica military, Movimiento 19 de Abril, archive, c1975.
- 69 Juan Pérez, interview with author, Bogotá, June 2010.
- 70 Partido Comunista de Colombia, M.L *Proletarización*, 1969 (CRPA).
- 71 Partido Comunista de Colombia, M.L *Combatiendo unidos venceremos*, 69, 253,
- 72 Carlos Duplat *Siete Pecados capitaless del pequeños burgueses*, obra teatral, Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia (CRPA).
- 73 Samuel Cifuentes, Interview by author, June 2010.
- 74 Carlos Duplat, *Siete Pecados capitaless 3* (CRPA); my emphasis.
- 75 Mao Tse-tung, *Las Tres Permanentes* (CRPA)
- 76 Carlos Duplat *Siete Pecados capitaless 3*, (CRPA),
- 77 Partido Comunista de Colombia, M.L *Combatiendo unidos venceremos*. Also see *Moral revolucionaria, moral burguesa*, c1969 (CRPA).
- 78 Ibid.
- 79 Partido Comunista de Colombia, M.L *Combatiendo unidos venceremos*, 220.
- 80 I have found inspiration in Carlos Ivan Degregory, *How Difficult It Is to Be God*, 159-172. See also Jacques Ranciere, *Proletariat Nights: the Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France* (London: Verso Books, 2012).
- 81 Minutes of discussion, university professors, c1971 (CRPA); *Moral Revolucionaria, moral burguesa*, 4-5, CRPA.
- 82 See, among several others, Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010). See, among several others, Eduardo Posada Carbo, *La nación soñada: violencia, liberalismo y democracia en Colombia* (Bogotá: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2006), 211-264.
- 83 A good example here is Wendy Wolford, *This Land Is Ours Now: Social Mobilization and the Meanings of Land in Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

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