

# Which Way Cuba?

Political transformations, social  
deterioration and attempted dialogue

Vegard Bye, Armando Chaguaceda and Borghild Tønnessen-Krokan



---

**Publisher:** Norwegian Institute of International Affairs  
**Copyright:** © Norwegian Institute of International Affairs 2014  
**ISBN:** 978-82-7002-341-1

Any views expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They should not be interpreted as reflecting the views of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. The text may not be printed in part or in full without the permission of the authors.

**Visiting address:** C.J. Hambros plass 2d  
**Address:** P.O. Box 8159 Dep.  
NO-0033 Oslo, Norway  
**Internet:** [www.nupi.no](http://www.nupi.no)  
**E-mail:** [info@nupi.no](mailto:info@nupi.no)  
**Fax:** [+ 47] 22 99 40 50  
**Tel:** [+ 47] 22 99 40 00

---

# Foreword

This NUPI Report is the result of a project financed by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the purpose of studying and accompanying economic and institutional reform in Cuba. NUPI has had two partners in this project: Centro de Estudios de la Economía Cubana (CEEC), and the magazine Espacio Laical, linked to the Havana Archbishop's Office of the Catholic Church.

NUPI's own research as part of the project has also covered both economic and institutional-political issues. The three articles published in this NUPI Report is the result of the research on the latter aspect.

This Report consists of three papers taking stock of the political changes in Cuba by the end of 2013 (with some updates from early 2014):

First, Vegard Bye attempts to summarize the status of the Cuban reform processes under president Raul Castro, with emphasis on the link between economic reforms and political transformations. One basic question is whether increasing economic pluralism may also lead to political pluralism, or whether there will rather be a re-concentration of both economic and political power.

Second, Armando Chaguaceda looks at the social deteriorations in Cuba. What is at stake are some of the most important achievements of the revolution in terms of health, education and social security. The author argues that these achievements have never been seen in a rights perspective. The paper is published in Spanish. An English summary of the main observations is included in Bye's paper (Chapter 7).

Lastly, Borghild Tønnessen-Krokan describes the polarized debate and issues that have blocked normalization and friendly coexistence, and analyzes constraints and benefits related to dialogue on human rights, security and other contentious issues both inside Cuba and between Cuba and the US in light of a recent thaw.

In Annex 1 at the end of the Report, we reprint an English translation of the very visionary Manifest elaborated by our partner *Laboratorio Casa Cuba: Cuba soñada – Cuba posible – Cuba futura*. This is the first proposal for a liberal democracy in Cuba proposed by a group of political thinkers operating within the Cuban political system, and thus tolerated by Government and Party. There is reason to believe that this document - with possible follow-up - will become a benchmark for future debate about democratic political transformations in Cuba.

## Contents

Foreword .....	2
<b>Which Way Cuba? The 2013 Status of Political Transformations .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>By Vegard Bye</i>	
1. Introduction.....	5
2. Agricultural transformations and their implications .....	6
3. Widening space for employment-generating entrepreneurs? .....	11
4. Mariel: the new Cuban panacea? .....	19
5. The new cooperative sector.....	21
6. A dual state-private structure? .....	23
7. Social deteriorations – and their possible impact .....	25
8. Cuban agents of change.....	28
9. International context – Cuba towards Latin American normalcy? .....	39
10. Assessing the on-going transformations up against theoretical and empirical literature .....	43
11. The three scenarios.....	52
<b>Cuba: revisitando la Justicia Social en tiempos de reforma .....</b>	<b>57</b>
<i>By Armando Chaguaceda</i>	
Resumen .....	58
1. Introducción .....	59
2. Las perspectivas del análisis.....	61
3. El caso cubano .....	65
4. Las reformas y sus impactos .....	70
5. La (in)seguridad alimentaria y los ingresos personales .....	75
6. El déficit habitacional y la marginalidad. ....	78
7. La “potencia médica” y el “pueblo más culto del mundo” .....	81
8. Reducciones en la calidad educacional .....	86
9. Conclusiones.....	88
Referencias .....	90
<b>Build Walls or Open Doors? Prospects for Cuba Dialogue .....</b>	<b>93</b>
<i>By Borghild Tønnessen-Krokan</i>	
1. Introduction.....	94
2. Methodological constraints.....	96
3. Scope and definitions of dialogue and reconciliation .....	98
4. Origins and dynamics of the conflict .....	100
5. From Deadlock to Détente.....	110
6. Conclusion .....	141
ANNEX I:.....	143

# Which Way Cuba?

## The 2013 Status of Political Transformations

Vegard Bye

Published by Norwegian Institute of International Affairs

# 1. Introduction

This paper attempts to summarize the status of the Cuban reform processes at the end of 2013 (including some elements from early 2014). It is part of a project at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, where we are following both the economic reforms and – in this case – the political implications of economic reforms.<sup>1</sup>

The article will take as a point of departure reforms and changes that may be observed in the following areas: agricultural transformations, possible widening space for entrepreneurs, the Mariel Special Development Zone, the new cooperative sector, the emergence of a new dual state-private structure in the economy, a discussion of different Cuban agents of change, considerations about an evolving international context. Towards the end of the paper, we attempt to assess these empirical trends against the backdrop of some theoretical considerations for political transformations, partly with reference to other cases, before the paper draws up three possible scenarios for Cuba towards and even after 2018, when the great generational shift in the Cuban leadership is supposed to take place.

This Report also contains an article going more in depth about the deterioration of social services in Cuba, written by the Cuban political scientist Armando Chaguaceda. Since this article is printed in Spanish, a summary in English is included in the present article.

The key question behind this paper is whether and to what extent a promotion of *economic pluralism* is taking place in such a way that it may lead to *political pluralism* and *de-concentration of power*, or contrary, whether there will be a *re-concentration* of both economic and political power in the party, state and military nomenclature.

\*\*\* Cuba: revisitando la Justicia Social en tiempos de reforma

Armando Chaguaceda

---

<sup>1</sup> The paper is a direct follow-up of NUPI Working Paper 818 (2013): The Politics of Cuban Transformations – what Space for Authoritarian Withdrawal (Bye 2013i). A shorter version of the present paper was published by ASCE Proceedings 2013, and is available on NUPI's website (Bye 2013ii). Vegard Bye (2013): It will also be published in *Cuban Affairs*, an electronic journal published by the Institute for Cuban & Cuban-American Studies, University of Miami. A Spanish version of this article will shortly appear in the Cuban magazine *Espacio Laical*.

## 2. Agricultural transformations and their implications

Agriculture is the sector so far most systematically affected by the on-going economic reforms in Cuba. The reason is simple: the country simply cannot afford spending 2 billion USD annually on food imports, only producing 40% or less of its own food consumption. These figures must also be seen up against the tremendous but largely unused potential for agricultural production in the country. The French socialist and initially very pro-Castro agro-economist Régis Dumont estimated that Cuba potentially could have the capacity to produce enough food for 30 million people;<sup>2</sup> now the country's agricultural output stands at a trivial 15% of that potential, for whatever the comparison is worth.

For years, leading Cuban agricultural economists have been arguing for a package of integral market reforms in order to drastically increase productivity and production of agricultural products. Actually, many of these proposals have little by little been put in place, most often against heavy resistance and barriers ("trabas") from the bureaucracy linked to the Ministry of Agriculture, the peasant organization ANAP which is supposed to represent the peasants and farmers but in reality is controlled by state and party, and not least the administration of state-dominated cooperatives and local buying monopolies (*Centros de Acopio*). Paradoxically, the decentralization that has been taking place in the agriculture sector may have made things even worse, by strengthening local power structures built up around the state's agricultural monopoly, and their bosses.<sup>3</sup>

The agricultural production and distribution structure has been substantially modified over the latest five years, but there is still a lot of remaining barriers.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> René Dumont (1970): *Cuba est-il socialiste?* (Paris)

<sup>3</sup> Marc Frank (2013): Cuban Revelations. Behind the Scenes in Havana (University Press of Florida), p. 261-264, based on interviews with local farmers, describes how this works in practice, in situations where the state monopoly on agricultural supplies and commercialization in most rural areas is the only significant business, and traditional bosses are afraid of losing their privileges, positions and powers. This may explain much of the resistance against the necessary reforms that we discuss in the following.

<sup>4</sup> The following discussion, and the information provided, is mostly based on two recent articles by agricultural economist Armando Nova Gonzales of CEEC: Nova

First of all, what we will qualify as non-state share of land tenure (including private property and the so-called credit and service cooperative, CCS, plus the new leaseholders – *usufructuarios*) has exploded since 2007, from 18.5 % to 62%, representing 55-60% of the country's total agricultural labour force of 1 million<sup>5</sup>. It is important to note that productivity in terms of food production on non-state land is the double of that at state land.<sup>6</sup>

One of the important reform factors introduced as early as 2008 was the opportunity for private peasants to lease idle-lying land, through so-called *usufructo*. Through a series of legal measures, we may at the end of 2013 summarize the status of the *usufructuarios* as follows<sup>7</sup>:

- there is now a total of 172,000 such leasing peasants in the country (17% of the agricultural workforce, occupying 21% of cultivable land);<sup>8</sup>,
- two important reforms in their favour have now been implemented, apparently against strong bureaucratic resistance: the right to build houses on the land and to pass on the leasing contract to the next generation (inheritance right);
- one important *remaining* reform measure is to prolong the very limited time perspective of the leasing contract (it has been extended from 10 to 20 years and is in principle renewable, but most farmers would like to see this period significantly extended with reference to similar discussions

---

Gonzales (2013i): "Impacto de los Lineamientos de la Política Económica y Social en la producción nacional de alimentos", in Perez Villanueva / Torres Perez: *Economía Cubana: Ensayos para una reestructuración necesaria* (CEEC/Havana); and Nova Gonzales (2013ii): "Continuidad de los cambios en la agricultura", in Perez Villanueva / Torres Perez: *Miradas a la economía cubana – entre la eficiencia económica y la equidad social* (CEEC/Havana).

<sup>5</sup> Anicia García and Armando Nova Gonzáles (2013): "Food Production and Import Substitution in the Cuban Reform Process", table 6.3 ref. table 6.2, in Brundenius/Torres (2013): *No More Free lunch – Reflections on the Cuban Economic Reform Process and Challenges for Transformation* (Springer). According to the Cuban statistical office, ONEI, the agricultural labour force in 2011 was approximately 1 million, 20% of total workforce in the country.

<sup>6</sup> CCSs and private property (lease holders are not included here), while they represented 24.4% of land holdings, produced 57% of the food in the country, according to Armando Nova Gonzales (2012): "La propiedad en la economía cubana", in: Péres/Torres: *Hacia una estrategia de desarrollo para los inicios del siglo XXI* (CEEC, Havana).

<sup>7</sup> This summary is based on Armando Nova (2013ii) op.cit.

<sup>8</sup> Gonzales/Nova (2013), op.cit.



in Vietnam where land leasing has led to a production boom;<sup>9</sup>

- another remaining problem is the threat that leasing contracts will be cancelled if less than the required 70-80% of production is sold to the state *Acopios*, and rather to market outlets with much better prices;<sup>10</sup>

In sum, there is too much uncertainty around the leasing system to make it really attractive and productive for production purposes.

Many of the same bottlenecks remain for other agricultural producers, either they are fully private or belong to cooperatives. Some examples of concrete bottlenecks:

- insufficient supply of inputs and means of production – still no wholesale market for agricultural implements;
- remaining centralization of product commercialization – prevailing state dominance although a few wholesale markets have been opened particularly around Havana<sup>11</sup> and direct sales to state-owned hotels and restaurants have become an option<sup>12</sup>;
- very slow and limited access to credits and technical service;

---

<sup>9</sup> In Vietnam, under the 1993 Land Law, people were issued 20-year land leases for agricultural purposes, a period farmers now want to see extended to 50 years or indefinitely. During the term, they also reserve rights to transfer, lease and mortgage the given land.

<sup>10</sup> It is quite obvious that far less than the officially required percentage is being sold to *acopios*, but the problem is that by violating these official requirements, peasants feel threatened with reprisals including the loss of lease rights.

<sup>11</sup> An important breakthrough in the reform of the agriculture has been the emergence of wholesale *sales* markets (“*mercados de mayorista*”), as alternative to the largely inefficient state buying monopolies (“*centros de acopio*”). The first large wholesale market near Havana, outside of Rancho Boyero, emerged more or less spontaneously in 2012, without really being legalized but it was mostly tolerated. In 2013, this market became formally legalized, and similar markets have been authorized in the two experimental provinces of Artemisa and Mayabeque (near Havana). Products not only from Havana’s neighbour districts but practically from the entire country are now sold by representatives of cooperatives or other middlemen, to thousands of different private outlets around the capital: state and private markets, street vendors (the so-called “*carretilleros*”), and to the hundreds of private restaurants (“*paladares*”) now to be found around Havana and other Cuban cities.

<sup>12</sup> According to Frank (2013, p. 270), chief reform manager Murillo, in a speech to Asamblea Nacional in July 2012, said that state share of food sales have fallen from 80 to around 50%. These are obviously very uncertain figures.

- imbalance in access to increase the area of land tenure per producer (maximum of 67 hectares for members of state-dominated UPBC and CPA vs. only 13.4 hectares for the far more efficient and private dominated CCS);
- problem of transport – private lorries are more available than before, but still not in sufficient quantity;
- the heavy and arbitrary control system when farm products are transported on the highways – with frequent need to bribe police or inspectors in order to pass<sup>13</sup>;
- remaining uncertainties about tax rates and collection.

As a result, domestic agricultural production is not really picking up; with some variations, production figures for the main products are more or less stable compared to 4-5 years ago. But there are serious question marks about statistics here, and the visual impression from booming private street sales in Havana indicate that in fact there is a significant increase in food supplies.

Anyway, import dependence for food is hardly reduced, a situation that is all the more paradoxical if we compare the prices paid by the state to what the state has to pay when importing the same products: when taking the distorted Cuban currency rates into account, the state pays the domestic producers only around 45% of the price for imported beans, 30% for rice and 20% for milk<sup>14</sup>. *So the big question is: why is the state not willing to pay better prices to domestic producers, and generally incentivize domestic production more, when so huge amounts of foreign currency is spent on food imports?*

All the hesitation to introduce more market-friendly conditions in Cuban agriculture is blocking the necessary transformations. Nova concludes that the agricultural producers are still not allowed to take their own decisions over the production – distribution – consumption cycle, and that there is no real recognition of market requirements. He sums up the state of affairs in Cuban agricultural transformations as follows:

“It is evident that production forces in the agricultural sector are still detained. The elimination of the obstacles that are slowing down development is required. Transformation of production relations in this

---

<sup>13</sup> Speaking to a lorry driver coming all the way from Manzanillo, in the eastern part of the country, he told he had been stopped no less than 17 times by the police or “inspectors” along the road, having to pay kickbacks in most cases in order to be allowed to proceed.

<sup>14</sup> Nova (2013i) op.cit., Table 5, p. 152.

sector, so strategic for the Cuban economy, should continue to accelerate as much as possible.”<sup>15</sup>

Reforms carried out so far are evidently far from sufficient to solve the deep crisis in Cuba's food production, prolonging the serious deficits, price increases and not least the tremendous pressure on the external economy as long as the major part of food needs to be imported.

On a more general level, it may seem that Cuban agriculture is moving towards a dual-track system, food for the domestic market is increasingly produced at middle-size family farms, whereas agricultural export production (particularly sugar, citrus) is dominated by large state farms, many of them under military corporation management, and with increasing foreign investment not least from Brazil. The exception to this is the production of two export products, coffee and particularly tobacco, which remains mostly in the hands of private farmers.

---

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 152-153.

### 3. Widening space for employment-generating entrepreneurs?

A deep change in the Cuban employment structure is assumed to take place, not least as a consequence of planned massive dismissals from state companies and the expansion of self-employment (“*cuentapropismo*”, here to be abbreviated as TCP, “*trabajadores por cuenta propia*”). The labour market imbalance – the generation of new and more productive employment – is along with increased food production the major structural challenge of the Cuban economy.

It is almost impossible to provide an accurate calculation of the division between state and non-state employment in present-day Cuba, due to missing or incomplete statistics, a huge hybrid category where people may hold a public job but earn most of their income from other sources, and a considerable number of people who simply make a living in the informal sector.

A recent attempt to analyse the labour market and calculate its composition, is presented in Feinberg (2013)<sup>16</sup>. He puts together official statistics and a host of other sources to produce the following statistic for what he calls “the Cuban private sector”:

The Cuban Private Sector, 2013 (in thousands)

Table 3.1. The Cuban Private Sector, 2013 (in thousands)

Private Sector Employment		Other private activities (est.)	
Registered self-employment (TCPs)	430	Self-employed (full time, unregistered)	180
Service and Credit Cooperatives (CCS)	353	Self-employed (part time, GESPI)	400-800
Land lease farmers	172	Independent artists	?
Private farmers	50	Migrant farm workers	?
Joint venture employees	34	Religious workers	?
New Urban Cooperatives	3	<b>Subtotal:</b>	<b>600 – 1000+</b>
<b>Subtotal:</b>	<b>1042</b>		
<b>TOTAL: 1,600 – 2,000</b>			

By adding together the TCPs<sup>17</sup>, members of CCS cooperatives and *usufructo* as well as private farmers, joint venture employees (where

<sup>16</sup> Richard E. Feinberg: *Soft Landing in Cuba? Emerging Entrepreneurs and Middle Classes*. Brookings Institute, Latin America Initiative (November 2013). The table we reproduce here is Table 3.1. in his Report (p. 12).

<sup>17</sup> The latest figure for *cuentapropistas*, quoted by Omar Everleny Perez of the CEEC in November 2013, is slightly higher than in this table: 446,000.

foreign capital participates along with the state), and the newly emerging urban cooperatives, he concludes that well over 1 million persons, about 20% of the workforce, is now working in the non-state sector. This is identical with the official figure given by the National Statistical Office (ONE) for 2011, while the Ministry of Economy and Planning suggested the share was standing at 25% (sources quoted by Feinberg, *op.cit.*, footnote 14). We may conclude that the official figure for non-state share of the workforce is somewhere between 20 and 25% (1 – 1,25 million people).

But Feinberg has ventured to estimate an additional, non-official figure for non-state employees, arriving at a maximum of another million. The most important sector in this calculation is what he calls GESPI, meaning “government employees with significant private income”. He is very conservatively suggesting that anything between 10 and 20 % of public employees have additional income in the private, informal or black sector of the economy (including stealing or “moonlighting” public property), while most people in Cuba seem to agree that this share is much higher. The second most significant sector in this category is made up by those who depend fully on the informal or black economy, which is also very conservatively estimated to represent 10% of the officially recognized “idle” workforce.

Based on these estimates, Feinberg concludes that as much as 2 million persons, up to 40% of the total workforce, may be fully or partly employed and making their living outside of the state economy. It may very well be that this figure is significantly higher, and that a clear majority of Cubans have the bulk of their monetary incomes from outside the state. *But this is very different from being employed in the non-state sector.*

What we have strong reservations about in Feinberg’s analysis, is when he includes all these groups in what he refers to as an *entrepreneurial sector*,<sup>18</sup> which in this connection has particular relevance for the potential for provision of employment and growth in the Cuban economy. The *part-time self-employed public employees* do normally only have the motivation of adding some income to their insufficient salaries; some *farmers* counted in the private sector are earning good money according to Cuban standards and will perhaps in

---

<sup>18</sup> An *Entrepreneur* may be defined as an individual who organizes or operates a business or businesses. The Irish-French economist [Richard Cantillon](#) defined the term as “a person who pays a certain price for a product and resells it at an uncertain price” and who is “making decisions about obtaining and using the resources while consequently admitting the risk of enterprise” (see Anthony Brewer (1992): *Richard Cantillon: Pioneer of Economic Theory*. Routledge. p. 51). In political economy, *entrepreneurship* is a process of identifying and starting a business venture, sourcing and organizing the required resources and taking both the risks and rewards associated with the venture.

some cases be willing to invest in agricultural market chains if conditions so permit – but such cases would probably be exceptions; and the *unregistered full-time self-employed*, mostly working in the informal sector often to be counted as black market could perhaps generate some employment but seldom in other than purely speculative business. *Cooperatives* may become an important employment-creation sector if and when conditions are made ready for it (see later). But so far, the main potential entrepreneurial sector to speak of in Cuba is what in this table is termed “*registered self-employment*”, the TCPs.

What we see, however, is that as much as 80% of the TCPs are owners of their own business, leaving only 20% to sell their labour force to others with self-employment license.<sup>19</sup> That is to say that the *cuentapropistas* have so far only generated approximately 90,000 jobs for others than themselves (although many of them may be hiring family members etc. on a part-time basis, ref. Feinberg’s GESPI category).

Another telling statistical detail about the TCPs is that only 15 % of them (approximately 65,000) were state employees before taking out their TCP licences,<sup>20</sup> and that the growth in non-state jobs is dramatically slower than anticipated when it was declared in September 2010 that half a million state employees would be laid off over the following six months and a similar number thereafter – for a total of 1 million or 20 % of the workforce. And this was only supposed to be the beginning: different high level government officials have spoken of 35-40% as the 2015 aim for share of the work force being employed in the non-state sector. Another official aim is that the private economy’s share of GDP should be increased to 50%, which is also a recognition that higher productivity is expected in the private than in the public sector.<sup>21</sup>

However, if we add together the TCPs, the usufructuarios and the new CCS peasants – and very tentatively assume that half of the latter have joined this category since the state dismissal plans were announced – we reach a total figure of only real employment creation in the non-state sector between 2010 and 2013 of 400 – 500,000. *In order to reach the aim of 35% (1,75 million) in 2015, a real explosion in job creation is required over the next two years, more than tripling the number of new jobs that have been generated so far.*

---

<sup>19</sup> Figure given by Omar Everleny Perez at CEEC Conference in Santa Clara, 7/11/13.

<sup>20</sup> Same source as the previous.

<sup>21</sup> There are even extra-official estimates indicating that as much as half the state employees are redundant and should be given non-state employment (ref Bye (2013), footnote 25).

So, if the aim is to provide alternative employment to any significant share of presently state employed workers, a completely different strategy is needed. Either it would require serious measures to provide the TCPs with opportunities to grow into small but particularly medium and even larger enterprise, or by supporting the establishment of strong and employment-generating cooperatives. In both cases, access to capital is in short supply, be it through direct investment or credit, which in both cases mostly would have to come from abroad.

SME, small and medium enterprise, does not even exist as an official category in to-day's Cuba. Still, some businesses are growing into this category, mostly in the restaurant business. We have come across several private restaurants, *paladares*, with 25 – 30 employees, and there is today no limit on the number of employees (but a ceiling of 50 chairs per restaurant). Also in transportation and construction there may be companies with a considerable number of employees, but in these cases they are often informal and right-out illicit or at least not registered. – e.g. one taxi owner having 5-10 licences in the name of various family members and letting other persons drive the taxi.<sup>22</sup>

There are several constraints for those who would have liked to develop their businesses into serious employment generators:

- a very limited capital market (family remittances being a main source although the access to sell houses and cars has added to this);
- very limited and complicated access to credit (few TCPs seem to have confidence in the existing credit schemes<sup>23</sup>);
- very limited access to inputs (not yet a wholesale market for anything but agricultural goods and therefore a widespread use of the black market);
- frequent harassment by police and government inspectors – often linked to corruption;
- disproportionate taxes if the number of employees exceed five;
- the legal areas for TCPs (and investment) are very limited, mostly excluding manufacturing.

So, in fact, the state tolerance for entrepreneurial growth and development still seems to be reserved, to say the least. We can not at all speak about proactive government policies for private enterprise growth. There is still a legal prohibition on “capital accumulation” –

---

<sup>22</sup> Feinberg, op.cit., in his study conducted conversations with 25 entrepreneurs in Havana and Cienfuegos, with an average of 2.5 employees per business; the highest average number (6.3) was in the restaurant sector.

<sup>23</sup> None of the 25 entrepreneurs interviewed by Feinberg (2013) in Havana and Cienfuegos had made use of credit schemes.

which was explicitly ruled out by Raúl Castro's speech at the 6<sup>th</sup> PCC Congress in 2011.<sup>24</sup> Without the opportunity to accumulate capital, and with minimum access to credit and foreign investment (except for family remittances), there will be no basis for the expansion of private companies.

The impression is that non-state employment is still only seen as a survival solution, not a strategic development option providing serious incentives for private entrepreneurs.

From the outset of the process to "update socialism" in 2010-2011, party leaders ruled out the option to cede significant public property to private hands. Only minor economic activities were supposed to pass over to the non-state sector.<sup>25</sup> The resistance to allow micro businesses developing into real companies should therefore come as no surprise. There are even those within government circles who consider efforts to foster entrepreneurship as a sinister plan to undermine socialism – and some go as far as claiming that the eternal enemies in the CIA are behind such plans, i.a. by using the Catholic Church as their tool<sup>26</sup>. It is unclear to what extent such conspiracy theories have any influence on public economic strategies, but if that is the case it may partly explain the resistance to more systematic market reforms.

Still, there seems to be a growing acceptance that the emergence of at least medium-size private companies is unavoidable, thus marking a significant deviation from the policies established through the Party Congress Guidelines. In some cases the private sector is putting up serious competition to the state, particularly in tourism, probably because this is the only sector where private businesses have quite unrestricted access to foreign currency. Through conversations with restaurant owners in Trinidad, one of Cuba's favourite tourist destinations, we can conclude that there are about the double number

---

<sup>24</sup> In his speech, Castro said that there had been some proposals to permit capital accumulation when the draft "*lineamientos*" were discussed in the run-up to the Party Congress. This would "for the time being" continue to be ruled out, he said, but he promised to come back to the issue.

<sup>25</sup> This was repeatedly made clear by then-economy minister, later head of the commission to oversee the implementation of the "modernization" plan, Marino Murillo, in the run-up to the 2011 Party Congress. He even stated in November 2010 that "modernization should not be mistaken with reform", since "reform" implied ceding property to private hands, which he said was not on the agenda. (see Frank, 2013, p. 230).

<sup>26</sup> See Arthur Gonzales (2013): "The CIA and the manipulation of the Catholic Church", posted 30/10/13 by *cubainsidetheworld*, <http://cubainsidetheworld.wordpress.com/2013/10/30/the-cia-and-the-manipulation-of-the-catholic-church/>, downloaded 2/12/13, where the author interprets plans by the Cuban Catholic Church to train entrepreneurs in Santiago and Havana as part of the subversive plans of the US government against the Cuban revolution, with the purpose of replacing socialism with capitalism in Cuba.



of both restaurant chairs and tourist beds available in the private compared to the state sector, in addition to taxis, artisan shops, musicians, tourist guides etc., all that keeps tourism running in Trinidad:

“It is quite fantastic how rapidly we private entrepreneurs have become a potential power factor here in Trinidad,” says Reinaldo Vivas Zerquera, owner of the beautiful *paladar* “*La Nueva Era*”, with a total workforce of 27. “We have not tried to exploit this power position explicitly, and I do not know whether the state sector here has even considered it. Perhaps they take us a bit too much for granted,” he goes on to say.<sup>27</sup>

So in typical tourist places like Trinidad, Baracoa and Vinales, the private sector is a very tough competitor to the state and actually has a potential power position. Even in the colonial part of Havana (“*Habana Vieja*”), where the state has made major investments in hotels and restaurants, the capacity in the private sector is more or less on par with the state sector (according to Feinberg, op.cit.), and the Havana Historian who is overseeing the comprehensive restoration work there is reported to go around begging private restaurant owners not to outcompete the state.

Very low levels of investments is generally speaking a critical problem in the Cuban economy and especially in the productive part of it, highlighted by the fact that only 10% of investments are in the manufacture sector. There is also were low imports of capital goods<sup>28</sup>. So productive investments have all but dried up. Without access to the international credit institutions (World Bank, IDB, IMF), with an exception for the Brazilian Development Bank and a possible exception for the CAF (Corporación Andina de Fomento), and in the absence of an attractive legal framework for foreign investments, there is little sign of sustainable growth in the Cuban economy. The present growth levels of 2-3% against the backdrop of the extremely weak point of departure is not at all sufficient in order for the economy to recover; growth rates at the magnitude of 6-7% would have been necessary<sup>29</sup>.

*Foreign investment* could have been a source of business expansion and job generation. But foreign investments in Cuba are very limited and actually falling, and in the absence of a long overdue new foreign

---

<sup>27</sup> Interview in Trinidad, 9/11/13.

<sup>28</sup> According to Omar Everleny Perez of CEEC, 7 November 2013 workshop in Santa Clara.

<sup>29</sup> This is the view of several CEEC economists, expressed in private conversations. Growth in 2013 was estimated by Government to end at 2.7%, against an expectation of 3.6%. Forecast for 2014 is 2.2% (Reuters 20.12.13, quoting economy minister Abel Yzquierdo´s 19 December speech to Council of Ministers).

investment law and considerable legal uncertainties<sup>30</sup>, there are few signs of foreign capital of any significance to be attracted. Some estimates (or perhaps rather “guesstimates”) put the present level of foreign investments in Cuba at 3.5 billion USD, a very limited amount for the size of the country and its economy<sup>31</sup>.

The one obvious source of investment capital is the Cuban diaspora, particularly in Florida. One frequently quoted estimate – although the figure is quite uncertain – is that the annual value of family remittances in cash is approximately 2,6 billion USD, with a similar amount going in kind<sup>32</sup>. The annual cash amount here is not far from the above estimated total accumulated value of FDI, while the total amount of this (cash plus goods) is very close to the country’s total value of goods exports.<sup>33</sup> Since this enters the country without any raw material or production costs, the net contribution to the Cuban economy is much larger. As always with family remittances in any country, much of it goes to consumption among family members. But there is no doubt that much of the small-scale businesses thriving in Cuba are based on family remittances.<sup>34</sup> Another important trend is the return of many Cuban-Americans (some say “hundreds per month”) to Cuba to set up small businesses. If there had been active support and even incentives to let these micro businesses grow into SMEs, there could be ample space for family businesses of significant proportions with mixed domestic and diaspora capital. This would probably be the best and perhaps only way real entrepreneurship could emerge in Cuba under the present conditions, in the same way as what happened when market reforms got under way in China and Vietnam.

---

<sup>30</sup> See Richard Feinberg (2012): *The New Cuban Economy: What Role for Foreign Investment?* Brookings Institute, Latin America Initiative (December 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Richard Feinberg, Brookings, gave these figures at his presentation at the ASCE conference, Miami, 1-3 August 2013. : He considers the amount of FDI in Cuba to represent approximately 15% of what would be normal for Cuba’s size. 3 billion out of the 3.5 billion investments, he considers, are concentrated in 20 companies, with a total of 35,000 workers.

<sup>32</sup> Estimate provided by Emilio Morales, Havana Consulting Group, in his presentation at ASCE Conference, Miami, 1-3 August 2013.

<sup>33</sup> According to official statistics, total value of exports in 2012 was 18.7 billion USD, of which only 5.9 was goods and 12.8 was services. The total value of imports was 14.9 billion USD, with goods representing 13.9 billion (ONEI 2013, Tabla 5.17: External Balance of goods and services).

<sup>34</sup> About half of the among the 25 cases studied by Feinberg in Havana and Cienfuegos had benefitted from family remittances to set up the business (Feinberg, 2013, p. 15).

There are many indications that the Cuban diaspora in the US is more than ready to invest in Cuba.<sup>35</sup> But still, there are serious doubts and contradictory statements about whether such entrepreneurship is really wanted by the Cuban leadership<sup>36</sup>. So the question is whether there really is a growing interest – and political willingness – in Havana to stimulate diaspora investments, which would also probably imply the emergence of an entrepreneurial class beyond the full control of the state, party and military system; and the privileged or even monopolized access of the nomenclature to constitute itself as a new entrepreneurial class?

---

<sup>35</sup> Ref. Bye (2013i), p. 27, with quotation from Carlos Saladrigas and other examples of leading representatives of the Cuban-American business community increasingly interested in doing business in Cuba.

<sup>36</sup> In the same Report (Bye, 2013i, p. 27-28), we quoted Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez expressing strong reservations in 2012 about diaspora investments by saying that "Cuba is looking for investments of a magnitude that normally does not come from the emigration", thus leaving the impression that medium-size entrepreneurship was of no real interest. But one year later, the Consul General at the US Interest Section in Washington, Llanio Gonzales, gave quite different signals during a visit in Miami by saying that the Cuban Government wants to promote and facilitate the repatriation of the diaspora Cubans who "during more than five decades have accumulated capital and a wish to return to their country and invest there" (El País, Madrid, 11/07/13).

## 4. Mariel: the new Cuban panacea?

As the first optimism about offshore oil drilling subsides, and the economic lifeline to Venezuela gets increasingly uncertain after the death of President Chávez and increasing economic problems in that country, a new strategic project has appeared on the horizon: Mariel.

The Mariel Container Port, and the related 460 square kilometres Special Development Zone (*Zona Especial de Desarrollo Mariel – ZEDM*) located 45 km west of Havana, is scheduled to be inaugurated in January 2014. Some observers go as far as seeing this as Cuba's version of China's "one country, two systems", the constitutional concept created by Deng Xiaoping for relations to Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan in the 1980s<sup>37</sup>.

The legal framework drawn up for the ZEDM – to be operated by a Singapore company as to underline that this is serious capitalism – includes a 10-year tax holiday, almost complete freedom to import raw materials and repatriate profits, 50-year contracts, 100% ownership of businesses, guarantees against expropriation. The hope is that this will lure manufacturing plants as well as research centres and operational hubs to Cuba. The deep water container port is the only infrastructure being built so far by the Brazilian company Odebrecht with 70% of the 900 million USD investments provided by Brazil's state development bank (BNDES). The special objective with this is to handle the new wave of larger "Post-Panamax" ships expected to dominate global commerce when the Panama Canal expansion is completed in 2015 (recent conflicts about the construction may imply a delay). The Cubans have particular expectations that Chinese firms will be looking for a modern shipping container terminal in the Caribbean, but there will definitely be competition from other countries in the region that have already established SEZs, like Dominican Republic and Jamaica<sup>38</sup>.

The big drawback with which Mariel will struggle from the outset is of course the US embargo, which prohibits ships that stop on the island from calling at US ports for half a year. But if and when the US embargo

---

<sup>37</sup> Special Development Zone or Special Economic Zone (SEZ) is normally a geographical region that is designed to export goods and provide employment. SEZs are exempt from federal laws regarding taxes, quotas, FDI-bans, labour laws and other restrictive laws in order to make the goods manufactured in the SEZ at a globally competitive price.

<sup>38</sup> see <http://cubainsidetheworld.wordpress.com/2013/11/06/mariel-special-zone-the-jewel-of-the-cuban-economy-cuba/>; or Nick Miroff (2013): "At Mariel Port, Cuba follows Chinese blueprint", in Global Post, 23/11/13.

is gone, the port may evidently become an ideal point for US-Cuban trade. There is all reason to believe that this perspective has been part of the calculation.

Cuba has been keen to present Mariel as a job-creation program. The question is how attractive it in reality would be for export-driven manufacture, given the limited experience Cuban labour force has with modern assembly plants and advanced technology. If the relatively advanced Cuban experiences with sectors such as medical devices and pharmaceuticals could attract investors that might offer interesting opportunities.

One of the great disincentives for foreign investors in Cuba so far has been that labour force can only be hired through a Cuban state employment agency, which keeps the lion share (often as much as 90%) of the salaries. Direct recruitment seems to be ruled out in Mariel like in the rest of the country, but there is an intention to let the workers keep the major part of their salaries (some say as much as 80%). That may increase the attraction for investors and workers alike and be an incentive for better productivity eliminating the pressure on foreign investors in Cuba to offer extra-official benefits to workers. But many companies may still be expected to be reluctant to engage with the Cuban labour regime.

## 5. The new cooperative sector

The recent approval of a new group of 200 approved urban cooperatives signals a new category of companies of potentially great significance in Cuba. We are speaking about groups of people who rent premises or production means from the State for ten years (this contract may be renewed), with the possibility of defining prices and distributing the profit. Cooperatives may also be set up in alliance between *cuentapropistas*. This may for instance be an opportunity for individual artisans to develop into small-scale industrial production.

Two legal measures approved in late 2012 (Decree-Law 305 and Decree 309 of the Council of Ministers<sup>39</sup>) establish some completely innovative principles for Cuban cooperative organization. Ultimate authority in these cooperatives will be with the General Assembly (GA), which includes all members. The GA will have the power to elect a President and other directives by secret ballot. Financial management of the cooperative will depend on size and complexity: left to a single member in small cooperatives and a financial committee in larger ones. At least judging by these legal principles, members of these coops should be able to exercise substantial control, almost resembling the workers' management system in Tito's Yugoslavia. But of course the proof is in the pudding: will the local nuclei of the Communist Party really accept democratic governance in these new cooperatives and avoid taking the control over workers' assemblies, and thus also stay out of the enterprise management function they normally control? If that happens, it would really be innovative for the Cuban society, with a possible spread effect into the political system.<sup>40</sup>

Very similar principles have also been established for the most independent agrarian cooperatives, the so-called CCPs. A new cooperative training project within the agricultural sector, organized jointly between UNDP and the Ministry of Agriculture with EU funding (part of the so-called Palma project), has developed some very interesting training material<sup>41</sup> where the basic international principles of cooperative organization<sup>42</sup> are emphasized. These include such

---

<sup>39</sup> Published in *Gaceta Oficial* No. 53, 2012.

<sup>40</sup> A good presentation of these measures is to be found on the blog of the Canadian economist and Cuba-watcher Archibald Ritter (October 7, 2013), published in ASCE Newsclippings.

<sup>41</sup> Ministerio de Agricultura (2013): *Gestión Integral Cooperativa: Guía para formadores y facilitadores* (La Habana).

<sup>42</sup> The International Co-operative Alliance (ICA – ACI with its Spanish acronyms), founded in 1895, is the most important world-wide co-operative organization. It

remarkable principles in the Cuban society as *open and voluntary membership*, *democratic control by the members* (one member, one vote; full accountability of elected leaders to members), *economic participation by the members* (democratic control of the capital, where members also decide how the surplus is to be used), *autonomy and independence* (organizations should be fully controlled by members; implicitly being independent of government). This training program is now being rolled out among cooperative members in a total of 37 municipalities in five different provinces all over the country. If these principles are being taken seriously, and respected as a basis for existing or new agricultural cooperatives, it would almost imply a revolution in the way cooperative members take control of their own economic situation in Cuba. The fact that the Ministry of Agriculture puts its stamp on this training material and actively supports the training is in itself quite extraordinary.

One of the problems with the new urban cooperatives, which the legislation presents as “experimental” and up for reappraisal and modification after the first 200 have been allowed to function for a while, is the terribly cumbersome approval process. Each and one of them has to be approved by the Council of Ministers, after previous assessments of financial, legal and other aspects by special commissions at local, provincial and national level. The need for firm control still penetrates the official thinking.

---

has a strong presence in Latin America and the Caribbean. The ICA Congress established seven basic principles, which all cooperatives are supposed to follow, in 1995. The training guide prepared for the purpose of this project in Cuba refers directly to, and is based upon, these principles.

## 6. A dual state-private structure?

A dual-track model may also become a realistic option in the case of Cuban business structure.

The strategic sectors of the economy (sugar and derivatives, petroleum, nickel, big tourism corporations, agriculture export including tobacco, coffee and citrus etc), will definitely continue to be controlled by the state, in many cases by military corporations. Foreign investment has so far been exclusively concentrated in these sectors plus a couple of domestic consumption sectors (Nestlé's ice cream production probably being the most important example of this).

New legislation provides more autonomy to state companies. Ministries are basically letting go of their previous business responsibilities, setting up holding companies with proper control of annual plans. They will now be allowed to sell excess production at the open market and keep as much as half of their profits for re-investment. This may be of particular importance for such sectors as petroleum and nickel, with *CUPET* and *Unión del Niquel* operating as independent business entities outside of the national budgets and accounts (in the latter case in a joint venture with General Nickel Co. S.A., a daughter company of the Canadian corporation Sherrit), both reporting to the newly created MINEM – Ministerio de Energía y Minas. In the slowly recovering sugar industry, the previously so powerful Sugar Ministry has been abolished, giving way to a holding company (*Grupo Empresarial de la Agroindustria Azucarera*) with its 26 subsidiaries replacing the ministry's previous 139 companies.

In the medium term, it will be important to watch whether these more autonomous state corporations – whether they are owned by the military or operate as holding companies supervised by ministries – will permit its top management or other high state, party or military officials (the nomenclature) to obtain property interest and not only management positions in these corporations, as we saw in the privatization process e.g. in Russia and Angola. So far, there does not seem to be any examples of that, but it may rapidly change.

But outside of these strategic sectors, most state industries and other enterprises are more or less obsolete, and this is exactly where massive dismissals were supposed to take place. The question is whether they will give way to private, for instance in the re-building of medium-size manufacture. There could clearly also be a potential for diaspora investors to get involved in this part of the economy, and one of the most interesting options is if this could take place through gradual expansion of SMEs jointly owned and operated by Cuban nationals



inside and outside the country – particularly on either side of the Strait of Florida.

## 7. Social deteriorations – and their possible impact

Starting in the *Período Especial* following the demise of the Soviet Union, but further aggravated by the reduction of state welfare as a direct or indirect consequence of economic reforms, there is no doubt that the Cuban society is undergoing a process of serious social deteriorations. What is at stake are the principal “*logros de la revolución*”, the achievements of the revolution in terms of health, education and social security.

In the following, we will briefly highlight some of the findings in Chaguaceda’s article (published in Spanish in this Report: *Cuba: Revisitando la Justicia Social en Tiempos de Reforma*), in order to consider which impact this may have on the political situation in the country.

Official figures show that *social assistance* in Cuba, help to the most needy, has fallen dramatically: In 2012 it represented only 26% of the level in 2007.<sup>43</sup> This means that the situation for the poorest sections of the population is getting really dramatic, particularly taking into consideration that the point of departure in 2011 was far from good. The effects are particularly felt among the revolution’s traditional social base, which is to say among old people, low-income groups, women, and not least Afro-Cubans. The official policy has signalled a change from general subsidies (through the gradual disappearance of the rationing card – “*la libreta*”) to focalised support to vulnerable population groups. But this re-orientation of subsidies is far from sufficient to halt the negative consequences for the most vulnerable, some of them concentrated in certain areas of the capital that more and more take on the characteristic of *barrios marginales* (slum areas) which we normally associate with other Latin American countries and not with Cuba. The influx of migrants from the provinces seeking survival in illicit activities in Havana is adding to this problem, since they have no access to housing of minimally acceptable standard or to state services.

*Food prices* have increased significantly with the reduction of rationed goods and increase in private distribution, particularly hitting old people and those who are unable to benefit from new income opportunities outside of the state. Some observers claim that those who

---

<sup>43</sup> ONE (2013): *Anuario Estadística*, Cuadro 6.3: Ejecución del Presupuesto del Estado.

receive no family support in addition to their pensions may pass outright hunger. This situation is still partly compensated by universal and free access to health services – although these are also deteriorating (see later).

The *average monthly salary* of 460 pesos is far from sufficient to cover basic needs, which – according to the testimonies – would require approximately 1000 pesos per person. This means that in a family of two adults and two children, an income of 4000 pesos – 2000 pesos per adult working family member – would be required<sup>44</sup>. This is four to five times the average income in Cuba, and it means that the majority of Cuban families that depend on public salaries only are living far below the poverty line. Their only solution is to seek illegal sources of income, such as theft of state or private property, black market transactions etc.

Regarding the latter, the informants claim that no real reduction in *black markets* has taken place through the liberalization of markets and self-employment, perhaps to the contrary since the needs for inputs in the new businesses and consumption goods for the population has increased. Some economists estimate that the value of black market turnover is equivalent to that of the formal economy. The state seems to be incapable of reducing the black market through police operations, fines and detentions – ambulant vendors of illegal products in Havana tend to disappear after police operations only to reappear shortly afterwards. There is a widespread perception that police and inspectors are easily corruptible.

The *hygienic and sanitary situation* of the country – one of the prides on the Cuban revolution – is also affected by the general social deterioration. Epidemic outbreaks have clearly increased in seriousness and frequency. Water and sewage systems are in a critical condition all over the country and unavailable to an increasing percentage of the population, and garbage collection is irregular. The return of *cholera* has dealt a particularly hard blow to Cuba's pride in its health system, being a disease that had been eradicated in Cuba more than a century ago and is generally associated with Sub-Saharan Africa and the Asian sub-continent.<sup>45</sup> The government response seems to have been more concerned with hiding its frequency than with launching effective campaigns against it.

---

<sup>44</sup> When discussing this with many people in Cuba in November 2013, most Cubans claim that even this figure – 1000 pesos per person per month – may be too low to cover basic needs.

<sup>45</sup> A prominent health sector official lamented that a few years ago, when she visited another Latin American country where a cholera epidemic had broken out, she had said without hesitation: "thanks God, this could never happen in Cuba". Now, she says, she ought to go back and say "sorry" for this statement.

The state of *hospital services* available to the ordinary population is also reported to be deteriorating. Examination equipment like X-Ray, ultrasound etc. is generally in bad shape, the massive exodus of qualified medical personnel to a large number of Latin American and African countries (30,000 only to Venezuela, recently a new agreement for 6000 to be sent to Brazil) is taking its toll on the availability and quality of such personnel in Cuba, and corruption is widespread – a logical consequence of the low salaries in this sector as in other sectors of Cuban public services. It seems to be normal that physicians expect “gifts” in cash or kind – depending on what the patient may offer and the quality of the physician – in order to carry out medical services supposed to be freely available, or to provide the service in time.

The *education system* is also losing its historic quality in Cuba, due to the general economic crisis, the exit of many of the best teachers on international missions, and the departure of even more who cannot survive on public salaries and rather take up *cuentapropismo*. The latter may even include leaving the public education system and work as tutor (*repasador*) at home. There is a vicious circle at work here: the general deterioration of schools obliges parents with education ambitions for their kids to send them to tutors, thus making it more attractive for teachers to leave public education.

The *housing deficit* is one of the most serious social problems in Cuba, with more than 70% of housing being reported to be in a “bad or regular state” (50% classified by the government to be in “poor conditions”<sup>46</sup>). The problem is aggravated by the constant arrival of thousands of migrants from the interior of the country, often settling in the most inhabitable constructions.

It is difficult to avoid that this situation is impacting on the *level of crime and violence*. Although very low by general Latin American standards, in the absence of official statistics, the general perception is that it is increasing: assaults, home burglaries, robbery and pickpocketing on open streets, even assassinations. The mystery is really how Cuba can avoid crime to explode, given the general deterioration of the social indicators, the rapidly increasing social differentiation, the dissolution of moral values reported by everybody including top leaders both in the Party and the Church. The state’s repressive capacity is probably still a quite effective preventive factor in this picture.

---

<sup>46</sup> According to a government report quoted by Frank (2013), p. 257.

## 8. Cuban agents of change

Conventional thinking about transitions to liberal democracy puts much emphasis on the appearance of a more independent peasantry (often the main element in predominantly peasant societies, ref. Barrington Moore<sup>47</sup>, Fukuyama<sup>48</sup>) or middle classes in more urbanized situations, ref. Linz&Stepan (op.cit.).

The Cuban peasantry is today emerging as more autonomous than ever since the 1959 revolution, in spite of an array of barriers and resistance to recognize them as autonomous actors. The urgent need to let loose the market forces in agriculture will only strengthen this trend. Three decisive political decisions for the role of peasants will be (a) the degree of market freedom they will be permitted, (b) the degree of organizational freedom either through a democratization of the peasant organization ANAP or the establishment of alternative organization(s), and (c) the degree of freedom achieved by the agricultural cooperatives.

Some observers claim that Cuba already has a vibrant middle class. The most recent Brooking report on Cuba (Feinberg, 2013) is even subtitled “emerging entrepreneurs and middle classes”: “(So) by several measures – such as educational attainment, women working outside the home, women’s access to contraception and reproductive rates, and common indices of economic security – Cuba looks very much like a middle class society. But there is one measure whereby Cuba would certainly not qualify: access to individual consumer items” (p. 42).

We have argued against comparing these achievements, which the majority of Cubans has enjoyed during the larger part of the post-1959 period, as middle class characteristics in the political meaning of the word. The main reason for this is that these social gains have been so completely dependent on state sector performance. The very missing element pointed out by Feinberg, access to middle class consumerism, has of course always been the main frustration among Cubans when considering their economic and social situation. Among youth today it is bordering on an obsession to lack all the “gadgets” that are taken for granted in almost all other societies, even in marginal neighbourhoods around Latin America.

---

<sup>47</sup> Barrington Moore jr. (1967): *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* - Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World.

<sup>48</sup> Francis Fukuyama (2011): *The Origins of Political Order*. Profile Books.

So, most Cubans can in this sense be seen as *aspiring for middle class status*, and with that qualification we can follow Feinberg's argument: "Whether these middle classes eventually challenge state power or decide to co-exist with a strong state sector will depend on, among other factors, whether the state is willing to accommodate their interests, or whether it closes off opportunities at its own peril"<sup>49</sup>.

When analysing probable scenarios for Cuba's future, it is obviously very important to discuss from where the future leaders will come, who they are and what they stand for. We can do this by distinguishing between party and government insiders, military and other technocrats, academics and intellectuals working within the system, church people and dissenters. We will in the following discuss these groups separately.

### **The party and government insiders**

A complete change of guards is now beginning to take shape in the Cuban regime, and it will have to be completed pretty soon. As Raúl Castro has emphatically stated, by 2018 both the Castro brothers and probably all other "founding fathers" of the Cuban revolution will be out of all formal positions. At the 2011 Party Congress where he made this commitment, Raúl also complained that the Party had failed to prepare a new generation of leaders with the capacity to take over (after systematically firing all such candidates for decades). But only two years later, a chief successor was found, when the National Assembly elected 53 years-old Miguel Diaz-Canel as First Vice President, second only to Raúl, and by changing 55% of the State Council.

The composition of the 31 members new *State Council* – which exercises the National Assembly powers between its two brief annual sessions – is very interesting: 42% are women, of whom 6 of colour; 1/3 are military, but 6 of these 10 are founding members of the revolution who will leave these positions in 2018, which means that only 4 are "post-revolution" militaries who may continue beyond that decisive year (and these are all between 70 and 75 years old). It is also interesting to note similar changes in the *Council of Ministers*, the executive state body, where the only remaining military ministers are those of Informatics/Communication, Transport plus Interior and Defence.

It may be interesting to compare this composition of *government bodies* with the leading *party bodies*. As much as two thirds of the 14-member PCC Politburo, elected at the 2011 Party Congress, are high military officers or have a military-technocratic background, among them the same four top military officers between 70 and 75 who in

---

<sup>49</sup> Feinberg (2013), p. 45.

principle may stay beyond 2018 (the ministers and vice ministers of defence and the Interior). Interestingly, none of these four top military Politburo members are among the six Vice Presidents of the State Council elected in 2013, so to say Raúl Castro's "Kitchen Cabinet". The average age of the Politburo members is 64 years, versus 56 years in the State Council.

What we can see is that the number of military ministers and military members of the recently re-composed State Council is being reduced, that they seem to have a significantly less prominent role in state bodies than in party bodies, and that – with one exception – no younger (below 70) top-ranking military officers have been selected for top party or government positions. This could be an interesting development: are the military men losing political hegemony in Cuba?<sup>50</sup>

Very few of the younger members of the Council of State are known outside of the inner circles, and even less is known about their thinking. The top power structure in Cuba remains to appear as monolithic as ever, maintaining a hermetic veil of secrecy about their internal discussions. The main reason why they have been selected and survive in these positions is probably exactly that they have not expressed any opinions deviating from the official line – and this also goes for Díaz-Canel. In addition to him, the people to watch would be Marino Alberto Murillo (coordinator for the implementation of the economic reforms, member of the Politburo) and possibly Bruno Rodríguez (Foreign Minister and newly elected as member of the Politburo). Another interesting person mentioned by many observers is a young black female member of the State Council, Inés María Chapman Waugh (born 1965), President of the National Institute of Water Resources, who is renowned for sorting out complicated corruption scandals in her sector. Among the Province First Secretaries from whom future leaders are often drawn, the one from Santiago, Lázaro Expósito is often mentioned as a man of the future, whereas few seem to have confidence in a woman who apparently has been on a fast way up, Lázara Mercedes López, only 49 years old, First Secretary of the Party in Havana and the only provincial secretary who is also member of the Politburo.

One statement from Díaz-Canel – who has so far been conspicuously careful to avoid showing his cards – points in the direction of the new

---

<sup>50</sup> Marc Frank (2013) tells of an interesting episode from a meeting between Raúl Castro and Cardinal Ortega when they met in April 2010 to discuss the release of political prisoners: "The Cardinal asked Raúl why he had appointed so many military men to his government. Raúl said simply that the country was in crisis and he had turned to men he knew and trusted, and that this would change over time" (p. 204).

generation of leaders being prepared for more substantial changes than those we have seen so far, although the direction of those changes are kept in the blue. He recently noted that Cuba has made “progress on the issues that are easiest to solve,” but “what is left are the most important choices that will be decisive in the development of (the) country.”<sup>51</sup>

Those at the top, and Raúl Castro in particular, may welcome criticism and debate, while others are effectively blocking it. Most of the intellectual critics – and here we are entirely talking about people working within the system – identify the Second Secretary of the Party, José Ramón Machado Ventura, as the personalized guardian of this old line and the main bottleneck in the system. Most of them claim, however, that the person behind Machado Ventura is Fidel Castro himself, probably most often without taking expressively part in internal discussions: it is more a question about what he historically stands for and what the party bosses assume that his position would be.

Many of these insider observers perceive a very interesting situation between Machado Ventura as number two in the Party and Díaz-Canel as number two in the State system: the traditionalist anti-change old-timer “Fidelista” versus the young and change-oriented “Raulista”. And when push comes to shove on important political issues, it is claimed that the party boss is still calling the shots at the cost of the appointed heir – who after all is only an ordinary member of the Party’s Politburo. There are concrete cases where Díaz-Canel has intervened in favour of more liberal academics when he was the Minister of Superior Education (before being promoted to First Vice Chairman of the Councils of State and Ministers), where traditionalist heads of academic institutions – assumingly under the protection of Machado Ventura – subsequently have returned to previous anti-liberal positions since Díaz-Canel no longer has the operational responsibility for this sector.

Such assumptions about internal strives and ideological differences, as well as the name-dropping attempted above, are extremely difficult for outsiders to assess, in a system that is extremely opaque. Hardly anybody in Cuba is able to identify any factions within the Party, or ascribe any ideological labels to persons in leading positions or those aspiring for future top leadership in the Party. It is anybody’s guess in which direction Díaz-Canel or other future leaders will take the country. Considering the tremendously difficult decisions these post-Castro leaders will have to take in the very near future, it is quite conspicuous how little we know about their thinking. They must indeed have some hard moments with themselves when going through the different

---

<sup>51</sup> No source for this statement.



scenarios they may imagine for the country, without being able to discuss it openly – or perhaps not even with their closest colleagues.

### **Managers of military and other state enterprises**

Although some high-ranking military officers are still represented in government and even more in party top positions, most of them are too old to play a long-term role, and we would claim that their relative position has been reduced over the later couple of years.

However, as pointed out in Bye (2013i, p. 29 and following), the role of *military corporations* in key areas of the Cuban economy may be much more strategically important. We are particularly speaking about the leaders of the two most important military conglomerates, *CIMEX* (with operations in finance, international trade, tourism, real estate etc., 25,000 employees and headed by Army Colonel Hector Oroza Busutin), and *Gaesa* (in charge of the leading tourism company Gaviota, and not least the Mariel ZEDM through its subsidiary Almacenes Universal, headed by Raúl Castro's ex-son-in-law Luís Alberto Rodríguez López Callejas).

The managers of companies under these conglomerates, and perhaps particularly the ZEDM and the tourism companies (Gaviota and others), may be going to play a decisive role in the future Cuban economy and indirectly in the political structures. The same is the case for the de-centralized corporations in the nickel and petroleum sectors, Cupet and Unión del Niquel, as well as in the new sugar industry conglomerate. There is reason to believe they will be advocates for further market reforms, but keen to secure that the state corporations keep as much as possible control vis-à-vis non-state actors. This is not least the case when it comes to strategic partnerships with foreign investors.

### **Academics / intellectuals / artists/ church**

There is no doubt an increasing space for academic and intellectual debate in Cuba, although the point of departure was quite limited. Among academics, it is particularly the economists who have been paving the way, understandably since economic reforms have been the most visible and officially promoted change issue. Quite fundamental criticism of the foot-dragging and slowness in the economic transformations, of increasing contradictions in the Cuban model, and more or less open arguments for the introduction of market reforms seem to be taken constructively. Some of the strongest critics – many of them Party members – are still invited to take part as advisors to the “Permanent Commission for Implementation and Development of the Guidelines”, headed by the “reform manager” Marino Murillo. But some of these advisors complain that the communication is still very vertical: there is no open debate with the political leaders although

they may read or listen to proposals; they do very rarely engage in direct discussions, and they shy away from expressing their own views on controversial subjects, at least until there is an official party standpoint, normally defined by Raúl Castro himself. Those outside the inner circles are left completely in the blue about the outcome of these processes.

Careful but frank criticism is being expressed by such Party-controlled organizations like UNEAC and UPEC (writers' and journalist unions, respectively), denouncing the limited Internet access and declaring "war against secrecy". First Vice President Diaz-Canel has engaged in an apparently constructive dialogue with these intellectuals about their claims.<sup>52</sup>

There are signs that *artists* may be enjoying more freedoms. An interesting case occurred in September 2013, when jazz musician Roberto Carcasses surprised the public speaking to a pro-government mass rally demonstrating for the release of the "Cuban Five" in front of the US Interests Section in Havana, asking for "free access to information" and the right to "elect the president by direct vote". The Ministry of Culture immediately responded by banning him indefinitely from all cultural institutions, a response that was publicly challenged (through his personal blog) by Cuba's iconic singer Silvio Rodríguez, actually leading the Ministry to withdraw its decision the day after.

Critics within the system – like Raúl Castro himself – tend to blame all problems on the abstract concept "bureaucracy", while everybody knows that the bureaucracy is nothing else than the executive branch of the state.

Other professional and academic groups who often play important roles in the political debate in other countries, such as lawyers, are very restricted by the fact that the exercise of their profession is held within the boundaries of official guilds. Nobody outside of the official bar association can act as court defenders, and no independent law firm (*bufetes de avogados*) is permitted. Lawyers defending political dissenters in court must also belong to the official "Bufete".

One of the few arenas for open debate about issues of political significance is the monthly meetings "*Último Jueves*", organized by Revista Temas linked to the Ministry of Culture. Here the discussion is remarkably open, and intellectuals taking part do not seem to shy away from heavy criticism. But two groups are conspicuously absent, although for different reasons: political leaders on one side are often invited but do not turn up, and anti-system dissenters on the other are apparently not invited. The participants here are *those who criticize*

---

<sup>52</sup> See website of Union de Periodistas de Cuba (UPEC): [www.cubaperiodistas.cu](http://www.cubaperiodistas.cu)

*from within*, while those who would be able to respond to this criticism and take proposals with them when decisions are made, do not take part.

Perhaps the politically most interesting document released in 2013 came from the so-called *Laboratorio Casa Cuba*, a small group of intellectuals with links to the Archbishop's office in Havana – but with quite varied ideological orientation – which prepared a manifest called *Cuba sonada – Cuba posible – Cuba futura* (The Cuba we dream about – the possible and future Cuba). This document is in reality a demand for the recognition of full liberal democracy in Cuba, including “direct, free, secret, periodic and competitive” elections; enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights; separation of legislative, executive, judicial and electoral powers; access to universal, free and diverse information without censorship nor monopoly as well as massive and participatory access to internet; systems for transparency and accountability of public affairs; elimination of the infamous principle of “pre-offense danger” (*peligrosidad predelictiva*) and “pre-offense security” – frequently used as legal basis for arbitrary detentions and political trials. The sensational character of this manifest is that it comes from a group that is operating fully within the Cuban system, and that there has been no attempt by the Government to stop its activity or the circulation of the document.<sup>53</sup>

It is noteworthy how limited reaction this document has generated in Cuba, whatever the reason may be. It seems that the different groups of critics in Cuba exist in splendid isolation, hardly knowing about each other, and hardly recognizing the work done by those who have a more or less critical attitude to the system. They are often more eager to attack each other than to establish dialogue.

### **Private entrepreneurs and co-operativists as interest actors**

One of the expected political impacts of the increasing non-state sector of the economy is that those operating in this sector will start voicing demands on the basis of their common interests. Until recently, we have seen very few cases of this, but they now start to emerge in what rapidly may become a new pattern which the authorities will have difficulties to handle without provoking further protest.

In September 2013 – only two months after the first non-agriculture cooperatives were approved – members of newly established transport

---

<sup>53</sup> The document is reproduced, along with several discussion articles, in the Catholic journal *Espacio Laical* no. 3, 2013, a journal that in principle is distributed through all Catholic churches in Cuba. The document was also reproduced and commented by several prominent intellectuals on the website of the cultural magazine *Temas*, with support of the Ministry of Culture.

cooperatives sent a letter to the State Council with some very interesting demands: property rights to their vehicles in order to avoid that “our company will continue to relapse in state bureaucracy”; the establishment of a “proper legal framework” as well as a “rational tributary policy”, in stead of stimulating “illegality and corruption”; a wish to work “under a regime of demand and supply“ and – importantly – to constitute “an independent association”<sup>54</sup>.

About the same time, a new government decree banning the sale of imported clothing and other goods, provoked strong reactions from small street vendors who sell such goods brought in informally – in more or less organized ways – by relatives and other travelers. The motive behind the ban may be an interest to protect state monopoly. According to a *Reuters* cable from Havana (October 3), this measure may potentially affect as much as 20,000 small businesses and their employees – and perhaps even more important their clients. Official unionists seemingly also echoed protests:

"We call on the authorities to reconsider. We have a lot of product and money invested in this," Justo Castillo, a representative of the official labour federation that has tried to organize the self employed, said according to the Reuters report.

"Banning this means unemployment for these people forcing them to do whatever. They will move into the black market, return to illegal activity," he said, as the crowd that had gathered applauded.

The first minor concession to this protest was that the implementation of the ban – which strictly speaking was only an enforcement of a previously existing legal situation – was postponed until the end of 2013. But protests continue, along with protest against the clampdown on private 3D movie theatres. Even the party organ *Granma* carries quite objective articles on the complications around this issue, and high-level meetings are reported to take place in a clear recognition of growing pressure on the government for speeding up the economic reforms<sup>55</sup>.

Perhaps the most significant form of interest representation on behalf of the new entrepreneurs is paradoxically to be found within the official trade union, CTC (*Central de Trabajadores de Cuba*). Several of the private restaurant owners in Trinidad have for instance decided to join the CTC in their capacity as *cuentalpropistas*, along with their workers. Their leading spokesperson is Reinaldo Vivas Zerquera, owner of the private restaurant *Nueva Era* in Trinidad whom we have already mentioned. He tells about his decision to join the CTC along with his 27

---

<sup>54</sup> *Diario de Cuba* 17 September 2013, reproduced in ASCE Newsclippings No. 582.

<sup>55</sup> Ref. a *Reuters* cable from Havana, dated 22/11/13: "Cuban entrepreneurs reeling over crackdown on 3D movie theaters".

employees – all *cuentapropistas* – and to speak out in defence of the private business owners' interests there for lack of other spaces. He often holds previous consultations with his colleagues in the tourism sector. Through this channel he claims to have gained access to decision-making bodies at national level and perceives that he is taken seriously.<sup>56</sup> This may actually be the first fable attempt at organizing an employers' interest group in Cuba, paradoxically through the labour union.

### **Bloggers and dissenters**

The Cuban dissenter community – long divided and with minimal influence and relevance inside Cuba as opposed to the considerable attention it has received internationally – has clearly got a shot in the arm with the increased access to internet and after the reform of the migration laws.

Anti-system critics, of course, direct their attacks on the Party and the State and the Castros themselves. This criticism is now a little more visible for those who have access to the internet, through bloggers like Yoani Sanchez and many others, and through an increasing number of independent journalist networks. The problem, of course, is that very few ordinary Cubans have such access, and these critics are therefore still virtually unknown in the country.

There is a very limited space of operation for human rights defenders in Cuba, mostly restricting this role to the political dissenters and their organizations such as the *Cuban Human Rights and National Reconciliation Commission*, led by Elizardo Sánchez. This association is able to collect information and expose it to the international audience, but it is virtually unknown within Cuba, thus having very little political impact.

Very few Cubans seem to bother about the anti-regime protest represented by the dissident community, obviously first of all because of the lack of access to information. The US Interest Section in Havana recognized this is a communiqué from 2009 made public by Wikileaks, saying that it saw very little evidence that the message from the principal dissident organizations had any resonance among the ordinary Cubans, and that the bloggers represent a far more serious challenge to the Government.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Zerquera in Trinidad, 9 November 2013.

<sup>57</sup> "US-Cuba Chill Exaggerated, but Old Ways Threaten Progress", *Wikileaks*, US Interest Section cable, January 6 2010, [wikileaks.org/cable/2010/01/10HAVANA9.html](http://wikileaks.org/cable/2010/01/10HAVANA9.html).

Perhaps in an effort to challenge this situation, a 15 days' stay with Solidarity leader Lech Walesa in Poland in mid-2013 may have convinced some dissident leaders, among them the winner of the European Parliament's Sakharov prize Guillermo Fariñas, to change strategy, realizing that political demands are not what mobilize people. "Walesa told us that (...) we were focusing on political demands and that we should rather concentrate much more on social problems (...) the idea is to do things so that people perceive us as their defenders (...) We will relegate the political demands because we need more popular support before we can promote them", he said in a telephone interview with a Miami journalist.<sup>58</sup>

In a follow-up to this new way of thinking among political dissidents to team up with social protest, Fariñas showed up when 200 owners of horse carriages made a peaceful demonstration in front of the government office in Santa Clara (his hometown) on 11 September, protesting against the high taxes. It is highly questionable how welcome such support is, however, since it will hardly have other effect than weakening the sympathy any legitimate protest might have in government circles. The position of the dissident movement simply seems to be too weak to make it attractive for those who are expressing social protest – it may rather be seen as a counterproductive to be associated with the dissidents.

A relatively new phenomenon perhaps worth watching is the so-called *Municipios de Oposición* (Municipalities in opposition), of which some few have made some public appearances particularly in Santiago de Cuba. The particularity of their work is that they claim to be collecting concrete complaints and demands from the population and present them directly to the local authorities, e.g. about poor repair work after the Sandy hurricane in 2012. They publish the result of their work through the internet<sup>59</sup>.

### Public protest

Against the backdrop of increasing social dissatisfaction and also the – after all – increasing space for criticism, it is a mystery to many Cuban watchers that there is not more *public protest*. Street protests are rare, sporadic and never massive. They are normally organized by small groups of dissidents, leading to quite immediate detention, normally of limited duration. A very common reaction is the so-called "*actos de repudio*", (acts of repudiation), where the so-called rapid response brigades and civilian police put up counter-demonstrations before the protesters are being detained. These acts are not reported in the official media. In cases where *cuentapropistas* and similar are being

---

<sup>58</sup> Juan Tamayo in *El Nuevo Herald*, 30.10.13.

<sup>59</sup> ASCE Newsclipping no. 584, September 2013.

maltreated, open discussions in public places may occur, but this is also not reported in the public media. It is quite obvious that the Cuban government is very concerned about such public protests mushrooming, knowing for instance that about 500 public protests take place every day in China as a consequence of a more pluralistic economic society. At a similar rate per capita, this would mean approximately 4 public protests per day in Cuba, a situation the Cuban government would definitely see as threatening to the country's stability.

*Summing up*, there is little doubt in our view that change in Cuba will continue to originate from within the *broader framework of the official leadership and tolerated critics*, and perhaps in an increasing exchange between the two. There is a clearly increasing space for intellectual and critical debate; the new economic actors are cautiously starting to get organized and mobilized in defence of their interests, and the government is getting increasingly confused about how to deal with this.

Dissidents are still quite irrelevant in Cuba, no matter how much international attention they get. Massive public protests, civilian movements in the streets etc., are still not on the agenda in Cuba. If young people were to start to protest openly, probability is that it would rather be over demands for better access to material improvements than for democracy. The new opportunity to leave the country as a consequence of the reformed migration law has only strengthened this prognosis.

## 9. International context – Cuba towards Latin American normalcy?

Cuba is also undergoing important changes in its international relations.

After the death of Hugo Chávez and the increasing socio-economic and political problems confronting his elected successor Nicolás Maduro, the Cuban leadership is conscious that it is not sustainable to continue its dependence on Venezuelan goodwill. Venezuela is still the most important international partner, providing two thirds of Cuba's oil consumption mainly being paid through medical and other professional services. But preparations are clearly underway in order to spread international risks.

First of all, Cuba is more and more looking towards a broader economic and political relationship with the rest of Latin America. Leftist and left-of-centre governments are still dominating in the continent. After the return of Michelle Bachelet as president of Chile (in March of 2014), Cuba will enjoy very warm relations with all major South American countries with a certain exception for Peru and Colombia – plus the rather irrelevant post-coup (and clearly anti-Cuban) government of Paraguay. Even Colombia has developed a very close relationship to Cuba because of the Cuban role in peace negotiations. Mexico has always been careful to maintain good links to Cuba, while a couple of the Central American countries keep a more cool distance from Havana. But altogether, Cuba is now completely back in the Latin American warmth, with the continent taking a clear stance in its favour in confrontations with the US. The OAS decision from 2009 to welcome Cuba back into the Inter-American system – with only the US and Canada opposing it – stands as firmly as ever. Many observers ask why Cuba is not taking advantage of this invitation to re-join the OAS, which might also ultimately give Cuba access to much needed credit from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

When Cuba has shown no interest in returning to the OAS, from which it was so dramatically suspended in 1962, it is partly for pride and partly because the OAS is seen as less and less relevant compared to the many new and parallel regional organizations that are emerging. The most important for Cuba is now CELAC, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, established in 2010 as a kind of “OAS minus the US” (and Canada), without proper resources but with an important symbolic significance. At the end of 2012, the conservative



Chilean president Sebastián Piñera headed over the 2013 one-year CELAC Presidency to no other than Cuba's Raúl Castro, in a tremendous show of political support from a Latin America where the US is clearly losing its dominance.

Within Latin America, Cuba still enjoys the closest political and economic ties with the ALBA countries (Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua in addition to Venezuela), but the quickly rising number one country for Cuba may be Brazil. An estimated 650 million USD investment in the Mariel *ZEDM*, to be inaugurated by President Rousseff in January 2014), was financed by the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES) through a non-transparent credit. Additionally, through several strategic investments in the sugar industry (including ethanol production), Brazil is positioning itself for a lead role in Cuba's transformation to a more "normal" market economy. Behind these economic relations is obviously also a cosy political relation with the governing party in Brazil (PT) since Lula was elected in 2003.<sup>60</sup>

It is important to reflect on how this increasing Cuban involvement with Latin America on a variety of aspects will influence on developments towards more market relations but possibly also a stronger political opening in Cuba. All Cuba's Latin American friends have democratically elected governments, in most cases with a vibrant civil society and a differentiated media structure. The economies are basically market-dominated but in most cases with strong state regulatory regimes based on different forms of public-private partnership "*Keynesianism*", growth rates are generally on competitive international levels, with a quite positive re-distribution effect over the latest decade and a half. All these characteristics ought to be attractive to the new generation of Cuban leaders looking for a future Cuban model of development (which, by the way, has not been defined as a basis for the present reform process). They can see that their political friends are being repeatedly re-elected and perhaps observe that their legitimacy may be more sustainable than the one they themselves may imagine to enjoy in a post-Castro Cuba. At the same time, there are evident signs of authoritarianism and democratic deficiencies e.g. in terms of a non-independent judiciary, restrictions in press freedom and the space for civil society including quite friendly international NGOs in several of the Latin American democracies (both ALBA countries and

---

<sup>60</sup> The impact of Brazil's relations on Cuban political development is yet to be seen: to the extent they will continue to be dominated by companies like Odebrecht – perhaps the main pillar of neo-patrimonial characteristics in Brazil itself – they may not be very instrumental for more pluralistic and transparent socio-political development. But a broader exposure to Brazilian entrepreneurs as well as political and civil society may definitely lead to more pluralism also in Cuba.

others)<sup>61</sup>. We may therefore observe that *Cuba is increasingly approaching a Latin American normalcy*, with prospects for some degree of democratic opening with the maintenance of significant authoritarian aspects.

This inspiration for what we may term “qualified liberal democracy” is also coming from other parts of the international system. Cuba continues to engage actively with Putin’s Russia; it has an active relationship with African and Asian states where democracy is under pressure; and of course the direction taken by the “Arab Spring” is not very conducive as an inspiration for liberal democracy. China and Vietnam probably continue to be the safest role models for most Cuban leaders, with their combination of a successful economy with the maintenance of one-party authoritarian rule. But there is also substantial fear for a repetition of widespread corruption and the combination of opulent wealth next to poverty under socialist banners, almost across political divides in Cuba.

Up against this international setting surrounding Cuba, the USA embargo policy is getting more and more absurd. Apart from its intended deep negative impact on the Cuban economy, it is also more and more contributing to the US isolation from Latin America. But most importantly, the political impact of the embargo on the political situation in Cuba is the absolutely contrary of its assumed intention: it is constantly strengthening those forces that resist both economic and political reforms.

Prominent Cuba watchers in the US are making constructive proposals for measures President Obama could take even without the lifting of the embargo. Julia Sweig (2013) has emphasized political goodwill signals like removing Cuba from the list of state sponsors of terrorism, eliminating obstacles for all Americans to travel there, and licensing greater trade and investment<sup>62</sup>. Richard Feinberg (2013) has been more concrete regarding the latter aspect, proposing that the US President “should authorize US firms and individuals to engage in commerce in goods and services with independent entrepreneurs in Cuba, and provide financial and technical assistance to them” (p. 50). He goes on to say that the US could be selective with such authorizations, and ensure that partnering Cuban firms are genuinely independent of state interests. He refers to US “legal authorities” that claim such measures would not be in contradiction with present embargo legislation.

---

<sup>61</sup> A very serious example of this is the December 2013 decision in Bolivia to expel the Danish NGO IBIS, which has been working in support of social movements very close to President Morales since long before he became President, apparently because some of their national partners have become more critical to him.

<sup>62</sup> Julia E. Sweig (2013), p. ..

After the famous handshake between Presidents Obama and Castro during the Mandela funeral services in Johannesburg in December, there are repeated signs of a US-Cuba thaw. President Obama had already expressed one month earlier that “we have to update our Cuba policies”, a high-level State Department delegation in Havana expressed in January that the US “is very open” to a new relationship, and prominent Florida Democrats like Joe Garcia and Bob Graham express unprecedented pragmatism towards Cuba. It is still unclear what will come out of this new US approach.

The EU is also losing relevance in Cuba as long as its “common position” policy<sup>63</sup> is in force. But in January 2014, The Dutch foreign minister signed an agreement to engage in political consultations with Cuba, breaking ranks with the European Union and urging the EU to adjust its relationship with the country<sup>64</sup>.

---

<sup>63</sup> According to EU’s common position, its relations with Cuba should be conditioned by the objective “to encourage a process of transition to a pluralist democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as sustainable recovery and improvement in the living standards of the Cuban people”. Cuba rejects the Common Position as interference in its internal affairs.

<sup>64</sup> Reuters, 7.01.14.

## 10. Assessing the on-going transformations up against theoretical and empirical literature

In Bye (2013ii) we have discussed the possible political implications of on-going transformations in Cuba in the light of two different sets of theoretical frameworks: a movement respectively towards liberal democracy and towards authoritarian market economy. On the basis of the more comprehensive empirical data gathered over the latest year and presented above, we hope this article succeeds to go a little deeper in this discussion.

### 10.1. Characteristics of transformations towards (quasi-) liberal democracy

One of the classical contributions to the comparative study of democratic transitions is that by Juan L. Linz and Alfred Stepan (1996).<sup>65</sup> Their analysis defines *five arenas* considered to be necessary for a consolidated democracy.

The first arena is what is termed an institutionalized *economic society*: norms, institutions and regulations that mediate between state and market. The driving force here is that the economic crisis for the state-led economy is getting really critical, with very low growth and hardly any access to investment capital. Cuba is now definitely falling into this situation.

What we are seeing is that the non-state sector of the economy is cautiously but steadily increasing, against heavy resistance from influential sectors of the old regime. Some of these see entrepreneurship as a tool to undermine socialism and the revolution, while even the main architects of the reforms still seem to prefer micro-enterprise as a survival measure rather than strategic support to the formation of serious private companies. The result of this is reforms with so many in-built restrictions and reservations that neither of the two most critical objectives is met: reduction of food import dependence, and the generation of alternative and productive employment that can release the massively redundant public payrolls.

---

<sup>65</sup> Juan L. Linz & Alfred Stepan (1996). *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (The Johns Hopkins University Press).

Short of a qualitative change of gear in the reform process, the situation of the Cuban economy will very soon get completely unsustainable.

In spite of missing incentives, medium-size service companies with up to 30 employees are anyway becoming more common, and in such a strategic sector as tourism the state sector is actually meeting tough competition outside of the larger tourist resorts, where more individual tourism dominate. The transport sector may be the second most important for what we may call small and medium enterprise (SMEs) in Cuba.

We are still far away from a situation where the market economy is governed by transparent and enabling legal frameworks, institutions and fiscal policies. Arbitrariness is still dominant. What is slowly and carefully emerging is the organization of private sector interest groups, though still infant and informal, including through paradoxical use of the formal trade union structures. The government is very hesitant to the handling of this unavoidable trend in an economic society of increasing differentiation, being fully aware that such ownership diversity ultimately will lead to a more independent and vibrant civil society which in turn will make crucial contributions to a more democratic society. The Cuban government is of course fully aware of the different context of their country as compared Vietnam and China: an overwhelmingly democratic Latin America and Western Hemisphere, which on the top of it is welcoming Cuba in its regional community against the strong but increasingly ineffective resistance of the US.

The potentially decisive contribution to the non-state Cuban economic society may be coming from a new and potentially more independent cooperative sector. If the government lives up to its own legal and political commitments to let agrarian as well as urban cooperatives develop into autonomous and democratic institutions, that may actually change the entire state vs. non-state equation and produce some of the desperately needed results in terms of food production, job creation and productive growth. Of particular importance will be the appearance of serious production cooperatives that may grow into a manufacturing industry, for instance linked to agriculture and construction.

The second of Linz/Stepan's arenas is *civil society*, defined as self-organizing groups operating in relative autonomy of the state. The spillover from economic to civil society has slowly started. But really autonomous trade unions, entrepreneurial groups, and professional guilds of normally strategic professions like journalists, lawyers etc., are not yet permitted. It is interesting to note, however, how the official trade union is opening up a small but important advocacy space for the self-employed and even medium-size entrepreneurs, but it is still difficult to see that the Party will permit such interest organization

moving into a proper organization. We have so far not seen a similar trend with the peasant organization, ANAP, although the potential would seem to be even more obvious there. It will be up to the next generation of Party leaders to allow such developments.

A third arena is a relatively autonomous and valued *political society*: mechanisms to contest the legitimate right to exercise control over public power and the state apparatus. Linz & Stepan argue that civil society may destroy a non-democratic regime, but political society is required to allow full democratic transition and particularly its consolidation, so there is an important complementarity between the two. Obviously, the abolition of the monopoly status of the Communist Party, which would be decisive for the emergence of a real political society, is not at all on the agenda in Cuba. The 6th Party Congress explicitly ruled this out. But many intellectual party members are silently complaining that the party is gradually losing its relevance, since no real debates about the country's future take place there. This debate will then have to move to other forums, or perhaps lead to the emergence of clearer internal factions in the Party, if not earlier when the Castros are out of power. The party is still completely in control of the state apparatus, but we may claim with clearly decreasing legitimacy vis-à-vis a whole series of actors questioning the way government is run even without throwing the revolution as such over board. This contradiction may get really acute come 2018, perhaps through a more transparent dialogue with intellectuals, artists and ordinary people. We are not yet there.

The fourth arena is *rule of law* to ensure legal guarantees for citizens' freedoms and independent associational life: all significant actors, especially the democratic government and the state, must respect and uphold the rule of law, embodied in a spirit of constitutionalism – a clear hierarchy of laws, interpreted by an independent judicial system and supported by a strong legal culture in civil society. We are of course far from this situation in Cuba, particularly as long as the Cuban judiciary enjoys no real independence. But Raúl Castro's strong insistence on institutional rather than Fidel's personalistic style of leadership may be a step in the right direction. Again, the growing strength of a non-state sector in the economy, and the transition to a new generation of leaders in 2018 may become important elements for the strengthening of rule of law. The emergence of a thriving private sector and the arrival of significant foreign investments will to a large extent depend on such legal and institutional guarantees.

The fifth arena is a *state bureaucracy* that is “usable by the new democratic government,” with an effective capacity to command (monopoly of legitimate use of force), regulate (prepare laws) and extract (compulsory taxation). The problem in Cuba is not the lack of a strong state – quite to the contrary. But the state apparatus is getting

increasingly ineffective and irrelevant to regulate, if transition to a post-communist economic and political regime becomes the chosen option. Raúl Castro's insistence on a clearer distinction between the roles of the party and the state may be an important beginning in this regard, but the bureaucracy has not shown impressive capability to implement such change. The lack of transparency and the bureaucracy's unwillingness to support reforms put a question mark on whether this condition may easily be fulfilled.

We have asserted above that Cuba is approaching Latin American normalcy. There are increasing political and economic ties between Cuba and the large majority of Latin American countries with a mostly liberal democratic political system albeit characterized by some significant neo-authoritarian elements where executives limit the countervailing powers of legislatures and judiciaries<sup>66</sup>. This could offer the next generation of Cuban leaders the most attractive model after all. Examples of rather *illiberal democracy* from countries like Russia or some African countries with close links to Cuba, and perhaps even the liberal democracies behind the Nordic welfare states could make the Cuban leadership see attractive variants of market democracies with more or less authoritarian restrictions.

## 10.2. Characteristics of transformations towards a socialist-patrimonial state

The second transformation option could be compared to those taking place in Vietnam<sup>67</sup>, often termed an authoritarian market economy. We will therefore try to discuss on-going changes in Cuba compared to those having taken place in Vietnam.

de Vylder & Fforde (1996)<sup>68</sup> interpret the political process in Vietnam after the so-called *Doi Moi* reform process started in 1986, as an adaptation by the Communist Party to the changing political structures beneath it: (a) the rising state business interests (of a rapidly

---

<sup>66</sup> In recent academic literature on the quality of democracy in Latin America, most observers agree that it is both more sustainable and more participatory than ever before in history. One apparent weakness, however, seems to be on the dimension of *accountability*: "given the general consensus that the current wave of democracy in Latin America is stronger and more durable than others, the time has arrived to think seriously about institutional arrangements that can empower and protect the autonomy of legislatures and judiciaries relative to the executive powers of presidents." (Daniel H. Levine and José E. Molina (eds) (2011): *The Quality of Democracy in Latin America*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

<sup>67</sup> China is a very similar case, but we prefer to use Vietnam as the reference case because China's size and importance in the world economy makes it rather irrelevant for a comparison with Cuba.

<sup>68</sup> Stefan de Vylder, Adam Fforde (1996): *From Plan to Market. Economic Transition in Vietnam*. Westview Press.

commercialized state sector), with the military playing an important role in food production; and (b) the fear of massive urban unemployment as non-viable state enterprises had to close, and the potential for social tension and disorder. Both these factors are clearly present in Cuba, where there is an increasing gulf between a majority of unproductive state enterprises and successful enterprises (many run by military companies) and joint ventures with foreign capital. This combination of factors is an important driver in favor of increasing market reforms in Cuba, just as in Vietnam. But there is still a decisive difference in that Vietnam according to the Enterprise Law of 2005 in principle treats foreign investments as well as private domestic investments similarly to state-owned enterprises (SOE), and that there are no boundaries for private investments or for “capital accumulation”. Private entrepreneurs are often Party members and vice versa.

The non-state sector in Vietnam did also to some extent, as in Cuba, emerge through the creation of self-employment. But the Vietnamese quickly concluded that self-employed needed incentives to grow into SMEs in order to generate jobs, although the large majority of these companies are still small or very small (with less than 200, often less than 10 employees). Only 10% of those working in the non-state urban sector in 2010 were self-employed, the same figure in China was 30%, whereas in Cuba – as we have seen – 80% of *cuentapropistas* had no other formal workforce than their own.<sup>69</sup>

Gainsborough (2010)<sup>70</sup> brings this discussion into an interesting analysis of the nature of the Vietnamese state. He finds three key changes during the years he studied (1996-2007): changes affecting state enterprises, growing capital markets, and signs of a widening of the political space and a more vibrant civil society which however is never permitted to challenge one-party rule. The various state institutions are strengthened as political actors, the National Assembly is strengthened, and the concerns of the business sector are also channeled through state-sanctioned (and not independent) institutions.<sup>71</sup> We are speaking of a constant blurring between the

---

<sup>69</sup> These figures are not fully comparable, but probably quite illustrative since *cuentapropismo* is the only legal non-state urban employment form in Cuba apart from the recently emerging cooperatives. The figures for Vietnam and China are taken from Claes Brundenius and Doanh Le Dang (2013): “Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and SMEs: What Can Cuba Learn from the Vietnam Reform Process”, in: Claes Brundenius and Ricardo Torres Pérez (eds): *No More Free Lunch: Reflections on the Cuban Economic Reform Process and Challenges for Transformation*. Springer.

<sup>70</sup> Martin Gainsborough (2010): *Vietnam: Rethinking the State*. Zed Books.

<sup>71</sup> Important in the latter category is the way the private economic sector is organized: through a semi-governmental organization called the Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) (where also state-owned enterprises participate),



public and the private interests and the use of public office for private gains, in an almost perfect negation of Max Weber's classical norms for distinguishing the two as a prerequisite for bureaucratic rationality. The resulting patronage networks are, according to Gainsborough, fundamental for the understanding of the country's political system: a peculiar form of a *patrimonial state*, with the ruler in the form of the ruling party controlling political as well as economic life with the key to personal wealth accumulation.

This seems to be the underlying logic to Vietnam's political system. According to Gainsborough, we may talk about a transition from a "socialist state" to a "capitalist state," where the concept of "reform" takes on a new meaning, and where the basic idea of "state retreat" is questioned.

He also claims that the reform drive does not come from independent interests made up by social classes, but from intra-elite conflict within the state apparatus.

Another related concept frequently used to describe systems with close and corrupt relationship between business and government, is *crony capitalism*. It is often associated with favoritism in the distribution of legal permits, government concessions, special tax breaks and other forms of state interventionism, with a select group of tycoons acting as gate keepers between business and government. The concept has often been associated with the East Asian financial crisis in the 1990s<sup>72</sup>. Lately, the concept is frequently used to refer to the transition in Myanmar, a transition some observers see as relevant for the study of Cuba; a "transition from a military dictatorship to military-run crony capitalism"<sup>73</sup>.

*Cuba* has developed some of the same characteristics as frequently found in these Asian economies, but they are still at a too early stage for us to determine whether they will become dominant. The blurring of private and public interests is almost complete and almost generally accepted among ordinary state employees (massive theft of public property for pure survival reasons), while large-scale corruption among higher employees (which seems to be an inevitable consequence of the Vietnamese model), is still harshly combated in Cuba. It may be rather doubtful, however, whether it in the end will be possible to stop it from mushrooming. But we cannot yet speak about a Vietnamese form of

---

rather than through independent employer organizations. The VCCI is not under the direct control of the Communist Party, but Party committees must be established in all private enterprises (Thayer, p. 3)..

<sup>72</sup> See for instance: David C. Kang (2002): *Crony Capitalism; Corruption and Development in South Korea and the Philippines*, Cambridge University Press.

<sup>73</sup> New York Times editorial, 3.12.2013.

patrimonialism in Cuba, although lack of openness and transparency makes it difficult to gather and analyze data. What needs to be carefully watched in the years to come is the role of Cuban top managers in leading state enterprises (most of them mixed enterprises with foreign capital), particularly in the nickel, petroleum, agriculture export and tourism sectors, and of course of those linked to the Mariel ZEDM complex, whether dominated by military or other state corporations. The potential for the emergence of a patrimonial state is obviously present in Cuba, and checks-and-balances put in place will hardly be effective in the absence of independent and effective watchdogs in media, civil society or the judiciary. It is difficult to see how the next generation of leaders will have sufficient authority to stop massive corruption without deep institutional and political reforms.

In Vietnam, some analysts speak about civil society “with a clear political space”<sup>74</sup>. We have not seen very much of this in Cuba until now. If open political opposition in civil society were allowed, it would probably be more difficult to control the undermining effect of this on the one-party system in a western than in an Asian context.

When we are looking for signs of a patrimonial or even crony capitalist model developing in Cuba, this may of course occur in different mixes of state (plan) and market. The quite orthodox definition of the 6<sup>th</sup> Party Congress that *plan and not market shall prevail* in the economy, and that *capitalism is not on the agenda*, may turn out to be of little value against the economic forces and necessities. Plan and market operate like pendulums in self-proclaimed socialist regimes like those of China and Vietnam. In China, experts cannot agree on whether the state makes up half or a third of the economic output, but state retreat has definitely slowed down and the so-called “bamboo capitalists” constantly feel squeezed by the state.<sup>75</sup> In 2013, however, under the pressure of reduced growth figures, the Plenum of the Chinese Communist Party’s Central Committee issued a communiqué saying that “(W)e must establish fair, open and transparent market rules... The core issue is properly handling the relationship between the government and markets, *giving markets a decisive role in the allocation of resources while better applying the role of government*” (italics added), while maintaining that the state’s regulatory role is not questioned: “the role of the party and government

---

<sup>74</sup> See Carlyle A. Thayer (2009): “Vietnam and the Challenge of Political Civil Society”, in: *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs*, April 2009, Volume 31, No. 1, pp. 1-27.

<sup>75</sup> An interesting analysis of this, also for those following trends in Cuba, is: James McGregor (2012): *No Ancient Wisdom, No Followers: The Challenges of Chinese Authoritarian Capitalism*. Prospecta Press.

in managing everything else in society is primary”.<sup>76</sup> In Vietnam, slowing growth in 2013 has led to similar considerations about the need to force state companies to sell stakes in non-essential business and to fire inefficient chief executives.<sup>77</sup>

Cuba is evidently still far away from giving the market forces a prominent role comparable to China or Vietnam, or to introduce “fair, open and transparent market rules”. There is probably a recognition that it may be much more difficult to allow real market reforms without risking to lose political power in Cuba than in China and Vietnam, and that may be one of the reasons why most reforms are moving so slowly in Cuba compared to its two communist friends. Also, there is an increasing recognition among intellectuals who work within the Cuban system of how different Cuba is – historically and culturally – to the Asian and also Soviet communist models based on their autocratic pre-socialist traditions, and which therefore are seen by many academics as quite irrelevant reference points for ongoing change in Cuba.<sup>78</sup> Probably, there is also a general scepticism against the widespread corruption and other malaise that has been coming in the wake of freewheeling “socialist capitalism” in these two countries.

Still, short of willingness to open up for more pluralistic social structures, and to let go of the centralist, vertical and non-transparent character of the Cuban society, the patrimonial state and authoritarian capitalism may be the more likely scenario for Cuba.

### 10.3. Lessons learned from the demise of the USSR

The demise of the USSR is an inevitable reference case for a Cuban collapse scenario. To transfer the Soviet experience to Cuba is meaningless; the very fact that Cuba survived the fall of Russian and Eastern European Communism in the 1990s says enough about that. But some factors must be more carefully watched now, e.g. as summarized by the British historian Archie Brown (2009)<sup>79</sup>: economic failure, increased access to diversified information, the easing of travel restrictions, the increasingly critical attitude of intellectuals and academics within the party, the coming to power of a new party leader

---

<sup>76</sup> The communiqué was issued by Xinhua, the official Chinese news agency, and quoted in a front-page article in International New York Times, 13.11.13: “China to give markets ‘a decisive role’”

<sup>77</sup> “Vietnam gets tough on State Firms in Economic Growth Push”, *Bloomberg News*, July 25, 2013.

<sup>78</sup> There is consensus around this idea in a debate about the concept of human rights between prominent Cuban intellectuals reproduced in Espacio Laical, Suplemento Digital 240, November/December 2013: “Cuba: Hacia un redimensionamiento de los derechos humanos”

<sup>79</sup> Archie Brown (2009): *The Rise and Fall of Communism*. HarperCollins.

(or a new generation of leaders). Regarding the latter aspect, which will soon also occur in Cuba, Brown emphasizes how impossible it was to forecast the evolution of Mr. Gorbachev's thinking when he was elected to the top position: "No one who thought as Gorbachev did in 1988, not to speak of 1990-91, could have become general secretary in 1985 unless he had been an actor of Oscar-winning talents who kept all his real opinions to himself." (p. 596). "Only change at the apex of the political hierarchy", says Brown, "could determine whether fresh and critical thinking would remain a mere intellectual diversion or whether it would influence the real world of politics" (p. 594), although he admits that Gorbachev needed reform-minded people one step down in the party hierarchy in order to win the ideological battle that followed. Brown claims that Gorbachev was already much more of a reformer when he became party leader than the Politburo realized, but that his intention was to reform the system and not make transformative change, until the system started to fall apart.

Whereas Mr. Gorbachev's reform attempt in the USSR implied both *perestrojka*, restructuring of the economy, and *glasnost*, political transparency, there has so far been no explicit message about *glasnost* in Cuba. There is one parallel in the sense that Cuba has also launched a serious campaign against corruption. But the main problem with this campaign, leading Cuban intellectuals argue, is precisely that it is not accompanied by policies to promote transparency and public accountability; that the system continues to be "opaque to knowledge and citizen control of (investment) contracts, the tender processes and the awarding of contracts for investment projects."<sup>80</sup> As we have noted, there are clear signs of increasing public debate in Cuba, but it is not taking place within the party – definitely not in public and apparently not even internally. The new generation of party leaders is not at all showing their cards in terms of new political thinking, let alone debate. We may have to wait until the end of the Castro era to see this. But without a gradual opening while Raúl is still in charge, the challenge of managing internal debate and factions may be too much for the future leadership, assumingly headed by Miguel Diaz-Canel.

---

<sup>80</sup> José Antonio Alonso and Pavel Vidal (2013). *¿Quo Vadis, Cuba? La Incierta Senda de la Reforma* (Editorial Catarata). The quote is taken from the introductory chapter of the book, reproduced by Espacio Laical, Havana, July 2013.

## 11. The three scenarios

What we have seen is that the reforms so far have given much more limited results than expected in terms of new non-state job creation, increased food production and economic growth, with a continued deterioration of social security as an inevitable result. The urgent need for new sources of capital in order to vitalize the economy is evident. The Mariel project is the latest intended response to this situation, but short-term results are quite uncertain. It is difficult to imagine that the heavy economic support from Venezuela may continue much longer on the same level given that country's increasing economic problems, and the hope to make large offshore oil discoveries is put on hold for several years.

The situation today is characterized by increasing structural contradictions between plan and market.

Politically, the one-party system is not at stake in the official discourse, and serious discussions about its replacement have only very cautiously started in some intellectual circles. But intellectuals – including leading economists – are openly arguing that the centralist and vertical form of government decision-making, without transparency and accountability, is a serious impediment to the effectiveness of the officially declared economic reform.

Some strategic policy decisions are required quite shortly in order to find a way out of this crisis.

Based on developments from 2011 to 2013 and present trends, we see three probable scenarios as we move towards the decisive year 2018, when there will be an almost complete renewal of Cuba's political leadership.

### **Scenario 1: Deepening economic pluralism with movement towards qualified democracy**

One way out of the present dilemmas is to give the market reforms more consistency, let loose the market forces in such ways that the country is enabled to produce more of its own food needs and provide productive non-state employment to its population, and in general promote the economic growth it so desperately needs to rebuild the country's infrastructure and sustain the social gains of the revolution.

This scenario may be strengthened if the self-employed are stimulated to develop into real entrepreneurs, given access to

investment capital partly through the accumulation of their own profits and partly through partnership with diaspora and non-Cuban foreign investors, and to a larger extent being allowed to take over non-strategic parts of the state economy. Another crucial element of this scenario would be a quite massive growth of genuinely autonomous cooperatives, both in agriculture and in urban service and production sectors. What we are speaking about is a systematic strengthening of what some have termed “hybrid market socialism” opening up to the international economy, where a strong state sector maintains regulatory functions and even a strong role in strategic sectors of the economy, but increasingly collaborates and competes with a growing private sector.

“Successful liberal democracy,” Fukuyama says, “requires both a state that is strong, unified and able to enforce laws on its own territory, and a society that is strong and cohesive and able to impose accountability on the state. *It is the balance between a strong state and a strong society that makes democracy work...*”<sup>81</sup>

So, the political complement to this would be to allow interest groups – including cooperatives – to organize independently of the Party in order to defend their more diversified interests (not least employers, workers and peasants/farmers), and to open the political decision-making for more transparent and participatory processes. This would also imply more freedom of expression with more open debate, and generally more civic-political liberties with a better legal and institutional framework and the gradual establishment of institutions for rule of law. We are probably not talking about abolishing the one-party system within the time perspective we discuss here, but the final outcome of this scenario further down the road would quite inevitably lead to a multi-party system with free and periodic elections of political leaders.

Ever-closer links to the rest of Latin America, economically as well as politically, will be an important element in this scenario. So will be a US decision about fully or partly lifting the embargo, short of a full introduction of a multi-party system (which is the present demand in the Helms-Burton law). Such a move would release a lot of investment and challenge trade barriers, but also remove the most important justification on the Cuban side for limits to civil-political rights. The elimination of travel restrictions for ordinary Cubans has possibly been the most important contribution to changing US-Cuban relations: this has effectively brought down the “Berlin Wall” between Havana and Miami, so that many particularly young Cubans now may increasingly share their lives between the two previously so mutually exclusive

---

<sup>81</sup> Fukuyama (2011), op. cit., p. 480, (italics added).

Cuban communities and demand more pluralism and acceptance for dissent on either side.

### **Scenario 2: Authoritarian capitalism with a patrimonial state**

Question marks are constantly growing about the real willingness, or perhaps the real power of the country's top leader, to carry out the reforms Raúl Castro himself has stated are absolutely necessary for the survival of the Cuban system. One cannot forget reform manager Murillo's warning from 2010 that the state has no intention of leaving significant property to the private sector, indicating that the continuous hesitation about reforms is more than bureaucratic resistance.

If the Party and Government maintain its reluctance to allow the development of private entrepreneurship, the only alternative is to continue depending on the military-owned corporations and the newly more independently organized state corporations in strategic sectors like petroleum, nickel and sugar. Strengthened military dominance of the economy, coupled with the growth of a rent-seeking military, state and/or party nomenclature, will pull the country in the opposite direction of liberal democracy, perhaps even towards some kind of crony capitalism. It is important to note, though, that military officers and even most of the military business leaders – in spite of important privileges – seem to maintain a quite moderate life-style, not showing their wealth to the extent they have it. However, the trend would probably be to see top-level managers getting more personally involved in these corporations, blurring state and business interests. The big question is whether a regime along these lines would have access to investment capital: either to attract significant foreign capital and/or have access to international credit institutions. The hope would obviously be that BRICS countries like China, Russia, to a less extent Brazil and India, do not condition their investments on internal market conditions as long as there are guarantees for their own SOE operations. The success of the Mariel EDZ will be crucial for the viability of this scenario, even more than for the former.

In this scenario, further state retreat will be blocked, and the emerging entrepreneurs would not be allowed to thrive as much as under the former scenario. That would probably lead to increasing tensions between the state and the private sector that has already established itself, probably also an increasing conflict over civil-political rights. It is furthermore difficult to see that this exclusion of the upcoming private sector will enable the massive increase in food production in family farms and job generation in medium-size companies that are implied in Scenario 1. Further social sector deterioration may be another consequence. Social confrontations, and the consequent need for more repressive reaction with increased violations of human rights, seem probable.

Economic, social as well as political viability of this scenario is highly unclear, particularly beyond the 2018 deadline when the legitimacy of the Castros and the revolutionary generation will rapidly disappear.

### **Scenario 3: Economic and political collapse**

Already in November 2010, Raúl spoke about the economy being on the border of the abyss (*“precipicio”*). That justified the “updating” program including the dramatic call for rapid dismissal of 1 million public employees. Although this aim was officially dropped, it cannot have been launched for fun, so the real needs for this radical overhaul of the labour structure must be assumed to have been valid. Now, three years later, the expected results are not visible. Only half of the original target figure has moved from the state to the private sector, and this figure will have to be tripled over the next couple of years in order to reach the 2015 target of the state only employing 65% of the working population. Agricultural production is not increasing substantially – at least according to official statistics – and import dependence is as high as before. Substantial economic growth does not take place. People’s dependence on the illegal economy is as high as ever, and the social gains of the revolution are rapidly falling apart.

It is therefore impossible to imagine possible scenarios for Cuba without having collapse as one of them. Collapse would mean that the country becomes unable to produce the most necessary goods and services to keep the economy floating; it would mean that the health and education systems – the two prides of the Cuban revolution – would fall into a situation where basic social needs of the population cannot be met; it would mean that a significant segment of the population does not have access to necessary food; and all this would probably lead to the massive protest we have so far not seen in Cuba and most probably to its repression by police force and perhaps even by the country’s strongest institution: the military. What may happen from there is pure speculation, but it is hardly what the large majority of Cubans would like to see.

-----

The choice of Cuba's political development will depend on a series of factors over the next five years, some of which will be the following:

- a) The seriousness of the economic crisis, and the efficacy in finding measures against it (like offshore oil, success with the Mariel project, continued support from Venezuela, strengthened economic relations with the BRICS countries and most of all Brazil, etc);



- b) The political development in Latin America over the next five years: will the pro-Cuba left maintain its present hegemony? Will the Cuba-friendly governments, led by Brazil, resume more impressive economic growth?
- c) The speed of market reforms, and the growth of the non-state sector plus independent cooperatives as effective providers of food production and job creation;
- d) The strength of investments originating with the Cuban diaspora, and the degree to which these are allowed to be channeled to the non-state sector (e.g. through family companies), versus access to foreign investments being monopolized by state corporations;
- e) US maintaining its embargo policy or gradually opening up to boost entrepreneurship and permit more pluralism and openness in the Cuban society.

# Cuba: revisitando la Justicia Social en tiempos de reforma

Armando Chaguaceda<sup>1</sup>

Published by Norwegian Institute of International Affairs

---

<sup>1</sup> Profesor e investigador, Instituto de Investigaciones Histórico Sociales, Universidad Veracruzana. Correo electrónico: xarchano@gmail.com

# Resumen

En el marco de la crisis socioeconómica de los últimos veintitrés años y de las transformaciones desarrolladas al calor de las reformas en curso, se explora el estado de la Justicia Social en Cuba, a partir de su expresión en políticas sociales seleccionadas (alimentación, vivienda, salud y educación) y desde su relación con el modelo de ciudadanía vigente.<sup>2</sup> Alertando sobre la necesidad de concebir el tema desde una perspectiva integral y eminentemente política.

## Summary

Within the framework of the socio-economic crisis Cuba has been going through during the latest 23 years, and the transformations taking place under the heat of the ongoing reforms, this article explores the state of social justice in Cuba. This is done on the basis of some selected social sectors (nutrition, housing, health and education), and in relation to the Cuban citizen model.

---

<sup>2</sup> Este texto es un producto preliminar –y forzosamente reducido- de una pesquisa mayor, aún en curso, que implica la colaboración y testimonio de una docena de especialistas, activistas y ciudadanos cubanos –residentes en su mayoría en Ciudad de la Habana- cuyos aportes han resultado claves para comprender, de forma integral y multidisciplinaria, el objeto de análisis. El envío y respuesta de los cuestionarios –a través del correo electrónico- abarcó del 13 de agosto al 9 de septiembre y/o en dos casos se acudió a entrevistas por vía telefónica (grabadas y transcritas). Por razones de confidencialidad –en particular por poseer residencia en la isla y/o vinculación a instituciones- en varios casos se preservará el anonimato de las fuentes.

# 1. Introducción

En Cuba, el actual desarrollo de las reformas está ampliando la brecha entre los individuos y grupos favorecidos por los cambios y aquellos convertidos –de la mano del mercado que no les acoge y del estado que aún administra y limita sus derechos– en perdedores netos. Estos *seres prescindibles* abarcan hoy diferentes categorías de trabajadores urbanos y rurales, familias carentes de remesas, habitantes de los barrios de la periferia capitalina y el interior del país, negros y mestizos, ancianos y mujeres. Frente a tal situación no queda más remedio que traer al debate el estado de la Justicia Social en la nación caribeña, analizando algunas de sus manifestaciones concretas.

Comienzo por recordar que, durante algún tiempo, varios autores – incluido quien escribe estas líneas– hemos utilizado el término *Contrato (o Pacto) Social* para aludir metafóricamente al peculiar nexo establecido entre la población cubana y el estado postrevolucionario. Nexo donde la primera entregó en manos del segundo grandes parcelas de derechos civiles y políticos, a cambio de formas subordinadas de participación política y, sobre todo, de extensas, generosas y en ciertos casos ejemplares, políticas sociales.<sup>3</sup> Lo que posibilitó, por tres décadas, una inclusión y movilidad sociales envidiables en el contexto latinoamericano, dentro de un orden estadocéntrico y bajo los subsidios masivos de la desaparecida Unión Soviética.

Sin embargo, es justo ese *Contrato* el que hoy naufraga dramáticamente, sin que el patrón devuelva a sus protegidos lo que alguna vez estos le entregaron. Frente a este escenario parece aclararse que las “conquistas sociales” nunca fueron derechos sino, en el mejor de los casos, prestaciones; por cuanto quedan en entredicho tres condiciones esenciales de los primeros: ser *exigibles* –y tener mecanismos donde demandarlos y defenderlos-, *universales* – inherentes a toda la población, amen su condición política o socioeconómica- y, sobre todo, *indivisibles*- por lo que si no se poseen, a cabalidad, derechos civiles y políticos nunca se podrán defender los sociales. Por eso, frente a cualquier llamado parcelario de orden, eficiencia, lucro o libertad del tipo de los que tirios y troyanos hacen hoy -en el marco de la compleja situación nacional cubana-, vale la pena promover el análisis, debate y posicionamientos públicos en

---

<sup>3</sup> Identificamos las políticas sociales como aquellas estrategias de intervención pública, desarrolladas desde el poder, que buscan privilegiar, a partir de ciertos criterios de equidad y justicia, los intereses de determinado grupo social (Espina, 2010: 220-223).

torno al estado real de justicia social que corre el riesgo de convertirse en pasto de la nostalgia.

## 2. Las perspectivas del análisis.

La Justicia Social es un asunto de perenne actualidad y alcance global<sup>4</sup>, que remite a diversas fuentes doctrinarias y problemáticas sociales. Se relaciona con los debates de la filosofía clásica en torno a la justicia distributiva -relativos a la lógica de asignación de bienes dentro de una sociedad particular-, con la llamada cuestión social –ligada al ascenso de luchas y reclamos obreros en los marcos del capitalismo decimonónico y contrarrestada con la creación del Estado de Bienestar desde mediados del siglo XX- , con el combate a la pobreza<sup>5</sup> y a las nuevas formas de discriminación/desigualdad<sup>6</sup> -y su denuncia/enfrentamiento- derivadas de la adscripción a diversas colectividades

- 
- <sup>4</sup> El 20 de febrero se celebra, a nivel internacional y como resultado de una decisión adoptada en 2007 por la Asamblea General de la ONU, el Día Mundial de la Justicia Social. Tal decisión se fundamenta en la visión de la Justicia Social como un *principio fundamental para la convivencia pacífica y próspera* y como componente central en la *promoción del desarrollo y la dignidad humana que impulsa la organización internacional*. Ver al respecto <http://www.un.org/es/events/socialjusticeday/>
- <sup>5</sup> La pobreza es un fenómeno de disímil conceptualización, en dependencia del entorno institucional, histórico y perspectiva disciplinar e ideológica del clasificador. En un plano más abstracto, Amartya Sen (2000) la concibe como la privación de capacidades necesarias para que los miembros de una sociedad generen recursos, se desempeñen cabalmente y logren objetivos individuales y sociales – posibilitando en un plano macro, una correlación virtuosa entre desarrollo y libertad-; mientras que el Banco Mundial (<http://datos.bancomundial.org/tema/pobreza>) la relaciona con la imposibilidad de alcanzar un nivel de vida mínimo, identificado con ingresos menores a un dólar de ingreso diario. Para medirla, el Índice de Desarrollo Humano del Programa de Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (<http://hdr.undp.org/es/informes/>) toma en cuenta indicadores que abarcan la esperanza de vida, la alfabetización, los años de escolaridad promedio y el poder adquisitivo medido en la correlación existente entre el PIB per cápita y el costo de la vida. En ese último rubro, la medición de la Línea de Pobreza toma en cuenta el costo de la canasta básica de alimentos (considerando los niveles de nutrición, los hábitos de consumo, así como la disponibilidad física de alimentos y sus precios) junto al acceso a otros recursos para necesidades básicas no alimenticias.
- <sup>6</sup> Pueden identificarse nociones tradicionales del enfrentamiento a la desigualdad, consistentes en la reducción –por la vía de la solidaridad social y /o la intervención estatal – de las diferencias del acceso a recursos y a la movilidad social entre distintos grupos poblacionales, lo cual generaría tendencias homogeneizadoras. Michael Walzer (1993) propone la coordinación de esfuerzos y capacidades de los distintos actores, considerando tanto la diversidad de estos –y sus perspectivas/necesidades- como de los propios bienes sociales demandados, combinando equidad y heterogeneidad sociales.

humanas. <sup>7</sup>Recoge ideas como la protección –mediante la atención estatal y la solidaridad social- a individuos y grupos sociales vulnerables, el reconocimiento de un conjunto de bienes y servicios sociales básicos inherentes a la condición humana -y por tanto dependientes de las posibilidades adquisitivas individuales, realizables en el mercado- y la promoción, con evidente sesgo normativo, de mayores niveles de equidad e igualdad en los marcos de sociedad contemporánea. <sup>8</sup>

La Justicia Social puede ser definida como el conjunto de *normas y acciones que una colectividad determinada define e implementa con el objetivo de establecer estándares equitativos y legítimos para el acceso y disfrute* de diversos *bienes* sociales por parte de sus miembros. Como fenómeno complejo, la Justicia Social puede ser leída desde la óptica de los funcionarios -como políticas sociales- y desde la mirada de los ciudadanos -como catálogo de derechos<sup>9</sup> que les habilita como beneficiarios activos-; perspectivas que entrecruzan una responsabilidad estatal de provisión de recursos (presupuestos, infraestructura, personal especializado) y una dimensión simbólica (criterios de accesibilidad, exigibilidad e inclusión) que cobra vida en reivindicaciones sociales. Situación que se complejiza aun mas considerando la tensión existente entre la acotada disponibilidad de bienes materiales y la diversidad y expansión de las demandas sociales, así como la coexistencia y contraposición de enfoques – administrativos, político-partidarios, clasistas, etc- sobre la problemática en el seno de cualquier sociedad contemporánea (Villamar y Gallegos, 2011)

---

<sup>7</sup> La diferenciación social confina los distintos grupos humanos a opciones de vida, reflexión y acción asociadas -a partir de variables como la espacial-territorial, la socioclaista, la racial y el género- a la desigualdad de su acceso al bienestar y el poder (Espina, 2010: 125).

<sup>8</sup> Equidad que integra una dimensión de igualdad absoluta (fundada en el reconocimiento de derechos universales y la existencia de oportunidades reales para toda la ciudadanía), con una igualdad relativa (basada en la diferencia de los aportes individuales a la sociedad) y en las acciones de solidaridad (mediante la ayuda a personas y grupos en desventaja) desplegadas por el estado y otros actores (Espina, 2010: 229).

<sup>9</sup> El nacimiento del Derecho Social se da en el siglo XX producto del análisis jurídico en el que la protección laboral y agraria no se podía subsumir en el derecho público, ni en el Privado, surgiendo como una nueva concepción del derecho que incluyen normas que protegen y reivindican a todos los económicamente débiles. El carácter social de este derecho incluye no solo la protección de los obreros y campesinos sino a todos los desprotegidos; su principal característica es la de generar prestaciones económicas o sociales -lo que le da un carácter de derecho-prestación- y posee como finalidades la redistribución de la riqueza y el contribuir a un mayor equilibrio entre las diversas clases sociales, generando un orden social más justo (Delgado, 1977, p.116).

Por su parte, la ciudadanía moderna es, simultáneamente, un status jurídico y una condición/sujeto políticos de carácter dual (individual y colectivo) que confiere la pertenencia a una comunidad específica-demarcada por las fronteras del estado nación y se expresa mediante un conjunto de prácticas culturales, simbólicas, económicas y políticas, que definen los derechos y obligaciones de los implicados.<sup>10</sup> Bajo el arbitrio del estado, estos derechos y obligaciones configuran una serie de espacios simbólicos y reales, donde los diversos individuos interactúan entre sí y de cara a los funcionarios, confrontando sus prácticas e interpretaciones sobre la memoria histórica, el acontecer actual y los proyectos futuros de sociedad (Tamayo, 2010: 21-27). En esencia, la ciudadanía concreta –a través de la institución y ejercicio de estos derechos- los modos en que los actores sociales pueden participar en los procesos políticos y socioeconómicos (Bobes, 2010).

La relación entre Justicia Social y ciudadanía se hace visible y directa alrededor del campo de los llamados derechos sociales. La concreción de estos -acceso a la educación y la salud, cobertura de seguridad social, disfrute de un trabajo digno- depende de intervenciones públicas -fundamentalmente estatales- en la esfera privada, orientadas a extender la igualdad, la equidad y el bienestar ciudadanos. Ello siempre a partir de los presupuestos de Justicia Social abrazados por los actores políticamente dominantes –entre varios contendientes- en cada sociedad y contexto histórico específicos

Aunque se ha destacado que los derechos sociales confieren al ciudadano un rol predominantemente pasivo -al ser consumidor de una provisión estatal y que regímenes autoritativos han tenido desempeños relevantes en la instauración y extensión de políticas y derechos sociales más o menos amplios y exitosos (Olvera, 2010) su existencia remite, de un modo u otro, a los otros componentes (activos) de la ciudadanía. Porque, como señalamos más adelante, la inexistencia y/o precariedad de derechos civiles y políticos deja a los ciudadanos en un estado precario para defender sus derechos sociales frente a la lógica funcional, siempre proclive a la simplificación de

---

<sup>10</sup> T.H. Marshall (1998) delimitó – a partir de la peculiar evolución histórica inglesa, aunque con la atención puesta en las formas de implementación del contemporáneo Estado de Bienestar en diversos países de Occidente- un catálogo clásico de derechos que se expresan en sus correspondientes formas de ciudadanía civil, política y social. Los derechos civiles (igualdad ante la ley, libertad de pensamiento y palabra, asociación, reunión, privacidad y propiedad) tienen su centro en el individuo, siendo la fuente de la seguridad, libertad y autonomía personales que permiten la constitución moderna de la sociedad civil – a partir de la conformación e integración de colectividades autónomas- y el espacio público. Los derechos políticos permiten al individuo incidir en la vida colectiva, participando en los procesos políticos y en la toma de decisiones. Los derechos sociales son explicados en mayor profundidad en el texto.



costos operativos, a la reducción del gasto social y a la limitación de la deliberación pública bajo criterios técnico burocráticos

.

### 3. El caso cubano

El modelo de ciudadanía vigente en Cuba desde 1959 se erige a partir de un ideal de Justicia Social definido en términos de igualdad económica -establecida a partir de la estatización de la propiedad privada sobre medios de producción y acompañado por restricciones a las dimensiones política y civil de la ciudadanía- y expresado en políticas sociales específicas. Estos elementos –ideal y políticas- se articulan, a nivel simbólico, con la peculiar trinidad “Estado, Nación y Revolución” que se corporeiza en su liderazgo histórico -Fidel y, en menor grado, Raúl Castro- y con mecanismos de control y encuadre políticos, que abarcan desde las instituciones policiacas, los medios para la propaganda ideológica y las políticas de participación tradicionales (Chaguaceda y Azor, 2011). Dando como resultado la conformación y legitimación de un régimen político estadocéntrico, donde la relación existente entre estado y ciudadanía consagra hegemónico al primero mientras desempodera esta última. Así, la definición de la Justicia Social funciona como un mecanismo de inclusión social políticamente subordinada y como justificación moral para el protagonismo estatal y la exclusión del disenso en la formulación de las agendas y políticas públicas.

La idea de Justicia Social presente en el discurso y las políticas sociales del gobierno revolucionario, parte de una definición tanto de la libertad como de la igualdad y el bienestar definidos como “*necesidades del pueblo*” según los criterios del Estado (Bobes, 2010). Si bien este paradigma ha atendido, por las políticas sociales y por otras vías de intervención/regulación estatales, a la redistribución de la riqueza, a la definición de mínimos de bienestar socioeconómico y a la concientización en torno al derecho a la igualdad y la equidad, bajo su férula se ha soslayado la justicia en términos de igualdad en la participación política, se han conculcado derechos (civiles, políticos) y se genera un ciudadano dependiente del Estado y con escasísimos márgenes de autonomía. En lo relativo a la Justicia Social, el modelo de participación ciudadana vigente en Cuba acota las demandas de la población a la elevación de quejas y la demanda -no vinculante- de información y mejoras sobre la distribución cotidiana de bienes y servicios (Bobes, 2010), en vez de propiciar la discusión de alternativas en las formas de aplicación de estos y a la deliberación de asuntos sustantivos (Chaguaceda y Azor, 2011) relacionados con la institucionalidad y cambios políticos, que inciden en la asignación de recursos y prioridades en materia de política y justicia sociales.

Cecilia Bobes (2010)<sup>11</sup> identifica tres grandes momentos –y periodos históricos- relacionados con (re)definiciones públicas (léase estatales) de la noción de justicia social, las cuales corresponden con modificaciones sustantivas de la política social del gobierno cubano. Parte de un momento fundacional (1959-1975) -bajo el sello de una “*Revolución de los humildes y para los humildes*”- que abarca desde la instauración del gobierno revolucionario hasta la institucionalización del socialismo cubano. En esta etapa, la justicia social como se concibe como participación en la distribución de la riqueza y el establecimiento de políticas sociales inéditas de redistribución y de equiparación de los niveles y calidades de vida de las amplias mayorías, lo que quintuplica (de 1958 a 1978) el ingreso del 40 % más pobre de la población (Zabala, 2010: p. 80). Acompañando tal evolución, la polarización política pinta una raya entre, por un lado, el pueblo revolucionario dirigido por la vanguardia y, en la acera del frente, una gama de enemigos internos, exiliados y el adversario principal (los EEUU), que se expresa en el plano socioeconómico con migraciones, nacionalizaciones y la estatización generalizada de la economía.

Una segunda etapa se abre con el periodo de soviétización (1976-1989), marcado por la celebración del primer congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC), la aprobación de la constitución socialista de 1976 así como por el incremento del crecimiento del PIB y del bienestar material de la población verbigracia los vínculos con el CAME. Inspirado bajo la idea de pertenencia a la “*comunidad socialista*” unida por una “*inquebrantable hermandad*” en aras de la construcción común de un “*futuro luminoso del socialismo*”. En la etapa las políticas sociales igualitarias se integran a la planificación económica quinquenal de corte soviético, combinándose con la fórmula socialista de distribución “a cada cual según su trabajo” basada en el desempeño.<sup>12</sup> Aparece un sistema meritocrático, que reúne tanto la competencia individual como en la lealtad política en diversas esferas de la vida social (así se expande el acceso de trabajadores a la universidad, al tiempo que se restringe el acceso a homosexuales y otras “lacras sociales”) dando como resultado

---

<sup>11</sup> El mérito del trabajo de Bobes al relacionar los temas gobernanza, justicia social y ciudadanía es indiscutible, aunque considero poco (re)conocido su potencial impacto en la reflexión académica y el debate público cubanos. Identifica el contenido y alcances políticos El presente texto es, en buena medida, deudor de los aportes de la colega, así como de la obra de expertos cubanos – de la isla y su diáspora- mencionados a lo largo del mismo.

<sup>12</sup> Hasta 1993, el Estado cubano logrará regular casi la totalidad del consumo a través del sistema de racionamiento y asignación de bienes duraderos a partir de un mecanismo de estimulación a los méritos laborales, alcanzándose una relativa homologación de los consumos, que se correspondía con el ideal de una sociedad más igualitaria y homogénea acercando la calidad del consumo, el estatus y el prestigio sociales a la lealtad y el compromiso político (Bobes, 2010).

procesos –y percepciones- de abundancia y movilidad social capaces de sustentar, hasta la fecha, el conocido mito de los “años 80”.

A partir de la crisis provocada por la desaparición del campo socialista (1989-1991) y concretamente con la proclamación oficial del periodo especial, el Estado implementa un conjunto de medidas de ajuste que transita a una modalidad restrictiva -en el discurso y la praxis- de la Justicia Social. El llamado a defender las “*conquistas básicas de la Revolución*” -el acceso a la educación y la salud, la obtención de éxitos deportivos y, sobre todo, la conquista de la soberanía y la independencia- es expresión de una brecha entre la definición simbólica de la Justicia Social y el desempeño de las políticas públicas concretas (Bobes, 2010). La homologación de las necesidades queda reducida a estas *conquistas sociales* -que están erosionadas- y al consumo mínimo – también a la baja- del mercado racionado. Reaparecen fenómenos identificados con el pasado prerrevolucionario -la pobreza, la prostitución y el consumo y tráfico de drogas-, se retrocede en la igualdad de género y de razas -afectándose especialmente las mujeres por el impacto de la crisis en los hogares y la población negra o mestiza por el magro acceso a remesas- al tiempo que la expansión de las desigualdades territoriales -entre la metrópolis y el resto del país- propicia un aumento de la migración interna, lo que a su vez genera diversas formas de discriminación a los migrantes, en la forma de leyes estatales o actitudes de los capitalinos.

El impacto de elementos como la dualidad monetaria, las remesas<sup>13</sup> o la inserción en un segmento dinámico y dolarizado de la economía –turismos, empresas mixtas, negocios privados- hace que los diferentes grupos sociales comiencen a distanciarse por sus niveles y tipos de consumo, configurándose identidades y “estilos de vida” diferenciados. Aunado al incremento de la desigualdad social, la desvalorización del empleo estatal como fuente ingreso y movilidad social provoca una disociación entre el estatus social emergente y el compromiso político. Como señala Bobes (2010), en la misma medida que los estilos de vida, el bienestar y el prestigio social cobran creciente independencia del Estado, la idea de la Justicia Social se torna difusa y el bienestar se va distanciando en el imaginario social del ámbito de las políticas públicas para desplazarse sutilmente hacia redes sociales más privadas.

---

<sup>13</sup> Bobes (2010) destaca la paradoja “incómoda” de que sean las remesas, enviadas por los emigrantes, la principal fuente de ingresos de muchas familias, que permite complementar el mínimo de consumo (subsidiado) que ofrece el Estado en moneda nacional. Valdría también añadir, en este sentido, su importancia como fuente de captación de divisas para el gobierno cubano, ubicándose –según diversas fuentes- detrás de los ingresos por la venta de servicios (Ej. Médicos a Venezuela) y el turismo.

Es justo en este contexto –y, en particular, a partir de finales de la década del 90- cuando comienza a abrirse paso en el discurso oficial y, de modo visible, en la producción intelectual de la isla, los temas de la desigualdad y la pobreza (Espina, 2010: 180).<sup>14</sup> En el ámbito académico comienzan a barajarse nociones específicas para su estudio, procurando diferenciarla –a partir del reconocimiento de las políticas sociales vigentes en Cuba- de la existente en otros contextos. Se ha destacado (Zabala, 2010) la existencia de una ventajosa posición de Cuba respecto a otros países de la región en cuanto a los niveles de desarrollo social y pobreza, así como la existencia de mecanismos de protección social que garantizan a todos los sectores el acceso a servicios sociales básicos.<sup>15</sup> Por su parte Mayra Espina (2010) ha señalado que, pese a los avances en la superación de las desigualdades extremas y la promoción de la equidad, tras la crisis se acentuaron los niveles de pobreza<sup>16</sup>, las diferencias de ingreso<sup>17</sup> y los límites de una política social caracterizada por su débil sustentabilidad, el énfasis en el consumo social estatalmente normado, cierto homogenismo distributivo y un patrón de gasto social con asignaciones desbalanceadas (Espina, 2010: 236-237).

Resulta innegable el aporte que el trabajo académico realizado en la isla –por las autoras mencionadas y por otros reconocidos especialistas de centros de investigación adscritos a la Academia de Ciencias- hace a la potencial corrección de las políticas sociales y, lo que es más importante, a la activación de un debate público e informado sobre tan

---

<sup>14</sup> Para abordar estos temas, la academia confrontó dificultades que van desde la escasa reflexión y publicación científica especializada existentes, pasando por la poca información (estadísticas y estudios) accesibles (Espina, 2010: 169, Zabala, 2010: 184) y los recelos políticos al reconocimiento público de la problemática. En similar tenor, el creciente reconocimiento y debate públicos en torno a la aceptación de la diversidad cultural, racial y sexual es una importante ampliación de las prácticas de Justicia Social, que impacta a un grupo de actores concretos. Sin embargo, continúa pendiente el reconocimiento de la pluralidad de opiniones y proyectos políticos.

<sup>15</sup> Aun cuando se reconoce que la canasta básica no satisface -en cantidad y calidad- las necesidades humanas, se insiste en la inexistencia de situaciones críticas de desnutrición (Zabala, 2010: 87) y se define la pobreza cubana como un fenómeno que afecta a un sector minoritario de la población, que no adopta expresiones extremas y es combatido tanto por las políticas sociales como por la existencia de un patrimonio material y espiritual (¿?) acumulado y una integración social de los grupos vulnerables (Zabala, 2010: 90).

<sup>16</sup> La investigadora señala la existencia (2000) de alrededor de un 20 % población urbana con *pobreza de ingresos* y necesidades básicas insatisfechas, estadística que se elevaría al 2 % en la zona oriental del país (Espina, 2010: 201-203).

<sup>17</sup> Si bien la autora señala que la ausencia de información pública no permite calcular con precisión la diferenciación de ingresos, alude a investigaciones realizadas en Ciudad de la Habana, que arrojarían -combinando salario estatal, remesa y otros ingresos provenientes de la economía privada- una brecha de ingresos per cápita entre un mínimo de 37 pesos a un máximo de 7266 pesos (Espina, 2010: 197-199).

relevante problemática. En ese sentido, se trata de una muestra de compromiso intelectual y cívico de un sector de la academia cubana. Sin embargo, habría que señalar críticamente el déficit que significa el no aludir/atender de forma sustantiva a aquellas variables específicamente políticas (ciudadanía, régimen político) que constituyen elementos nodales del análisis sobre la Justicia Social, la pobreza y la desigualdad. Al reducir el componente institucional a las referencias a las políticas y programas sociales y, con creciente frecuencia, al identificar a los dirigentes con el término genérico “decisores”, se desdibuja una importante veta en el análisis de estos fenómenos. Una que los ubique en relación directa con la posesión y distribución del poder y no como mero epifenómeno de decisiones tecnocráticas, atributos culturales y crecimientos económicos.

## 4. Las reformas y sus impactos

Cuba vive, desde 2008, un proceso de reformas de diverso calado (estructurales o parciales) y modalidad (económicas, legales, institucionales) que modifican los contornos y rumbos del país (ver Tabla). Estas operan sobre el trasfondo de dos décadas pasadas, marcadas por el derrumbe del campo socialista europeo, la crisis del llamado Periodo Especial, las reformas parciales de los años 90 y la Batalla de Ideas de la primera mitad de los 2000. La concatenación de estos procesos han impactado una sociedad más diversa, heterogénea, desigual y con actores no estatales inexistentes en el modelo anterior de corte soviético. Mientras, tanto el gobierno como, en un sentido más amplio, el régimen político (nexos legales e institucionales que relacionan al estado con los ciudadanos) siguen anclados al modelo de socialismo de estado clásico, con los rasgos que ello supone: monopartidismo, personalismo y verticalismo políticos, estatización de la vida socioeconómica, control político de la esfera pública y los derechos de ciudadanía.

Las actuales reformas obedecen al interés de la elite dirigente por pasar de un modelo de liderazgo carismático (Fidel Castro) a uno con rituales y mecanismos institucionalizados para: a) procesar sus conflictos internos entre grupos y figuras, conflictos en potencial aumento una vez desaparezcan los líderes históricos; b) lograr el relevo generacional, objetivo traumático tras el defenestramiento en 2009 de los relevos naturales (el vicepresidente Carlos Lage Dávila, el canciller Felipe Pérez Roque) y sus secuelas; c) lidiar con esa sociedad compleja -y presumiblemente beligerante- a la que la reforma dará paulatinamente nuevos derechos y de la cual provendrán demandas ampliadas. En correspondencia, tanto los cambios en la composición gubernamental como las modificaciones legislativas (Constitución y otras) apuntan a resolver esas urgencias de estabilización y relevo ordenado.

Desde la óptica de muchos analistas -entre ellos quien suscribe este texto- así como de buena parte de los ciudadanos, las reformas son positivas, pero insuficientes, por su ritmo de implementación y alcances, para resolver los problemas acumulados durante medio siglo de política económica<sup>18</sup> y liderazgo fidelistas. Además, tienen un costo

---

<sup>18</sup> Mesa Lago (2012) señala que el crecimiento promedio cubano (2,4% del PIB) fue la mitad del latinoamericano en 2010-2011, dependiendo principalmente de la inversión, comercio, crédito y subsidios venezolanos, la inversión extranjera privada en hidrocarburo, minería y turismo y los créditos e inversiones chinos.

social de problemático asunción y procesamiento por el gobierno, tanto a nivel simbólico (de cara a la población, a sus partidarios locales y foráneos) como de índole práctica. Los cambios adolecen de conflictos de diseño que conspiran contra su eficacia: cuando se decide implementar alguna reforma necesaria, las tendencias/sectores inmovilistas dentro de la dirigencia le introducen excesivas regulaciones, que limitan su efecto positivo. Ello, sin embargo, se está resolviendo en la forma de pequeños y constantes ajustes, orientados a enmendar la medida anterior, en general con soluciones más aperturistas pero costosas por las demoras de su corrección/introducción.

Tipo de Reforma	Fecha (Anuncio/ inicio)	Medidas	Objetivos	Efectos
Cambios Institucionales/Administrativos (Supone, en años venideros, una reforma constitucional para avalar cambios)				
Reorganización de Entidades	2007	Fusión/cierre de entidades (ministerios, etc)	Recortar gasto y burocracia Mejor administración	Impacto Indeterminado
Reorganización Territorial	2012	Nueva provincia	Adecuar a desarrollo regional y demográfico	Impacto Indeterminado
Perfeccionamiento Empresarial	2006	Más autonomía en gestión y mejor	Mejorar producción y productividad sector estatal	Impacto Indeterminado
Campañas anticorrupción/ disciplina social	2006	Más control y sanción legal	Reducir robo al Estado, aleccionar funcionarios y empresarios	Cientos procesados (incluye extranjeros), expedientes en curso
Apertura al debate	2007	Más crítica en prensa, foros académicos y convocatorias oficiales	Detectar y mejorar problemas "dentro de la Revolución"	Desatanización de ciertos temas (desigualdad, derechos) y mantenimiento censura asuntos

Factores como la fuerte descapitalización y el atraso tecnológico en la industria (cuyo aporte al PIB se reduce de 28 % -1989- a 16 % -2010- ), el desplome de la agricultura (de 10 % a 3,5 %) expresado en una menor productividad y la consiguiente importación del 84 % de la canasta básica en 2012, así como los datos que revelan la abultada deuda externa, el déficit fiscal y la prolongada crisis del transporte público y las comunicaciones revelan el agotamiento del modelo vigente en el país caribeño.



Separación Cargos/Limitación mandatos	2012	Anuncios de cambios futuros (fin mandato de Raúl en 2018)	Garantizar sucesión Ordenada Relevo generacional Dirección colectiva	Pendiente
Reformas no Estructurales (No modifican estructura económica aunque tienen amplio impacto social)				
Liberalización nuevos bienes/servicios	2008	Acceso hoteles, compra computadoras, y celulares, compra venta autos y viviendas entre particulares	Incrementar ingresos/ legitimidad estatales Eliminar prohibiciones molestas a población	Apoyo mayoritario de población Crece número beneficiados/ ingreso estatal Incremento de desigualdad social
Pagos adeudos/ y venta insumos a campesinos	2007	Cumplimiento pagos de Acopio Incentivo a productores	Aumentar producción agrícola Reducir importaciones	Variable. No eliminación de impagos Aumento precios
Cambios en política salarial	2007	Pluriempleo, no tope salarial, Pago x resultado, Pago (parcial) en divisa en empresas mixtas	Incremento producción/ productividad Mejora salarios	Impacto desigual y no suficiente Persiste pérdida valor de salario frente a costo de la vida
Reforma de pensiones	2008	Incremento edad/ años de trabajo para retiro Cotización personal a fondos	Reducir déficit Aumentar ingresos Mantener fuerza de trabajo activa	No equilibrio a medio plazo Déficit de fuerza de trabajo
Reducción gratuidades y servicios sociales	2008	Recorte gasto social/ subsidios estatales	Ahorro fiscal Sustentar gasto social	Afectación a cobertura salud y educación Afectación a alimentación popular Incremento pobreza
Reformas Estructurales Identificadas con la llamada Actualización del socialismo (2011), que redefine parcialmente nexo plan-mercado y correlación % empresas estatal/social/privada.				
Usufructo	2008	Entrega tierra estatal ociosa a privados, cooperativas y empresas	Aumentar producción agrícola Mejorar abasto Reducir importaciones	Expansión de superficie y producción agraria privada Caída de producción general
Cooperativización	2012	Arriendo locales servicio, artesanado y transporte a nuevas	Reducir gastos estatales Mejorar ingresos estatales Absorber desempleo Mejorar servicios a población	Apenas inicia Impacto Indeterminado

Despidos estatales/Empleo Privado	2010	Despido 500000-1,3 millones trabajadores estatales, expansión cuentapropismo	Reducción gasto fiscal, Aumento ingreso fiscal Aumento eficiencia y producción	Incremento de empleo no estatal Insuficiente ritmo/tamaño de reducción de plantillas (temor a costo social/político de
Dualidad Monetaria	2012	Cierre de brecha o eliminación de relación asimétrica Peso convertible (CUC)-Peso(CUP)	Fin de mercado segmentado Ordenamiento contable Mejora poder adquisitivo	Pequeña devaluación CUC Persiste asimetría entre monedas
Reforma Migratoria	2013	Reducción/eliminación de trabas a viajes de cubanos	Responder a demanda popular Mejora legitimidad Mayor flujo visitantes	Eliminación/simplificación importante de pagos, trámites y vetos absurdos Mantenimiento de veto estatal puntual a ingreso/salida por razones políticas

**Tabla: Síntesis de las reformas implementadas o anunciadas bajo el mandato de Raúl Castro**

**(Fuente: Elaboración propia con base en Carmelo Mesa-Lago “Cuba en la era de Raúl Castro. Reformas económico-sociales y sus efectos”, Editorial Colibrí, Madrid, 2012)**

En lo relacionado con la temática central de este artículo, Bobes (2010) ha señalado como las reformas adelantan cambios conceptuales referidos, por una parte, a la *definición de la justicia* y, por otra, a la *legitimación de la desigualdad*. Si bien se ha valorado de forma positiva la liberalización del acceso -en términos de oportunidades- a ciertos consumos (celulares, computadoras, turismo) se reconoce que las fuentes de ingreso en divisas – que sirven efectivamente para sostener tal consumo- se encuentran como regla disociadas del trabajo en el sector dominante (estatal) de la economía, que emplea a la mayoría de los trabajadores. Lo que, según la autora, conlleva la negación del principio básico de la justicia como se había definido tradicionalmente en el socialismo de estado cubano, ya que ni se ha podido redistribuir a partir del ideal predominante en la primera etapa -“según la necesidad”- ni de la segunda -“según su trabajo”- .

Carmelo Mesa Lago (2012) señala que el crecimiento promedio cubano (2,4% del PIB) fue la mitad del latinoamericano en 2010-2011, dependiendo principalmente de la inversión, comercio, crédito y subsidios venezolanos, la inversión extranjera privada en hidrocarburo, minería y turismo y los créditos e inversiones chinos.

Factores como la fuerte descapitalización y el atraso tecnológico en la industria (cuyo aporte al PIB se reduce de 28 % -1989- a 16 % -2010- ), el desplome de la agricultura (de 10 % a 3,5 %) expresado en una menor productividad y la consiguiente importación del 84 % de la canasta básica en 2012, así como los datos que revelan la abultada deuda externa, el déficit fiscal y la prolongada crisis del transporte público y las comunicaciones revelan el agotamiento del modelo vigente en el país caribeño. Y si bien se mantienen indicadores notables de servicios sociales (acceso a salud y educación, bajísima mortalidad infantil) se acusa una merma en su calidad y cobertura, una ineficiencia de inversiones y prestaciones del sector, lo cual será objeto de abordaje, en varios temas emblemáticos, en los siguientes acapites.

## 5. La (in)seguridad alimentaria y los ingresos personales

Si consideramos, por tomar un ejemplo, el estado de la seguridad alimentaria –entendida como el acceso a alimentos suficientes, seguros y nutritivos capaces de cubrir las necesidades nutricionales y sustentar una vida sana y activa- veremos que este elemento básico de cualquier agenda de protección social está en crisis. La seguridad alimentaria en Cuba, en las últimas dos décadas, se ha contraído significativamente debido a la caída en la producción agrícola –que en 2012 inferior en relación a la de 1989 en la mayoría de los productos- y por los elevados precios de los alimentos y otros productos de primera necesidad, tanto en mercados privados como estatales. En tal situación, los ancianos sin familia son particularmente los más afectados, debido a las escuálidas pensiones que reciben -ya sea por su jubilación o por la “asistencia social”- y porque no compiten en el nuevo mercado del trabajo por cuenta propia.

La tan preconizada distribución de productos normados/subsidiados continúa a la baja y la tendencia de la famosa libreta de abastecimientos es a desaparecer –más por paulatino desangramiento que por súbita clausura- , pese al rechazo que tal situación genera en amplios sectores populares, dependientes de estos productos básicos subsidiados, como se demostró en debates convocados por el propio gobierno.<sup>19</sup> El tema es tan polémico que se refleja en los foros de debate de la isla, generando posiciones diversas entre los participantes. En uno de estos (el *Último Jueves*, organizado por el equipo de la revista *Temas*) el economista y ex funcionario José Luis Rodríguez dijo que los productos de la libreta satisfacen el 60% de los requerimientos proteicos y calóricos de las personas, mientras otros ponentes recordaron que las familias cubanas –cuyos salarios reales son hoy la

---

<sup>19</sup> Ver Información extraída del Documento “Información sobre el resultado del Debate de los Lineamientos de la política Económica y Social del Partido y la Revolución. Mayo 2011. Para consultar este y otros materiales relacionados ver: <http://www.one.cu/publicaciones/08informacion/Lineamientos/folleto-lineamientos-vi-cong.pdf> ; [http://www.one.cu/publicaciones/08informacion/Lineamientos/tabloide\\_debate\\_lineamientos.pdf](http://www.one.cu/publicaciones/08informacion/Lineamientos/tabloide_debate_lineamientos.pdf) y <http://www.one.cu/publicaciones/08informacion/Lineamientos/Resolucion%20sobre%20los%20Lineamientos%20de%20la%20Política%20Económica%20y%20Social%20del%20Partido%20y%20la%20Revolucion.pdf>

mitad de los de 1989- dedican entre 60% y 75% de sus ingresos a la alimentación básica.<sup>20</sup>

Hay que especificar que las autoridades han ido sacando productos de la libreta, que luego se venden en el mercado libre a precios 3 o 4 veces mayores. Los precios de la distribución normada también ha ido en aumento, permaneciendo dentro de la libreta los siguientes productos: 5 libras de arroz a 0.25 centavos la libra y dos adicionales a 0:90 centavos; 10 onzas de granos a 0.80 centavos: 3 libras de azúcar refino y 1 de azúcar sin refinar a 15 y 10 centavos la libra respectivamente; 1/2 libra de aceite a 0.20 centavos, 1 sobre de café (mezclado con chícharo) de 4 onzas a 4.00 pesos; 1 libra de pollo a 0.70 centavos y 11 onzas de pescado o, en su lugar, pollo al mismo precio; 5 huevos a 0.15 centavos; y 1 pan pequeño (diario) de 80 gramos a 0.05 centavos.<sup>21</sup> Esta cuota alcanza aproximadamente para una semana de consumo. El resto de los productos deben adquirirse a precios altos, en las tiendas en divisas o en los mercados agropecuarios: en estos últimos los huevos a 1,10 pesos la unidad, el arroz a 5.00 pesos la libra, el frijol negro o colorado a 15.00 pesos la libra, la carne de puerco a 30 pesos la libra; un aguacate a 10.00 pesos, un mango a 8.00 pesos, una libra de cebolla a 15.00 pesos, etc.

Y en tanto los productos de la libreta son insuficientes para cubrir las necesidades básicas, la población tiene que completar las necesidades de diversos bienes de consumo de alta demanda (jabón de baño y de lavar, detergente, pasta dental, aceite, puré de tomate, condimentos, café, etc.) acudiendo al mercado liberado en pesos cubanos o en divisa, en el que los precios son mucho más altos, lo que incide en la baja capacidad de compra de la gente. En estos establecimientos -a los cuales no tienen posibilidad de acceso regular los sectores más pobres- los precios mantienen una tendencia al aumento, a lo que se suma las irregularidades en el abastecimiento de numerosos productos, favoreciéndose con esto el incremento del mercado negro y la especulación.

El salario promedio mensual en Cuba, que ronda los 460 pesos, no cubre las necesidades básicas más elementales: según criterio de varios especialistas y testimonio de diversos ciudadanos, cada persona requiere hoy alrededor de 3 salarios promedio para adquirir los productos de primera necesidad. Con semejantes salarios, la mayoría de las familias cubanas viven en situación de pobreza, sobreviviendo con ingresos obtenidos por vías ilegales: desvíos de recursos estatales, participación en el mercado negro, hurtos, etc. De esa situación se exceptúan aquellos que ocupan puestos importantes vinculados con la

---

<sup>20</sup> <http://temas.cult.cu/blog/201307/resena-ultimo-jueves-julio/>

<sup>21</sup> Además, se entregan 3 kilogramos de leche en polvo para niños de 0 a 7 años y 13 pomos de compotas para niños de 0 a 3 años.

economía que opera en divisas (empresas mixtas, inversiones extranjeras), ciertas categorías especiales (oficiales de los cuerpos armados, algunos deportistas y artistas), los que rentan al turismo o tienen algún negocio relacionado con este (paladares, clubs) o quienes reciben una ayuda importante (remesas) del exterior. Y si bien se suele replicar aludiendo a las prestaciones estatales de servicios de educación o salud -también bajo asedio combinado de la crisis y los recortes- no es menos cierto que incluso en estos rubros la población está destinando parte de sus ingresos para garantizar, sino el acceso, sí la calidad del servicio.

## 6. El déficit habitacional y la marginalidad.

El acceso popular a la vivienda es uno de esos temas que ciertos defensores foráneos de “la obra de la Revolución” mencionan como una de las bondades del esquema de protección social vigente en Cuba. Pese a ello, otras voces “amigas del país”, más objetivamente informadas, mantienen un prudente silencio sobre el asunto, por ser uno de los problemas sociales más graves del país. Y es que si bien es cierto que el estado postrevolucionario aprobó entre sus primeras medidas justicieras la rebaja de alquileres y la concesión de títulos de propiedad a los moradores, también lo es que en las últimas décadas la situación del rubro ha ido agravándose. Hoy, más del 70% del fondo habitacional califica como de regular o mal estado; se construyen poquísimas nuevas casas cada año, incumplándose planes constructivos de por sí insuficientes. Y es muy común que en una casa convivan, con todos los roces que ello supone, hasta 3 generaciones de cubanos.

En lo relativo a la construcción o reparación de viviendas por el Estado, esta ha disminuido en los últimos años. El ritmo constructivo es inferior a las necesidades, por lo que el déficit habitacional se incrementa en correspondencia con una trayectoria ya histórica.<sup>22</sup> Si apreciamos el panorama actual, se constata que se han realizado algunas construcciones estatales -denominadas “viviendas con destino”- en especial algunas de alta calidad destinadas a oficiales del Minint y de las FAR, en barrios de Plaza y Playa, el Casino Deportivo, en los repartos Santa Catalina y La Coronela, entre otras zonas de la capital. Y se han habilitado como albergues y viviendas algunos edificios que antes fueron centros de trabajo; pero estos son casos puntuales y no satisfacen en modo alguno la demanda.

A la incapacidad constructiva se unen los fenómenos meteorológicos de los últimos años que han derribado o dañado parcialmente cientos de miles de viviendas, la mayoría porque eran de

---

<sup>22</sup> El proyecto de construir (de 1960 a 1970) 32 mil apartamentos anuales quedó en una cifra promedio de 11 mil. De 1971 a 1980 elevó la meta a unas 38 mil anuales, pero el promedio anual fue de menos de 17 mil. A partir de 1981 se inició un plan de 100 000 anuales, que -hasta 1990- no rebasó el promedio de 40 mil. Si bien en 1995 se logró sobrepasar las 40 mil, la cifra descendió paulatinamente hasta que en los primeros siete meses de 2005 sólo se habían concluido 7 300 viviendas. En el 2008 la meta se bajó de nuevo hasta 50 mil, rondando las cifras de los primeros cinco meses el 28% de cumplimiento.

baja calidad -tanto por los materiales empleados como por el cuestionable rigor del proceso de edificación- y porque, además, estos han carecido de mantenimiento durante el medio siglo. Este verano, producto de los aguaceros, se produjeron varios derrumbes en una pequeña zona de Centro Habana: en Escobar entre Neptuno y San Miguel, en Neptuno entre Manrique y San Nicolás y un tercero en Soledad entre Neptuno y Concordia. En cuanto a la recuperación, hay numerosas familias que perdieron sus viviendas al paso de los huracanes que asolaron el Oriente y la provincia de Pinar del Río y que todavía no han logrado recuperarlas. Por todo ello el déficit habitacional real sobrepasa, según diversas fuentes, el medio millón de viviendas oficialmente reconocido.

Después del fracaso del Estado de querer asumir por sí sólo la construcción de viviendas y de acudir a las llamadas Microbrigadas, actualmente se ha transferido esa responsabilidad a los particulares. Tal decisión deja sin cobertura a la numerosísima población trabajadora que habita cientos de edificios multifamiliares -en zonas como La Lisa o Alamar- mucho más difíciles de reparar con la suma de esfuerzos individuales. Así, los planes de asignar préstamos bancarios y facilitar materiales de construcción a la población para que construya o repare sus viviendas con recursos propios tampoco ha resuelto el enorme déficit habitacional del país. Semejante rehabilitación “por cuenta propia” se confronta con una oferta de materiales escasos, a precios altísimos y de baja calidad, pues en los rastros hay revendedores que adquieren casi todo el material que entra -como las barras de acero (cabillas) y el cemento en bolsa- para venderlos a precios superiores. Sin embargo, también está en curso un celebrable programa de subsidios a gente de bajos ingresos, para que reparen sus viviendas o construyan piezas como cocinas, baños u otra habitación, que concede el poder decisor a una comisión municipal de composición amplia lo que, según algunas opiniones, ha acotado las prácticas de “sociolismo”.<sup>23</sup>

A la población empobrecida de la capital hay que añadir el arribo – nunca interrumpido pese a cuestionadas iniciativas legales y operativos policiales- de millares de inmigrantes de las otras provincias, que sobreviven en la urbe a través de disímiles actividades, legales o ilegales. Estos se instalan en edificaciones de pésimo estado constructivo -casi siempre inhabitables- o bien improvisan precarias habitaciones con materiales de desechos en zonas de la periferia de la ciudad, sin servicio de acueducto, alcantarillado ni electricidad, en condiciones de hacinamiento e ilegalidad. Estas poblaciones marginales no cuentan tampoco con la cartilla de racionamiento, lo

---

<sup>23</sup> Uso de influencias y relaciones para obtener y proveer acceso a bienes, servicios y empleos demandados.



que dificulta más la sobrevivencia y multiplica el comercio ilegal y el delito.

Los barrios empobrecidos que albergan una población en tal situación de marginalidad se dispersan por diversos municipios de la capital. Tan solo si mencionamos los más notorios, encontramos que en Centro Habana se identifican los barrios de Los Sitios, algunas zonas de Cayo Hueso, el Barrio Chino y San Leopoldo; en La Habana Vieja destacan los barrios de Jesús María y Atarés; en Arroyo Naranjo se encuentra Párraga; en La Lisa el asentamiento ubicado debajo del puente que colinda con el municipio de Marianao; en Plaza existen El Fanguito y La Timba, en el Cerro el asentamiento El Canal, entre otros. Pero los más famosos son comunidades muy precarias de la periferia de la ciudad y barrios como La Corea, La Cueva y El Canal en los municipios Cerro, Marianao y San Miguel del Padrón.

La agudización del problema de la vivienda en Cuba constituye un serio problema social.<sup>24</sup> De hecho, es presumible que el notorio incremento de los niveles de violencia en la capital y la proliferación de diversas formas de marginalidad e ilegalidades guarden estrecha relación al incremento de la pobreza y el hacinamiento poblacional. Para combatir y solucionar tales problemas serán necesarios una importante inversión –y no solo una racionalización, como parece preferirse hoy- de recursos en función de mejorar las políticas sociales (vivienda, salud, educación, recreación) que atienden a esas poblaciones, así como experimentar formas alternativas (cooperativas de construcción y gestión de viviendas, cajas de crédito, etc) que impidan que la ineficacia de las burocracias o la especulación del mercado inmobiliario sean las que determinen, para las mayorías, el acceso y disfrute de su derecho a una vivienda digna. Meta que solo se alcanzará en la medida que se combata y reduzca, de forma integral y sostenible, la pobreza que afecta a amplios sectores de la población cubana

---

<sup>24</sup> Para un vivo y reciente abordaje del tema ver, del periodista Fernando Ravsberg, el siguiente trabajo <http://cartasdesdecuba.com/vivienda-en-cuba-un-problema-aun-sin-solucion/>

## 7. La “potencia médica” y el “pueblo más culto del mundo”

Las condiciones higiénico-sanitarias del país, en general, y de la capital en particular, son complicadas, existiendo consenso entre los diferentes testimoniantes respecto a la amenaza y afectación derivadas de brotes epidémicos, aunque difiriendo las opiniones relativas al alcance y eficacia del compromiso estatal en su erradicación. Los sistemas hidráulicos, el alcantarillado, las redes de aguas negras están rotas o parcialmente dañadas en casi toda la ciudad.<sup>25</sup> Lo mismo sucede con el sistema de recogida de desperdicios a la población<sup>26</sup>, que en zonas de las periferias urbanas es más irregular y se realiza utilizando carretones de caballos.<sup>27</sup> Esa situación se agrava justamente en las bolsas de marginalidad, donde se vive en peores condiciones de higiene y donde incluso muchas veces la población carece de sistemas de acueducto y alcantarillado. Al no informarse adecuadamente a la población ni desarrollarse una campaña intensiva para prevenir la epidemia, la población no tiene una verdadera percepción del riesgo, lo que también aumenta el peligro de propagación.

En relación con la situación epidemiológica en La Habana y en el resto de la Isla, persisten contradicciones entre el no reconocimiento oficial a diversos brotes de epidemias y la situación real. Desde hace años, sucesivas epidemias de dengue y cólera se han silenciado por

---

<sup>25</sup> El agua albañal corre por doquier en cualquier barrio habanero, incluyendo Miramar. Esas aguas, debido a que las tuberías de agua potable están deterioradas, cuando le falta la presión las aguas albañales penetran en las tuberías de aguas potables y generan enfermedades como el dengue y el cólera (DC).

<sup>26</sup> “En Centro Habana una parte considerable, sino la mayoría de los contenedores de basura, están en mal estado, muchos volteados, abarrotados y con escombros y basuras a su alrededor. Da la impresión de estar en algún país africano de los más atrasados o en Haití (DC). Según LG “En sentido general, la situación de la sanidad es regular, mejora o empeora según el barrio. En el Cerro las calles están bastante limpias y recogen la basura todos los días, pero cuando falla un solo día ya la insalubridad comienza a tomar dimensiones peligrosas.”

<sup>27</sup> “En el Diezmero, barrio perteneciente al municipio San Miguel del Padrón, los vecinos retienen la basura durante semanas en sus casas o van a botarla a un basurero directamente, por que los carros de recogida no pasan con regularidad. En la calle Cero, desde Primera hasta Quinta, pude observar aglomeración de desechos alrededor de los contenedores de basura. Lo mismo ocurre en la parte de La Habana Vieja que está fuera del proyecto que dirige Eusebio Leal y en otros lugares de la capital. Sin embargo, tengo entendido, aunque no puedo confirmarlo, que el Cotorro es uno de los lugares más limpios (DC).”

parte de las autoridades políticas y sanitarias. El cólera, en particular, parece estarse expandiendo en zonas cercanas a la capital – se reportan extraoficialmente numerosos casos en Güira de Melena, Güines (donde se dice ha habido que improvisar hospitales de campaña para poder ofrecer asistencia médica a todos los afectados sin tener que trasladarlos a la capital para evitar el riesgo de contagio) y Guanajay. En este último se dice que el *Vibrio colerae* ha sido localizado incluso en el acueducto (MC). Las autoridades han habilitado salas de hospitales, han aumentado la frecuencia de la fumigación, mantienen una propaganda acerca de la higiene en la televisión, pero el deterioro ambiental neutraliza esos esfuerzos (DC).

Como consecuencia del control oficial respecto a la información sobre el cólera no se conoce el número de afectados, aunque meses atrás se reconoció oficialmente una cifra que rondaba los 160 y poco después se declaró “controlado” lo que llamaron eufemísticamente “el brote de infección intestinal diarreica aguda”.<sup>28</sup> Lo más peligroso es que no se le informa a la población del estado ni de la marcha de las medidas: cuando en agosto se reconoció la existencia del cólera, hacía un mes que se sabía de su presencia que en varios lugares de la capital como La Puntilla (Miramar) y en Regla, entre otras zonas.<sup>29</sup> El número exacto de afectados es difícil saberlo, esas cifras no se brindan y cuando lo hacen, están por debajo de la realidad (DC). Otras evaluaciones estiman como mayormente positivas las acciones del gobierno en este rubro,<sup>30</sup> lo cual hace suponer que los mayores déficits se relacionan a la tardía información y reconocimiento públicos del problema, que limita la efectividad social de las acciones de control epidémico desplegadas por el estado.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Es de suponer que en la actualidad dicha cifra debe ser muy superior, porque el cólera se ha expandido (MC).

<sup>29</sup> “Según comunicados oficiales el cólera y otras enfermedades tropicales erradicadas hace mucho tiempo en Cuba y de reciente re-introducción, no existen en La Habana u otras provincias del territorio nacional. No se aprecian, al menos en La Habana, medidas epidemiológicas de control sanitario (IS).”

<sup>30</sup> LG testimonia que “Cerca del Cerro hubo un brote de cólera hace unos 4 meses; pero se controló rápido con un amplio despliegue de un contingente de trabajadores de la salud. Mi impresión es que el gobierno le dedica bastantes recursos. En las zonas con brotes o sospechas, son muy estrictos con el lavado y desinfección de las manos antes de entrar a las instituciones.”

<sup>31</sup> Según GV, en el enfrentamiento al cólera “Se realizó una inmensa labor de divulgación sobre las medidas de precaución e higiene para no continuar difundiendo la enfermedad y se hospitalizaba a todo aquel que tuviera los síntomas. Se comenzó a vender en las farmacias hipoclorito de sodio para desinfectar las verduras, frutas y para agregarle al agua de tomar. En todos los lugares públicos te obligaban a lavarte las manos con estos líquidos desinfectantes.”

Respecto a la salud pública, aunque se mantiene un sistema universal, gratuito y público, con especial atención a grupos vulnerables (embarazadas, infantes, ancianos) y padecimientos de alta gravedad/complejidad (VIH, diabetes), se aprecia deterioro acumulado en varios rubros. Desde hace años, la cobertura médica ha sido irregular e insuficiente. La contratación de médicos en “misiones” fuera de Cuba producen un déficit en la atención a la población cubana, que se percibe tanto en la atención primaria (consultorios del programa de Médicos de la Familia, policlínicos y hasta cuerpos de guardia de hospitales), como en la inserción de estudiantes, principalmente extranjeros, sin la suficiente preparación profesional para prestar una atención calificada.

El estado de los centros hospitalarios también es, en su mayoría, deficiente, salvo aquellos que prestan servicio especializado (como el turismo de salud) o mixto (población, extranjeros, militares).<sup>32</sup> Muchos centros que han sido reparados presentan nuevamente un deterioro precoz, debido a la mala calidad de los trabajos de restauración<sup>33</sup>, al desvío de los materiales de construcción (que suelen venderse en el mercado negro por los propios encargados de las labores de reparación o mantenimiento, que los roban de los lugares de almacenamiento en las obras), además que las instalaciones hospitalarias presentan también numerosas deficiencias en equipamiento, confort para pacientes y acompañantes y alimentación de los pacientes.<sup>34</sup> No es raro que falten los reactivos para la realización de diferentes tipos de análisis o que el equipamiento técnico para pruebas (ultrasonido, rayos X, resonancia, etc.) esté averiado o sea insuficiente para cubrir la demanda. Sin embargo, varios testimoniantes coinciden en señalar que

---

32 “Hay fuerte deterioro en la mayoría de los centros hospitalarios, como el Hospital-Docente Calixto García, en permanente restauración y con un alto nivel de deterioro; el Hospital de la calle 26, con gran deterioro e incluso cierre de áreas. A la vez existe una notable diferencia con los centros hospitalarios militares, como el Hospital Naval (IS).”

33 “Han sido restaurados unos cuantos policlínicos, pero la calidad de las reparaciones deja mucho que desear, pues vuelven a deteriorarse rápido. Varios centros hospitalarios necesitan que se les “pase la mano” desde el punto de vista constructivo (LG).”

34 Según DC “En el hospital Clínico Quirúrgico, que está frente a la Ciudad Deportiva, he estado varias veces para visitar enfermos y es deprimente la falta de higiene. La escasez de materiales y medicamentos es mala, pero empeora porque los trabajadores de la salud, como el resto de los trabajadores, tampoco pueden vivir con su salario. Eso explica que los enfermeros y demás trabajadores trafiquen con medicamentos y materiales, mientras los médicos reciben favores, regalos o dinero a cambios del servicio que prestan.”

el abasto de medicinas no sufre un deterioro visible y que, de una u otra forma, la población posee la posibilidad de ser atendida.<sup>35</sup>

En la formación del personal de la salud, el *promocionismo* -que prioriza la cantidad sobre la calidad de los graduados- ha incidido negativamente en la calidad de muchos graduados, si bien hay también muchos profesionales que prestan un servicio de calidad. Lamentablemente, estos últimos están siendo mayoritariamente contratados en el servicio paralelo disponible para el turismo, la élite dirigente o, en menor medida, enviado a las llamadas misiones médicas en el extranjero. Aunque varias fuentes reconocen la calidad de formación (GV, LG), otras señalan que, desde hace aproximadamente una década, se aprecia una disminución de la calidad de los galenos recién graduados (IS).

Dentro del sistema de salud han proliferado formas de mercantilismo y corrupción que afectan la calidad de la atención. La población que acude a solicitar atención médica de cualquier índole, desde una consulta hasta una intervención quirúrgica, suele hacer “regalos”, sea en especies o en metálico, al personal médico, en dependencia de las posibilidades adquisitivas de cada paciente y de la calidad y categoría del especialista. Se ha establecido dicha práctica como un mecanismo natural ante la necesidad de acceder a un servicio médico de alguna calidad, para conseguir turnos sin demora y ante los míseros salarios de los especialistas de la salud.<sup>36</sup> Se ha señalado que

---

<sup>35</sup> En este rubro las opiniones difieren según la experiencia y percepción personales. Para IS “Existe falta de algunas medicinas y de material para realizar pruebas médicas (ej. PTG) en los puestos de farmacia de los policlínicos de atención primaria atención primaria y algunos hospitales (ej. Calixto García).” Según GV “No es un secreto que hay escasez de materiales en los hospitales. Por ejemplo, hace un mes fui al podólogo y me dijeron que hacía tiempo que no tenían bisturís, que si yo conseguía uno ellos me hacían el trabajo. Si vas al ginecólogo y quieres que te pongan un anticonceptivo tienes que buscarlo antes con alguna amistad. Es decir muchas veces están los médicos pero no cuentan con los recursos para hacer su trabajo. Sin embargo, aunque es posible que no haya alguna medicina en una farmacia, pero la puedes localizar en otra. Como se han graduado tantos médicos, todavía no se siente mucho la escasez de buenos médicos en los hospitales y policlínicos (GV). En la óptica de LG “No conozco sobre grandes carencias de medicinas o materiales para exámenes, siempre resuelvo en una farmacia u otra. Aunque a veces se percibe el interés material por sobre el servicio desinteresado y gratuito; también puedes encontrarte personal de salud decente y profesional”.

<sup>36</sup> Según DC “Cuando un enfermo es remitido a un especialista al policlínico, los turnos son para las calendas griegas. Por esa razón todo el que puede acude a los sobornos y a los regalos para obtener una atención con mayor calidad, lo que ha hecho del sistema estatal un sistema *estaticular* -mezcla de estatal y particular (Nota del Autor)-, donde el personal de la salud actúa como si fuera un servicio privado. Si careces de medios o de esos contactos, tienes que esperar durante semanas o meses. Lo mismo ocurre con los servicios de estomatología y oftalmología, incluyendo las ópticas. (DC)”. Señala GV que “Los turnos para

en ocasiones el personal de salud muestra actitudes improcedentes, como groserías, maltratos, negligencia, desatención, despreocupación (IS).

Cifrándose en varias decenas de miles (entre estos unos 30 mil en Venezuela, según diversas fuentes) los trabajadores de la salud que están en el exterior, tal situación incide en la cobertura de salud y en la percepción poblacional sobre la prioridad que el estado da a su atención. El fenómeno ha afectado a programas emblemáticos como el Médico de Familia y, según vox populi, fue la causa de defenestración de dos ministros de salud bajo los últimos años de Fidel Castro, al cuestionar la magnitud y celeridad de los envíos de personal al exterior que afectaban el sistema de salud pública cubano.<sup>37</sup> Frente a tal situación –como en general frente a todas las problemáticas de servicios–, existe consenso respecto a que las actitudes de la población oscilan entre la queja (expresada en las instalaciones de salud y ante las instancias del Poder Popular), la catarsis en grupos más o menos cerrados o el acomodo mediante las fórmulas de la provisión particular (corrupción e ilegalidad mediante), pero no existen mecanismos ni la cultura de reclamarlo como derecho.

---

atenderse con un especialista dan trabajo, mucha gente opta por buscarse una amistad para conseguir cita. Ya existe la costumbre en Cuba de agradecer la atención médica con regalos. Como los médicos son tan mal pagados, estos gestos de los pacientes a veces motivan a los médicos a hacer mejor su trabajo.” Para LG “La gente se percata del cambio negativo en los servicios de salud y, en consecuencia, muchos adoptan la postura de que “siempre hay que llevarle un presente o detalle” al médico. Es como un pacto de silencio, que prolifera subyacente”.

<sup>37</sup> En la población, tal situación genera “consenso en reconocer que las “misiones internacionalistas” no son tan “solidarias y altruistas” como se venden, sino que los cooperantes van para mejorar su situación económica, porque pagan bien. A veces he escuchado a algunos pacientes protestando por la mala calidad del algún servicio y dicen que debían haber nacido en Venezuela o Bolivia, para recibir una buena atención del personal cubano (LG).” En similar cuerda, desde la perspectiva de los galenos “muchos médicos están esperando a que les caiga una misión al extranjero para mejorar económicamente (GV).”

## 8. Reducciones en la calidad educacional

Otra de las emblemáticas “conquistas de la Revolución” es la política educacional. En esta área hoy confluyen, de forma simultánea, tres procesos: a) la rectificación de decisiones tomadas al calor de la Batalla de Ideas, por decisión de Fidel; b) un conjunto de cambios en segmentos (educación preuniversitaria interna, con escuelas en el campo) del modelo educativo vigente por décadas -que cargaba con una justificada fama de generador de violencia, marginalidad, erosión del rol de la familia y pérdida de valores y calidad educativa- y c) la reorientación de las carreras y el trabajo vocacional para estimular la formación de técnicos y obreros calificados, en detrimento de las carreras sociales y las humanidades, con excepción del magisterio.

Dentro de ese panorama, a la falta de profesorado se la están aplicando algunos paliativos, como el retorno de maestros y profesores jubilados a las aulas, la reactivación de las escuelas pedagógicas -que exigen el ingreso de estudiantes con 9no grado aprobado- con un programa de estudios de cuatro años (similar al de las antiguas Escuelas Normales) y la legalización de profesores repasadores como cuentrapropistas. Sin embargo, en tanto esto sigue siendo insuficiente, se requerirá de un plazo de varios años para que comiencen a emerger los primeros graduados de estas escuelas pedagógicas. Una parte de los maestros anteriores se dedican a repasar y a dar clases particulares, aunque algunos de ellos por conveniencia mantienen el vínculo laboral con el Estado. <sup>38</sup>Se ha dado un fortalecimiento del sector de los profesores particulares en todos los niveles: ya es normal en Cuba que los niños desde que entran a la Escuela Primaria tengan su profesor o “repasador” particular: los padres tienen que hacer el esfuerzo para pagar este nuevo servicio para que los niños aprendan y pasen de grado.

El sector de trabajadores pedagógicos tampoco es estable debido a los salarios poco atractivos y a las malas condiciones de trabajo, por lo que se producen problemas de ausentismo o de abandono laboral.

---

<sup>38</sup> Lo que no es óbice para que desde el periodismo oficial se haya descalificado recientemente a los repasadores, como denunció el periodista Fernando Rasverg en su blog personal: <http://cartasdesdecuba.com/no-muerdas-la-mano-que-te-educo/>

Todavía existen Maestros Emergentes al frente de muchas aulas<sup>39</sup>, aunque la tendencia es a disminuir, como también ha disminuido la utilización de medios audiovisuales, no solo por su ineficacia y la imposibilidad de sustituir al maestro por esos medios, sino porque los equipos se han deteriorado o han desaparecido en medio de la corrupción, y objetivamente no existen recursos para reponerlos. Aunque existen planes oficiales para potenciar las carreras docentes, pero se basan esencialmente en la apelación a la “conciencia revolucionaria” y al discurso ideológico más que a fomentar la vocación o hacer más atractiva la profesión, tanto desde el prisma económico y de las condiciones de trabajo como desde el punto de vista del prestigio social del profesor.

Según información proporcionada por diversos testimoniantes, permanecen abiertos los comedores en las escuelas primarias y secundarias para los niños y adolescentes cuyas madres son empleadas estatales. Mientras en las escuelas primarias se mantienen los almuerzos, en las secundarias les dan a los estudiantes una merienda. En el caso de los preuniversitarios hay comedores en escuelas especiales como la Vocacional Lenin o el Instituto del MININT, pero no en el resto: eso hace que a la hora del almuerzo en estos centros se ven a los padres pasándoles alimentos a los hijos. Pero, en general, los comedores cada vez son menos y la comida no es variada o nutritiva.

---

<sup>39</sup> Aunque el programa de formación de Maestros Emergentes se detuvo, se mantienen dando clases muchos de los graduados anteriores, pero generaron tantos problemas y dejaron tan mala impresión que la tendencia apunta a que desaparecerán. Por suerte, muchísimos profesores jubilados se han recontratado para duplicar sus ingresos (LG).



## 9. Conclusiones

Como señala Bobes (2010) la política social cubana, basada en los criterios de universalidad, solidaridad e igualdad, ha tenido durante casi medio siglo considerables avances en cuanto a equidad y Justicia Social. En los momentos presentes conviene reflexionar, por una parte, en torno a aquellos temas pendientes que estas políticas han dejado de lado –como la participación ciudadana en la formulación y evaluación de sus prioridades y su acompañamiento por un sistema de mecanismos para la defensa de los derechos sociales- y, por la otra, en la tensión que introducen los fenómenos de la desigualdad asociados a las reformas en curso frente a un obsoleto discurso de legitimación del orden político vigente el cual, aunque se ha modificado, sigue presentando el estado real de la Justicia Social en la isla como un logro de la Revolución y el socialismo.

Se trata de impulsar un debate nacional, informado e inteligente, sobre la Justicia Social que aproveche los logros de equidad –entendidos como distribución de bienes básicos y servicios sociales- alcanzados pero fortaleciendo su calidad y sostenibilidad (Espina, 2010) , aterrizando las agendas para tomar en cuenta las especificidades de género, raza, entornos familiares y comunitarios (Zabala, 2010) y ampliando las nociones de bienestar, equidad y justicia a las dimensiones políticas hoy ocluidas. Considerando que toda permanencia y reproducción de las condiciones de pobreza y desigualdad no solo son normativamente injustas, sino que –más allá de la retórica justiciera- benefician a actores e intereses concretos (burocracia tradicional, tecnocracia del sector emergente) interesados en sostener sus posiciones de control político.

¿Pero, preguntan algunos, frente a tal situación en un país con las añejas tradiciones de lucha y niveles de instrucción como el cubano, no sería lógico que la gente expresara su disenso? E ignoran que esto está sucediendo, tanto en los canales institucionales (asambleas sindicales, barriales, buzones de queja del estado y la prensa) como en las conversaciones callejeras y las manifestaciones de la acotada oposición. Sin embargo, en tanto la prensa y sociedad civil oficiales funcionan en sintonía con los intereses estatales y las voces críticas corren el riesgo permanente de sufrir sanciones de todo tipo -en un país donde el estado es patrón, policía y dador de permisos para la incipiente iniciativa privada- la queja en voz baja, la catarsis en círculos de confianza o la inserción en el mercado negro- mezcla de robo al estado y al prójimo- parecen ser, todavía, las reacciones individuales más comunes ante tal coyuntura.

Sin embargo, de continuar el empobrecimiento de la población en estos tiempos de reformas liberalizadoras, no es trasnochado presumir que asistiremos -en un futuro cercano y sobre todo en las abandonadas zonas del interior de la república- a frecuentes expresiones de descontento y protesta social, más caóticas y espontáneas que políticamente conscientes y organizadas. Como señala Bobes (2010) la creciente diferenciación en los consumos, en una sociedad permeada por un discurso que basa la justicia social en la igualdad, puede estar generando resentimientos que amenazan el patrón de cohesión social tradicional. Algunas experiencias recientes en otros países señalan que el disgusto con las afectaciones a la vida cotidiana pueden desencadenar protestas personales que, a la postre, conllevan a procesos de cambio de insospechadas consecuencias: el publicitado caso del tunecino Mohamed Bouazizi, cuya inmólación dió inicio a la llamada Primavera Árabe, resulta en ese sentido paradigmático.<sup>40</sup>

Cuba es un país de gente instruida y de reservas de desarrollo/eficiencia aun inexplorados, pero que tiene en contra el bono demográfico, los problemas económicos acumulados y las limitaciones a un debate y participación ciudadanas imprescindibles para superar la situación actual. La realidad es que las emblemáticas conquistas sociales de la Revolución, que tanto beneficiaron a las mayorías trabajadoras, están bajo asedio y en retirada. Y que su defensa debe ser tarea no sólo de las izquierdas sino de todo el que se considere demócrata, porque no puede erigirse -y subsistir- un auténtico Estado de derecho sobre la pobreza y desigualdad de las mayorías. En todo caso, el romántico relato de que los cubanos viven con una *pobreza digna* debe ser, como otros tantos, debidamente revisado.

---

<sup>40</sup> Según testimonio de un colega estudioso de la política árabe, el joven tunecino se encontraba previa (y forzosamente) insertado en las redes políticas y clientelares del régimen autoritario de Ben Alí, hasta que el proceso de liberalización y la expansión de la corrupción, combinados con la desresponsabilización estatal respecto a la política social y la erosión de los mecanismos de integración *ad hoc* tradicionales, elevaron a niveles inéditos las presiones económicas y los maltratos de los funcionarios corruptos sobre los trabajadores informales. Factores estos que desencadenaron, en el caso de Bouazizi -insertado en redes de vendedores ambulantes y en una asociación de desempleados- la dramática respuesta.

# Referencias

- Bobes, Velia Cecilia Cuba: justicia social, gobernanza e imaginario ciudadano. Presente y futuro de una compleja relación, Revista Mexicana de Sociología, Vol.72, No.4, México DF, oct./dic. 2010
- Chaguaceda, Armando y Azor, Marlene Cuba, políticas de participación y prácticas de autonomía: organización, acción y discurso, Crítica & Emancipación, Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales, Buenos Aires, Año 3, No 6, segundo semestre, 2011.
- Delgado Moya, Rubén, Derecho social del presente, Porrúa, México, 1977.
- Espina, Mayra Desarrollo, desigualdad y políticas sociales, Publicaciones Acuario, Centro Félix Varela, la Habana, 2010.
- Marshall, T.H. y Bottomore T Ciudadanía y clase social, Madrid: Alianza, 1998.
- Mesa-Lago, Carmelo Cuba en la era de Raúl Castro. Reformas económico-sociales y sus efectos, Editorial Colibrí, Madrid, 2012.
- Olvera, Alberto, Ciudadanía y democracia, Cuadernos de Divulgación de la Cultura Democrática, Instituto federal Electoral, México DF, 2008.
- Sen, Amartya Desarrollo y Libertad, Editorial Planeta S.A., Buenos Aires, 2000
- Tamayo, Sergio, Critica de la ciudadanía, Siglo XXI, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana Azcapotzalco, México DF, 2010.
- Villamar, Zirahuen y Gallegos, Jesus Hacia una concepción moderna de la Justicia Social: una mirada desde América Latina, Perspectivas Progresistas, julio, México DF, 2011.
- Walzer, Michael Las esferas de la justicia, FCE, México DF, 1993.
- Zabala, María del Carmen Familia y pobreza en Cuba. Estudios de casos, Publicaciones Acuario, Centro Félix Varela, la Habana, 2010.

**Lista de Expertos/Testimoniados consultados:**

-Dimas Castellanos (DC) historiador y activista disidente, residente en la isla, 6 de septiembre.

-(GV): académica oficial, residente en la isla, 23 de agosto.

-(IS) académica oficial, residente en la isla, 21 de agosto.

-(LG) periodista oficial, residente en la isla, 23 de agosto.

-Manuel Cuesta (CM) historiador y activista disidente, residente en la isla, 9 de septiembre.

-Miriam Celaya (MC) antropóloga y bloguera, residente en la isla, 5 de septiembre.



# Build Walls or Open Doors?

## Prospects for Cuba Dialogue

Borghild Tønnessen-Krokan



Published by Norwegian Institute of International Affairs

# 1. Introduction

*“Since the world began, one thing has been certain:  
some people build walls, while others open doors.”*

– Carlos Varela, ‘Muros y Puertas’

For over half a century, Cuba and the United States have been locked in destructive and passé Cold War dynamics characterized by mutual distrust and blaming. This continues to harm the two neighboring countries’ national interests, and most of all 11 million Cubans that suffer as a consequence.

At the core of today’s conflict, with its polarized chicken-and-egg debate and “tit-for-tat” diplomacy, are the mutual accusations of human rights violations, support to terrorists and espionage. In light of earlier U.S. dominance, the author argues that the fierce U.S. reaction to the Cuban revolution – including through the U.S. trade embargo, the Bay of Pigs invasion and the CIA training of extremist exile Cubans performing terrorist acts towards Cuba – has contributed to a Cuban siege mentality that has been counterproductive to declared U.S. goals on openness, human rights and democracy in Cuba, and has further provided the Cuban government with a pretext for continued repression. As such, it has served to strengthen hard-liners on both sides.

However, there has been a recent détente between the two foes. There are also clear signs of more political and economic openness inside Cuba, which has led other countries to change their Cuba policy. Despite setbacks, President Castro is reforming Cuba and allows for more criticism from within. Under the radar, Cuba and the U.S. have had “increasingly constructive” cooperation on a number of vital areas, and the two presidents recently made headlines when they shook hands, arousing hope and anger. Although there are still powerful hardliners in the U.S., their influence is waning: The majority of Americans – including those of Cuban origin – support normalization of ties, according to a recent poll. In a few years, key actors the past sixty years in both Miami and Havana will be gone, for “biological reasons”, which will also further change the dynamics. Various actors are preparing for a transition, and inside Cuba, bloggers, artists and others are challenging state censorship and debating Cuba’s past, present and future.

This paper examines the characteristics and opportunities associated with these recent signs of thaw and opening, and the origins

and power dynamics of the political tensions within Cuba and between Cuba and the United States. It describes the polarized debate and issues that has blocked normalization and friendly coexistence, and analyzes constraints and benefits related to reconciliation and dialogue on human rights, security and other contentious issues. Key actors and arenas for dialogue on various levels are identified. The main emphasis is on examining the unique role of the Cuban Catholic Church, civil society and others in widening the political space inside Cuba.

Approaching the end of the Castro era, the author argues it is high time to recognize the collective pain of Cubans both inside and outside the island, and prepare for a peaceful coexistence with an inclusive approach. Dialogue must not however be a façade for action, an excuse for ignoring human rights abuse. Rather, cooperation should be based on mutual respect aimed at advancing shared security and respect for human rights.



## 2. Methodological constraints

Examining contentious political issues and in a country characterized by censorship, poor internet access, limited freedom of expression, lack of transparency and access, as well as excessive bureaucracy and control, poses several challenges, including for research.

Even though criticism has become more tolerated in later years and quite a few Cubans tend to express themselves rather freely, many Cubans still whisper or use sign language when they talk about controversial political issues, or stick to the official version, or avoid the topic altogether.

Perhaps not surprisingly, one frequently comes across academic works that seems to be based on “anecdotal methodology”, where accidental conversations and casual encounters become evidence<sup>1</sup>.

One should therefore critically examine and evaluate both sources and official statistics, and be careful generalizing. Triangulation of sources, confidence building and continuity becomes all the more important.

I have therefore consulted a wide range of relevant sources in both Cuba and Miami, including talking to researchers, civil society, journalists, businesspeople, diplomats and “ordinary people”. Living in Cuba since 2012, I have made observations visiting all of Cuba’s provinces including in marginalized communities, attended Cuban political debates and read both Cuban and foreign media (traditional and social, both critical and supportive of the Castro government) regularly, and read academic works on the area. Further, I have compared these observations to observations made during fieldwork and journalism that I conducted in both Cuba and the US from 1996 to 2000.

I do not hold any of these observations to be scientific evidence. Rather, they might serve to shed light on the issue and at best indicate trends or patterns.

As in hermeneutic traditions, texts will be interpreted in relation to its context<sup>2</sup>. This article does not apply hermeneutic methods systematically,

---

<sup>1</sup> Sheryl Lutjens warns against this in Chapter 13 on academic exchange in Dominguez and Hernandez (2012).

and the main emphasis is not on theory but rather on empirical findings, current affairs, and interpretations and analysis of these.

Prejudice is an element of our understanding and is not *per se* without value, as pointed out by Hans-Georg Gadamer. Indeed, prejudices, in the sense of pre-judgements of the thing we want to understand, are unavoidable, according to Gadamer. So, I suppose, are mine.

---

<sup>2</sup> This reciprocity between text and context is part of what Martin Heidegger called the “hermeneutic circle”. Hermeneutics refers to the theory of text interpretation. Neither the whole text nor any individual part can be understood without reference to one another, and hence, it is a circle. The meaning of the text must be found within its context.

### 3. Scope and definitions of dialogue and reconciliation

*“Reconciliation means working together to correct the legacy of past injustice.”*

–Nelson Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom

Before looking at the obstacles and opportunities for dialogue and reconciliation, I will briefly examine the two terms.

*Dialogue* (from *dia*, through or across) refers to a conversation between two or more persons, or an exchange of ideas or opinions on a particular issue, especially a political or religious issue, with a view to reaching an amicable agreement or settlement, according to Encyclopedia Britannica.

Today, dialogue is used on various levels to help people resolve long-standing conflicts and to build deeper understanding of contentious issues. It is not about judging or making decisions. Rather, it is a process of respectful exchange with the aim of developing a better understanding of the concerns, interests, and needs of the other side. It is about talking *with* each other, not *past* each other.

Dialogue seeks to dispel stereotypes, build trust, and enable people to be open to perspectives that are different from their own. It involves “a process of genuine interaction through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn.”<sup>3</sup> It is successful when, as peace scholar Johan Galtung puts it, “the exclamation mark at the end of our statement becomes a question mark<sup>4</sup>”. This signals a change in our position: We become open to the idea of changing our perspective based on what our conflict partner has shared.

Dialogue can occur at multiple levels, at different times, and/or on parallel tracks. Without dialogue, there can be no *reconciliation* (from Latin *reconciliāre*, to bring together again).

---

<sup>3</sup> Harold Saunders (1999): “A Public Peace Process”. New York: Palgrave, p.82-85.

<sup>4</sup> Galtung quoted in the Peace Portal, <http://www.peaceportal.org/web/gppac-south-asia/dialogue-and-mediation>.

*Political reconciliation* broadly refers to the process of rebuilding political relationships<sup>5</sup>. Also frequently known as *conflict resolution*, it refers to methods and processes facilitating the peaceful ending of conflict and retribution.

Today, political reconciliation is widely considered to be one of the most important challenges for societies attempting to democratize after periods of repressive rule or civil conflict characterized by widespread and systematic human rights abuses. After the importance this played in the transition from apartheid in South Africa through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it was increasingly seen as a condition for successful democratization and a critical component of peacemaking.

Reconciliation also plays a prominent role in the burgeoning multidisciplinary literature on transitional justice, and in the literature within moral and political philosophy analyzing the nature and justifiability of responses to wrongdoing.<sup>6</sup>

As we will see below, opinions on the value of and limits to dialogue are – as in other conflicts – often closely related to opinions of the legitimacy and motivations of the actor in question, and often to ethical considerations around the use of force.

---

<sup>5</sup> This core idea can be found with Trudy Govier and Wilhelm Verwoerd: “Trust and the Problem of National Reconciliation,” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 32(2) (2002), 178–205, and with Daniel Philpott, “Introduction,” in Daniel Philpott (ed.), *The Politics of Past Evil: Religion, Reconciliation, and the Dilemmas of Transitional Justice* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Colleen Murphy (2012): “A moral theory of political reconciliation”. Cambridge University Press, p.1-4.

## 4. Origins and dynamics of the conflict

*“For we are alone – alone – here, on this ocean of capitalism that surrounds us.”*

– Fidel Castro

The battle over Cuba’s future is not simply one of revolution versus counter-revolution, left versus right, socialism versus capitalism, self-determination versus imperialist dominance, order versus justice, South versus North, or David versus Goliath. These are all relevant explanatory factors, but by focusing on only some of these, one risks concealing more than revealing.

To understand the conditions for dialogue and the dynamics between Cubans, and between Cuba and other countries, we should therefore also look at other factors influencing this. This includes both the country’s geographical features, power relations, and the country’s history. I am not attempting to make a detailed account of all past wrongdoings on both sides in the tumultuous history, but rather describe *some* of the key events and factors, frequently mentioned by the different parties, that can shed light on why issues like human rights and security have become so divisive. I am sure many readers will identify other relevant factors and/or interpret events described below differently.

### 4.1 Geography, power and dominance

Cuba’s role in international affairs hardly matches its modest size nor reflects its relative isolation. A Caribbean developing country of 11 million inhabitants and few natural resources, it is not a top priority to other countries, including the U.S. Despite this fact, Cuba has repeatedly been at the center of the world’s attention: One of the world’s most debated political leaders – Fidel Castro – created a socialist revolution in the US’ backyard, and Cuba was central to the 1962 Missile Crisis bringing the world at the brink of nuclear war.

Located only 90 miles off the Florida Coast, and near the Panama Canal, Cuba has historically been of strategic value to both the U.S. and

other countries. After intervening on Cuba's side and defeating Spain, the U.S. formally began a military occupation of Cuba in 1899<sup>7</sup>. In 1901, despite Cuban protests, the U.S. Congress passed the Platt Amendment, granting the U.S. the right to intervene. It further limited Cuba's sovereignty by granting the U.S. a lease in perpetuity to a naval base at Guantanamo Bay in eastern Cuba, where the U.S. treatment of prisoners in the notorious Camp Delta in recent years have been in violation of international law including human rights law.

According to the Cuban-American renowned scholar Louis A. Perez, Jr., the U.S. has ever since attempted to dominate Cuba:

“(T)he means used by the United States in Cuba constitutes a microcosm of the American imperial experience: armed intervention and military occupation; nationbuilding and constitution writing; capital penetration and cultural saturation; the installation of puppet regimes, the formation of clientele political classes, and the organization of proxy armies; the imposition of binding treaties; the establishment of a permanent military base; economic assistance-or not- and diplomatic recognition-or not- as circumstances warranted. And after 1959, trade sanctions, political isolation, covert operations, and economic embargo.<sup>8</sup>”

An asymmetric relationship, Cuba has nevertheless continued to resist attempts of U.S. dominance.

This was also the case after the Castro-led Revolution in 1959 that toppled the dictator Batista and adversely affected the privileged elite and U.S. economic and political interests.

In his widely acclaimed book, Hugh Thomas describes how Fidel Castro soon “established a personal hold over the Cuban masses such as no Latin American leader ever had”<sup>9</sup>. The Revolution enjoyed massive popular support inside Cuba and helped empower the poor and marginalized and led to increased equality and expansion of social services. At the same time it also became a divisive issue, including through the execution of around 160 Batista officers in “war tribunals”, and through nationalization of companies and expropriation of land, and intolerance towards opponents. Two years after the 1959 Revolution, at the time of the US invasion in the Bay of Pigs, Castro declared that Cuba was socialist. As Castro – in a polarized Cold War atmosphere – drew closer to the Soviet Union for support, he also lost

---

<sup>7</sup> Sweig, Julia (2009): *Cuba: What Everyone Needs to Know*. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>8</sup> Perez, Jr., Louis A (2009): *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

<sup>9</sup> Hugh Thomas (1971:803): *Cuba: A history*. London: Penguin books.

support among key groups himself. Some felt the Revolution had been betrayed<sup>10</sup>.

Although economic, social and cultural rights were boosted – as well as the rights of women and children – civil and political rights were violated. For Cuba's new leaders, liberal democracy was seen as central to Cuba's vulnerability to political control and capitalist exploitation by the United States<sup>11</sup>. In a war of words between Cuba and the United States over the definition and application of human rights, human rights were to be used as an ideological sledgehammer<sup>12</sup>.

As author and Reuters' veteran Cuba correspondent Marc Frank has observed, it is somewhat like a chicken-and-egg situation:

“Which came first, the U.S. repression of dissident Cuba at a time when Washington engineered and supported many military dictatorships in the region? Or Fidel Castro's repression of dissent, followed by Washington's efforts to rescue the island's inhabitants?<sup>13</sup>”

As he notes, most governments and human rights organizations think both Cuba and the U.S. share the responsibility for this situation. So does he:

“Does the Cuban Communist Party repress its opponents? Without a doubt! Does the U.S. embargo aim at making Cubans suffer to the point where, it is hoped, they desperately topple the government? No question about it!”(ibid)

Examining power relations in this conflict is vital to understanding its dynamics and the prospects for true dialogue, which is motivated by a will to understand rather than a will to dominate or control the other. Obviously, the U.S. is by far the most powerful actor in the conflict. However, inside Cuba, the Cuban government is by far the most

---

<sup>10</sup> The term “Revolution Betrayed”, used by some of Castro's critics, refers to a book by the Soviet Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky from 1937 written during his exile in Norway, where Trotsky advocates a new revolution to replace the Stalinist dictatorship with a socialist democracy.

<sup>11</sup> Sweig, Julia (2009:44): *Cuba: What Everyone Needs to Know*. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>12</sup> This was the topic of my MA thesis (hovedoppgave) in political science, where I analyzed speeches by the Presidents Fidel Castro, George Bush and Bill Clinton on human rights and did fieldwork in Cuba and the US. See Borghild Krokan (1998): *Menneskerettigheter som ideologisk slaghammer: Ordkrigen mellom USA og Cuba om menneskerettighetenes definisjon og gyldighetsområde*. Universitetet i Oslo.

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter 17 in Marc Frank (2013): “Cuban Revelations: Behind the scenes in Havana”. University Press of Florida.

powerful actor, despite reforms. Frequently labelled an authoritarian, totalitarian or post-totalitarian<sup>14</sup> one-party state, the Castro government and its military controls the economy, politics and the media. As Pedro Campos argue, the conflict inside Cuba is not merely one of left versus right. In fact, some regime critics may constitute a new left and government representatives a new right:

“Much of the opposition faced by the Cuban government isn’t prompted by imperialism or the Miami-based Right (as the Cuban government, its media and international spokespeople want us to believe), but, rather, by its own economic and political measures, its abusive exploitation of Cuban workers and professionals, its restrictions on individual liberties, its anti-democratic model of government, the lack of freedom of expression and association it has brought about and the unnecessarily violent actions it has taken against all dissenting thought, be it at the right, center or left of the political spectrum.”<sup>15</sup>

I will return to this issue in the last chapter exploring dialogue inside Cuba.

## 4.2 Terror and espionage

Despite Cuba’s quest for independence and its leadership in the Non-Aligned Movement, the Castro government became increasingly influenced by Moscow during the Cold War, especially after a series of hostile actions from the U.S. The best known among these are the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, the many assassination attempts on Fidel Castro<sup>16</sup>, as well as the U.S. trade embargo punishing third parties and condemned yearly in the UN General Assembly by almost all countries. U.S. aggression also involved sabotage and terrorist actions by exile Cubans, many of whom were trained by the CIA.

The repeated hostilities influenced internal power dynamics in both Havana, Washington and Miami.

---

<sup>14</sup> On the academic debate around regime typology, see Juan J. Linz & Alfred Stepan (1996): *Problems of Democratic transitions and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*. John Hopkins University Press. On the application of this typology on Cuba, see Vegard Bye (2013): *The Politics of Cuban Transformation – what Space for Authoritarian Withdrawal?* NUPI Working Paper 818.

<sup>15</sup> Pedro Campos: *The Old International Left and the New Cuban Right*. In *Havana Times* 2 October 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Documents detailing CIA’s assassination attempts on Castro were declassified in 2007. See “CIA Plot to kill Castro detailed”, *Washington Post* 27 June 2007, and “638 ways to kill Fidel Castro”. *The Guardian*, 3 August 2006. Former CIA officer Brian Latell says Cuban intelligence has long been among the best in the world, and grossly underestimated by the CIA. See Latell (2012): “Castro’s secrets. The CIA and Cuba’s intelligence machine.” Palgrave Macmillan.



Shortly after the U.S. Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba 1961, Fidel Castro uttered these famous words in a meeting with artists and intellectuals:

“Within the Revolution, everything; outside the Revolution, nothing”.

Given that there was no true balance of power in the one-party state, Castro could himself define whether a critical remark was inside or outside the so-called Revolution.

### **Miami Cubans bombing Miami Cubans**

In Miami, the powerful Cuban-American community has long been dominated by loud hardliners influencing Washington. Max Lesnik, a friend of Fidel Castro, hosted a Cuban radio program in Cuba after 1959, but as Cuba drew closer to the Soviet Union he became disillusioned. Two years later he declared on the air that he was no communist, and left for the U.S. In Miami, he started a magazine called *Replica*, where he called for dialogue between the U.S. and Cuba. As a consequence, *Replica's* offices in Miami's Little Havana district were bombed 11 times, mostly in the mid-1970s during a period of political violence<sup>17</sup>. In a conversation we had with Lesnik in Miami in 2013, he explained:

“These terrorists have been heroes here among hardliners in Miami. Through violence and repression, they have sought to prevent dialogue.”

### **U.S. harboring airplane bomber**

On Cuba, the most infamous attack by extremist Cuban-Americans was the bombing of a Cuban passenger plane in 1976, killing all 73 persons onboard including the entire Cuban fencing team returning to Cuba with gold medals from a Pan-American championship.

In 1997, several hotels and restaurants in Havana were bombed, wounding several and killing an Italian tourist.

One of the perpetrators behind these bombings, former CIA operative Luis Posada Carriles, was also linked to an assassination attempt on Fidel Castro in Panama in 2000.

In 2005, Posada Carriles was held by U.S. authorities on the charge of illegal presence on national territory, but the charges were dismissed two years later. In 2005 a U.S. immigration judge ruled that Posada cannot be deported, finding that he faces the threat of torture in Venezuela<sup>18</sup>. For the same reasons, the U.S. government has refused to

---

<sup>17</sup> Tom Brown: Cuban revolutionary Max Lesnik fights on in Miami. Reuters, 29 December 2008.

<sup>18</sup> “No deportation for Cuban militant.” BBC, 28 September 2005.

send Posada to Cuba<sup>19</sup>. Posada Carriles was released on bail in 2007, although the U.S Justice Department urged the court to keep him in jail saying he was “an admitted mastermind of terrorist plots and attacks”, a flight risk and a danger to the community<sup>20</sup>. In 2011, his trial ended with the jury acquitting him on all charges. In Miami, where he lives, he is considered “a heroic figure in the hardline anti-Castro exile community”<sup>21</sup>. In 2010, Posada Carriles appeared publicly on the streets of Miami during a protest march against Cuba, speaking to reporters<sup>22</sup>. As the expression goes: One man’s terrorist, another person’s freedom fighter.

### **Terror list**

The U.S., harboring Posada Carriles, insists on keeping Cuba on its list of countries sponsoring terrorists, which hurts Cuba economically and politically. Keeping Cuba on this terror list is unfounded, according to several analysts including Sarah Stephens, a long-time human rights advocate and the executive director of the Center for Democracy in the Americas:

“Cuba – which poses no military threat to the U.S., which stopped supporting foreign insurgencies (after its troops helped end apartheid in South Africa) – remains on this list for wholly political reasons”<sup>23</sup>.

In addition to Cuba, that list also includes Iran, Syria and Sudan. Cuba is included on the list because it has harbored Colombian rebels and Basque militants as well as some aging members of American militant groups from the 1960s and '70s. However, since the Cuban government is now hosting peace talks between Colombian FARC rebels and that country's government, while the Basque militants have announced a permanent cease-fire, and neither the Colombian nor the Spanish government is criticizing Cuba's role in their conflicts, many have argued it is time to get Cuba off the list<sup>24</sup>.

---

<sup>19</sup> “Cuba anger at US Posasa Carriles verdict.” BBC 9 April 2011.

<sup>20</sup> “U.S. Criticized as Cuban Exile is Freed”. LA Times, 20 April 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Kornbluh, Peter: “Former CIA asset Luis Posada goes to trial . In The Nation, January 5, 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Kornbluh, Peter: Terrorism and the Anti-Hijacking Accord in Cuba’s Relations with the United States. In Jorge Dominguez ,Rafael Hernandez and Lorena Barberia (2012): Debating US-Cuban Relations: Shall We Play Ball? (Chapter 6) New York: Routledge

<sup>23</sup> “Cuba action vs. terror financing compels U.S. response”. Progreso Weekly, 28 January, 2014.

<sup>24</sup> “US keeps Cuba on state sponsors of terrorism list”. Associated Press, 1 May 2013.

To prevent and detect banking transactions related to terrorism and international crime, Cuba recently published a new legislation<sup>25</sup>.

What is more, after 11 September 2001, Cuba immediately offered to the U.S. government its condolences, medical assistance, and to open its airports and airspace to the U.S.

### **Alan Gross and the Cuban Five**

Meanwhile, five Cuban agents who were in South Florida allegedly to infiltrate Cuban-American groups were arrested in 1998, the year after the Havana bombings, and sentenced to prison by a Florida court in 2001. Three of these are still in prison in the U.S., one of them convicted of conspiracy to commit murder for supplying information to the Cuban government which according to the prosecution led to the exile-Cuban “Brothers to the Rescue” airplane being shot down, killing all four onboard. Cuba insists the plane was violating Cuban airspace as the organization had done several times before despite Cuban protests and warnings, while the U.S. claims it was shot down in international airspace. Cuba is campaigning for its five “antiterrorist” and “heroes”, for “freedom for the five political prisoners of the empire”<sup>26</sup>.

In what somewhat resembles a hostage situation, in 2012 it was reported that the U.S. had declined a “spy swap” proposed by Cuba, wherein the Cuban agents would be returned to Cuba in exchange for USAID contractor Alan Gross, imprisoned in Cuba in 2009 for illegally providing equipment allowing Cuba’s Jewish community to have internet access. Gross serves a 15-year prison sentence in Cuba, convicted for “acts against the independence or the territorial integrity of the state.” U.S. State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland responded to the suggestion saying,

“There is no equivalence between these situations. On the one hand you have convicted spies in the United States and on the other hand you have an assistance worker who should never have been locked up in the first place.”<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile, the Cuban government considers Alan Gross an agent of U.S. policy designed to force a regime change in their country. Today, the imprisonment constitutes one of the major impediments for normalization between the two countries.

---

<sup>25</sup> The Decree-Law 317 was published by the Official Gazette on 23 January 2014 . See also “Cuba passes banking reforms aimed at international crime and terrorism”. Associated Press, 29 January 2014.

<sup>26</sup> See the Miami 5 official website <http://www.granma.cu/miami5/ingles/index.html>

<sup>27</sup> “US says NO to Alan Gross-Cuban 5 swap”. Havana Times 11 May 2012.

In later years, double standards and mutual accusations on human rights, espionage and surveillance again became a topic with the National Security Agency (NSA)<sup>28</sup> scandal revealing the extent of U.S. Internet surveillance. This, along with discussions around cyber wars, illustrates tensions between security needs and civil rights, to be revisited in the last chapter when we examine the political debate and prospects for dialogue inside Cuba.

### 4.3 Siege mentality and repression

A siege or bunker mentality is a collective state of mind whereby one believes that one is being constantly attacked, oppressed, or isolated in the face of the negative intentions. Among the consequences of a siege mentality are black and white thinking, social conformity, and lack of trust, but also a preparedness for the worst and a strong sense of social cohesion<sup>29</sup>.

Author and researcher Keith Bolender argues that US aggression has played an instrumental role in creating contingencies for the existence of a national sense of besiegement, with the resulting civil restrictions, social limitations and economic dislocations<sup>30</sup>. This included strict limitations on freedom of expression and association by Cuba, criticized by numerous countries and human rights organizations worldwide<sup>31</sup>.

From empowering Cuba's marginalized communities, bringing equality and liberating Cuba from former president Fulgencio Batista's brutal dictatorship, Cuba under Castro had become an increasingly repressive and centralist one-party state.

---

<sup>28</sup> The NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden was allegedly denied asylum by Cuba. It is claimed that Castro did not want to risk worsening the relationship with the US, according to a Russian newspaper . See "Edward Snowden got stuck in Moscow 'after Cuba blocked entry". The Guardian, 26 August 2013.

<sup>29</sup> At a national level, siege mentalities existed in apartheid South Africa and Bolshevik Russia as a result of ideological isolation, according to Wikipedia, while a similar mentality is currently to be seen in countries like North Korea and Israel, encouraged by the leadership to help justify their continued power.

<sup>30</sup> Bolender, Keith (2012): Cuba Under Siege: American Policy, the Revolution and Its People. Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>31</sup> See for instance the 2013 reports to the United Nations Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review on [www.un.org](http://www.un.org) , submitted by both countries, civil society and UN organizations, where Cuba received both criticism and credit for its human rights performance.

#### 4.4 Conformist Revolutionaries?

While the phenomenon *revolution* (from the Latin *revolutio*, “a turn-around”) is commonly defined by scholars as a fast and fundamental shift<sup>32</sup>, Cuba today is characterized by the opposite: A system in place for over half a century, with power concentration and emphasis on unity and maintenance of status quo at the expense of respect for pluralism and dissenting views. In Cuba, participation is broad, through mass organizations<sup>33</sup> and rally’s, but generally not seen as “real” or independent from the government. The country’s human rights record illustrates the contradictions between social equity on one hand and political and social control on the other.

Cuba – with its free and universal health care and education, its high life expectancy and other impressive social gains – became the envy of both developed and developing countries, a result of a range of policy priorities benefitting its people<sup>34</sup>. However, the deterioration and stagnation inside the one-party state gradually became evident. Pioneers and political entrepreneurs became conformist. Defending the “Revolution” became synonymous with defending status quo (or, as explained tautologically on billboards in Cuba: “Revolution means changing everything that needs to be changed”), as mass rally’s including on Labor Day (May 1<sup>st</sup>) demonstrate. As a Cuban teacher, once a fervent revolutionary, explained to me<sup>35</sup>:

“In the 1960s, we felt that anything was possible. Being a black woman from a modest background with very limited opportunities, I could finally get a university degree! During Fidel’s literacy campaign, I even taught my mother how to read and write. However, witnessing later how more and more central Party members became opportunistic and

---

<sup>32</sup> Jack Goldstone defines revolution as “*an effort to transform the political institutions and the justifications for political authority in society, accompanied by formal or informal mass mobilization and non-institutionalized actions that undermine authorities*”. See Jack Goldstone, “Towards a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory”, *Annual Review of Political Science* 4, 2001:139-87.

<sup>33</sup> Among these mass social organizations are the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), the Association of Small Farmers (ANAP) and the controversial Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR), a nationwide network of neighborhood committees created for surveillance to help dissuade counter-revolutionary activities. The CDR’s are said to have important social functions and have helped keep streets safer than in most countries in the region, but the CDR’s have also been responsible for organizing “rapid response” gatherings outside the houses of dissidents to intimidate these.

<sup>34</sup> This is also indicated by Cuba’s high ranking on the Human Development Index, and the fact that Cuba has reached many of the Millennium Development Goals even before world leaders committed to these. See [www.undp.org/cu](http://www.undp.org/cu)

<sup>35</sup> Interview in Havana, October 2013. “Sonia”, who at first communicated these subjects through whispering, would prefer to remain anonymous for political reasons.

dogmatic, and other comrades more conformist, I started to lose faith and pulled out.”

So did thousands of other Cubans, many of whom left for the U.S. that welcomed Cubans “fleeing” the regime. In Cuba, censorship and self-censorship became widespread.

With the loss of Soviet patronage after 1989 and the subsequent tightening of the U.S. embargo, Cuba went into a deep economic crisis known as “the Special Period in Time of Peace”, characterized by shortages of food and fuel, among other things. Castro encouraged the people to work harder and be patient. In order to stay afloat, Fidel Castro had to start opening up and reforming the Cuban economy to improve living standards and attract tourists and investors. By opening Cuba to the world, Cuba started to change from within.

## 5. From Deadlock to Détente

What are the prospects for dialogue, cooperation and peaceful co-existence, given divisive issues like human rights, terrorism, espionage and dominance in the polarized debate both between and within Cuba and the U.S?

As mentioned in chapter 3, dialogue can – and does, in this case – take place at different levels.

Below I will briefly look at Raul Castro's reforms, which has led to more dialogue both within Cuba and between Cuba and other countries. Then I will turn to Cuba's current international relations that influence dialogue both with the U.S. and among Cubans, and vice versa. I will then examine the recent rapprochement between Cuba and the U.S., including suggestions on how this can be advanced. Finally, I examine the prospects and arenas for dialogue and openness inside Cuba, with the Catholic Church as well as bloggers, artists and civil society as some of the main actors attempting to widen the political space.

### 5.1 Raul's reforms

In 2006, the ailing Fidel Castro became ill and transferred his presidential powers to his (not much) younger brother Raul, head of Cuba's military, who formally became President in 2008. While Fidel was the charismatic visionary, Raul is frequently described as a pragmatic realist<sup>36</sup>. Change, he said, would progress "without haste, but without pause". Under Raul, Cuba has embarked on a number of reforms, officially called "updating". Today, more than 440.000 Cubans are self-employed (in Cuba known as *cuentapropistas*) and have opened businesses, many of these thanks to remittances from relatives in the U.S. after Obama loosened restrictions. Thousands of farmers are leasing idle land from the state. To increase efficiency and stimulate growth, cooperatives and better management forms are encouraged, many state companies shut down, and hundreds of thousands of people have been laid off<sup>37</sup>. Cubans further were allowed to buy and sell houses and cars, and own a mobile phone.

---

<sup>36</sup> Marc Frank (2013): *Cuban Revelations: Behind the Scenes in Havana*. Miami: University Press of Florida.

<sup>37</sup> For a thorough overview, see this book by the leading economist Carmelo Mesa Lago (2012): "Cuba en la era de Raul Castro: Reformas economico-sociales y sus

Although the one-party system remains, Raul Castro also embarked on political reforms. On his very first week in office, Raul signed the two UN Covenants for civil and political rights and for economic, social and cultural rights, respectively, and later strengthened the rights of groups including sexual minorities, with his own daughter Mariela leading the way.

The information monopoly remained, but still Raul repeatedly encouraged Cubans to “fearlessly” criticize the government<sup>38</sup>. Where Fidel had predominantly blamed the outside world, Raul focused on internal ills, criticized his own bureaucrats for foot-dragging and called for decentralization.

After mediation from the Catholic Church he released political prisoners, many whom were under pressure to accept exile, including the 75 regime critics arrested during the crackdown in 2003 known as the Black Spring (more about this in the last chapter). In January 2013, Raul Castro eliminated exit visa restrictions<sup>39</sup>, allowing even dissidents to go abroad and publicly criticize Castro and then return to Cuba. However, due to censorship and poor internet access, few Cubans inside Cuba hear this criticism. As Human Rights Watch observed:

“Since 2011, the Cuban government has relied less on long-term prison sentences to punish dissent and has relaxed draconian travel restrictions that divided families and prevented its critics from leaving and returning to the island. Nevertheless, the Cuban government continues to repress individuals and groups who criticize the government or call for basic human rights. Officials employ a range of tactics to punish dissent and instill fear in the public, including beatings, public acts of shaming, termination of employment, and threats of long-term imprisonment.”<sup>40</sup>

Although the increased harassment and short-term detentions of regime critics is a worrying tendency, some have speculated that (although the actions are by themselves serious) this might in fact not only be a bad sign: The increased short-term detentions might take place precisely because of – not despite of – the Cuban opening. Like

---

efectos” with contributions from Cuban experts including economists from the CEEC at the University of Havana.

<sup>38</sup> Raul Castro did this from the very beginning, including in a meeting with Cuban students as described in Washington Post in December 2006:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/21/AR2006122101476.html>

<sup>39</sup> Among the regime critics that soon got a passport and travelled extensively were the blogger Yoani Sanchez as well as Berta Soler from Ladies in White. They were both frequently interviewed by foreign media and later returned to Cuba where they continued their activities.

<sup>40</sup> See the Cuba pages on Human Rights Watch [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org)



one diplomat regularly meeting both Cuban human rights defenders and Cuban officials said to me:

“Many Cubans are encouraged by Raul’s political opening. I wonder if the reason why there are more short-term detentions now is that there are much more Cubans protesting now. Cubans have reason to be less afraid of being severely punished if they raise their voices.”

After all, going from risking several years in prison to risking a few days or hours of in prison must be considered a progress by any measure.

Changing the system takes time, and strong forces within the system resist change. Further, not everyone feels that Raul’s reforms are necessarily making life better yet. Salaries are still very low, subsidies are being cut, and most Cubans still struggle to make ends meet. Across the country, people are worried about rising food prices, deteriorating social services, increasing waterborne diseases, poor housing and growing inequalities<sup>41</sup>.

Although some of these admit Cubans today have more opportunities, they feel it is mostly those with positions or family abroad that can benefit from this. Like a man I spoke to in the Sierra Maestra mountains – where the Castro brothers started the Revolution – said to me, also referring to the Latin American caudillo tradition of strong and charismatic leaders:

“We have been told that the people will benefit from the economic opening, but we don’t see much of that here. A bottle of cooking oil now costs me the equivalence of three day’s work. Raul Castro is a military man. They keep their privileges and control. Fidel made several mistakes, but at least he cared for the poor. That’s why I am a Fidelist, not a socialist<sup>42</sup>.”

Despite setbacks, including inconsistencies as well as inequalities – commonly referred to in Cuba as “territorial differences” – and a pattern of short-term detention and harassment of government critics,

---

<sup>41</sup> See Armando Chaguaceda (2014): “Cuba: Revisitando la Justicia Social en tiempos de reforma”, NUPI, February 2014, and Juan O. Tamayo: “Poverty in Cuba increases as government slashes social spending”. *Miami Herald*, 9 February 2014. The article quotes Carmelo Mesa-Lago, a leading expert on Cuba’s economy, who says there’s more poverty in Cuba now.

<sup>42</sup> Conversation in January 2014 in the Granma province. In my experience, this is a commonly expressed sentiment especially in marginalized areas, although many praise Raul Castro for necessary reforms. This was also echoed by two fishermen I spoke with in the Guantanamo province and farmers in the Santiago province the same month, as well as Cuban women in the poorer Cerro neighbourhood in Havana.

Cuba is on the road to reform. Castro has declared he will step down no later than 2018, and has appointed a 52 year-old successor without military background and whose last name is not Castro: Vice President Miguel Diaz-Canel Bermudez.

The U.S. policy on Cuba however has remained largely the same, despite periods of partial liberalizations, especially under US President Jimmy Carter who helped establish Interest Sections in the two countries, and in the early Bill Clinton years, and under Barack Obama.

Due to the embargo, the Cuban Interests Section in Washington were forced to suspend its consular services again in February 2014, accepting only humanitarian cases, because it was impossible find a bank based in the United States to assume the bank accounts of Cuban diplomatic missions.<sup>43</sup>

Despite this, there has been a recent rapprochement, to be explored under.

## 5.2 Cuba's current foreign policy relations

Previously dependent on the Soviet Union (and before that the U.S. and, before, Spain) and risking isolation, Cuba has recently improved relations with a number of countries.

To some critics both inside and outside Cuba, this is seen as unfortunate, serving to legitimize and strengthen the one-party state. Others see this as positive for human rights in Cuba. They argue that such interdependence and cooperation (especially with democratic countries) is likely to further encourage Cuba to open up and enter into dialogue with its critics while feeling less vulnerable and still under obligation to make concessions in the spirit of cooperation.

Russia, China and Brazil are among the country's powerful partners, the latter funding the recently inaugurated deep-water container port of Mariel with a free trade zone.

In early 2014, the European Union agreed to launch negotiations with Cuba to increase trade, investment and dialogue on human rights<sup>44</sup>.

Around the same time, Cuba received heads of 31 Latin American and Caribbean states as well as dignitaries such as UN Secretary

---

<sup>43</sup> "Cuba forced to suspend consular services in the U.S." Granma, 14 February 2014.

<sup>44</sup> EU gave the go-ahead in February 2014. The pact could be agreed by the end of 2015, according to Robin Emmott and Fiona Ortiz: "Europe to launch talks to upgrade relations with Cuba". Reuters 30 January 2014.

General Ban Ki-Moon when Cuba hosted the CELAC meeting, effectively bypassing the United States. The U.S., that has blocked Cuba's membership in the Organization of American States (OAS), seems to be losing influence in the region. This comes at a time where a number of center-left politicians have become presidents in other countries in the region. In the so-called Havana Declaration, the governments affirmed "the sovereign right of each of our peoples to choose their own political and economic system."<sup>45</sup>

Further, Cuba's relevance is felt at several continents through the thousands of doctors Cuba has sent. Venezuela is its closest ally and main supplier of oil (making Cuba rather vulnerable, though) in exchange for doctors and other professionals. What is more, together with Norway, Cuba is credited for facilitating peace talks in Colombia.

Cuba generally cooperates with the United Nations inside and outside Cuba, although particularly human rights in remains a thorny issue. It is an elected member of the United Nations' Human Rights Council based in Geneva.

The conflict with Cuba's most powerful neighbor frequently influence or spill out onto other countries as well, which negatively impacts the prospects of effectively developing bilateral, regional and international norms and agreements and has a polarizing effect<sup>46</sup>. Despite being progressive on certain global issues including related to sustainable development, it is often observed that insistence on national sovereignty and non-interference – joining the position of repressive regimes – prevents advancement on other important issues both on a national and global level.

### **5.3 The recent thaw in U.S.-Cuban relations**

"Cuba has the same effect on U.S. administrations as the full moon has on wolves: it's an obsession," said Wayne Smith, a former U.S. diplomat in Havana calling for dialogue.

As explained above, the relationship between Cuba and the U.S. before Castro was characterized by U.S. dominance, and under Fidel Castro by a sustained state of political and military Cold War tension. The two countries drew closer to one another under the presidencies of Barack Obama and Raul Castro.

---

<sup>45</sup> [http://celac.cubaminrex.cu/sites/default/files/ficheros/havana\\_declaration\\_celac.pdf](http://celac.cubaminrex.cu/sites/default/files/ficheros/havana_declaration_celac.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> As a recent example, Cuba's failure to sign the recent Arms Trade Treaty adopted with overwhelming majority by the UN in 2013 is related to Cuba's fear of US intervention and "politization" of human rights. A normalization and strengthening of human rights could make the violence-ridden Americas region more unified in getting the deadly trade in arms under better control.

### 5.3.1 From “Soviet proxy” to “regime change”

With the prevailing “domino theory”, Washington decided to crush the Cuban Revolution to prevent it from dragging the rest of Latin America towards Soviet communism. Cuba was considered a security threat and a Soviet proxy.

This is no longer the case. In the 1990, Cuba no longer had troops in Southern Africa, nor did it actively support liberation movements in Latin America, and the Soviet Union had collapsed. The U.S. shifted its focus towards the Cuban system itself<sup>47</sup>, with a stronger emphasis on human rights and economic freedom, tightened the trade embargo punishing third parties, and maintained its policy of “regime change”. Fidel’s reaction: “Socialism or death”.

However, the U.S. has not succeeded in isolating Cuba or toppling Castro. Today, Cuba has more allies, as we saw above. Nor has the U.S. embargo – condemned in the United Nations’ General Assembly every year by all but a few countries<sup>48</sup> and classified as genocide<sup>49</sup> by Cuba – helped improve the human rights situation in the country, as the Human Rights Watch recently concluded:

“The United States' economic embargo of Cuba, in place for more than half a century, continues to impose indiscriminate hardship on the Cuban people and has done nothing to improve the country's human rights.”<sup>50</sup>

The report also criticizes the Cuban practice of arbitrary detentions and short-term imprisonments, as well as the government’s treatment of human rights defenders, government control of the media and poor prison conditions. However, many argue that through the U.S. policies including the use of force, sanctions and regime change programs, the U.S. has served to give the Castro regime an excuse for such suppression of dissent.

---

<sup>47</sup> Rafael Hernandez: *Intimate Enemies. Paradoxes in the Conflict Between the United States and Cuba*. In . In Jorge Dominguez ,Rafael Hernandez and Lorena Barberia (2012): *Debating US-Cuban Relations: Shall We Play Ball?* (Chapter 2) New York: Routledge .

<sup>48</sup> In October 2013, 188 countries at the United Nations voted in favor of the resolution asking the United States to lift the blockade. Only the U.S. and Israel voted against it. See “U.N. urges end of U.S. embargo on Cuba for 22nd time”. Reuters, 29 October 2013.

<sup>49</sup> Referring to the collective harm inflicted on its people, the Cuban government has repeatedly said the US “blockade” is tantamount to genocide, including on current billboards in Cuba, and in an editorial in the Communist party newspaper *Granma* in April 2009 by Fidel Castro.

<sup>50</sup> Human Rights Watch Country Report for Cuba 2014 is available here: <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/cuba?page=3>

The binary debate has hardly served to shed light, but rather produced more heat. Dissidents – many of whom turned to the U.S. for financial and political support after being ignored or harassed by their own government – are frequently dismissed by Cuba as “U.S. agents” or “mercenaries”, and viewed by many ordinary Cubans as traitors for taking money from the enemy. The U.S. on their side called Castro a “tyrant”, while Cuba responded by labelling President Bush a “fascist”, also with reference to U.S. torture in Guantanamo’s infamous Camp Delta and the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), responsible for enforcing sanctions, were under fire at home for paying more attention to Castro and enforcing the Cuba embargo than it did to Bin Laden and stopping financial flows to terrorists.<sup>51</sup> Like a journalist in Cuba commented to me: “There are many other countries that the U.S. should be much more worried about than Cuba.”

The embargo grew increasingly unpopular, also among Americans.

### 5.3.2 Obama: “A new beginning”

Before his election in 2008, President Barack Obama said: “It is time for us to end the embargo against Cuba.” Obama justified this by saying it had not helped Cubans enjoy rising living standards, and that instead, it harmed innocent people and didn’t improve human rights. Obama continued, “It is time for us to acknowledge that that particular policy has failed”<sup>52</sup>.

Reminding Obama of this, a recent Financial Times editorial stated that the embargo is “embarrassing, anachronistic – and has failed”<sup>53</sup>.

In what seemed to be a change in the U.S. policy towards Cuba, President Obama was met with applause when stating the following at the Summit of the Americas in April 2009, on his first trip to the region:

“The United States seeks a new beginning with Cuba. I know there is a longer [applause], I know there is a longer journey that must be travelled to overcome decades of mistrust, but there are critical steps we can take towards a new day. I’ve already changed a Cuba policy that

---

<sup>51</sup> In his book “Cuban Revelations: Behind the Scenes in Havana” (2013), Reuters’ Cuba correspondent Marc Frank writes that a congressional report found that there were just four staff members dedicated to terrorist finances and twelve to enforcing the trade embargo against Cuba. OFAC reported only 93 terrorism investigations from 1990-2003 and 10.683 Cuba-related investigations in the same period.

<sup>52</sup> See more at Center for Democracy in the Americas, 10. January 2014, at [www.cubacentral.org](http://www.cubacentral.org)

<sup>53</sup> Time for US policy change on Cuba. Financial Times, 21 February 2014.

I believe has failed to advance liberty or opportunity for the Cuban people. We will now allow Cuban-Americans to visit the island ... I'm prepared to have my administration engage with the Cuban government on a wide range of issues – from drugs, migration and economic issues, to human rights, free speech, and democratic reform ... I'm not interested in talking just for the sake of talking. But I do believe that we can move U.S.-Cuban relations in a new direction.”

However, the changes that took place the first years following this speech turned out to be quite modest, as observed by the leading Cuba experts Jorge Domínguez from Harvard University and the Cuban social scientist Rafael Hernández, Editor of *Revista Temas*<sup>54</sup>. This was partly due to the imprisonment of USAID contractor Alan Gross later that year. Obama has lifted all restrictions on family travel and remittances, eased restrictions on other types of purposeful travel including academic exchange, but has maintained most sanctions. Under Obama, the U.S. continued to support democracy, human rights and civil society projects and continued its radio and TV Martí broadcasts.

Nonetheless, in November 2013, Obama said the U.S. would be more “creative” and “thoughtful” in “updating” its Cuba approach. As such he sent a key signal to Washington, Miami and Havana:

“Keep in mind that when Castro came to power, I was just born. So the notion that the same policies that we put in place in 1961 would somehow still be as effective as they are today in the age of the Internet and Google and world travel doesn't make sense<sup>55</sup>.”

During the final session of Cuba's National Assembly for 2013, President Raúl Castro called for the U.S. to establish civilized relations with Cuba. However, Castro warned that Cuba would not negotiate its political and social system:

“We do not demand that the United States change its political and social system, nor do we accept negotiating ours. If we really want to move forward in our bilateral relations, we have to learn to mutually respect our differences and become accustomed to peacefully living with them.”<sup>56</sup>

For the U.S. however, the political system is precisely what they want to contest. However, as one U.S. Interest Section official in Havana told

---

<sup>54</sup> See the introduction to Domínguez, Hernández and Barbería (2012): *Shall We Play Ball? Debating U.S.-Cuban Relations*. New York: Routledge.

<sup>55</sup> Obama at a fundraising reception in Miami, quoted in a White House press release 8 November 2013.

<sup>56</sup> “President Castro calls on the U.S. to establish civilized relations with Cuba.” Reuters, 22 December 2013.

me recently, both Cuba and the US have recently moderated their language use. The U.S. talks less of regime change, while the Cubans tend to use terms like “mercenaries” less when referring to dissidents.

### 5.3.3 Talks under the radar

Despite the hostilities, Cuba and the U.S. have in fact cooperated for years. The U.S. has become one of the largest exporters of food to Cuba<sup>57</sup> and American series are shown on Cuban TV, to mention some.

Lately, Cuba and the U.S. have stepped up the cooperation on several levels and areas of importance for the two neighbors, including through talks on border issues vital to their shared security, like migration, military-to-military, drugs, terrorism, postal services, environment, oil spills, disaster preparedness, health and epidemics.

The tone between the two during these talks has been described as increasingly “constructive” and “respectful” by both parties. The U.S. delegation stated:

“Despite our historically difficult relationship, over the course of the past year and a half we have been able to speak to each other in a respectful and thoughtful manner...the U.S. and Cuba continue to seek opportunities to cooperate and advance our shared interests.<sup>58</sup>”

A senior American official said they had made “substantial progress” and that the U.S. is “very open” to building a new relationship with Cuba, but stressed it should go hand in hand with more political freedom. The head of the U.S. delegation also visited U.S. subcontractor Alan Gross, jailed for illegally providing internet. About the Gross case he said that “[t]hroughout the discussions we expressed our sincerest hope that the government of Cuba allows Alan Gross to return to his family...and we took note of what the Cubans said about their prisoners,” referring to the Cuban intelligence agents currently imprisoned in the U.S.<sup>59</sup>

Later that month there was a historic breakthrough in U.S.-Cuban talks when the U.S. in a new deal in Florida agreed to cooperate with Cuba in the event of an oil spill, thereby putting environmental concerns over the trade and travel embargo against Cuba. The agreement was a product of workshops and negotiations among

---

<sup>57</sup> An exception to the embargo, in 2000 the U.S. Congress allowed the sale of agricultural products for cash to Cuba, and had earlier done the same on the sale of medicines.

<sup>58</sup> This was confirmed to me by officials at the US Interest Section in Havana. See also Marc Frank: “Cuba, United States meet on migration in latest sign of a thaw”. Reuters, 9 January 2014.

<sup>59</sup> BBC 10. January 2014: “Cuba: US ‘very open’ to new relationship”

diplomats, Coast Guards and environmental officials. As one U.S. delegate explained: “Just something as simple as knowing who to call in what nation and not needing to ask permission to do so can save valuable time.”<sup>60</sup>

Recently, several visits to Cuba by U.S. Senators have added to this warming of relations and helped prepare the ground for dialogue. Also, both countries have sought to overcome potentially divisive incidents, including Cuba's decision not to offer safe haven to Edward Snowden, and what it calls the U.S.'s deft handling of the seizure by Panama of a North Korean ship carrying Cuban weapons in possible violation of U.N. sanctions<sup>61</sup>.

#### 5.3.4 Miami hardliners losing ground

Obstacles to normalization remain. In addition to the above mentioned issues, as well as ideological differences, the U.S says Cuba simply isn't important enough to them. Unlike more powerful and resource-rich countries like China and Saudi Arabia where human rights violations have been massive, Cuba has not been seen to carry enough weight for normalization to be a priority. Many hesitate to challenge powerful hardline Cuban Americans in Southern Florida and New Jersey.

However, a recent survey showed that the majority of U.S. voters including 63 percent of Floridians are in favor of normalizing U.S. ties with Cuba. Perhaps most surprisingly, those of Cuban descent heavily favor normalization or engagement. The support was greater among Democrats but the majority of Republicans in the U.S. also support normalization of relations with Cuba.<sup>62</sup>

Even among several old anti-Castro Miami residents there has been a recent shift. For example, the Cuban American sugar baron Alfonso Fanjul spoke publicly in February about investing in Cuba. This provoked a harsh reaction from Cuban American hardliners such as the Florida Republican Representatives Mario Diaz-Balart<sup>63</sup> (whose family

---

<sup>60</sup> “New oil spill pact between U.S., Cuba has Tampa roots”. Tampa Tribune, January 29, 2014.

<sup>61</sup> “Cuba, United States meet on migration in latest sign of a thaw”. Reuters, 9 January 2014.

<sup>62</sup> The survey was released the same day by the Atlantic Council, a think tank based in Washington. Nationwide, support for better relations with Cuba was 56 percent, rising to 62 percent among Latinos. The survey also found strong backing, 64 percent, for that position in Miami-Dade County, the center of the Cuban-American community. Support for normalizing relations was greater among Democrats, 60 percent, than among Republicans, 52 percent. See “Floridians support thaw with Cuba. A plus for Charlie Crist?” The Miami Herald, 11 February 2014, and “More than 6 in 10 Floridians favor better relations with Cuba”. EFE, 11 February 2014.

<sup>63</sup> The Diaz-Balarts are also Fidel Castro's former in-laws – Fidel was first married to Mirta Diaz-Balart.



worked for the Cuban dictator Batista) who was “outraged”, and Ileana Ros-Lethinen who called it “pathetic”<sup>64</sup>.

Similarly, passions ran high in Miami when the two Presidents Barack Obama and Raul Castro in December 2013 shook hands during the memorial service for Nelson Mandela. Although the U.S. administration insisted the handshake was not pre-arranged, it nevertheless spurred both hope and anger. In South Florida, the same Ros-Lethinen labelled the Obama-Castro handshake “nauseating” and the Castro regime “cruel” and “sadistic”. In many U.S. newspapers however, the handshake evoked a welcoming editorial reaction<sup>65</sup>.

As we will see below, several U.S. actors – some together with Cubans – encourage dialogue, regretting “those among us who constantly divide, project our own divisions to Cuba’s democracy advocates, insult and offend those who differ from their points of view”, stressing “We believe in tolerance and respect, because no one has a monopoly on truth.”<sup>66</sup>.

### 5.3.5 How Obama can advance dialogue

During his State of the Union Address before the U.S. Congress 28 January 2014, President Obama presented an overview of his foreign policy objectives but failed to mention Latin America. However, Ben Rhodes, the Deputy National Security Advisor, elaborated on the President's foreign policy priorities, and spoke about possible changes in U.S. policy toward Cuba this year. He remarked,

“Our bottom line remains that we believe that there should be respect for human rights in Cuba, political and economic reforms that advance those opportunities for the Cuban people. The embargo, frankly, is not simply an act of the President, too; it's an act of Congress. And there's great congressional interest in making sure that we're standing up for our democratic values in terms of our relationship with Cuba. So those are constants in our policy. But we're open to exploring pragmatic steps that can be taken, if they serve our interests, if they serve the interests of the hemisphere, if they serve the interests of the Cuban people.”<sup>67</sup>

Lifting the embargo will not be easy. Even with the necessary Congress votes, the 1996 Helms Burton Act stipulates certain conditions that must be met before the embargo can be lifted. Among them are that

---

<sup>64</sup> Jorge Perez: “Among Elite Exiled Cuban-Americans, Views Shifting On U.S. Foreign Policy with Caribbean Island”. Associated Press / Fox News, 9 February 2014.

<sup>65</sup> The New York Times repeated its call to “Lift the Cuban Embargo, while The Kansas City Star stated, “What if this greeting signaled another apparent micro-thaw in the half-century cold war with our island neighbor? Frankly, that would be good news.”

<sup>66</sup> See the Core Beliefs on the Cuba Study Group’s website.

<sup>67</sup> Statement released by the U.S. Department of State the same day.

neither Fidel nor Raúl Castro be in power; legalization of political opposition parties and an independent media; dismantling the State Security apparatus; and holding free, fair and internationally monitored elections within 18 months after a transitional government assumes power.

Still, inside and outside the U.S., many have suggested that Obama build on the momentum outlined above, and have suggested steps that Obama can take to “update” U.S policy on Cuba without waiting for a divided U.S. Congress. To broaden the dialogue and develop knowledge leading to proposals on how to proceed with a dialogue between the two countries, cooperation has developed between experts from Cuba, the U.S. and other countries. Most notably, Cuban researchers including leading economists and social scientists at the University of Havana and others have met frequently with foreign experts in the Cuba-United States Academic Workshop (TACE) – an academic dialogue program facilitated by regional research coordination unit CRIES<sup>68</sup>, that also has included the Brookings Institution and diplomats including from Norway and institutions like the World Bank and IMF.

Both governments have been presented with their proposals in the fields of academic, scientific/technical and cultural cooperation; freedom to travel; international trade and development; terrorism and security, and environment. The experts suggest that the U.S. government remove Cuba from the list of state sponsors of terrorism, “given that its inclusion on that list is an obstacle to cooperation between the two countries on the fight against terrorism.” Other areas include exchange between high-ranking officials; mutual recognition of proposals for improving security; talks for agreements on fighting terrorism and drugs; and a review of sentences given to individuals convicted of crimes committed in the name of a foreign country.

This is an example of how internal reforms in Cuba have triggered cooperation and dialogue both inside Cuba and between Cuba and the outside world that again could lead to increased openness.

Similarly, the Brookings Institution and others recommended a package of unilateral steps under Obama to expand trade, travel and communications with the Cuban people. These include: direct assistance to Cuba’s burgeoning small and medium enterprises, expanded general licenses for travel, additions to the list of authorized exports, lifting the cap on cash and gifts that non-Cuban-Americans

---

<sup>68</sup> See their evaluation report: <http://www.cries.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Evaluation-report-by-WG.pdf> and an article in the official newspaper The Havana Reporter 20 June 2013: “Academic diplomacy, one more element in the Cuba-US conflict. “<http://www.cries.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/TheHavanaReporter.pdf>

can send to the island, and – again – removal of Cuba from the list of state sponsors of terrorism.

The Brookings Institution encouraged Obama to continue to “honor the sacrifice of Cuba’s human rights defenders and bring new attention to the private-sector entrepreneurs who are taking risks to open businesses”.

These measures, the Brookings Institution argue, would draw support from key political and business constituencies in the United States including Florida, help accelerate further change on the island, and pave the way for improved U.S. relations in the region. They would leverage Obama’s presidential leadership as a further catalyst for a historic process of reconciliation now underway and “long overdue”:

“If successful, we can trigger a new dynamic in the long and troubled history of U.S.-Cuban affairs, avert negative consequences for us of a potentially hard landing for the Cuban people, and further our goals of a free and prosperous Latin American and Caribbean neighborhood.”<sup>69</sup>

Such measures would place the ball in Castro’s hands. If the U.S. were no longer perceived a threat to Cuba, then the island would no longer be “under siege” by the U.S. which has long been the Castro brothers’ explanation for limiting freedom of expression and association common under Marshall Laws.

The question remains: Will such a shift serve to advance human rights in Cuba, or will this move from confrontation to cooperation rather strengthen the Cuban government control at the expense of human rights and better understanding among Cubans, like some sceptics claim?

Below, we will further explore how such issues are discussed inside Cuba.

#### **5.4 Dialogue among Cubans**

The one-party state’s lack of freedom of expression and assembly<sup>70</sup>, with state-controlled media, poor internet access, tight surveillance,

---

<sup>69</sup> “Reach out to Cuba”. Memorandum to Obama from Ted Piccone at the Brookings Institute 23 January 2014. See also Vegard Bye (2014): “Which Way Cuba?” NUPI, February 2014.

<sup>70</sup> On January 6, 2014, the independent Havana-based Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation reported that there were at least 6,423 short-term detentions for political reasons in 2013, with at least 1,123 detentions alone in December.

ensorship and self-censorship hardly provides fertile ground for dialogue among Cubans.

Further, with the economic crisis, most Cubans struggle daily and spend considerable time trying to get basic necessities, and often spend much time waiting in line or for transport. People are rewarded for supporting the government, and frequently punished if they don't.

For instance, in article 53 of the Cuban Constitution, it is declared that "Citizens have freedom of speech and of the press in keeping with the objectives of socialist society". As the famous Cuban bloggess Yoani Sanchez has remarked, partly referring to incentives used by the government to keep people "in line", and experiences of her husband Reinaldo Escobar after he stopped working for the party press *Juventud Rebelde*:

"Several generations of information professionals have had to approach their work through censorship, ideological propaganda and the applause of power. Sugarcoating reality, using national media as a showcase for false achievements and filling newspapers with a doctored and distorted Cuba, these are some of the evils of our national press (...) The informants end up prostituting their words to stay out of trouble or to earn certain privileges.<sup>71</sup>"

At the heart of the conflict are the differing views of political participation, as we will come back to.

According to many Cubans I have spoken to, there's not much left of the revolutionary fervor of the 1960s. Political apathy is spreading, especially among youth. However, Cubans across the country often say they support many of the revolutionary (although perhaps somewhat outdated) ideals. They frequently stress the good things about Cuba, especially the safety<sup>72</sup> due to low rates of violent crime, and the free and universal education and health care – although many also complain about deteriorating services and rising inequalities.

---

<sup>71</sup> Yoani Sanchez (2013): "Cuba Magazine Style". 6 February 2013  
<http://generacionyen.wordpress.com/>

<sup>72</sup> Safety – like risk - is of course subject to individual perception, relative to both political and human conditions. In UNDPs 2004 Human Development Report and elsewhere, it is argued that global vulnerability and instability must be tackled through a people-centered (not only state or military-centered) "human security" approach, defined as "freedom from need" and "freedom from fear" (inspired by Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Four freedoms" speech in 1941). Both these are of course relative. It is also relative in Cuba because - although basic necessities are generally provided by the state, and the streets are generally safe – people that criticize the government have repeatedly found themselves with less protection.

Further, many say the strict control prevent them from contributing freely both politically and economically. After six years of university studies, many realize they can't make a living on 20 USD a month and end up as taxi drivers or street hustlers instead, frustrated and unable to speak their mind without fear of consequences. Hence, thousands leave the country every year in search for more opportunities and freedom, benefitting from U.S. immigration policies favoring Cubans over others.

However, this is not to say the country is hermetically closed or isolated, and that there's no criticism. From blaming it all on the U.S. aggression and the trade embargo, Cubans today talk of the "self-embargo". As explained above, Raul Castro himself – although not using this term nor changing basic systemic barriers – confronts Cuba's problems to a larger degree by looking inside the country and encourage criticism. He has himself exposed many of the country's problems, also within the bureaucracy<sup>73</sup>.

This opening has led to closer cooperation between Cuba and other countries including in Europe and Latin-America, which again has further influenced both the internal dynamics in Cuba and the relationship with the U.S. As a consequence, the U.S. might be on the way to becoming less of a dialogue "spoiler", despite resistance from some hard-liners that are losing support.

Although there has been signs of a more critical debate, many still hold themselves back and are (also literarily) afraid of raising their voices to express criticism. Some say they fear consequences, others are concerned with how "the enemy" will use such criticism<sup>74</sup>.

Criticism inside Cuba cuts across the classic left-right dichotomy. As Pedro Campos in the Left-leaning independent Cuban "Havana Times"

---

<sup>73</sup> There are various explanations to why Castro's bureaucrats fail to implement new reformist policies: Some may lose privileges. Others fear change, after half a century defending status quo. Others again experience that some of the policies contradict each other, or that the new regulations are unclear, and hence delay. Also, in this hierarchic, centralist society with outdated technology, decision making especially on lower levels can be very slow.

<sup>74</sup> There are similar debates in other societies that have suffered from various forms of external domination and misrepresentation, including in the debate around "Orientalism in reverse": Since Middle Eastern (often Muslim) cultures have traditionally been subjected to negative stereotyping from dominant Western cultures - as described in Edward Said's classic work "Orientalism" - many hesitate debating negative aspects of their own cultural or religious traditions and practices because they fear feeding such stereotypes or being perceived as disloyal. Hence, emphasizing unity over diversity, such communities often seem overly sensitive to criticism.

stress, referring to apologetic international leftists failing to criticize human rights violations by the Cuban government:

“Human rights are precisely that: human. They are not the exclusive domain of the Right or Left and their violation must be condemned by the Left wherever it takes place. Otherwise, the Left would be guilty of the same double standards that imperialism is criticized for.”<sup>75</sup>

There is a tight public space for dialogue and debate, but as we will see the Catholic Church and others have succeeded in widening it. However, given the limited possibilities for criticizing human rights within Cuba noted above, much of the debate between Cubans has been taking place through the UN system, international media and social media, to be examined below.

#### 5.4.1 Human rights battle at the UN

As mentioned, given the information monopoly in Cuba, much of the debate between the Cuban government and its critics takes place outside Cuba. The United Nations, established to maintain peace and dialogue, has become a virtual battlefield for the propaganda war on human rights.

In 2013, Cuba underwent its second Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a compulsory procedure for all member states at the United Nations Human Rights Council. During this UPR, Cuba was the infamous record-holder for the number of reports sent by NGOs to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). More than 450 reports, many of them without any criticisms of the human rights situation in the country, were sent to the UN to be used to assess Cuba’s human rights situation. Such a high number of reports made it difficult for OHCHR to produce a summary of the information provided. Moreover, the overwhelmingly positive views contained in these reports skewed the balance of the summary prepared by OHCHR.<sup>76</sup>

Critics claim that the Cuban government had mobilized hundreds of not-so independent organizations to counter and even attempt to drown the criticism from countries and human rights organizations.

The review of Cuba also broke the record of the number of countries taking the floor to ask questions and make recommendations to the State being reviewed (*ibid*). Several countries expressed concern with repression of human rights defenders, increased arbitrary detentions,

---

<sup>75</sup> “The Old International Left and the New Cuban Right”. In *Havana Times*, 2. October 2013. See also Red Observatorio Critico for other discussions related to this topic: <http://observatoriocriticodesdecuba.wordpress.com>

<sup>76</sup> “Unprecedented challenge to the Universal Periodic Review”. International Service for Human Rights, 31 May 2013. <http://www.ishr.ch/news/unprecedented-challenge-universal-periodic-review#sthash.UOEz9pja.dpuf>

and lack of freedom of expression. Cuba rejected many of these recommendations on the grounds that they were “politically biased and built on false premises, resulting from efforts to discredit Cuba on the part of those who, with their hegemonic ambitions, refuse to accept the diversity and the right to freedom of determination of the Cuban people.”<sup>77</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the many Cuban organizations gave very different versions of the human rights situation in Cuba. While supporters credited Cuba for advancing economic, social and cultural rights as well as the rights of women, children and others, government critics largely focused on civil and political rights including the lack of space for civil society.

For instance, the Comisión Cubana de Derechos Humanos y Reconciliación Nacional (Cuban Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation, CCDHRN), by Cuba considered illegal but somewhat tolerated<sup>78</sup>, reported that Cuba has neither published the outcome of the previous universal periodic review nor held regular and inclusive consultations, as it had agreed to do during the previous Universal Periodic Review. It also indicated that the State has not established an inter-institutional mechanism for implementing the universal periodic review recommendations in which civil society would have a role.

The Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), a mass organization generally considered being very close to the Cuban government, stated that it had facilitated the participation of women in the preparation of a draft of the second national Universal Periodic Review report. However, CCDHRN indicated that Cuba excluded many civil society human rights defenders from the process of producing the final document. (ibid)

This illustrates both the poor dialogue between Cuban organizations as well as between the Cuban government and its critics.

#### **5.4.2 No Internet Revolution: Dialogue and Cyber War**

The Internet Revolution has not reached Cuba. The access to Internet is among the poorest in the world. Around one out of four Cubans has

---

<sup>77</sup> UPR documents are available on <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/UPRMain.aspx> . It is worth noting that the comments from Norway, containing both encouragement and explicit criticism, were seen as more balanced by Cuba and therefore not equally dismissed.

<sup>78</sup> It is led by Elizardo Sanchez Santa Cruz, a long-time human rights defender known to be moderate, systematic and accused by the Cuban government in 2003 of being a double agent, according to Samuel Farber (2011:230).

access to a few limited sites. However, only 5% of the population has proper access to the Internet, some at their workplaces and schools, others at hotels or via the black market<sup>79</sup>. In short, Internet is highly expensive, limited and slow<sup>80</sup>. In addition to this, the U.S. embargo has put additional obstacles in place for Cubans wanting to access internet<sup>81</sup>.

Despite this fact, in recent years Cuba has seen the emergence of a variety of independent bloggers and Twitter users. Seeking to express themselves freely and overcome both political and material obstacles, they have started to form blogger collectives<sup>82</sup> and new public spaces – both cyberspaces and increasingly public spaces, as the American professor and blogger Ted Henken has noted. In these emerging spaces, they attempt to move beyond the dismissive labels of *oficialista* (Cuban government propagandist) and *mercenario* (U.S. government lackey) and begun to engage in real civic debate, dialogue, and even collaboration<sup>83</sup>.

Interpreting the messages of bloggers – especially those in the “grey zone” – can be challenging. Given the limited freedom of expression, there are numerous rumors and speculations. Who is their audience? Their “masters”, if anyone? What is their “agenda”? How does self-censorship work? Examining the space for dialogue, an interesting blog is “Digital Controversy” (La Polemica Digital) by Elaine Diaz, a young lecturer at the University of Havana. She frequently criticizes both Cuban and U.S. politics. When she closed her blog in 2012, there was much speculation as to whether the reason was that she had gone too far, that the “oficialista” had become disillusioned or pressured to close

---

<sup>79</sup> Freedom House. “Freedom on the Net, 2012: Cuba.” Pp. 1–12, 2012.  
<http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Cuba%202012.pdf>

<sup>80</sup> For most foreigners internet access is easier, but often through slow modem, and with blocked sites, as in our case. An hour of internet at a hotel or internet café can cost 8 USD, almost two week salary for many Cubans. See also Burnett, Victoria. “Salons or Not, Cyberspace Is Still a Distant Place for Most Cubans,” *The New York Times*, July 9, 2013.

<sup>81</sup> For instance, due to the embargo, Cuban students were recently prevented from doing a digital course. See “Bloquean courser en Siria, Iran y Cuba por sanciones estadounidenses”. Global Voices, 12 February 2014.

<sup>82</sup> Among the independent blogger portals are La Joven Cuba, Havana Times, Voces Cubanas, Bloggers Cuba and Red Observatorio Critico, as well as sites translating blogs such as Translating Cuba. See also interviews with many of these bloggers by Ted Henken (2011): “Independent Cuban Blogger Projects in a Polarized Political Context.” ASCE 2011. Pro-regime blogs include La Pupila Insomne, and Yohandry’s Weblog. Cubaperiodistas.cu, the official site of the Union of Cuban Journalists (UPEC), links to many blogs.

<sup>83</sup> Ted A. Henken and Sjamme van der Voort (2013): From Nada to Nauta: Internet access and cyber activism in a changing Cuba. Paper presented to the 2013 Conference of the Association for the Study of Cuban Economy.



it<sup>84</sup>. The blog has however been reopened, also opening spaces by linking to a number of other blogs. This – and her tweets with both Cuban and U.S. officials – generates considerable debate<sup>85</sup>, although her outreach is limited given that many Cubans are not connected.

Cubans frequently use memory sticks and a number of creative methods to increase access to information. This led the Cuban blogger Yoani Sanchez to tell students at Columbia University:

“When democracy comes to Cuba, there will be a monument to the digital memory stick.”

When Yoani Sanchez visited Brazil earlier on the same trip (after Cuba loosened travel restrictions) she was met by protestors shouting that she is under the control of the Pentagon and funded by the CIA. She responded that although such accusations were lies, it didn’t bother her because they are an expression of free speech. “Loud conflicting voices are part of democracy,” she said. “These are things we hope for in Cuba.” As a result of news reports about the protests, her Twitter feed added 35,000 new followers.<sup>86</sup>

The Cuban government has responded with its own official bloggers to counter the independent bloggers. As a government representative explained in a closed meeting about this “cyber war”:

“It’s a dynamic and permanent combat, and we cannot lose the perspective that the internet is the battlefield, and that the enemy has their troops ready”<sup>87</sup>.

On the battlefield there is of course no space for seeking mutual understanding.

Risking political stability to achieve the benefits of the Internet has been described as “The Dictator’s Dilemma<sup>88</sup>”: On the one hand, the

---

<sup>84</sup> See for instance “Elaine Diaz, ‘Official’ Cuban Blogger, Closes Her Blog. Did She Step Over the Line?” by Yoani Sanchez in Huffington Post 23 August 2012.

<sup>85</sup> <http://espaciodeelaine.wordpress.com/> See also tweets between @elainediaz2003 and @conradtribble from the U.S. Interest Section.

<sup>86</sup> “Cuban blogger Yoani Sanchez makes first U.S. appearance in journalism school forum”. 15 March 2013. <http://news.columbia.edu/sanchez>

<sup>87</sup> In Chapter 16 of Marc Frank’s (2013) book “Cuban Revelations : Behind the scenes in Havana”, the author refers to a video from a meeting at the Interior Ministry that was leaked providing a “fascinating view into the thinking of US officials as they struggled to come to terms with the inevitable, in one of the last countries in the world to require government authorization to access the Internet”.

<sup>88</sup> Sheetal D. Agarwal, Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain (2011): “The Dictators’ Digital Dilemma: When Do States Disconnect Their Digital Networks?”

Internet and associated information and communication technologies offer enormous economic potential for developing countries, and the increasingly interconnected global economy thrives on openness of information. On the other hand, the information revolution poses new challenges for regimes that rely on centralized political control<sup>89</sup>.

In China, the government has attempted to overcome this by blocking thousands of websites. But even in the UK, David Cameron considered blocking facebook and twitter that was used to organize riots in London in 2011<sup>90</sup>. The same year, following right wing terrorist attacks in Norway, surveys indicated that many Norwegians expressed tolerance towards increased surveillance (ibid). And in the US, the extent of Internet surveillance was exposed during the Snowden affair.

This illustrates that the tension between civil rights and Internet control poses dilemmas in both democratic and authoritarian countries. Nevertheless, although Internet can also be used as an instrument of control, censorship and surveillance, it is most of all a vital tool to facilitate dialogue and mutual understanding.

#### 5.4.3 The “Official”, the “Tolerated” and the “Illegal”

Political participation and communication in Cuba has – as in other Communist countries – mostly been channeled through mass organizations close to the government, like the women’s organization FMC referred to above, the trade union CTC, and the neighborhood watch committees CDR, as well as organized political rally’s often involving hundreds of thousands of people generally marching for status quo.

Independent civil society is weak and fragmented in terms of channeling public discontent, and frequently met with suspicion, various barriers (bureaucratic, financial or other) and downright repression and harassment.

In addition, poor access to internet and other means of communication create further obstacles to coordination and dialogue. Under such conditions, in a polarized Cold War atmosphere, unity, open debate and cooperation within civil society remain difficult.

Today, one can say that three main types of civil society in Cuba exist: The “official”, the “tolerated” and the “illegal”. The first is the

---

Paper by the Brookings Institute, October 2011.

<http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2011/10/dictators-digital-network>

<sup>89</sup> Taylor C. Boas (2000): “The Dictator’s Dilemma: The Internet and U.S. Policy Toward Cuba”. *The Washington Quarterly* 23.3 (2000) 57-67.

<sup>90</sup> [www.computerworlduk.com](http://www.computerworlduk.com), quoted in Steen Johnsen, Enjolras and Wollebæk (2013): “Sosiale medier, samfunnspolitisk deltagelse og kontroll”. In *Internasjonal politikk*, årgang 71, nr.2, p.267-270.

one approved and to a large extent even organized by the government. While the third is frequently sanctioned and criminalized and often written off as U.S. agents or even “mercenaries” – especially those funded by the U.S. – some of the actors “constructively” criticizing the government are tolerated by the Cuban government.

### *Intellectuals and artists*

Today, one finds tolerated criticism and dialogue within different segments of society including the Catholic Church and among intellectuals and artists as we will see below, although many of these experience setbacks.

Above we have seen how Cuban and foreign academics have made joint proposals on how to advance dialogue. Also, in various fora in Cuba, intellectuals to some extent express criticism and both engage in and facilitate dialogue and political debates between Cubans tolerated by the government. “Dialogar Dialogar”, organized by the Asociación Hermanos Saíz is one arena. Another is Revista Temas, a journal that organizes the open “Ultimo Jueves” monthly debate in a popular Havana café, with open microphone and panels consisting predominantly of academics. Many of these debates – including interventions from the public – are spread by Temas through social media. Some might consider it a safety valve, but the debates still cover rather controversial areas including social media, reforms, the functioning of the party, political participation, and are at times fairly critical. However they are largely academic<sup>91</sup> and do not reach the wider population.

Despite being denied the right to express themselves freely, Cubans in many ways often come across as unusually free and expressive. Across the country, cultural schools have contributed strongly to that, in addition to the emphasis on education on all levels. The past year, I have myself frequently observed political criticism and free expressions at theatres and other prominent Cuban cultural institutions through popular music<sup>92</sup>, theatre plays<sup>93</sup>, stand-up comedians<sup>94</sup>, artists<sup>95</sup>, and film-makers, generating debate also among younger Cubans.

---

<sup>91</sup> For instance, during a debate I attended about social media in 2012, the topic was largely approached as a phenomenon, and Cuba’s restrictive internet policy was mostly referred to indirectly. Panelists did however refer to the Arab Spring and social media’s potential in political mobilization.

<sup>92</sup> In addition to singer-songwriters like Pablo Milanes and Silvio Rodríguez that for decades have voiced tolerated criticism, younger musicians also express criticism and social consciousness as is the case with popular current musicians like Buena Fe, Carlos Varela and X Alfonso, and also among rappers like “Los Aldeanos”, as well as reggaeton artists creating a “moral panic” described by Nora Gámez Torres (2011): “La Habana está en todas partes: younger musicians and the symbolic redefinition of the Cuban nation”, La Revista Temas, 2011.

For instance, the popular musician Roberto Carcasses from the band Interactivo was sanctioned by the Cuban government after he sang out for direct elections and freedom of information during a nationally televised concert in 2013 for the release of “the Five Heroes” imprisoned in the US. Prominent Cubans like the singer-songwriter Silvio Rodríguez however defended Carcasses’ freedom of expression, which led to the sanctions being lifted<sup>96</sup> – a victory over state censorship.

The talk of the town at the time of writing is the film “Conducta” illustrating marginalization and systemic narrow-mindedness. The film attracts crowds at the biggest cinemas several times a day. One scene in particular was met with spontaneous applause from the audience: An ageing, tolerant teacher challenging the system is asked whether the problem could be that she’s been teaching too long, whereas she responds: “So, do you think perhaps the leaders of this country have stayed to long too?”

#### 5.4.4 Confrontation or cooperation?

Independent civil society in Cuba is divided on both their views of the Cuban and U.S. governments respectively and on what strategies to choose accordingly<sup>97</sup>. This includes issues such as how and to what degree Cuban sovereignty<sup>98</sup> should be respected, whether they themselves and/or others should choose confrontation and pressure or dialogue and cooperation with the government, on whether or how

<sup>93</sup> For instance, in 2013 the theatre play “Goldfish” featured criticism of the government from a “psychiatric patient”. It was advertised and played several times, with strong emotional reactions among audiences.

<sup>94</sup> For instance, on national TV in prime-time and from Cuba’s biggest stages, the popular stand-up comedian under the name Panfilo regularly makes fun of institutional arrangements like the rationing card and food supply.

<sup>95</sup> Art galleries in Havana, Camaguey and elsewhere display artworks with rather explicit political criticism.

<sup>96</sup> See Silvio Rodríguez’ blog for details. After the televised concert, Carcasses has played extensively.

<sup>97</sup> This was well illustrated in a blog 26 May 2013 by Professor Arturo López-Levy with the title “El editorial de Espacio Laical y sus descontentos”, as well as the debate this generated (see comments below the article).  
<http://observatoriocriticodesdecuba.wordpress.com/2013/05/26/el-editorial-de-espacio-laical-y-sus-descontentos/>

<sup>98</sup> This debate has elements of the old debate within political science between Order and Justice. But as John Gaddis stress: In order for the US to be successful in the promotion of its order and justice agenda, the author concludes that US hegemony needs to be coupled with legitimacy, consent, and a modesty of aims. See Rosemary Foot, John Gaddis, and Andrew Hurrell (2003): “Order and Justice in International Relations: What Is at Stake?”. Oxford University Press.  
(See also the classic Hedley Bull (1971): “Order vs. Justice in International Society”. Paper delivered to the Annual Conference of the P.S.A. at Birmingham, March 1971.)

other countries should support Cuba, and on whether it is legitimate for government critics to receive financial and political support from the U.S.

Although opinions vary, government critics that do not want dialogue with their government usually perceive it as illegitimate. Convinced that regime change is necessary, many of these tend to rarely credit to their government for its changes (and similarly rarely criticize the U.S., except for some that criticize the embargo). They tend to view the “cosmetic” reforms with suspicion, saying these are motivated by a wish to please some critics in order to strengthen control. Therefore, dialogue and normalization is futile and only serve to prolong the misery.

For instance, the Washington Post quotes a recent meeting with Jorge Luis García Pérez, known as Antúnez, who spent 17 years in Cuba’s prisons and spoke freely of the need for radical change in Cuba. Antúnez is an Afro-Cuban dissident and voice for democracy and change. He said:

“Castro’s totalitarianism cannot be reformed. (...) With totalitarians, you do not negotiate. Rapprochement only strengthens the dictatorship. We want to be totally free – we don’t want to accept it piecemeal. We want a democracy that we deserve. (...) I won’t be silent. I won’t leave.”<sup>99</sup>

Similarly, Berta Soler, leader of “Ladies in White”, opposes political dialogue between Cuba and the EU. She says this will not benefit the Cuban people because “all the resources the Government receives will be used by them to stay in power and perfect their repressive machinery<sup>100</sup>”

While such critics often are harassed by the government and turn to the U.S. for support, such support can also worsen the human rights situation and deepen distrust among Cubans. As a Cuban woman and active member of a local Havana Committee for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR) neighborhood watch told me:

“In principle, I am sympathetic to some of the peaceful critics’ call for freedom, like Ladies in White. But since they are paid by the U.S., I don’t trust them. Many see them as traitors.”

In other words, by funding civil society groups, the U.S. might weaken their support base, contrary to their goals, while on the other hand

---

<sup>99</sup> “OPINION: Cuba’s changes are no more than window-dressing.” Washington Post Editorial Board, 16 February 2014.

<sup>100</sup> Translated from Spanish. “

Cuba's intolerance towards dissent has fuelled resistance, contrary to their goals.

U.S. policy is in itself a divisive issue both between and within organizations. For example, while some of the "Ladies in White" members support the embargo, others, including Miriam Leiva, one of its founding members, wrote recently that changing U.S. policy would help the nascent Cuban private sector and create a better climate for Cuba's civil society<sup>101</sup>. The famous blogger and government critic Yoani Sanchez is another opponent of the embargo, as she also made clear during a tour in the U.S. in 2013. One can easily argue that it is problematic for the U.S. to have a policy in place with limited support even among the very people it sets out to assist.

What is more, dissidents are often seen as merely criticizing without offering solutions. As Professor Arturo Lopez-Levy at the University of Denver said:

"Touring dissidents ... have made some noise about their well-known opposition to the government. But they have not announced viable alternatives to the country's main problems."<sup>102</sup>

Referring to the need for civil society to be prepared to change and encouraging debates on the road ahead, the young critical blogger Yusnaby Perez asked:

"The government is changing, little by little...are you ?"<sup>103</sup>.

In truly democratic societies, peaceful but sometimes loud civil society groups have legitimate and necessary functions as government watchdogs, providing critical correctives and constructive advice, contributing to transparency and broad participation. Depending on the space for civil society and the performance of the state on a particular subject, civil society employ different means to encourage governments on policy issues, switching between cooperating with and confronting governments, depending on what best serves to advance their cause.

Below we will see how the issue of confrontation versus cooperation plays out inside Cuba related to the role of the Catholic Church as dialogue partner.

---

<sup>101</sup> "Prospects of Relationship between Cuba and the United States". Atlantic Council, 10 February 2014.

<sup>102</sup> "Dissidents free to travel but influence in Cuba wanes". AFP, 1 January 2014.

<sup>103</sup> La critica, la reflexion y el cambio en Cuba". yusnaby.com 16 October 2013.

#### 5.4.5 Dialogue with the Church

In socialist Cuba, with its liberal view of the women's rights, sex and birth control, the position of the Roman Catholic Church has been relatively weak. In 1991, the communist party dropped its ban on religious believers to become party members and thereafter replaced the definition in the Constitution of the State from "atheist" to "secular". There are various other religious groups, and many Cubans prefer the syncretism of the Afro-Cuban religion known as Santería.

However, the Catholic Church has in later years occupied a unique political space in Cuba, and developed a dialogue with the Cuban government on human rights, reconciliation and reform. In the absence of a legal opposition, the Catholic Church has emerged over the past few years as the sole well-established organization with the standing to negotiate politically with the Havana government on social and economic issues<sup>104</sup>.

The influence of the Church on politics has been explained partly with the Catholic Church being an international organization that can strengthen lobbying efforts abroad<sup>105</sup>.

Pope John Paul II's visit to Cuba in 1998 became a turning point. The Pope said:

"Let Cuba open itself to the world, and the world open itself to Cuba."

But it was events related to the so-called "Black Spring" that most of all brought about this change. In April 2003, as the US went to war against Iraq, Cuba saw one of its most serious crackdowns on dissidents with the imprisonment of 75 government critics. Many of these had been supporters of the so-called Varela project, where 11.000 signatures were collected in support of a referendum on one-party rule, later dismissed by Fidel Castro who mobilized signatures from 8 million Cubans declaring the Cuban socialist revolution irrevocable<sup>106</sup>.

Soon after the imprisonment of the 75 dissidents in 2003, some of their female relatives, all dressed in white, attended a Sunday mass at the Havana Church of Santa Rita, the patron of desperate causes. After the mass, they marched in silence several blocks, with pink gladiolas in

---

<sup>104</sup> "Cuba's Catholic Church calls for accelerated reforms". Agence France-Presse, 26 November 2013.

<sup>105</sup> Samuel Farber (2011): "Cuba Since the Revolution of 1959: A Critical Assessment". Haymarket Books, p.237.

<sup>106</sup> According to the Cuban Constitution, citizens can suggest changes to the law if it is supported by more than 10.000 Cubans. The leader of the Varela Project, Oswaldo Paya, died in a car accident in 2012. Critics claim it was caused by Cuban government agents.

their hands. The women became known as the “Ladies in White”. Following the death of hunger striker Orlando Zapata Tamayo in March 2010 and Guillermo Fariñas’ hunger strike demanding release of sick prisoners, the Ladies in White organized a week of daily marches and sit-ins. The rough handling of the Ladies, including pushing and shoving and “demonstrations of repudiation” by government supporters further helped them gain sympathy and attracted attention both inside and outside Cuba.<sup>107</sup>

The Catholic Church Cardinal Jaime Ortega publicly criticized these acts of repudiation with its “verbal and even physical intolerance”, while also criticizing the US. The Cardinal also sent a letter to Raul Castro lamenting the incident. A series of meetings followed between the Church and the government. This dialogue ended with the Cardinal supporting Castro’s reforms, and the Government releasing 115 political prisoners, including all 75 that were imprisoned after the crackdown in April 2003<sup>108</sup>. Most of the prisoners were however under pressure to accept exile in Spain (ibid).

The Church has kept advocating for wider national dialogue which includes diverse visions of Cuban society.

In 2012, Pope Benedict XVI visited Cuba. Previous to his visit, a Christmas pardon favored other 2.991 prisoners<sup>109</sup>. Pope Benedict ended his Cuba visit in Havana's Revolution Plaza with a reference to what he described as a need for “authentic freedom”:

“Changes between Cuba and the world can come only if each one is prepared to ask for the truth and if they decide to take the path of love, sowing reconciliation and brotherhood.”<sup>110</sup>.

Pope Benedict said Cuba could build “a society of broad vision, renewed and reconciled,” but it was more difficult “when restrictive economic measures, imposed from outside the country, unfairly burden its people.”<sup>111</sup>

President Castro responded by saying,

---

<sup>107</sup> See Chapter 17 in Marc Frank (2013): Cuban Revelations: Behind the Scenes in Havana.

<sup>108</sup> The Ladies have kept marching for political freedom and against harassment. While I have often witnessed that they have done so without much interference in Havana, in other parts of the country they have been frequently harassed.

<sup>109</sup> “Catholics in favor of dialogue with the government”. IPS, 27 May 2012.

<sup>110</sup> “Pope calls for greater freedoms in Cuba as he ends two-country tour.” CNN, 29 March 2012.

<sup>111</sup> “Pope meets Cuba's Fidel Castro, slams U.S. embargo.” Reuters, 28 March 2012.



“Your visit has taken place in an atmosphere of mutual understanding (...) Your holiness, we have found many and deep agreements, although it's natural that we don't think the same on all issues.”<sup>112</sup>

The new openness has helped encourage the Church to go further, as we will also see in the last subchapter. In a letter to parishioners in 2013, Cuba's Catholic Church leadership called on the Cuban Government to “update” the political system to allow more freedom similar to liberalization undertaken in the economy. The statement by the Cuban Bishops Conference, presented to the press and read in churches, praised “incipient” reforms such as allowing small private businesses, more freedom to travel and buy personal property and the release of political prisoners, while at the same time urging a broader economic and political opening.

“We believe an updating of national legislation of a political nature is indispensable, as has been occurring in the economic realm,” the bishops said in their letter. Without explicitly demanding a multi-party system and the restoration of a formal market economy, the statement added,

“Cuba is called upon to be a plural society ... There must be a right to diversity in terms of thought, creativity and the search for truth.”<sup>113</sup>

According to Lenier Gonzales, Deputy Editor of the Catholic journal *Espacio Laical*, Cuba has “an extremely diverse and active society (official, independent and opposition), who are consistently creating movements to defend religious issues, environmental, racial, immigration, sexual orientation, gender, political, and others.”<sup>114</sup> For Gonzales, the goal is to achieve political and economic reforms in Cuba “through an orderly and gradual transformation of the state of affairs on the island, without trauma or bloodshed, favoring a path of dialogue, consensus and political agreement” (ibid).

In the future, civil society's stance on violence as a means to achieve its goals may further divide or unite Cuban civil society. Calling for respect for diversity while emphasizing cooperation and dialogue rather than confrontation, Gonzales says:

“Cuba's political successors will be challenged to unleash depolarizing dynamics that allow negotiations and synergies with Cuban groups of opposing ideologies inside and outside the

---

<sup>112</sup> “Pope meets Cuba's Castro, slams embargo”. Reuters, 28 March 2012.

<sup>113</sup> “Cuban bishops call for political reform”. Reuters, 16 September 2013.

<sup>114</sup> Lenier Gonzales (2013): *From Collision to Covenant: Challenges Faced by Cuba's Future Leaders*. Paper submitted to the 2013 Conference of the Association for the Study of Cuban Economy, Miami, USA.

island, but committed to the historical goals of the Cuban nation. From this angle, it would be feasible to create space for a constructive opposition, committed to the structural changes Cuba needs (...)

Gonzales stress that in order to banish the instability and uncertainty, and to avoid compromising the historical goals of the Cuban nation, the future of Cuba must be born as a result of a national covenant and not the collision between opposing forces. Cuba will rather have a peaceful transition than an Arab Spring<sup>115</sup>, he believes.

While some praise the Church for serving as an interlocutor on sensitive issues, others criticize it for legitimizing the Castro regime. Cardinal Ortega has been called a government “lackey” by U.S.-sponsored TV Marti<sup>116</sup> and a “sellout” by Guillermo Farinas, a hunger striker and winner of Europe's 2010 Sakharov prize.

Among those defending Ortega was Orlando Marquez in the Catholic magazine *Palabra Nueva*:

“Those who repudiate dialogue will never cease to open fire because that is their mission.” (...)“They want to blow up any effort at understanding.”(ibid)

Some fear the Church is becoming the Government's only interlocutor. Feminist blogger Yasmín S. Portales said that this was generating “tensions within civil society” by undermining the legitimacy of other actors. She adds,

”One of the results of this tendency could be an increase in obstacles for the struggle against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, and a threat, in the medium or long term, to the Cuban state's commitment to defend the sexual and reproductive rights of all its citizens.”<sup>117</sup>

---

<sup>115</sup> “En Cuba no habrá una primavera árabe sino una transición a la cubana” . ABC.es, 5 February 2014. See also the ten reasons Marc Frank presented as to why Cuba will hardly have an Arab Spring, including the limited internet and satellite TV penetration, completely different demographics, the level of health and education, much less apparent police brutality, no developed business class, and finally that “you are allowed to have sex and party”; and “the leaders are not stealing the oil wealth and fooling around at European casinos.” Marc Frank (2011): “Notes on the current situation in Cuba,” *Cuba in Transition—Volume 21*, [www.ascecuba.org](http://www.ascecuba.org)

<sup>116</sup> “Cuba's Cardinal Jaime Ortega under fire for comments”. Associated Press, 13 June 2012.

<sup>117</sup> “The Impact of the Pope's Visit to Cuba”. IPS, 3 April 2012. It is worth noting that both Catholics and LGBT rights groups both have considerable political space in

Catholic lawyer Roberto Veiga González, Editor-in-Chief of Espacio Laical, stress that both the Church and the government must be inclusive:

“[T]he Church should provide spaces for everyone to express themselves, provided that the intention is to seek good through good, to discuss all matters, human and divine, even those that are hostile to Church doctrine”<sup>118</sup>.

Being a dialogue partner is a tough balancing act. The Church calls for an inclusive debate reflecting the Cuban diversity. But the more inclusive and inviting the Church itself becomes towards dissidents<sup>119</sup> and outspoken towards the government, the more they might risk being labelled illegal themselves by the Cuban government. If they on the other hand are neither inclusive nor speak out against government wrongdoings, the Church abandons its own principles and lose legitimacy as well as added value as a true dialogue partner.

#### 5.4.6 Tolerated Proposal: “A Dreamed of, Possible and Future Cuba”

In March 2013, a rather remarkable document containing a list of 23 proposals “for our immediate future” was widely circulated, spurring hope and debate inside and outside Cuba.

The document was called *A dreamed of, possible and future Cuba (Cuba soñada – Cuba posible – Cuba futura: propuestas para nuestro porvenir inmediato)*. The authors were proposing (“never imposing”) that it be “studied and debated publicly, about how a process of economic renovation might develop alongside a renewal of the Cuban social order.”

The proposals in *Cuba soñada – Cuba posible – Cuba futura* included: “Direct, free, secret, periodic and competitive” elections; enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights; separation of legislative, executive, judicial and electoral powers; access to universal, free and diverse information without censorship nor monopoly as well as massive and participatory access to internet; systems for transparency and accountability of public affairs; elimination of the infamous term “pre-criminal social dangerousness”

---

Cuba. This might indicate that discussions regarding sexual orientation may become defining in the years to come.

<sup>118</sup> Roberto Veiga (2013): Cuba Today: Walking New Roads?” In *Articles from the Island*, published by Cuba Study Group, July 2013, Issue No. 17.

<sup>119</sup> Church representatives like priest Jose Conrado Rodriguez in Eastern Cuba and editor of the Catholic magazine Vitral Dagoberto Valdez in Western Cuba have been far more critical towards the regime than Ortega.

(*peligrosidad predelectiva*)<sup>120</sup> in Cuba's Criminal Code, frequently used as legal basis for arbitrary detentions and political trials.

Such proposals for democracy and human rights are not new. What *is* new however is that this comes from persons and institutions working *within* the system.

It came from *Laboratorio Casa Cuba*, a group of Cuban professors and researchers with links to the Havana Archdiocese but representing of diverse ideologies (Catholics, critical Marxists, republican-socialists and anarchists), whose critical contribution will “attempt to provide tools that can help to continue the dialogue and consensus building for a Cuba with dignity, solidarity and citizen participation,”<sup>121</sup> underlining Cuba's sovereignty and their commitment to non-violence.

This has contributed to the considerable interest. It was widely circulated, without interference. The document is published in the Catholic journal *Espacio Laical* mentioned above, a journal that is distributed through Catholic churches in Cuba, and is available on its website<sup>122</sup>. It was also published and commented by prominent intellectuals on the website of the cultural magazine *Temas* previously mentioned, with support from the Cuban Ministry of Culture<sup>123</sup>. It has been frequently and discussed among diplomats and academics inside and outside Cuba, mentioned by international media and also frequently published and discussed in independent and social media through youtube<sup>124</sup> and numerous tweets, websites and blogs<sup>125</sup>.

---

<sup>120</sup> During the Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council in 2013, Cuban and international human rights organizations expressed concern about this term, “pre-criminal social dangerousness”, which refer to “the dangerous situation associated with an individual's particular proclivity to commit crimes, as demonstrated by conduct that is manifestly contrary to the norms of socialist morality”.

<sup>121</sup> An English (unofficial) version was published in Havana Times 18 March 2013 <http://www.havanatimes.org/?p=89772>

<sup>122</sup> *Espacio Laical* no. 3, 2013 <http://www.espaciolaical.org>

<sup>123</sup> Juan Valdes Paz (2013): Notas sobre el documento “Cuba soñada-Cuba posible-Cuba futura” Revista *Temas*, 12 April 2013 [http://www.temas.cult.cu/catalejo/economia/Valdes\\_Paz.pdf](http://www.temas.cult.cu/catalejo/economia/Valdes_Paz.pdf)

<sup>124</sup> See [www.youtube.com/user/ascecuba](http://www.youtube.com/user/ascecuba)

<sup>125</sup> Too numerous to list here, this includes (but is not limited to) [www.diariodecuba.com](http://www.diariodecuba.com) [www.havanatimes.org](http://www.havanatimes.org) [www.kaosenlared.net](http://www.kaosenlared.net) [estepais.com](http://estepais.com) [vaticaninsider.lastampa.it](http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it) [cienciapolitica.cl](http://cienciapolitica.cl) [cubanuestra.wordpress.com](http://cubanuestra.wordpress.com) [elmicrowave.wordpress.com](http://elmicrowave.wordpress.com) [www.rebellion.org/jennroig.wordpress.com](http://www.rebellion.org/jennroig.wordpress.com) [www.sinpermiso.bridgesuniversal.com](http://www.sinpermiso.bridgesuniversal.com) [nuevodebatecuba.wordpress.com](http://nuevodebatecuba.wordpress.com) [www.cronicapopular.es](http://www.cronicapopular.es) [www.librosdelcrepusculo.net](http://www.librosdelcrepusculo.net) [www.nodo50.org](http://www.nodo50.org) [lalineadefuego.info](http://lalineadefuego.info) [www.partealta.ec](http://www.partealta.ec) [www.partealta.ec/america/cuba](http://www.partealta.ec/america/cuba) [www.bitacora.com.uy](http://www.bitacora.com.uy) [translatingcuba.com](http://translatingcuba.com) [llatinocuba.blogspot.com](http://llatinocuba.blogspot.com) [www.unionporcubalibre.net](http://www.unionporcubalibre.net) [www.uypress.net](http://www.uypress.net) [www.alasbarricadas.org](http://www.alasbarricadas.org)

Outside Cuba, it was presented at one of the leading conferences for Cuba research, the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy<sup>126</sup>.

It is too early to determine its impact, but it is interesting noting that the proposals seem to have been considered a constructive contribution to dialogue by government supporters and critics alike.

The proposal came at a time of economic crisis and with the death of Cuba's closest ally Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, causing many to reflect on how to avoid deepening the crisis and instead build a better Cuba, leaving no-one behind. The independent Havana Times that were among those publishing the document, stressed the urgency of finding solutions:

“The consideration of measures that can inject new optimism and dynamism to the process of change in the country become ever more urgent. President Raul Castro has voiced the need to modify the Cuban Constitution but to date there has been no indication of how to do that. For that reason, this set of proposals strives to fill the void.”<sup>127</sup>

---

*poresto.net www.herramienta.com.ar www.vientosur.info  
cubanuestra1.wordpress.com www.chiringadecuba.com*

<sup>126</sup> Due to the Cuban government's easing of travel restrictions in 2013, a record number of Cuban researchers and practitioners attended the ASCE Conference in the US in 2013 facilitating a rare, open debate on Cuba.  
*www.ascecuba.org/.../pdfs/conferenceprogram.pdf*

<sup>127</sup> <http://www.havanatimes.org/?p=89772>

## 6. Conclusion

---

*“Abre la muralla si me aceptas como soy  
con mi duda razonable, con mi trozo de ilusión.”*

– Buena Fe, “Quién es”

---

During a concert with one of Cuba’s most popular bands “Buena Fe” at Cuba’s biggest stage recently, the crowds kept on cheering after the musicians in their gentle, lyrical way expressed what was perceived as a call for more tolerance, diversity and openness, and for accepting that people have doubts or have lost illusions. From the public’s reaction it seemed obvious that they had struck a nerve, reflecting a deep longing.

“The wall”, here referred to by the Cuban singers both above and in the introduction, is a much-used symbol of separation both in Cuba and elsewhere. “The wall serves not only to defend oneself... it allows one to control what happens within it” wrote the renowned author and journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski in his book ‘Travels with Herodotus’. In his works, Kapuscinski has reflected on the human and material costs of constructing walls, both physical and discursive. This has inspired people in Cuba and elsewhere to reflect on the resources spent on building trenches and obstacles that separate us from the other, dividing nations and families.

Worldwide, governments launch wars for peace, repress freedom in the name of freedom, and violate human rights to strengthen human rights, with various intentions and ideological justifications. As we have seen in this article, Cuba and the U.S. are no different in this respect. Will history absolve them?

Dialogue can be used with the motivation of silencing critical voices, or it can be used to listen to these with the purpose of finding solutions leading to reconciliation and a better future for all.

A cynic could dismiss Cuba dialogue as window dressing, where critics are given merely a symbolic say. Conversely, an optimist could argue that dialogue can bring human rights and reconciliation.

Both may be right.

Sometimes opening doors rather than building walls – to rephrase the Cuban singer Carlos Varela quoted in the introduction – can be naïve, even dangerous. Without walls, one is more vulnerable to attack

and domination. On the other hand, locking yourself (and/or others) in and others out can also make you vulnerable. As argued, examining power relations is therefore crucial to understanding both the benefits and limits of dialogue.

Without political will, dialogue and cooperation can become a charade, a calculated diversion to appease critics of complacency rather than to ensure change.

Principled dialogue with key parties both within Cuba and between Cuba and the US is however necessary for shared security, and to foster necessary cooperation and advance human rights and wellbeing for all Cubans. As demonstrated, there are a great number of important issues of common concern that could be solved by sitting down and talking in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Both neighbors need to deal with the consequences of division, exclusion, repression, conflict and economic crisis, as well as transnational impacts of the trafficking of people, drugs and weapons, of terrorism, natural disasters, epidemics, oil spills and lack of communication, to mention some.

Issues like human rights and security are painful for the adversaries. Despite this fact – or perhaps even precisely *because* of this fact – a true dialogue can lead to a deeper understanding necessary for reconciliation.

Without a dialogue - recognizing the pain of the other and one's own wrongdoings – no sustainable peaceful solution or reconciliation can be found. As a result, the Cuban transition may become unnecessary hard.

Its success will ultimately depend on the actors themselves.

The Cuba conflict is a Cold War relic. As has been argued, U.S. policy has sustained the very conditions that it set out to remedy, and has hence been counterproductive. Similarly, through the Cuban government's strict control, for the sake of freedom, Cuba has turned to repression.

As a result of such policy choices, Cubans have suffered and families have been divided.

With the current thaw, both the U.S. and Cuba have a window of opportunity. Presidents Raul Castro and Barack Obama can choose to act on their shared slogan "Si, se puede!" from 2008 and "Yes we can!" from 2009, and turn the words into action this year, to the benefit of people on both sides of the Florida Strait.

## ANNEX I:

### **A Dreamed of, Possible and Future Cuba**

The sovereignty of the country is only the unrestricted exercise of all the rights of human dignity throughout the territory of our country for all Cubans.

Cuba is experiencing a new era. This imposes on us the urgency of ensuring the sovereignty of our country. Concerned about the present and the future, we wish to make proposals to be studied and debated publicly, about how a process of economic renovation might develop alongside a renewal of the Cuban social order.

We in the *Laboratorio Casa Cuba\**, of dissimilar ideological provenance, start from a consensus on five pillars that we deem crucial and indispensable for the present and future of Cuba: Advocate the realization of human dignity, which is specified by non-violent exercise of freedom, equality and brotherhood, for the socialization of spiritual and material wealth to be able to create, for the achievement of full democracy, for the pursuit of greater stability in this process of change and solved by the rejection of foreign powers meddling in the affairs of Cuba.

In proposing (never imposing) a minimal definition of Republic and some possible tools to achieve it, we don't want to promote private agendas, but Cubans', with different opinions and beliefs, among all of us to realize, broaden and deepen these criteria, we aspire to be the basis of our coexistence in the near future.

#### **Republic:**

A public order with a universe of attitudes, commitments and rules guaranteed to every human being to enjoy all the capabilities needed to perform their share of sovereignty. The exercise of citizen sovereignty, which requires a democratic order must be based on human virtues, as the principal means mutual support, and the goal of building justice.

#### **Instruments to strengthen the Republic of Cuba today and tomorrow:**

- I. Ensure the enjoyment of civil, family, political, cultural, social, labor and economic rights.
- II. Implement effective mechanisms through which every citizen can equally enjoy these rights, and to empower the disadvantaged.



- III. To ensure the right to universal information that is free and diverse, broad and deep, interactive and critical, without censorship or monopolization. This is especially essential to ensure transparency in governance and participatory mass access to the Internet.
- IV. Ensure the social and political multiplicity of the nation the right to choose different ways to self-organize in order to promote their goals, influence opinion and act in society and participate in governance.
- V. Allow believers and practitioners of different religions, spiritualities and worldviews that exist in Cuba to publicly promote their identities, feel respected, and self-organize into communities with legal status.
- VI. Establish diverse ways to enable citizens to actively monitor compliance with the Constitution, and the performance of all official institutions.
- VII. To seek the greatest possible autonomy for local institutions, understood as community spaces, resources and decision-making capabilities on these, to exercise the role of solidarity and citizen sovereignty.
- VIII. When a problem can be solved at the grassroots level, locally, community wise or in the workplace, the higher courts should not intervene in the solution; communities, associations, companies and groups of workers must be able to freely cooperate with each other to solve their problems together.
- IX. Repeal all rules that establish discrimination between citizens according to their places of origin or residence, including those that favor foreigners' over Cubans. Likewise, repeal laws providing the possibility of criminal sanctions for those who didn't commit criminal acts (charged with pre-criminal dangerousness: the "dangerousness" and "pre-criminal security measures").
- X. Establish mechanisms of mutual control between the various public functions. Separate legislative, executive, judicial and electoral functions and outline the cooperation that should exist between them.
- XI. Each taxpayer should be involved in the development and approval of the use of funds coming into the treasury, and accountability for use in well-defined social purposes.

- XII. Choose any public office representative, through direct elections, free, secret and periodic and competitive among candidates nominated directly by citizens.
- XIII. Likewise, the above rules should apply to the election of the highest executive positions of the Republic and of each locality.
- XIV. Limit to two periods remaining in the popularly elected executive positions, and set age limits for such functions as well as determine the incompatibility of positions to be held by the same person.
- XV. Enforce the periodic interactive public accountability of all public officials.
- XVI. Ensure the right of the people to revoke all mandates.
- XVII. Make full use of the referendum and the plebiscite, in all areas and dimensions.
- XVIII. Effectively ensure the right to work and employment guarantees, as well as the needed economic freedoms, and make the management of the economy subject to enforceable social and environmental commitments.
- XIX. Keep as law, universal and free access to health care, through various forms of social organization as well as fair remuneration according to professional performance.
- XX. Ensuring universal and personalized access to a democratic, humanistic and diverse education, with fair pay for educators and the active involvement of teachers, students, families and communities in the management of the school facilities and the definition of curricula as well as a free and responsible cultural development.
- XXI. Academic and university autonomy, with academic freedom and of research, and an active participation of all stakeholders.
- XXII. Ensure effective ways to ensure a balanced participation of the Cuban diaspora in the country's life.
- XXIII. All social activity must comply with the principles of legality, justice and constitutional supremacy. Constitutional provisions should be developed and adopted with the participation of the general population.

With this we add our modest effort to the unforgettable efforts of those who have fought and worked for the triumph of love in our land, a

choir of plural and diverse voices, which we join in a common redemptive password.

Comments, analysis and proposals can be sent to the following email address: [labcasacuba@gmail.com](mailto:labcasacuba@gmail.com)—

*(\*) The Laboratory Casa Cuba is a newly created team for social and legal research, recently created by Espacio Laical, a publication of the Roman Catholic archbishopric of Havana. It includes professors and researchers of diverse ideologies (Catholics, critical Marxists, republican-socialists and anarchists), whose critical contribution will attempt to provide tools that can help to continue the dialogue and consensus building for a Cuba with dignity, solidarity and citizen participation.*

**March, 2013**











## Norwegian Institute of International Affairs

Established in 1959, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs [NUPI] is a leading independent research institute on international politics and areas of relevance to Norwegian foreign policy. Formally under the Ministry of Education and Research, NUPI nevertheless operates as an independent, non-political instance in all its professional activities. Research undertaken at NUPI ranges from short-term applied research to more long-term basic research.

### About the authors

**Vegard Bye**, political scientist, research fellow at NUPI 2012-2013, coordinator of NUPI's project on economic reform and political-institutional transformations in Cuba. Mr. Bye has had a working relationship with Cuba since he was working and living there 1977-79 as a UN employee. Democratic transition and consolidation in Latin America has been one of his main academic interests since long. In addition to academic work, Mr. Bye is a partner in the consulting company Scanteam, specializing on governance and rights issues in post-conflict and fragile states worldwide.

**Armando Chaguaceda** is a Cuban political scientist and historian. He is Research Professor at the

### NUPI

Norwegian Institute of International Affairs  
C.J. Hambros plass 2D  
PO Box 8159 Dep. NO-0033 Oslo, Norway  
[www.nupi.no](http://www.nupi.no) | [info@nupi.no](mailto:info@nupi.no)

Colegio de Veracruz, Mexico. He is a member of Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (Latin American Council for the Social Sciences, CLACSO). Specializing in the study of socio-political processes in Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela.

**Borghild Tønnessen-Krokan** is associated with NUPI and lives in Havana (2012-2015). Consultancies for UNDP and Norwegian Forum for Environment and Development. MA thesis in Political Science on U.S.-Cuban human rights relations. Also MA in Media and Communications from LSE. Freelance Journalist in Cuba in 1996. Wrote articles from Cuba as Information Director at Center for International Climate and Environmental Research Oslo in 2000. Steering Board Member of the global Control Arms.