

Portrait of a Cuban Refugee

APPROVED FOR RELEASE 1994
CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
18 SEPT 95

SECRET

Composite character sketch of a category of potential agent.

Andrew Wixson

A recent article on the personality of the Libyan pointed out that "any attempt to characterize all members of a society . . . is necessarily a stereotype, subject to error in individual application."¹ The following attempt to describe the composite personality of certain Cuban refugees is fraught with even greater likelihood of error with respect to individuals because the sample under study is much less homogeneous than the Libyan was. It ranges from illiterate peasants to highly educated members of professional groups; the level of intelligence, which is comparable over-all with that found in the United States, runs from nearly deficient to superior. In addition, while the Libyan data were gathered through the administration of a psychological test designed for such purposes, the data analyzed in the present study are the by-product of assessments conducted for a variety of reasons, often under much less than ideal conditions.² Two characteristics were common to all members of the group: all had fled Cuba because of their opposition to the Castro regime, and at the time of their assessment all were either candidates for anti-Castro clandestine activity or actively engaged in such activity.

With such great variability in the sample it is not anticipated that the personality descriptions which follow will be accurate for any given

individual. But a delineation of the psychological features common to the majority of the group will serve to describe a composite or representative Cuban agent who manifests certain critical areas of adjustment. These areas must be examined in each agent by the case officer, but the general portrait presented below may give a frame of reference from which to consider the individual operational assessment. Successful handling will of course require careful study of the individual agent, for how any individual reacts to the psychological and environmental forces acting upon him at any given time depends upon his own life history and his current needs and motives.

The Male: Social Relationships

During his early years the typical Cuban male is inclined to be highly responsive to the world around him and to the people in it. Since he is very sensitive to others' needs and can respond appropriately to these needs, people tend to seek him out as a companion and cater to him. As a result he is apt to be somewhat spoiled, relatively immature, and overdependent upon those who take care of him. He discovers it is easy to find people who will do things for him and make allowances for his deficiencies. As he grows older, however, and is expected to show more independence and self-reliance, he may see, perhaps for the first time in his life, that his ability to play on others' feelings is not enough; rather than being able to gain support from others for what he is, he only meets with criticism for what he cannot do. His solution for this problem is to develop means to keep people at a distance, not only so they will be less demanding of him but also to control his own tendency to become involved with them. At the same time he learns, unconsciously, to become more rational and less emotional in his response to his environment.

On the surface, then, this representative Cuban exhibits considerable defensiveness and control, a kind of detachment in dealing with others. He is actively social, relating easily to others on a superficial basis, but the chip on his shoulder is readily apparent when he is threatened with becoming intimately involved. He makes a very favorable first impression but deliberately holds people at a distance so that they will make no more demands on him than he thinks he can tolerate. If they do demand

more, he may withdraw from the situation, thus gaining the reputation of being fickle and disappointing. If withdrawal is not possible, he can be actively cruel and hostile toward those with whom he is most intimate, turning on them unexpectedly and violently as a means of forcing them to retreat. He has at all times the potential for over-responding: he can be too demonstrative toward and involved with people and activities which by his criteria he finds proper and worthy, and at the same time he can be equally demonstrative against and hostile toward objects which he considers bad or improper. This sort of loss of control is often followed by guilt reactions characterized by depression and apathy, and in this phase there may be many expressions of inferiority or unworthiness.

There are a considerable number of Cuban males who lack the natural social skills and interpersonal sensitivity described above. Most members of this second group emphasize intellectual or procedural skills as a means for gaining acceptance. That is, they try to achieve recognition for what they can do, not for what they are. Since they are very much aware of the need to maintain some sort of social adjustment, even though it be superficial, they tend to be much concerned with the impression they make on others. They are quite moody and unpredictable in their prolonged associations with others, reacting strongly to real or imagined criticism of their behavior. An alternative solution for this group is the adoption of a limited but reasonably comfortable social role which is rigidly maintained even if it becomes inappropriate. The displaced person who does not change his way of behaving in spite of loss of wealth, rank, position, or status probably belongs in this subgroup. An example would be the former military officer who acts toward his civilian colleagues as if he were still in command of troops.

Attitudes toward Work

At the same time he is making this adjustment in his relationships with other people, the typical Cuban tries to be less emotional and more rational in his view of the world. He tends to immerse himself in his daily routine and to behave as if he were a self-disciplined individual without need for external direction and control. He admires intellectual

achievement in others and can himself learn facts and procedures fairly rapidly, but these attributes only make him appear better informed and intellectually oriented than he is in fact or he himself feels. Since he can retain information with more ease than he can assimilate or understand it, he tends to be defensive when he meets with any form of testing or criticism. Unless he has a supervisor whom he respects and admires, his work productivity tends to fall off when he is criticized. On the other hand, he can work quite competently without constant supervision if he knows exactly what he is supposed to do or if he is working alone. It is stressful for him to be subjected to continual demands to relate to others. His initial reaction to such demands is further withdrawal, and then if the demands persist either violent reaction against those making them or flight from the situation.

There is a smaller but still numerous group whose outward behavior under normal circumstances is quite similar to that just described but whose reaction to solitude is quite different. These, though also active and dedicated to their jobs, become very tense and agitated when placed in situations which do not allow them to interact with others. For them stress is solitude; they require outside distraction and social demands in order to maintain their adjustment.

Emotional Expression

Another mental mechanism the Cuban male uses to control his tendency toward emotional involvement with associates is denial of his inherent sensitivity. He avoids the necessity for expressing his feelings by relying on procedures, rules, and regulations of social intercourse and work activity. His underlying sensitivity is evident in his ability to temper this impersonal behavior with judgment; at the same time, however, he does not have his emotions under complete control, so that he is apt to be somewhat inconsistent and unpredictable in his behavior. He can be cruel or even sadistic when one least expects it or, on the other hand, almost overwhelmed by guilt and remorse at having been cold or cruel to others.

By virtue of the very sensitivity he is trying to control, the Cuban strongly retains the imprint of the culture from which he springs: he is apt to be

devoted to the traditions and mores of his early surroundings. He has so learned the rules, regulations, customs, and procedures his society follows that he has a blueprint to guide him in almost every situation he may meet. As a result, he is very cautious about adopting new ways to meet new situations; he does not readily accept new ideas unless he has some assurance that his peers understand and accept them. In this sense he lacks versatility and adaptability. He may be prone to prejudgments and logic-tight mental compartmentation; that is, he may be unable to recognize that he is behaving inconsistently and inefficiently from one situation to another.

The Female

In general, the composite Cuban female sampled parallels the male in her development.³ Initially sensitive, she, too, must learn to become more aloof and less involved with the people in her world. But her solution for the problem is considerably less efficient, psychologically, than that of her male partner.

The typical Cuban female tends to be oriented somewhat less to the intellectual than the male. This does not mean that she is less intelligent but rather that she is much more aware of the demands made on her by the environment. She tries to reduce these demands by losing herself in the routine activities of her life, compensating a certain lack of procedural skill with sheer conscientiousness and determination. Somewhat more than the male, then, she can perform boring, tedious, and repetitive activities for long periods with little apparent fatigue or loss of efficiency. Since she is deliberately not interested in making herself socially acceptable to more than a few persons, she can function quite adequately in environments which most people would consider unfriendly, cold, or unrewarding.

At the same time, however, since she is fundamentally dependent upon someone in her world for support, guidance, and gratification of her needs, she tends to be loyal to and involved with a few key individuals. (The bond she has with them is not a permanent one, for she can switch her allegiance, albeit with considerable initial difficulty, from one to another supporting figure.) Thus on the one hand she discourages most

approaches to social involvement by an impersonal and fairly rigid adherence to conventional social relationships or, when particularly pressed, by being actively negative or hostile, and on the other she jealously guards the few more intimate relationships which she has cautiously established and views any threat to these with considerable anxiety and suspicion. In the absence of threat, her longterm relationships are more predictable and less fickle than those of the male, but they are no more satisfying, in the long run, than his disappointing superficiality.

Operational Implications

Given these personalities as generic, what tendencies with respect to major strengths and weaknesses and potential handling problems can be anticipated? The male, especially, may have a potential for being particularly adept at recognizing and describing the feelings and attitudes of others without himself becoming so involved as to lose his objectivity. To the extent that this ability were verified in the individual agent he could be used to evaluate the emotional states of individuals or assess the relationships among members of a group. The female is much less likely to be adept at such evaluative tasks; she has more often pushed the development of impersonal work skills at the expense of her fundamental sensitivity.

The main psychological disadvantage of the adjustments we have discussed here is that they take a great deal of energy to maintain. Both male and female are under considerable pressure to become more involved with others than they wish to be. Keeping uninvolved leads to marked strain and tension which are often relieved by the use of alcohol and drugs, although not usually to the point of alcoholism or addiction. Obviously, the case officer must check on his agent's tolerance for fatigue and stress and how he counters these strains.

From a management point of view the Cuban may seem disappointing in long-range performance and at the same time overly sensitive to criticism. The male, seeming more intellectual than he himself feels and being verbally fluent and able to learn procedures quickly, may appear to understand something when he really does not. Thus he may be

overrated during training, and in operations the discrepancy between expected and actual results may be increased by his lack of versatility: once he has found a way of doing things he does not readily shift to new patterns which may be demanded by the operational situation. On the contrary, he may persist in partially learned but inappropriate modes of behavior. The female, as we have seen, is somewhat less capable procedurally, but her dogged application covers her inefficiencies.

Each therefore has a potential for underlying feelings of inferiority. Direction and control are necessary, but criticism and testing, especially from someone who is not respected and admired, may be extremely threatening. A supervisor must be careful to direct his criticism to the methods and procedures being used rather than to the performance of the individual. But any change of procedures must be preceded by long and careful training.

The biggest problem appears to be that of long-term loyalty and control. Essentially, the Cuban is loyal only to himself. With a few exceptions, he cannot tolerate close relationships for long periods of time; only temporary liaison is possible. In his relationship with a case officer he will tend to view himself as a colleague rather than as a subordinate.

In the approach to the female, a painstaking study of her emotional needs must be made in order to find a way to win her from those to whom she feels loyalty. The male, on the other hand, can often be subverted by appeals to his intellectual orientation and devotion to objectivity. One consequence of these mental mechanisms is that he usually has quite adequate justifications, in his own mind at least, for all his behavior. It may then be possible to provide him with an intellectual rationale for engaging in activities inconsistent with or contradictory to his usual pattern. If this is done the new action will no longer be perceived as being inconsistent and can be carried out with little or no anxiety.

1 Studies, VII 1, p. 85 f.

2 This study is based on an analysis of tests administered to 201 male and 19 female Cubans between May 1960 and October 1963. The sample includes only those subjects for whom complete data are available.

3 The observations which follow are tentative indeed; they are based on a very small sample, probably not at all representative of Cuban women

in general.

SECRET

Posted: May 08, 2007 07:56 AM