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# **Cuba in the World, the World in Cuba**

Essays on Cuban History, Politics and Culture

*edited by*

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*with a preface by*

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A nuestro querido Pablo Arco Pino  
por la alegría, la ternura y las reflexiones  
que siempre compartió





R. Pruessen  
R. Halpern  
M. Guderzo

## Preface

This volume provides an introduction to an innovative collaborative project launched in 2007 by scholars at the University of Florence and the University of Toronto. There are immediate rewards here – in the 21 chapters that explore wide-ranging features of Cuban history, politics, and culture. There are also signposts that point to future insights and illuminations that will be made possible by the utilization of a symmetrical *Cuba in the World/The World in Cuba* approach to the study of the island's relationship to global dynamics in the modern era. On one hand, ongoing collaboration of this nature is certain to yield studies that continue to enrich understandings of specific Cuban experiences. On the other hand, there will also be increasing attention to what those Cuban experiences can tell us about developments elsewhere in Latin America and the Caribbean, in North America, and beyond – in short, about *world* history.

At the heart of the Florence-Toronto collaboration – in this volume and in the ongoing joint initiative – is the conviction that the traditional dividing lines between “domestic” and “international” affairs can be artificial and misleading. In a “globalization” era, of course, we have become familiar with the way the movements of people, goods, and ideas tie separate communities together (for both good and ill). With a respectful bow toward previous theorizations regarding “transnationalism”, “transculturation”, and “diasporas”, the *Cuba in the World/The World in Cuba* project seeks to elaborate yet further on the intertwining of “internal” and “external” forces within national and international arenas – by using a single country's distinctive history as the fulcrum for a steadily unfolding round of back and forth analytical explorations.

It should be emphasized that such explorations will take deeper as well as more recent histories into account. Although a concept like “globalization” often tends to be associated with the later twentieth century, the existence of something that might be identified as “transnational space” – and the

manifold transnational dynamics that are evident within that space – is as old as the worlds that would have been known to people in the ancient empires of Egypt, China, and Rome. Cuba’s history is deep as well, of course, and in many ways commences in that earlier era of globalization that saw Spain and other Old World empires colonize in the Caribbean Basin and South America at the end of the fifteenth century. This volume demonstrates the collaborators’ intention to consider the *longue durée* of the zigzag that characterizes the world’s influence on Cuba and Cuba’s influence on the world.

The use of phrases like “back and forth” and “zigzag” is quite purposeful as far as the *Cuba in the World/The World in Cuba* project is concerned. A significant component of our approach to transnational dynamics, that is, is the placing of emphasis and the focus of scholarly enquiry upon *process* – and on *ongoing* process, in particular. The impact of notionally “external” factors on Cuba – e.g., European appetites for sugar, European and African engagement in slavery, Cold War clashes – was never a “one time” phenomenon. US-Soviet clashes affected Cuba for decades while the relevance of sugar and slavery to Cuban history, for instance, requires a centuries-long timeline. Moreover, inherent in the existence of expansive chronologies is the notion of *evolving* patterns and dynamics. The Cold War’s impact on Cuba was not the same in the early 1960s, the mid 1970s, and the 1990s: these periods were related, but not at all in the same way or involving the same dynamics. Sugar and slavery even more obviously suggest how the imprint of “outside” influences can change over time: simply consider the very different, but no less important role of “race” in post-emancipation Cuba.

*Cuba in the World/The World in Cuba* also places particular emphasis on the way transnational, globalized processes require focused attention on *two-way* flows and reciprocal influences. An important assumption here, to amplify a previous point, is that Cuba was not simply a body on an operating table, inert and surrounded by “outside” surgeons of one kind or another. Cuba’s responses to “external” influences had considerable relevance to the way the outside world evolved over time as well: consider, for example, the impact of various forms of Cuban resistance on Spain’s demise as a great imperial power, on the Cold War in Africa, on US domestic politics. What is involved here – and this is one of the key concepts at the heart of *Cuba in the World/The World in Cuba* thinking – is something that might be envisioned as a *cybernetic* process. Although the term is often now used in discussions of human/computer dynamics, its earlier and more broadly relevant meaning highlights the perpetual give-and-take interaction between an actor and a surrounding environment – with the assumption very much being that each round in the interaction affects both “sides” of the engagement in important ways.

One example should make this clear – with more to become evident in the chapters that follow: A *Cuba in the World/The World in Cuba* approach encourages appreciation for the complex, two-way process by which both this single country *and* the global arena surrounding it moved through

a long historical cycle in which colonialism and traditional imperialism gave way to varying hybrids of independence and neo-colonialism. The Cuban side of the story is certainly somewhat more familiar – in terms of the obvious impact of Spanish or US behaviors. Even here, however, more focused sensitivity concerning an abstract notion of “world” influences on Cuba could increase attentiveness to the way US pressures in the years since the 1959 Revolution have been augmented by the evolving roles of the Soviet Union, Canada, Mexico, Venezuela, and China.

While subject to the influence of many, however, Cuba never has completely lacked power. Time and again – albeit not constantly – it has demonstrated the capacity to absorb and hybridize outsiders and outside forces; the strength to resist and repel; and the ability to project cultural, ideological, social, and even military force of its own into the global arena. Examples of all of these facets of Cuba’s international experiences will be found in the chapters that follow.

Not surprisingly, to be sure, the long-term, cybernetic processes at the core of the *Cuba in the World/The World in Cuba* project generate complex results. Such complexity more closely approximates the nature of real, lived experience – and thereby demonstrates the value of the approach. With an eye still only on the colonialism/neo-imperialism theme suggested above, for example, appreciation for the two-way nature of interaction suggests how neither “side” could ever have legitimately contemplated the relationship in triumphalist terms. Powerful states sometimes have had their way with Cuba, to be sure, but they have never enjoyed as much control as they would have liked (or imagined) and they regularly paid a heavy price for their efforts. Cuba, on the other hand, has also borne heavy burdens – very much up the present day – for the real measures of autonomy it has sometimes surprisingly been able to achieve. Both sides of the ledger – for both Cuba and its global interlocutors – deserve contemplation.

A final word about the *Cuba in the World/The World in Cuba* project: those of us participating in the Florence conference that launched the collaborative effort might have taken some inspiration from meeting almost in the shadow of Brunelleschi’s magnificent Duomo. Perhaps we were imagining the striking pleasures of the view that could be enjoyed from the pinnacle of that stunning dome. Here was a perch, after all, from which one’s attention could be pulled back and forth from the very near to the very far. In the end, though, there could always emerge an awareness of the fact that it was precisely that combination which contributed to the wonder of the experience.

Toronto and Florence, June 2009



A. Lorini  
D. Basosi

## Introduction

### Cuba in the World. The World in Cuba

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Cuba was known as *la llave del Nuevo Mundo* (the “key to the New World”). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, before the *Cuba Libre* movement helped the country gain its independence with the intervention of the United States in 1898, it was known as the “pearl of the Antilles”, “the richest jewel in the royal crown” and *la siempre fidelísima isla* (the “ever-faithful isle”). Indeed, the “Caribbean sugar bowl” populated by Spanish colonists and African slaves had already developed a complex relationship with its North American neighbor by then. This only got tighter with the end of Spanish rule, the subsequent US military occupation and the birth of the fragile republic in 1902 in the shadow of the Platt Amendment that allowed the US to intervene on the island at its discretion<sup>1</sup>. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the US-Cuba connection was strategic and intimate, taking on the shape of real neocolonialism that would last until the outbreak of Fidel Castro’s Revolution in 1959. Cuba would then enter the orbit of the Soviet Union, “the other” superpower of the Cold War, once again following rather complex dynamics.

A virtual laboratory of imperial strategies on the one hand and revolutions on the other, Cuba played a key role in a world divided between two superpowers. At once physically close and politically distant from the

<sup>1</sup> See: Louis A. Pérez Jr., *Cuba and the United States. Ties of Singular Intimacy* (Athens, GA: Georgia University Press, 1990); Id., *The War of 1898: The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1998); Id., *Cuba in the American Imagination. Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2008); Rafael Hernández, *Mirar el Niágara. Huellas culturales entre Cuba y los Estados Unidos* (La Habana: Centro de Investigación de la Cultura Cubana Juan Marinello, 2000); Alessandra Lorini, *L’impero della libertà e l’isola strategica. Gli Stati Uniti e Cuba tra Otto e Novecento* (Napoli: Liguori, 2008); Id., ed., *An intimate and Contested Relation: The United States and Cuba in the late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2005).

United States, it was also able to carry out important international initiatives in relative autonomy from Moscow<sup>2</sup>. For Cuba, the end of the Soviet Union implied the need to rethink its independence. Unlike the former Soviet bloc countries, Cuba has continued the socialist revolution, and it has paid a high price for it. Their strong national identity rooted in three centuries of history is undoubtedly the source of the Cuban people's capacity for survival. At the heart of this identity is the ideal of a universal nation "for all and for the good of all", in the words of José Martí, which survived by transforming itself through the complex anthropological process Fernando Ortiz called *transculturación*<sup>3</sup>.

This ideal of a global nation was one of the most important issues that emerged during the workshop "Cuba, a Strategic Island: New Perspectives on History, Politics and Culture" held at the University of Florence in November 2007. This multi-disciplinary conference hosted scholars from various countries to discuss the specific encounters they have had with Cuba along their distinctive paths of research<sup>4</sup>. The present volume took its cue from that conference and takes a step further by proposing to approach Cuba as an example of a nation that hosts a convergence of extraordinary global developments and in turn projects itself onto the world's major cultural, political and economic processes. Such an approach embraces relations between colony and motherland during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, conflicts between imperial strategies and the formation of identities and political cultures and a reading of architectural and artistic documents as well as strategies and economic policies from the Cold War to the first decade of the present century. Without any pretension to completeness, the seven parts of this book focus on moments, events and characters that are more or less well-known and together indicate a new path for "global history". From each of these points of view, the Cuban experience seems to reveal the limits of the long-held equation according to which "globalization" could not exist without capitalism, containers or the internet<sup>5</sup>. On the one hand, the recent experience in Cuba is that of a socialist country that was

<sup>2</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 158-249; Piero Gleijeses, *Moscow's Proxy? Cuba and Africa 1975-1988*, «Journal of Cold War Studies», 2 (2006), 3-51.

<sup>3</sup> On Martí, Ortiz, and other Caribbean intellectuals who forged ideals of free nations see: Consuelo Naranjo Orovio, Miguel Á. Puig-Samper y Luis Miguel García Mora, eds., *La Nación Soñada: Cuba, Puerto Rico y Filipinas ante el 98* (Madrid: Doce Calles, 1996). On nineteenth-century Cuban political culture also see: José Piqueras Arenas, *Sociedad civil y poder en Cuba. Colonia y poscolonia* (Madrid: Siglo XXI de España, 2005). The most recent and multifaceted history of Cuba up to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the volume edited by Consuelo Naranjo Orovio, *Historia de Cuba* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> The conference was the first cooperative effort of a group of historians working at the University of Florence and the University of Toronto to develop an international research group on Cuban studies.

<sup>5</sup> For some general thoughts on this subject: Jurgen Osterhammel and Niels Petersson, *Globalization: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

left economically isolated after the collapse of all its main eastern European allies in 1989 and has since built new global networks that range from economic to political relations, from cultural to social exchanges. Today, tourism brings millions of visitors to the island every year, putting Cubans vis-à-vis with the lifestyles of the rest of the world. The island's "medical diplomacy", which covers some seventy-five countries, brings thousands of Cuban doctors abroad, presenting a veritable "Cuban social model" to large portions of the global South. On the other hand, the Cuban experience confirms the theoretical fragility of the paradigm that wants to see globalization only as a recent fact. On the contrary, a quick overview of the island's history is sufficient to trace the signals of many previous "globalizations": from the mixed composition of the population to the country's long-held role in the world sugar market; from political migration and intellectual hybridization during the wars for independence to the global impact of the Revolution of 1959.

This book aims at portraying, at least in part, the long duration, the complexity and the multidimensional nature of Cuba's interactions with the world. Spanning two centuries of history, the essays collected here analyze the continuous interplay between what is Cuban and what is global. "Cuba in the world", then, for the island's ability to project its own culture, economy, and politics beyond its borders. But also "the world in Cuba", for the island's repeated hybridization with the cultural, political and economic stimulation from outside the country. First there is the centrality of slavery and emancipation. Ada Ferrer's essay focuses on the impact of the slave revolution in Haiti on Cuba at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a time when Cuba itself was becoming an increasingly slave-based society. The contribution by Irene Fattaciu reconstructs instead Cuba's presence in the African Spanish colony of Fernando Po in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as an example of the complex interactions between Africa, Europe and the Americas. In the aftermath of Cuban independence from Spain, the legacy of slavery and the racialization of social conflicts in US terms profoundly affected definitions of racial identity and nationalism among Cuban "leaders of color", as Loredana Giolitto discusses in her essay.

By analyzing how Cuba, still a rich Spanish slave colony in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was a crucial hub for the transatlantic telegraph system financed by US capital, Marta Blaquier Ascaño shows how the island was at the center of the commercial networks between Europe and the Americas. However, while the telegraph and other technologies were developed during the colonial period, scientific debate and higher education remained backward, because of first colonial and then neo-colonial dependence until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As highlighted in the essay by Angelo Baracca, the great leap forward in scientific and higher education only happened as a result of the Revolution of 1959.

Although the Revolution sanctioned the ideal of a free and independent nation, presenting itself as the realization of Martí's ideals, forms of popular resistance and nationalist opposition against US occupation had already started appearing in the Cuba "between two empires" – the period of 1899-1902. As demonstrated by Marial Iglesias Utset's contribution to this volume, a strong national identity and a symbolic construction of the nation based on the institutionalization of patriotic memory was built in those years one that found strong bases in festivals and other popular traditions. However, tensions also existed among various expressions of nationalism and images of Martí, and between popular and elite culture, which both radicalized in subsequent years. In the semi-independent Cuba of the Platt Amendment years (1902-1934), turbulence and political corruption culminated in the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado and the birth of an opposition against the dictatorship, which was extremely varied both socially and ideologically, as demonstrated by Alessandra Lorini. As described by Amparo Sánchez Cobos' contribution, in the Cuban labor movement, brutally repressed by Machado, a major component was constituted by the Spanish anarchists, who sought to integrate and organize the Cuban working class by raising the level of education, though they failed to reach the majority of colored workers. The student movement, which had an important role in the overthrowing of Machado and the quasi-revolution of 1933 that led to the repealing of the Platt Amendment, left a legacy for the student generation of the 1950s whose role would culminate in the Revolution, as illustrated in the essay by Michael Lima.

The triumph of the Revolution of 1959, the epochal event that attracted dozens of intellectuals from the US and Europe to Cuba in the very early years to participate in the revolutionary transformation, is analyzed in the essay by Gabriella Paolucci, who explores projects of radical change with regards to Havana's urban space. The history of Havana contains the meaning of Cuba as a crossroads of the world. In his contribution, Raffaele Paloscia traces the history of its monuments, its residential geography and its radical transformation during the first US occupation and the entire first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The architecture and the transformations of the territory of *Habana del Este* during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are described by Luca Spitoni, with a particular emphasis on the priority given by the Revolution to architectural and urban projects with significant social content.

Cuban cultural expressions embrace traditions that come from near (the Caribbean and the Americas) and far (Europe, Africa, Asia). As Coral García shows in her essay, there were "pure" poets like Dulce María Loynaz, born in 1902 at the same time as the Cuban republic. Loynaz's process to define Cuban identity involved asserting the importance of a bourgeois culture and her strong connection with Spain. There were also artists like Julio Girona, the Cuban-born painter who spent most of his life outside



the island, between New York, Mexico and Europe, and yet maintained a visceral connection with Cuba by exulting in the Revolution of 1959, as described in this volume by his daughter Ilse Girona. There are also Cuban musicians whose music, as well-known as the Revolution itself, was rooted in the process of *transculturación* that mixed musical genres from different countries and continents, as demonstrated by Vincenzo Perna in his essay on the bright and dark sides of the famous film *Buena Vista Social Club* by Wim Wenders.

In addition to the spread of Cuban cultural forms throughout the world, the other side of Cuban internationalism during the Cold War was the Revolution's commitment to the liberation movements of the Third World. Cuba's intervention in Africa is examined from different angles and points of view in the essays by Pablo Arco Pino, who inserts Cuba's presence in Africa into the Latin American tradition of selfless solidarity among poor countries; Candace Sobers, who focuses on the reasons for the success of the first Cuban intervention in Angola in 1975; and Maria Stella Rognoni, who analyzes the effects of the Cuban intervention in Angola on the process of nation-building in that country.

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union has caused an unprecedented crisis in Cuba, which has been called the "special period", also marked by increased strain on the country's already-negative relationship with the United States. But as Duccio Basosi shows in his essay, far from merely surviving in a world turned economically and politically unipolar, Cuba has reacted to the changes by seeking to actively promote cooperation with the countries of Latin America. Certainly, the cost to maintain the socialist experiment alive has been, and still is, very high, leaving the question open as to the future of "21<sup>st</sup> century socialism", as Davide Gualerzi asserts in his contribution to this volume. However, such alternatives have already begun taking shape amid the many difficulties: in her essay, Filomena Critelli discusses Cuban programs in "community medicine" and "capacity building" (including the exchanges of Cuban doctors with Venezuelan oil) that, in addition to demonstrating Cuba's "resilience", represent an alternative foreign-policy strategy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, based on an innovative concept of human and national security.

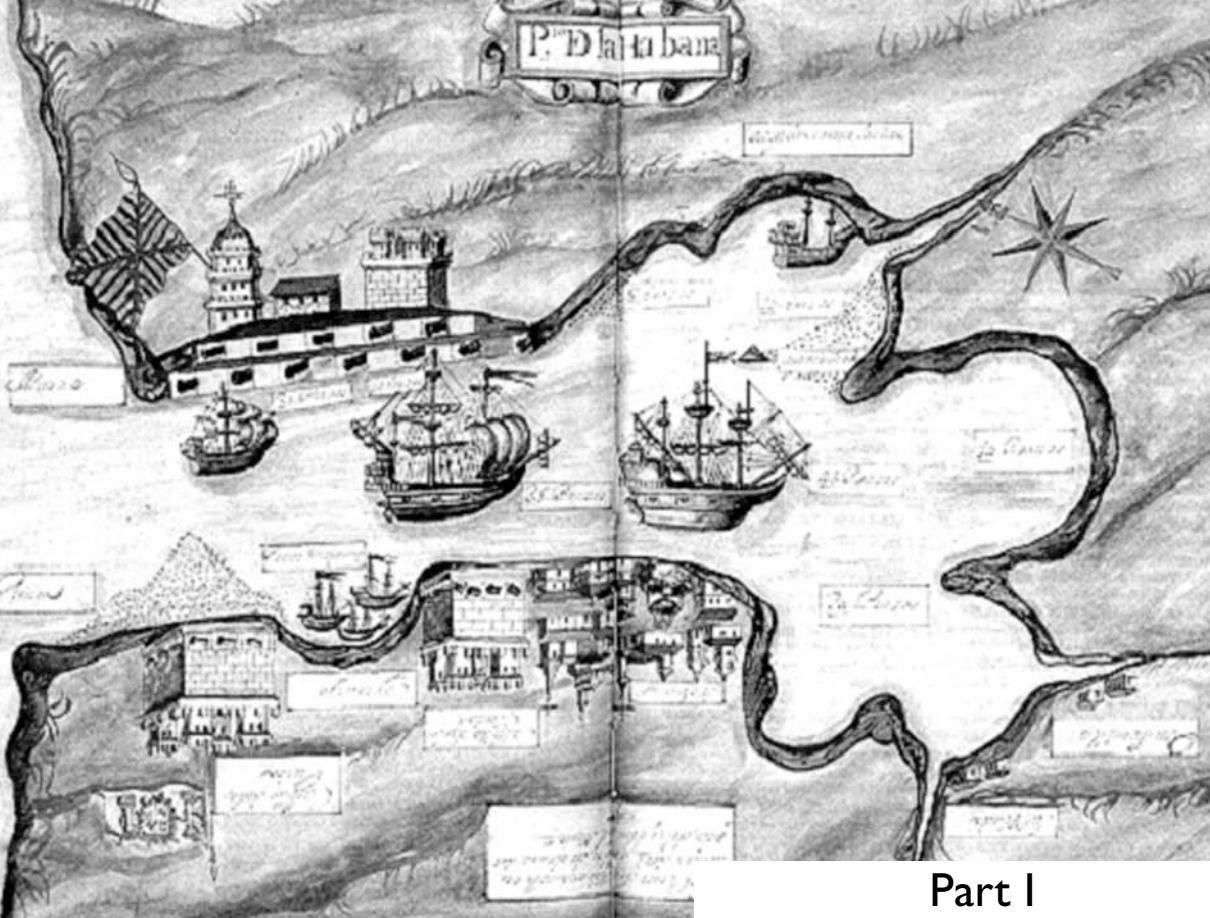
Finally, during the long history of Cuba in the world and the world in Cuba, the island's relationship with the United States, both as meeting and confrontation, has been crucial. According to some cautious public positions, the recent election of Barack Hussein Obama to the presidency of the United States seems to open a door to potential change in that long-asymmetrical relationship. The normalization of diplomatic relations, the elimination of a long series of punitive laws and a blockade that dates back to 1961, and the return of the Guantanamo enclave to Cuban sovereignty seem more plausible today than they have seemed in over half a century.

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Should this happen and, with such normalization, were Cuba able to maintain its social achievements, it would represent an important message for the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

During the final editing of this volume we received the sad news that Pablo Arco Pino, one of our contributors, suddenly died. We feel to dedicate this volume to his memory.

Florence, 9 June 2009



## Part I

# The Making of the Cuban Republic: from Slavery to a Raceless Nation

On the previous page – *Havana Map, 1501-1601* (in G. Cavallo, ed., *Cristoforo Colombo e l'apertura degli spazi*, Roma, Poligrafico dello Stato, 1992).

## The Making of the Cuban Republic: from Slavery to a Raceless Nation

Like many American countries, Cuba built its economy on slavery. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the slave revolution in French Saint-Domingue strongly affected the Cuban economy and the political future of the Spanish colony. The collapse of sugar production in the black republic of Haiti meant the consolidation of a plantation economy in Cuba, which became the number one producer of sugar in the world. At the same time, the image of the Haitian revolution less than fifty miles from the Cuban coast aroused a sense of fear among Cuban whites surrounded by a growing number of slaves. It has been argued that the powerful shadow of the Haitian revolution made Cuban whites less prone to leaving the mother country, concerned as they were that any nationalist movement could turn Cuba into the “realm of terror” of another black Haiti. On the other hand, voices of slave victory in Haiti stirred among Cuban slaves the feeling that freedom was possible. In this section, Ada Ferrer brings fresh insights to existing historiography<sup>1</sup> by showing how Cubans had access to detailed news on Haiti and that several contacts existed between the dying slave society of the French Saint-Domingue and Cuban society in which slavery was becoming more solid. Ferrer argues that, far from being vague, both the fears and the hopes that Haiti aroused were based on real experiences of Creole elites and Cuban slaves.

Just as many Spanish American colonies had fought for and achieved independence by 1820 and slavery was abolished in the British Caribbean

<sup>1</sup> David B. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975); Alfred Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1988); David P. Geggus, ed., *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Columbus: South Carolina University Press, 2001); Sybille Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004). The most recent work on Haiti and Cuba is by Dolores González-Ripoll et al., eds., *El rumor de Haití en Cuba: temor, raza y rebeldía, 1789-1844* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2004).

in the 1830s, educated Cubans had begun to question relationships between slavery and colonization in various ways by the middle of the century. The transnational debate over slavery in the US and the ensuing civil war (1861-65) profoundly affected the ideas of freedom and independence of the Cuban community of exiles in the United States and anticipated the Cuban Ten Years' War against Spain (1868-1878)<sup>2</sup>. One significant example of how slavery had become the most controversial issue in Cuba before 1868 is the public Cuban debate over the Spanish project of sending Cuban freedmen, *emancipados*, to the African colony of Fernando Po. This relatively unknown example, discussed by Irene Fattacciu in this section, sheds light on the competing and contradictory colonial policies that Spain imposed upon its first African possession and its last American one. The case of Fernando Po is also rather telling of Cuban creoles attitudes towards freedmen: they were perceived as dangerous examples of what slaves could follow.

Both the American Civil War that ended slavery in the United States and the Ten Years' War in Cuba made the very existence of slavery obsolete. In Cuba it was gradually abolished in the 1880s and the struggle for independence became the continuation of the lost Ten Years' War. The community of Cuban exiles inspired and mobilized by José Martí's indisputable capacity to forge alliances raised funds to support one final war of liberation from Spanish domination. From the United States, Martí shaped an ideal of *Cuba Libre* as a fatherland "for all and for the good of all". Living two thirds of his life in Gilded Age America during the post-Reconstruction era, when blacks were segregated, disfranchised and lynched, Martí argued for a Cuban nation built on racial equality. Unlike the United States where the white elite obtained the independence and shaped the institutions of the new country by maintaining slavery and racial inequality, and unlike Haiti where slaves achieved independence and the white planter class was forced to leave, the ideal Cuban nation would be a raceless and socially egalitarian country. Martí's raceless argument gave an exceptional formal equality to all citizens of the new Cuban state<sup>3</sup>. Yet, as Loredana Giolitto shows in this section, formal equality coexisted with racial prejudice and discrimination. The *líderes de color* of the early republic deployed various strategies to achieve racial equality that clashed dramatically with the ideal of a raceless nation.

<sup>2</sup> See: Louis A. Pérez, *Cuba between Empires, 1878-1902* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1983); Rebecca J. Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860-1899* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba. Race, Nation and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1999); Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, *Empire and Slavery: Spain, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, 1833-1874* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> See: Gerald E. Poyo, "With All and for the Good of All": *The Emergence of popular Nationalism in the Cuban Communities of the United States, 1848-1898* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989); Enrique López Mesa, *La comunidad cubana de New York: siglo XIX* (La Habana: Centro de Estudios Martianos, 2002); Louis A. Pérez, ed., *José Martí in the United States: The Florida Experience* (Tucson: Arizona State University, 1995).

A. Ferrer

## Chapter 1

# Cuba in the Age of the Haitian Revolution

At the end of the eighteenth-century, the island of Cuba witnessed a transformation both internal and external. Internally, a new system emerged that would transform everything from the island's interior forests, to the racial and demographic make-up of its population, to the character of its agriculture and economy. Externally, the new changes brought the island into unprecedented commercial engagement with the world. Dating such transformations is always somewhat artificial, but we can name, for example, the 1789 opening of the slave trade as the opening move. By the 1820s, the process was not yet over but had already converted the island into the world's foremost producer of sugar. To understand this moment of transformation and this particular encounter of Cuba with the world at the end of the eighteenth century, an encounter that would profoundly shape Cuban society in nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we must place those changes in the context of the sweeping revolutionary transformations that engulfed the region in the same moment.

Then, in the small but prosperous colony of French Saint-Domingue, less than fifty miles from the Cuban coast, a world built upon slavery, colonialism, and racial hierarchy was turned upside down. Known today as the Haitian Revolution, the events that shook Saint-Domingue converted Europe's most prosperous colony into an independent nation ruled by former slaves and their descendants. This new society, born of a process never contemplated before, stood right in the middle of the Caribbean sea, a short sail from islands ruled by European governors and inhabited, sometimes overwhelmingly, by enslaved Africans<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> On the revolution, see David Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Carolyn Fick, *The Making of Hai-*

As slavery and colonialism collapsed in the French colony, Cuba underwent transformations almost the mirror-image of Haiti's. In Cuba, sugar planters and colonial authorities saw the devastation of their neighboring colony and looked at their own society with fresh eyes. Publicly and privately, they professed fear and terror that the scenes of the Haitian Revolution would be repeated in their own territory. But, for the most part, the men with the power to decide the future course of the Spanish colony resolved to live dangerously. Working with the colonial state, Cuban planters rushed in to fill the void left by Saint-Domingue's collapse. They imported an ever-growing number of Africans and amassed greater and greater wealth in sugar. "The hour of our happiness has arrived" predicted one planter, looking ahead to the boom that would turn Cuba into the world's single largest producer of sugar<sup>2</sup>. The planters' vision, however, had a catch: they sought to follow in the footsteps of Saint-Domingue and to reproduce a prosperity built on sugar, slavery, and colonialism, but to stop emphatically short of the upheaval caused by those same institutions in Saint-Domingue. They sought, in other words, to emulate Saint-Domingue, but to contain Haiti.

In Cuba, however, the example of Haiti was hard to contain. The distance between the two islands was short and well-travelled. Early in the revolution, slave owners from the French colony arrived by the thousands, carting slaves, seeking refuge, and telling stories of black vengeance and physical desolation. Throughout the conflict, French forces defeated by former slaves evacuated through Cuba, as local residents watched with great interest. In the decades that followed Haitian independence, Cubans heard repeated rumors about imminent Haitian invasions into Cuban territory. Cuban plantations increasingly resembled those in pre-revolutionary Saint-Domingue. Slaves were subjected to increasingly brutal labor and disciplinary regimes and sometimes responded by envisioning risings like the ones of their counterparts in Haiti.

In Cuba, then, the Haitian revolution produced a potentially powerful contradiction: at the same time that it created a heightened consciousness of slave rebellion and power, it also produced a massive rise in the actual number of slaves, a new "minority" status for whites, and an economic boom self-consciously modeled after Saint-Domingue. Here, the example of black revolution and the rise of black enslavement unfolded in the same context and at the same time.

This essay takes the simultaneity of these two developments as its starting point, and attempts to tell the multifaceted story of the entrenchment

*ti: The Saint-Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991); and, of course, C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint Louverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London: Allison and Busby, 1980).

<sup>2</sup> The classic and indispensable study of this transition and transformation, is Manuel Moreno Fraginals, *El ingenio* (La Habana: Ciencias Sociales, 1978).



of slavery in Cuba, which occurred precisely as the world's foremost slave society unraveled just off the Cuban coasts. Grounded in Cuba, the study tacks back and forth between the two islands, to tell the overlapping stories of freedom and slavery being made and unmade – simultaneously and each within view of the other.

To understand the transformation of Cuban slavery occurring in the shadow of the Haitian Revolution I contend that we need to explore the social and intellectual history of the idea of Haiti in Cuba. How was the violent destruction of slavery by the enslaved themselves understood and discussed in a society where a similar model of slavery was taking root? What news of the Saint-Domingue revolution circulated in Cuba? Through what specific points of contact? Among whom? With what language and images? And with what resonance? Asking such questions allows us to better understand questions about the material and cognitive encounters and connections between the simultaneous destruction and expansion of slavery in the nineteenth century.

### **I. An Unlikely Source, An Impossible Alliance**

Material daily links between the Haitian Revolution and Cuban society produced distinct streams of information or news that traveled from one colony to the other. In this paper, I will examine three such sources of Haitian news in depth. I chose these three in particular because they highlight on the one hand how rich and detailed was the information about the revolution that arrived in Cuba and – on the other – the capacity of that information to reach different social sectors in Cuba. Finally, they allow a rethinking of the broad categories that scholars have used so far to talk about the Haitian Revolution's impact not only in Cuba but in the Atlantic World in general – a set of concerns I will return to at the end of the essay.

The first source of information I will analyze involves the movement of people between the scenes of the Haitian Revolution and Cuban society. Tens of thousands of French refugees left the turbulence of revolution in Saint-Domingue to resettle in Cuba. But rather than focus on this migration, I focus instead on movements in the other direction. People in Cuba actually traveled to the scenes of revolution and brought back first-hand accounts of revolutionary events in which they themselves were directly implicated.

When Spain declared war on France in February 1793, that war came quickly to the island of Hispaniola, where these two countries shared a border that had already been a hot zone since the start of the revolution in Saint-Domingue. In the spring of 1793, the Spanish governor of Santo Domingo, Joaquín García, using priests and military officers near the border, sealed a formal alliance with the black troops from the French side of the island in order to combat their common enemy, the revolutionary

government of France. These forces came to be called the black auxiliaries; they retained their own internal organization, but now received arms, provisions, and orders from the Spanish military administration. As a result of this pact, by mid-1793, almost every major slave and former slave leader was fighting for Spain against France. Relying on the services of these black auxiliaries, Spain came to control a large swath of territory formerly held by France and, in 1794, even appeared poised to take the capital city of Le Cap, surrounded by what had been – and many hoped could be once more – the richest sugar country in the world.

If this alliance can be broadly identified as one between slave rebels and the Spanish colonial state, for our purposes it is highly significant that many of the “Spanish” who oversaw this alliance on the ground were in fact men from Cuba, who had been dispatched in a massive troop movement from the two largest cities in Cuba to the contested boundary between French Saint-Domingue and Spanish Santo Domingo. There, these men from Cuba became intimately enmeshed in the revolution that would turn Saint Domingue into Haiti.

The Cuban regiments began arriving in the summer of 1793, under the command of Matías de Armona who, exhausted and frustrated at having to embody the alliance between the Spanish monarchy and the slave forces of Saint Domingue, grew ill and was replaced by another Cuban, Juan Leonart.

In general, the Cuban commanders saw the alliance with men like Toussaint Louverture and Jean-François as an improper and highly volatile inversion of customary roles. They complained that former slaves seemed to flaunt their newfound power and Spanish vulnerability. The black forces, complained Armona, “give themselves military ranks and titles, they wear imposing military and regal insignia. They try to act like men with us, pushing up shoulder to shoulder with us, with a certain air of superiority, as if we need them and have to please and gratify them”. In the language and tone of written communication between black leaders and Cuban commanders, this sense of role inversion shows up clearly. White officers wrote to former slaves addressing them as friends and exuding deference. New black officers wrote letters incessantly requesting supplies of all kinds, stamping their missives with images of trees of liberty topped with crowns sustained by naked black men<sup>3</sup>.

The inversion of roles was given material form and official sanction in military ritual and ceremony. Black leaders Toussaint and Biassou were re-

<sup>3</sup> The reference to the stamp of the tree of liberty appears in Matías de Armona to C.G. Joaquín García, 14 August 1793, in Archivo General de Simancas, Spain (AGS), Guerra Moderna (GM), leg. 6855. Armona says the stamp was used on a letter from Biassou, which he received on the 12th of that month, and which he forwarded to the Captain General. For a discussion of slave royalism and the on-the-ground compatibility of royalist and republican motifs, see Dubois, *Avengers*, 106-108.

galed in San Rafael in February or March 1794, each receiving a gold medal from the King of Spain in honor of their services as his loyal vassals. At the ceremony, it was the officers of two Cuban regiments who awarded the medals. Men from the Cuban regiments, who gathered to witness the concession of this highest honor, played the military music, paraded with the medal recipients, and joined the two black officers in a lavish two-hour meal prepared in their honor<sup>4</sup>. The encounter between the Cuban officers and the rebel slaves represented a clear inversion of roles, and everyone who witnessed and participated in it seemed to see it as just that.

Just as palpable as this inversion of roles, however, was the struggle of these same Cuban commanders to apprehend and in a sense classify the novel political, military, and social landscape that lay before them. Confronted with a large army of rebel slaves only nominally under Spanish command, Armona and others had trouble figuring out how to approach and address them. They knew the black rebels were officially auxiliaries, but they often noted that actually they were “runaway slaves”. The officers’ reports sometimes seemed to acknowledge that their own system of classification did not correspond with that of the slave rebels. Armona, for example, routinely recorded such discrepancies. “They – he wrote – referred to their positions as encampments”, but he called them “palenques”. He mentioned that they referred to themselves as generals, brigadiers, and lieutenants. He seemed about to record a difference in the way the Spanish named these same leaders, but then added, sheepishly almost, that he and his colleagues called them that, too. His discernible discomfort seems to suggest that the power of the forces led by black rebels was making old labels (such as “maroons”) inappropriate, and new ones (such as “general” for a former slave) plausible, but still not so natural as to go unnoticed<sup>5</sup>. Here the documents produced out of the routine and material contacts between slave rebels and white commanders reveal the traces of competing ways of naming the history represented by this revolution.

The alliance between the slave rebels and the Cuban officers reminds us that the contact between colonial Cuba and revolutionary Saint-Domingue involved significantly more than Haitian news passively making its way to Cuban ports. What we have here is rather something much more sustained and meaningful. Cuban men – some of them direct witnesses to the sugar revolution that was then transforming Havana into a major slave society –

<sup>4</sup> *Continuación de la noticias de la Ysla de Sto Domingo hasta 25 de Marzo de 94* in folder “Relación de los ocurrido en la Ysla de Santo Domingo con motivo de la guerra con los franceses, 1795. D. Antonio Barba”, Servicio Histórico Militar, Madrid, Colección General de Documentos, Rollo 65, doc no. 5-4-11-1. The document mentions that General Jean-François had received the same honor earlier.

<sup>5</sup> Matías de Armona to C.G. Joaquín García, 12 and 14 August 1793, in folder “Correspondencia del Brigadier Dn. Mathías de Armona desde 19 de Junio hasta 1 de Septiembre de 1793”, in AGS, GM, leg. 6855.

traveled to the scenes of the Haitian Revolution that was then transforming the world's most profitable colony into a revolutionary one in the process of destroying the institution of slavery.

The Marquis de Casa Calvo, for instance, came from one of the wealthiest sugar families in Havana. He himself owned a prosperous, dynamic plantation; his brother, Nicolás Calvo, was at the forefront of sugar production and of the implementation of new technologies to advance it. In the midst of the revolution, the Marquis became Governor of Bayajá, a French town known as Fort Dauphin that was taken by the Spanish and black auxiliary forces in January 1794. There, he acquired slaves to ship back to his plantations in Cuba; he purchased sugar-making equipment from French plantations being destroyed by his allies, and sent that back to Havana as well. He derided his black allies to officials in Havana and Madrid, but on the ground he found himself forced to keep up appearances and, indeed, even went beyond the mandate, becoming godfather to Jean-François and flirting with the latter's wife during the dances held in the town<sup>6</sup>. These Cuban officers and soldiers had contact with slave insurgents and leaders, corresponding with them, sometimes eating and celebrating with them, and eventually – after Toussaint broke with the Spanish and allied with the French – suffering military defeat at their hands. After taking part in those unprecedented events, they returned to Cuba. From scattered documentary evidence we know they brought back artifacts from the war itself, for example, *estampas* of black revolutionary figures that would turn up in Havana seventeen years later, during an ambitious and mysterious conspiracy led by a free black carpenter known as José Antonio Aponte. Other soldiers and officers returned to Cuba bringing with them slaves purchased or taken from Saint-Domingue. All came back with stories and memories they might have felt eager to share freely in a society they hoped was the antithesis (rather than the precursor) of the revolutionary upheavals they had just witnessed.

Through these Cuban officers and soldiers the world of the Haitian Revolution met the world of the sugar revolution in Cuba, that is, the ascendancy of slavery and the slave trade, and of sugar and large scale plantation agriculture. In the heart of the entrenchment of slavery in Cuba lived the raw example and the intimate knowledge of slavery's destruction, so menacingly close to Cuban coasts.

## 2. The Circulation of Haitian News in Black Havana

But in the world of burgeoning slavery in Cuba, there were other ways to hear and learn of revolutionary Saint-Domingue. Sometimes it is possible to discern the specific routes of transmission; other times we can only see

<sup>6</sup> See Ada Ferrer, *The Making and Unmaking of Slavery: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution*, manuscript in preparation, chapter 3.

the evidence that people in Cuba were avidly consuming the news, without being able to discern how they knew. Just two weeks after the start of the Haitian Revolution, in early September 1791, authorities in Havana grew alarmed when they learned that people of color in the area were sacrificing pigs in honor of the slave insurgents. The prospect raises the possibility that Havana was home to some version of a Bois-Caiman ceremony, the famous (if disputed) ritual beginning to the revolution, in which Haitian conspirators took blood oaths and sacrificed a black pig as preparation for the war they were about to commence<sup>7</sup>. Whether or not such ceremonies were taking place in Havana, as authorities feared, the prospect alone makes it very likely that just days after the turmoil erupted in Saint-Domingue, people in Cuba – and specifically people of color – knew about those events and were thinking and digesting them actively. Indeed, in casual street encounters between free urban blacks and local whites, in confrontations between masters and slaves, in heated exchanges between black suspects and white interrogators, Cuban people of color regularly referred to the Haitian Revolution as something they knew about and perhaps hoped to emulate. They referred by name to men such as Toussaint, Dessalines, Christophe, and Jean- François. Their testimony, on numerous occasions, explicitly refers to the heroic deeds of their “compañeros” in Haiti. Slaves recruited others to conspiracy by urging them to do as their counterparts had done in St. Domingue, where blacks were now “absolute masters of the land”<sup>8</sup>.

While the regular invocations of Haiti by slaves and free people of color leave no doubt that they learned and used knowledge of revolutionary events, on their own they do not tell us how and from what sources they acquired that knowledge. There were, of course, many sources: from the stories told by escaping refugees, sea captains, and crews, to the official reports by French officials which spawned rumors and vivid talk among the local populace. But among the many possible sources, some are potentially surprising.

One such source is the *Gaceta de Madrid*, the official newspaper of the Spanish government in Madrid. For all the government’s efforts to curtail the flow of information, the source with most information on events in Saint Domingue circulating in Cuba was not a foreign newspaper, but the official newspaper of its own metropole. According to Captain General Someruelos, this posed a significant problem. He lamented that the newspaper was so readily available: “It is sold to the public, and everyone buys it, and it circulates well among the blacks”, who, he wrote, read it and analyzed its contents “with considerable liveliness [viveza]”<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, 207-220.

<sup>8</sup> See Ada Ferrer, “La société esclavagiste cubaine et la révolution haïtienne”, *Annales* 2 (2003), 333-356: 346-356.

<sup>9</sup> Someruelos to Sec. de Estado, 25 May 1804, in Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid (AHN), Estado, leg. 6366, exp. 78. A transcription of the letter also appears in Someruelos to Sec. de Estado, 13 Agosto 1809, in Archivo General de Indias, Sevilla (AGI), Estado, leg. 12, exp. 50.

What worried the Captain General so profoundly was that in the pages of this gazette, Cubans of color, and others, encountered substantial and animated news of black rebellion in what had been an orderly and prosperous sugar colony just miles away. Here were stories of the revolutionary terror in Paris, of abolitionist debates in Britain, of war in Europe. And in regular snippets and sometimes in longer pieces taken mostly from French, British, and US newspapers, the story of the Haitian Revolution unfolded in incredible and dense detail, from the first article on the attacks of August 1791 to the repeated installments about black military victories in 1803. Indeed, by the end of the conflict, the *Gaceta* was even publishing articles and reprinting translated documents that gave significant insight into the ideas of the black insurgents. It published the words of the emerging Haitian leadership.

The issue of the gazette that had prompted the complaint by the Captain General, in fact, contained two translated proclamations by Haitian leaders. In both documents, the black leaders invited refugees who had fled the colony to return and live peacefully under the new system. But their invitation also entailed a very clear and explicit threat.

The God who protects us, the God of free men, commands us to extend towards them our victorious [vencedores] arms. But those who, intoxicated with a foolish pride, [...] [those who] think still that they alone form the essence of human nature, and who pretend to think that they are destined by heaven to be our owners and our tyrants, [we tell them] never to come near the island of Santo Domingo, because if they come, they will find only chains and deportation<sup>10</sup>.

These words made manifest the power of new black leaders, who forbade the return of Saint-Domingue to its colonial ruler and who were willing to admit only those refugees who deigned to live under a government of former slaves and in a society without slavery.

Just one week after Someruelos penned his attack on the publication and circulation of this document, a new proclamation appeared in the pages of the gazette. This time it was the Haitian declaration of independence, signed by Dessalines on January 1, 1804, and published in the gazette six months later on June 1<sup>11</sup>. We know that other copies of the Haitian declaration of independence had already reached Cuba aboard French ships and that authorities on the island had done their best to have them confiscated, and then translated and sent to Madrid<sup>12</sup>. But in spite of the attempts to limit its circulation, in June the declaration was translated, published, and

<sup>10</sup> *Gaceta de Madrid*, 23 de Marzo de 1804.

<sup>11</sup> *Gaceta de Madrid*, 1 de Junio de 1804.

<sup>12</sup> Marqués de Someruelos a D. Pedro Cevallo, 14 Marzo 1804, en AHN, Estado, leg. 6366, exp. 70.

circulating, even among black Cubans, who Someruelos argued were able to acquire the gazette with little difficulty<sup>13</sup>. Thus, we know that people of color in Cuba were able to read the Haitian declaration of independence, a proclamation of former slaves who had vanquished their masters by force of arms.

Now we can understand more profoundly Someruelos' discomfort upon recognizing that these words and these ideas, and these examples of a new kind of power in Haiti, were circulating in his own colony. It was not only that people of color learned of Haitian news—according to the gazette itself: there was not one black person who did not already know them by memory. It was also that with repetition and circulation, the example acquired more and more substance. What circulated, however, was not just vague examples or even rich narratives of retribution and justice. With the publication and circulation of such declarations, it was also the very intellectual production of the revolution that circulated. Emerging black leaders engaged in a stinging critique of what they saw as the French Revolution's false universalism and they expanded the meaning and content of emerging notions of rights and citizenship. That critique was read with appetite and fascination and urgency by men of color who gathered around Havana to hear and talk of it.

### 3. Haiti and the Enslaved in Cuba

The question then becomes what people of color in Cuba might have made of declarations like Dessalines's, or of Haitian news and the Haitian example more generally. There is, of course, no way to answer this kind of question with any degree of certainty. But asking it is important. If we think of the history of slavery globally, we see that its destruction in Saint-Domingue as a result of revolution coincided temporally with the entrenchment of slavery precisely in places like Cuba, southern Brazil, and parts of the United States South. In Cuba, slaves living through and embodying that entrenchment heard news of revolutionary Haiti and appear to have thought about it in relation to their own enslavement and their own prospects of freedom. In this final section of the paper, then, rather than focus on routes of transmission for revolutionary news, I experiment with thinking about the ways in which enslaved people in Cuba consumed and invoked the Haitian Revolution.

To examine how slaves might have understood the Haitian Revolution, we have a valuable resource in the thousands of pages of judicial testimony taken from enslaved men and women in moments of suspected or actual

<sup>13</sup> The Spanish gazette does not appear to have published the Haitian Constitution of 1805, even though it was published by several international gazettes and newspapers. Perhaps Someruelos's complaints did have their desired, if delayed, effect.

conspiracy and rebellion. When conspiracies were revealed or suspected, and when rebellion erupted, planters and authorities collaborated to find answers. They brought before them men and women, guilty and innocent, and asked them question after question. Witnesses answered, and scribes paraphrased those responses in the third person. The testimonies from any number of such incidences amounts easily to thousands of pages, some with surprising insights into Cuban slavery precisely at the moment of its expansion and precisely at the moment in which the Haitian example circulated.

In these testimonies, enslaved men (and, much more rarely, women) sometimes invoked the Haitian Revolution with great regularity, sometimes not at all. When Haiti came up, it did so in three ways, all of which reflected the ways in which slaves in Cuba not only knew about the revolution, but also used it to think about their own enslavement and to engage the political currents of their time.

First, Cuban slaves talked about the Haitian Revolution in very general terms, which highlighted a strong sense of admiration and, often, a desire to emulate the bold move of their Haitian counterparts. This was, of course, the fear of both planters and authorities. The words of captured slaves, then, were not entirely comforting. Haiti was for their servants clearly an example to hold up. Take the case, for example, of the alleged slave conspiracy that was uncovered in Güines in 1806. Güines was at the center of the transformation of slavery in Cuba, home to the boom that converted Cuba into the world's largest producer of sugar in the 1820s. The leaders of the 1806 conspiracy were three enslaved men. The first was a Saint-Domingue-born slave who allegedly boasted to others that he had participated in the revolution; another was a Cuban Creole who could read and write; the third a Congolese man, perhaps recently arrived. Some of the enslaved questioned in connection to the plot, confessed to telling others that, if they rose up, killed the whites, and took the fort in town, they would be free like their counterparts in Haiti, who had taken back the land from the whites. The Haitians, whom the accused identified as their "compañeros", were now "absolute masters of the land". Sometimes this kind of invocation became a sort of dare: if the French slaves could do it, why not them? They needed, recruiters said, to have "balls", as the slaves of Saint-Domingue had shown<sup>14</sup>. For these slaves, Haiti signified not only the murder of whites or the end of slavery, but a more general victory as well: the forceful taking of the land and the exercise of total mastery.

The second type of Haitian invocation in the slave testimonies is a biographical one, when slaves talked about specific Haitian leaders they admired. In 1795, the Cuban Captain-General had claimed that the names of

<sup>14</sup> "Expediente criminal contra Francisco Fuertes y demas negros [...] sobre levantamiento en el pueblo de Güines", in Archivo Nacional de Cuba, La Habana (ANC), Asuntos Políticos (herefter AP), leg. 9, exp. 27. For a more detailed discussion, see Ada Ferrer, *La société*.



black revolutionary leaders resounded among the population of color in Havana like the names of well-known conquerors. The testimony of slaves would seem to prove him right. In numerous conspiracies and rebellions, slaves testify to having been recruited with promises that they could serve as captains, as had Toussaint or Jean-François in the revolution in Saint-Domingue. Even when suspects denied any participation in rebellion or conspiracy, they admitted that they did in fact engage in sustained conversations about men like Toussaint and Jean-François and expressed admiration for the heroic military and political achievements of these former slaves turned generals<sup>15</sup>.

Haiti also came up in third form. In many of these alleged conspiracies and rebellions, the accused made regular reference to aid coming directly from Haiti. This claim – present not only in Cuba but elsewhere in the Atlantic World – was not a vague expression of sympathy or admiration for Haiti or Haitian leaders, as we have seen in some of the examples above, but rather a concrete (if generally unfounded) assertion that they believed that this society which they so much admired stood ready to commit money, arms, and forces for their own liberation. Sometimes the alleged aid was in the form of a ship waiting off the coast with men and munitions. Sometimes it was in the form of emissaries of Haitian leaders bringing proclamations of freedom for local slaves. Such assertions in the testimony allow us to glimpse a potentially strong sense of solidarity, in which enslaved people in Cuba (or elsewhere) might imagine themselves to be, on the one hand, emulators of Haitian rebels and, on the other, objects of Haitian benevolence and of active Haitian foreign policy.

One instance in which claims about Haitian aid gathered considerable momentum was during the Aponte rebellion, the most widespread and ambitious conspiracy in Cuba in this period<sup>16</sup>. Its leader was a free black carpenter who recruited slaves and free people showing potential rebels a book of pictures he had made, which included images of scenes and people from Saint-Domingue. Others who were implicated appear to have seen or carried printed pictures of Henri Christophe, the revolutionary leader who became president (and later king) of the northern part of Haiti in 1807. Another conspirator took on the name of Jean-François,

<sup>15</sup> «Consulta de los autos seguidos por la... ordinaria contra varios negros por sublevación», 30 April 1812, ANC, AP, leg. 12, exp. 27. On the figure of Jean-François in the Aponte rebellion, see Matt Childs, *The 1812 Aponte Rebellion and the Struggle against Atlantic Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 173-189.

<sup>16</sup> For recent work on Aponte, see works by Childs, *The Aponte Rebellion*; Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); and Stephan Palmie, *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002). The early work of José Luciano Franco is indispensable. See especially *Las conspiraciones de 1810 y 1812* (La Habana: Ciencias Sociales, 1977) and *Ensayos históricos* (La Habana: Ciencias Sociales, 1974).

usually identified in the record as Juan Fransuá. Conspirators thus drew bold and explicit links between their efforts and both the history and present state of Haiti.

But they also went further, asserting that this link was reciprocal: they emulated Haiti, yes, but Haiti itself stood behind them, prepared to aid them in their endeavor. Several key witnesses testified that there were 5,000 Haitians waiting either in the hills of Monserrate (Havana) or on boats off the harbor ready to swoop in and fight for the freedom of Cuban slaves as soon as the rebellion began. Even more witnesses asserted that there were one, two, or several Haitian officers in Havana with orders from King Henri Christophe to negotiate and, if necessary, fight for their freedom<sup>17</sup>.

Seemingly fantastic claims about Haitian assistance emerge, in fact, in many slave conspiracies and rebellions across the Americas. Some historians have accepted such claims and incorporated them into narratives about an unwavering Haitian commitment to an expansive New World freedom, despite a glaring lack of evidence. Others, to the contrary, have dismissed them as spurious, as products of either overactive imaginations or of loose or drunken talk. Rather than focus on the question of the reality of Haitian assistance, it may be more fruitful to explore when, why, and under what specific circumstances, Cuban (or other) slaves believed Haitian assistance was imminent. The point is to shift our focus away from arriving at a true/false conclusion and instead to contextualize slave testimony and to try to glimpse the world of news, references, and rumor to which the enslaved had access. What might have enslaved and free people of color in 1812 Havana had in mind when they spoke of Christophe sending delegates or troops on behalf of their own freedom? Might such claims have referred to anything specific?

In fact, there may have been several possible explanations for the origins of the slaves' belief in Haitian intervention. First, while there were no formal political relations between Spain (or its colonies) and independent Haiti, just two years before the rebellion, Christophe and the Governor of Havana had had sustained communication about the possibility of exchanging delegates or representatives. The prospect of high-ranking Haitian officials moving freely in Havana in plain sight of the city's enslaved and free population of color seemed so patently dangerous that the Governor abandoned the idea, even in defiance of the royal order that had authorized it<sup>18</sup>. It is impossible to know the extent to which this back

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, the *careo* (judicial confrontation) between Aponte and Ternero, in ANC, AP, leg. 12, exp. 18, 25 March 1812; and that between Aponte and Chacón in ANC, AP, leg. 12, exp. 14, 19 March 1812. There is an interesting variation in this *careo*, in which one of them reminds the other to recall that he had even given the names of the two officers "siendo hijos de la Habana que habían ido al Guarico para incorporarse al Ejército del Rey Cristoval".

<sup>18</sup> See the 1809 correspondence between Christophe, Someruelos, and multiple Spanish authorities in AGI, Estado, leg. 12, exps. 57, 50, 51, 54. On Christophe sending agents to meet

and forth about potential emissaries of Christophe would have circulated beyond the governor and his immediate circle. But we do know that the governor's personal coachman was one of the first men questioned and implicated in the Aponte conspiracy in Havana, and that the rumor about the two Haitian agents sent by Christophe circulated intensively among black coachmen who testified<sup>19</sup>. It is interesting to think about a possible connection here, but we are still a long way from understanding a certain origin for the assertions about Haitian assistance for Cuban slaves.

A perhaps more likely possibility is that the slaves' claims referred instead to one of the conspirators in the Aponte plot, Juan Barbier, a freed slave who appears to have spent time in Charleston and in Saint-Domingue. In Cuba in 1811-1812, Barbier took on the name, persona, and sometimes the uniform of Jean-François and tried to recruit slaves by presenting himself as someone now in Havana to fight for their freedom<sup>20</sup>. There were also other "French" figures in Havana at the time of the conspiracy. Men who had served under the real (now late) Jean-François in Saint-Domingue in 1791-1795, and who had been exiled from the island, were now returning to Santo Domingo and claimed to have stopped in Havana en route. During their several-month sojourn in Havana they appear to have had contact with local people of color, who, according to the testimony of the sojourners, displayed great interest in their military uniforms. Between the elusive Barbier and the former officers of the real but deceased Jean-François, there seem to have been flesh and blood referents for the vague but persistent testimony that there were two Haitian officers working for freedom in Havana.

But the slaves' testimony does not just refer to Haitian agents, it presumes more generally that inclination, will, and desire of Christophe and the Haitian state was to work for their freedom. Haiti, in the testimony, was a state that carried the promise of emancipation to slaves like themselves in other colonies of the region. What might have made witnesses so sure that Haiti was engaged in a policy of international anti-slavery and that they themselves would be its beneficiaries? It would certainly be possible to read the slaves' belief in this Haitian mission as a powerful appropriation of the memory of the Haitian Revolution to serve the interests and desires of Cuban slaves at the moment. I think, however, that it makes more sense to read this belief as part of the slaves' sustained interpretation of recent Haitian acts and of interesting Haitian news then circulating in Havana. Early in 1811, news began arriving in Havana about new and daring acts by Christophe in the north, who was intercepting slave ships bound for Cuba, liberating the Africans on board, bringing them to Haitian soil as free men and women, and sending the crews and empty ships on their way. In 1810-1812, such was the fate of

with Spanish authorities in Philadelphia, see AGI, Estado, leg. 12, no. 54.

<sup>19</sup> I discuss these connections more extensively in *The Making and Unmaking of Slavery*, chapter 6.

<sup>20</sup> This claim is repeated many times in the testimony. See especially ANC, AP, leg. 13, exp. 1.

at least three ships: the Spanish *Nueva Gerona*; an unnamed Portuguese ship en route with 440 Africans from Rio de Janeiro to Havana, and the *Santa Ana*, whose shipment of 205 slaves was liberated and taken by Christophe's forces to the port of Gonaïves. In addition, Havana planters complained to authorities about the capture of "various slave ships" prior to the interception of these three, news of which, they said, was circulating in Havana<sup>21</sup>. If the news circulated, we can be sure that one of its key points of transmission would have been the docks, where the arrival of empty slave ships, whose original human cargo had been taken to Haiti, would have found a most attentive audience. As is well known, many of the figures questioned in association with the Aponte conspiracy were men who frequented the docks, as workers or simply as residents of a bustling port city. Many further testified to having heard news of the current conspiracy and of Haiti itself at the docks. It was in fact at the docks where Haitian artifacts and images circulated from hand to hand. One of the principal conspirators in the Aponte rebellion in Havana, Francisco Xavier Pacheco, confessed shortly before his execution that when Aponte showed him a portrait of King Christophe, he had explained "that England was intercepting the ships that came loaded with blacks because it no longer wanted slavery, sending them to [Haiti] to be governed by the black king"<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> On these three examples, see Junta Consular to Capitán General, 23 February 1811 and 26 June 1811, in Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, La Habana (BNJM), CM Morales, Tomo 79, nos. 23 and 26 respectively; and Claudio Martínez Pinillos to Real Consulado, 24 March 1812, in ANC, AP, leg. 106, exp. 21. Haitian interception of slave ships is discussed briefly in José Luciano Franco, *Comercio clandestino de esclavos*, 106-107. The fate of the *Santa Ana*, which was taken to the port of Gonaïves, may be linked to the history of the famous village and ritual center of Souvenance, a few miles from that city. In oral and popular history, the origins of the place are associated with a slave ship whose human cargo was liberated and taken to that area in roughly this period. Personal communication, Patrick Tardieu, November 2006; Michel Hector and Jean Casimir, February 2007. To my knowledge, no one has worked on the Haitian capture of slave ships, and it is thus impossible at this point to know how widespread or rare the practice was, whether it affected other slave holding powers, the extent to which such acts were carried out by north or south, or the fate of those Africans aboard the ships captured. Years later, Christophe, in correspondence with British abolitionist Thomas Clarkson, appears to deny involvement in such practices, writing on March 20, 1819, «Though it is only with the greatest grief that I can bear to see Spanish vessels engaged in the slave trade within sights of our coasts, it is not my intention to fit out ships of war against them». This was in reply to Clarkson's recommendation that he consider doing just that. See Leslie Griggs and Clifford Prator, eds., *Henry Christophe and Thomas Clarks: A Correspondence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952), 115-117 and 128. For this same period, José Luciano Franco (*Comercio*, 107) briefly discusses an 1819 case in which Boyer's naval forces (on the warship *Wilberforce*) intercept a Cuban-bound slave ship, and free and take its hundreds of captives to Port-au-Prince.

<sup>22</sup> Here the testimony seems to echo the interpretation of the events advanced by the Real Consulado to the Captain-General: that Haiti was intercepting slave ships with the protection of the British. The quote is from the testimony of Francisco Xavier Pacheco, in *Autos sobre el incendio de Peñas Altas*, in ANC, AP, leg. 13, exp. 1, f. 291. Quote is: «y entonces le enseño Aponte el retrato del Rey negro de Aití nombrado Henrique Cristóval, instruyendole que se había coronado y reconocido por el Rey de Ynglaterra y el Rey de España. Que

It was in this world, that slaves and free people of color talked about Haiti's commitment to their freedom – a world where men and women who would have been enslaved alongside them had through the intervention of Christophe reached free soil<sup>23</sup>.

#### 4. Conclusion

If we return to our original question of how the Haitian Revolution was apprehended in a Cuba that was just making the transition to full-fledged slavery, we see now how insufficient it is to speak simply about vague notions of fear and hope. Whatever sense of fear or hope may have been sparked in Cuba by the Haitian Revolution would have likely drawn on ample raw material, on detailed narratives, and suggestive stories available to residents of Cuba regarding those events. So, for example, when alleged slave conspirators in Bayamo in 1805 relayed the name of Jean-François to Spanish authorities, or when, during the Aponte conspiracy, slaves and free people again invoked the shadowy figure in 1812, both tellers and audiences for those stories would have had ample opportunity to learn of the real Jean-François and his exploits. Likewise, the oft-repeated assertion that Creole elites feared that any attempt at political independence would awaken the population of color, perhaps makes more sense when we know that some of that elite had first-hand experience with unsuccessful attempts to mobilize and then contain former slaves in support of elite political goals. Cuban men deployed on the Saint-Domingue-Santo Domingo border had been defeated by some of those slave forces in 1794-1795. Cuban residents had opportunities to witness defeated whites evacuate the French colony and then to read the proclamations of their black victors. The fears or hopes allegedly inspired by the Haitian Revolution would have been shaped by these very concrete contacts and experiences.

But what of the enslaved and free people of color specifically? How are we to understand their relationship to and understanding of the Haitian

los Yngleses apresavan los Buques que vienían cargados de negros por que no queria que hubiera esclavitud, destinando aquellos a Santo Domingo para que fuesen gobernados por el Rey Negro».

<sup>23</sup> The ongoing work of Sue Peabody and Keila Grinberg on the evolution of the free soil idea prompts us to think of a related vernacular, as opposed to juridical, concept of Haiti as free soil, an association perhaps encouraged by Haitian policies such as the interception of slave ships whose captives were liberated “to” Haiti and Pétion's activist definitions of Haitianness (and thereby freedom) extending to black and brown people in other territories who might come to reside in Haiti. On the legal concept of free soil, see Sue Peabody and Keila Grinberg, *Free Soil: An Atlantic Legal Construct*, presented at the conference “Rethinking Boundaries: Transforming Methods and Approaches in Atlantic History”, New York University, 9-10 February 2007. On the circulation of vernacular, Atlantic concepts of rights, see also Rebecca Scott, “Public Rights and Private Commerce: A Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Creole Itinerary”, forthcoming in *Current Anthropology*.

Revolution? Undoubtedly, the example of the Haitian Revolution gave local resistance, conspiracy, and rebellion new momentum. Even though no rebellion came close to assuming the proportions of the Haitian example, and even though in most cases actual rebellion was thwarted, it is clear that the Haitian Revolution, and Haiti itself, became part of the cognitive world of the enslaved, who engaged it as possibility and goal and invoked it as metaphor for freedom or radical change. But for them clearly it was more than just a symbol, Haiti was also a living, active agent, a viable state with the potential to have an impact on their own lives. They consumed and thought about the most current information available to them, developing and sharing interpretations with one another about the meanings of the Haitian Revolution in relation to their own world. The traces of this intellectual process are audible in the voluminous slave testimony. And the traces of those conversations, as fragmentary and mediated as they are, leave further traces of slaves' engagement with Haiti as a state whose presence was in some way felt in their lives, as a state capable, for example, of freeing captives bound for Cuba, as a state whose very existence and whose actions (based on what they heard in Cuba) might in some way contribute to their own liberation. In this light, slave testimony about Haiti emerges less as vague abstraction or groundless hope. It can be seen, rather, as the product of slaves' sustained intellectual and political engagement with the tumultuous world of the Age of Revolution, a world that – based on their evidence and interpretation – might produce enough openings to help them generate freedom in their own lifetime.

## Chapter 2

# Cuba and Fernando Po in the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

[The Cubans] could have taken this island from the Spaniards if they had tried [...] but there was no organization among them at all, and so little caution that everybody knew their escape plan<sup>1</sup>.

When the *Tratado del Pardo* ratified the transfer of Fernando Po from Portugal to Spain in 1778, the Spanish government had no clear projects for the island's future role among its colonies. The first Spanish governor there – Carlos Chacón – did not take effective possession of the colony until almost a century later, when he arrived on the island in 1858. As climate and tropical diseases made colonization difficult, the colonial administration decided the Afro-Cuban population would have a better chance of adapting to the weather and helping to develop the cultivation of cane and cacao there<sup>2</sup>. In 1862, following a number of bureaucratic and practical problems, 200 black Cuban *emancipados* arrived on Fernando Po aboard the “Ferrol”.

This was the first contact between the two Spanish colonies, and it would not be the last. In 1862 and 1863, the Spanish government renewed its request to Cuban authorities for another group of 200 *emancipados* to be sent to the island. However, for reasons to be explained below, the project was never realized. Subsequent expeditions from Cuba to the African island, in 1866 and 1869, would no longer carry *emancipados* but instead political prisoners involved in the battle for independence<sup>3</sup>.

A study of the relations between Fernando Po and Cuba in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century suggests different reflections regarding the historiography of the

<sup>1</sup> John Holt, *The Diary of John Holt, 1862-1872* (Liverpool: Young, 1948), 148-149.

<sup>2</sup> Juan José Díaz Matarranz, *De la trata de los negros al cultivo del cacao. Evolución del modelo colonial español en Guinea ecuatorial de 1778 a 1914* (Barcelona: Ceiba, 2005), 111-115.

<sup>3</sup> This paper is a work in progress. As full access to Cuban newspapers and periodicals has not yet been possible, the research has been based on sources consulted in Spain. Apart from useful references found in secondary literature, the primary sources used here are mainly official documents (*Reales Ordenes*, documents from the *Archivo General de la Administración*, expedition reports, and the diaries of an English merchant and two Cuban political prisoners in Fernando Po).

period of the Cuban struggle for independence. On the one hand, it could help to reconsider the role of the *emancipados* in the Spanish colonial economic system by putting the issue of slavery and its role in Cuba not only in relation to US and Spanish interests, but also to other colonial realities of minor importance and dependent on Cuba. On the other hand, examining the polemic aroused by the project in Cuban public opinion at the time could contribute to the reconstruction of the different opinions, hopes and contradictions that linked the issue of and discourse on slavery with Cuban nationalism in the period before 1868. Finally, episodes of *emancipados* and political prisoners being transferred to Fernando Po by force opened up the issue of the competing and contradictory colonial policies that Spain practiced towards its first African possession and its last American one.

The few scholars who have dealt with the Cuban presence in Fernando Po have been specialists in African studies and have therefore focused more on the actual experience of Cubans on the island than on the reasons for and organization of the expeditions<sup>4</sup>. Their interests have been founded on the colonization process in Fernando Po, especially the reasons for the delay in its occupation and the scarce interest of the Spanish government in developing a precise plan to exploit its resources and develop its potential. In the present study, the main objective is to contribute to an understanding of the contradictory interaction between the economic interests of the Spanish Crown; the Spanish need to take control of their possessions in Guinea on the one hand and maintain political control over Cuba on the other; and the collision between nationalist sentiment and the fear of a racial war in Cuba.

It would be impossible to understand the atypical colonization process involving the only Spanish possession in Africa without taking Cuba and its history into consideration. Cuba, the jewel in Spain's crown, and Fernando Po have parallel but very different histories, as the growth of the Cuban sugarcane economy was the determining factor in the delayed colonization of the African island<sup>5</sup>.

Cuban sugar was the main trade of what survived of the mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish empire, and its production still required the exploitation of slave labor. Cuba became the driving force behind a huge growth in the demand for commodities and slave labor<sup>6</sup>. For this reason Spain became increasingly in-

<sup>4</sup> On the subject see: Maria Dolores García Cantús, *Fernando Poo: una aventura colonial española en el África Occidental 1778-1900* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Universidad de Valencia, 2003), 450-460; Mariano Luis de Castro y Antolín, *Fernando Poo y los emancipados de La Habana*, «Estudios Africanos», 14-15 (1994); C. Gonzalez Echegaray, "Cubanos en Fernando Poo. Un capítulo en las memorias de John Holt", *Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea*, 1 (2003), 205-212.

<sup>5</sup> On the "forgotten island" of Fernando Po, see: Mariano Luis De Castro and Maria De la Calle, *Origen de la colonización española de Guinea Ecuatorial (1777-1860)* (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> On Cuba, slavery and the latter's role among Spanish colonies see: Arthur F. Corwin, *Spain and the Abolition of Slavery in Cuba, 1817-1886* (Austin: Texas University Press, 1967); and Rebecca J. Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860-1899* (Princeton:



volved in West Africa during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, since Africa was seen as the answer to Cuba's need for labor. Most importantly, a base in Africa provided an opportunity to procure slaves directly for Cuba without foreign middlemen.

The first intersection of Cuban interests with the colonization of Fernando Po concerned the British-Spanish negotiation of 1839. As Spanish interest in the island had been minimal until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, British authorities had installed an anti-slaving base there. Between 1839 and 1841, the British government, which had evacuated the island in 1834, opened negotiations to buy the African island, but failed in its attempt. Initially it had seemed that the Spanish government was greatly interested in ceding their forgotten possession. However, it closed negotiations in the face of Cuban opposition. Cuban planters opposed the cession because a British settlement in that area would have posed a difficult obstacle to their illicit slave trade. The United Kingdom's offer to buy the African island forced the Spanish government to pay more attention to its possessions in Guinea, and in 1858 a commission was created to research a strategy for the future of Fernando Po. However, the colonization plans they drew up at the time subordinated the development and government of the island to Cuban economic interests.

When the Spanish government decided to take definitive possession of Fernando Po, the British engagement to fight slavery and the fear of violent protest among black settlers convinced Spain not to introduce slavery to the island. A royal order of 1859 proclaimed all slaves arriving there to be free, therefore making Fernando Po an anomaly among Spanish colonies. After the failure of the two expeditions of Spanish settlers in 1859, Cuba's need to alleviate the tension provoked by the large presence of *emancipados* and Fernando Po's need for a labor force appeared to meet in the recovery of the old project to use *emancipado* population to colonize the African island.

The idea of colonizing the African possession with Cuban *emancipados* had already been part of Spanish plans in the 1840s when L. O'Donnell – then Capitán General de Cuba – proposed taking a certain number of Afro-Cuban freedmen off the island and sending them to Fernando Po “because their nature or attitude caused troubles on the island”<sup>7</sup>. It was believed this initiative could have two important and positive consequences: not only could it introduce Spanish costumes, religion and language to the island – where English presence had been very strong – in a pacific way, it could also alleviate the tensions provoked by the presence of *emancipados* in Cuban society. However, these initial intentions would not be realized until the 1860s, and the colonial authorities continued using the island's Kruman population for labor and attempting to organize settlements with Spanish

Princeton University Press, 1985).

<sup>7</sup> O'Donnell's letter of 25 June 1845, in Archivo General de la Administración de Madrid (hereafter AGAM), Africa-Guinea (AG), box 683.

settlers<sup>8</sup>. Meanwhile, the lack of labor in Fernando Po became pressing and cacao started to prevail over the island's other crops – sugarcane, coffee and spices – because it needed much less care than the other seeds.

In Cuba, on the other hand, the reform movement had gained strength, which led Spain to initiate a period of tolerance under Capitán General Francisco Serrano y Domínguez and his successor, Domingo Dulce, in an attempt to curb independent tendencies. It had become clear that slavery and the racial issue were the keys to Cuban independence. A growing number of Cubans therefore started to advocate the ending of the slave trade and even the gradual abolition of slavery. It was in this climate that the first expedition of *emancipados* was organized and carried out in the early 1860s.

### I. The Problem of the Cuban *Emancipados* in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

The problem of the *emancipados* and their use as a slave-labor or hard-labor force remained a recurring issue that intersects with the histories of both Cuba and Fernando Po. The surplus of slaves that was reached in Cuba during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century put the island in a contradictory situation: not only did the need for slave labor clash with the fear of a “negro” insurrection, but it was also controversial with respect to the growing activism in favor of Cuban independence.

Spain signed the second treaty to abolish the slave trade in 1835. While this treaty granted a mutual Right of Search and authorized the condemnation and dismantling of vessels equipped for the slave trade, its most important consequence was probably the problems it caused for the administration of *emancipados*<sup>9</sup>.

The treaty signed in 1817 had already declared that slaves liberated by the British antislavery squadron had to be received on Cuban territory and that the Spanish government had to grant a certificate of emancipation to these recaptured Africans. Spain, which still covertly approved of the illegal importation of slaves, now had to face the sudden emergence of a class of freedmen whose status was guaranteed by international agreement. There were already more than 5,000 of these recaptives, or *emancipados*, in Cuba in 1834, but the major preoccupation for Spanish authorities was the exponential growth of their number<sup>10</sup>.

Here their status was ruled by an annex, the *Reglamento para el buen trato de los negros emancipados*. The most important article in the *Reglamento* was the fourth, according to which the Spanish government was obliged to assure the freedom of *emancipados*, as well as promote their moral and religious education

<sup>8</sup> Matarranz, *De la trata*, 111-115.

<sup>9</sup> Transcription of the *Tratado [segundo] entre España y el Reino Unido para la abolición del tráfico de esclavos* in Manuel Lucena Salmoral, *Leyes para esclavos...* (Madrid: Tavera, 2000), 1236-1249, doc. 535.

<sup>10</sup> Corwin, *Spain*.

and instruction so they could be in the condition to earn a living. *Emancipados* were entrusted to corporations in charge of their “education to freedom” for a period of five years, during which time they repaid their freedom through forced work; this period could also be prolonged for another three years<sup>11</sup>.

The 1861 census reports the presence of 6,650 *emancipados* on the island, many of whom were declared free in 1870 (4,492)<sup>12</sup>. This new class of Afro-Cubans was viewed as a more disruptive threat to the maintenance of the slave order than the pre-existing class of Cuban freedmen:

If those who have redeemed themselves from slavery by their honor, or by their savings which have been the fruit of proper conduct are feared in the towns because of their excessive numbers compared to the whites, how much more are they to be feared if we add to them negros [...] who lack these qualities? And how much greater would be the danger if the incendiary spirit of Independence is communicated to the slaves, making a common cause, following the example of those of Santo Domingo?<sup>13</sup>

The evocation of the Haitian revolution, often recalled by Cuban representatives in the Cortes and by advocates of slavery in the debate over abolition, was used as an excuse for the inhuman treatment reserved for *emancipados*. In the following decades, *emancipados* suffered all forms of abuse. Initially, the Capitán General M. Tacón allowed them to be transferred to the plantations and incorporated into the slave-labor force, practically endorsing a cheap and illicit internal trade of “slaves”<sup>14</sup>; often they even took the place of dead slaves, whom were declared to the authorities as dead *emancipados* instead. By the end of the 1860s, their situation, ratified by the *Reglamento de emancipados* in 1855, was worse than that of slaves<sup>15</sup>.

While one possible solution to the difficult Cuban *emancipado* situation was another expulsion of the most active and dangerous elements from the island, Cuban interests completely clashed with the needs of Fernando Po. Cuba would be the main beneficiary of such an initiative, as is evident from the fact that Fernando Po authorities had already refused to receive *emancipados* from the United States in 1861<sup>16</sup>. In this sense, the Cuban situation was peculiar, as it encouraged both emigration and immigration of black labor. The illicit slave trade was meant to procure the labor force necessary for the sugar economy, while a reverse emigration scheme would free Cuba of its emergent class of *emancipados*.

<sup>11</sup> Transcription of the *Reglamento para el buen trato de los negros emancipados* in Salmoral, *Leyes*, 1248-1249, doc. 535.

<sup>12</sup> Salmoral, *Leyes*, 451.

<sup>13</sup> Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Social Control in Slave Plantation Societies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 131.

<sup>14</sup> The price of an *emancipado* was 1/3 of the price of a slave.

<sup>15</sup> Corwin, *Spain*.

<sup>16</sup> Correspondence in AGAM, AG, box 672, n. 3.

## 2. Transferring *Emancipados* from Cuba to Fernando Po, 1862

On 7 March 1860, the first *Real Orden* was sent to Cuba asking for 200 *emancipados* to be sent to Fernando Po, a petition that remained unattended and was repeated in another *Orden* of 5 April 1861<sup>17</sup>. As stated therein, “such a small number of workers cannot in any way penalize the development of public works on the island, especially if we take into consideration [...] the evil always caused by colored *libertos*”<sup>18</sup>.

Not only did the contrasting interests of the two colonies start a debate in Cuba over whether to expel a good number of *emancipados*, but it also led to an interesting series of letters/reports in which Cuban, Spanish and Fernando Po authorities discussed who exactly should be sent to the African island. The dispute delayed the organization of the expedition for two years, and an analysis of the composition of the group that was eventually sent from Cuba reveals the extent to which these *emancipados* matched the expectations of either side.

Authorities in Fernando Po had expressed their opposition to the project from the beginning. By the end of June 1860, however, the island’s governor, J. de la Gándara y Navarro, sent a report regarding the binding conditions and advantages determined for the *emancipados* who were going to migrate there<sup>19</sup>. Though expressing his skepticism of the expedition’s benefits for the African island, he wrote that deportees could in fact help to replace the peninsular military garrison and carry out public works to help advance the colonization process. In an attempt to prevent Cuban authorities from taking the opportunity to expel criminals and dangerous elements, the *Ordenes* contained several requirements. One of the first general requirements was that the *emancipados* be “intelligent and civilized people [...], who speak Spanish and profess our religion; even better if with their wives”<sup>20</sup>, to contrast British influence. The most important request, however, concerned their professional skills: the expedition was required to include at least twelve house servants, ten masons, ten master carpenters, three blacksmiths, three bakers, two cobblers and two tailors, while the rest could be composed of unskilled or agricultural laborers<sup>21</sup>.

If, on the other hand, *emancipados* had to be recruited as volunteers for the expedition, as stated in the *Ordenes*, what were they offered to attract them to the other side of the ocean? In order to settle on the island, *emancipados* with the requested professional skills were promised complete freedom in addition to a salary – the same given to the previous settlers from Spain; they were furthermore promised land to cultivate. The others were told they could have the same

<sup>17</sup> Transcription of *Reales Ordenes* in Agustín Miranda Junco, *Leyes Coloniales* (Madrid: Rivadeneyra, 1945), 29 and 31.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, 31.

<sup>19</sup> De la Gándara y Navarro, letter of 28 June 1860 in AGAM, AG, box 672.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

advantages if they decided to stay on the island at the end of their contract<sup>22</sup>.

The organization of the expedition proceeded slowly, since the Cuban government's plan was to pressure Spanish authorities to transform Fernando Po into a penal colony for undesirable Afro-Cubans and political dissidents. Capitán General F. Serrano y Domínguez expressed the same desire in a letter he sent the Spanish government on 6 June 1861, in which he asked for «all those coloreds who have been sentenced in Cuba for brawling, illegal weapons possession, drunkenness and other crimes of this kind» to be sent to Fernando Po<sup>23</sup>.

Four months after the publication of the recruitment announcement, he communicated that no *emancipados* had yet asked to participate and that it would consequently be necessary to recruit them without their consent<sup>24</sup>. In spite of the doubts expressed by the governor of Fernando Po<sup>25</sup>, who protested against the idea of sending black criminals to a developing colony and lamented the unattractive conditions offered to volunteers, the order was renewed on 26 October 1861<sup>26</sup>. Governor La Gándara had nothing left to do but ask that the necessary number of participants be recruited “por la elección o por la suerte” among those who corresponded with the requested requirements. On 14 June 1862, 200 black *emancipados* were shipped across the ocean aboard the “Ferrol”, arriving on Fernando Po on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August of that year<sup>27</sup>.

### 3. The Experience of *Emancipados* on Fernando Po and the *Reglamento de emancipados*

The group of Cubans who arrived on Fernando Po met few of the requirements requested by the island's governor. With regards to the demographic composition of the group, a report on the expedition drawn up in 1862 includes a list of the 200 *emancipados*, indicating their age and original provenance<sup>28</sup>. The large majority of them were young males from ten to thirty-six years of age, while the few women included in the expedition were between eleven and sixteen years old<sup>29</sup>. But what can the data tell us about the criteria adopted by Cuban authorities to recruit *emancipados* for the expedition? Fernando Po's new governor, P. López Ayllón, wrote that, although the newly arrived young labor force could prove very useful on the island, there were just two masons and one blacksmith among them.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>23</sup> Serrano y Domínguez's letter, 6 June 1861, AGAM, AG, box 672.

<sup>24</sup> Serrano y Domínguez's letter, 26 September 1861 in AGAM, AG, box 672.

<sup>25</sup> Letter of 25 September 1861 in AGAM, AG, box 672.

<sup>26</sup> Transcription of *Reales Ordenes* in Junco, *Leyes Coloniales*, 32.

<sup>27</sup> *Relación nominal y circunstanciada de los doscientos negros emancipados que por R.O. de 21 de Marzo de 1862 se han trasladado desde esta Isla de Cuba a la de Fernando Poo en el vapor transporte “Ferrol”*, in AGAM, AG, box 672.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

In virtue of this, the governor asked that another 200 *emancipados* be sent, among which he requested the presence of thirty-two masons, sixteen master carpenters, six blacksmiths, and a few tile makers and glaziers<sup>30</sup>.

The scarce professional skills of the *emancipados* sent from Cuba already give us an idea of how little the requests of Fernando Po had been taken into account in their selection. By looking at the age and provenance of the participants, one could argue that the majority of them, who were very young, were probably recently arrived and emancipated slaves (*bozales*). The small remaining group of older *emancipados*, on the other hand, was likely formed by “undesirable” Afro-Cubans, a fact that could be confirmed by the indication of Cuban towns in the place of the expedition name. In the documents written by Fernando Po authorities, there are not many other explicit references to the composition of the expedition, apart from a final note by the governor in charge in 1871, A. Vivar, regarding the laziness and poor nature of the Cuban *emancipados*<sup>31</sup>.

Another serious problem posed by the composition of the Cuban group was the scarcity of women. There were only twenty-five of them – a fact that, together with the general scarcity of women on the island, made it difficult to celebrate marriages as encouraged by Spanish authorities. Nevertheless, as the merchant John Holt noted ironically in his diary, barely a month after their arrival already twenty-one marriages had been celebrated<sup>32</sup>.

Adapting to life in Guinea was difficult from the beginning for the *emancipados*. While accommodations were arranged for the twenty-one married couples in 1862, the rest of the Cubans had to wait until 1863 when housing blocks were built on a patch of land west of Santa Isabel. This was destined to be a new neighborhood, called “Congo”, which was to pass officially to the Cubans in 1867 at the end of their contracts<sup>33</sup>.

But how did the *emancipados* react to their transfer to Fernando Po and how did they adapt to their new life? Many did not expect to be forced to work and were especially unwilling to accept that almost half their salary (fifty *reales* per month) would only be paid at the end of the contract, after five years. Some tried to protest when informed of the conditions, but the governor repressed the rebellion immediately, inflicting “punishments proportioned to their faults” upon the rebels<sup>34</sup>.

In the governor’s opinion, it seemed the Cubans had left the island with a deceitful idea of their destiny in Fernando Po. In order to correct such misleading ideas, the governor promulgated the *Reglamento de emancipados*, upon which the Cubans were instructed every Sunday<sup>35</sup>. With the help of

<sup>30</sup> López Ayllón’s letter, 7 August 1862 in AGAM, AG, box 672.

<sup>31</sup> AGAM, AG, box 781, n. 29.

<sup>32</sup> John Holt wrote in his diary: “Today [...] Spaniards have married a lot of these Cubans by wholesale”, quoted in García Cantús, *Fernando Poo*, 460.

<sup>33</sup> AGAM, AG, box 672, n. 1.

<sup>34</sup> AGAM, AG, box 672.

<sup>35</sup> *Proyecto de Reglamento para el Régimen de los Emancipados de la isla de Fernando Poo*, 28 Septem-

the *emancipados* and the energetic direction of Governor López Ayllón, in just a couple of months a church was built, the main square was leveled and the bogs around Santa Isabel were reclaimed. The group then went on to contribute to the development of different *granjas* in which tobacco, coffee and especially cacao were to be cultivated<sup>36</sup>.

When their five years under the jurisdiction of the Fernando Po government came to an end, many *emancipados* expressed the desire to go back to Cuba. However, none of them could: Fernando Po authorities had in fact used the salary the *emancipados* were supposed to be paid at the end of their contract to finance the building up of the “Congo”. Moreover, it was decided that the children of *emancipados* would be under the protection of the governor until their legal age, and therefore had to stay on the island<sup>37</sup>. In the end, the only capital the Cubans received from the authorities was the Congo neighborhood, and from the descriptions we have of the situation there, the exchange was not in their favor. As described in the diary of a Cuban political prisoner deported to Fernando Po in 1869, there were no streets and the neighborhood was just a square “around which [the Cubans] have built their shacks and live miserably, those who live, since most have died”<sup>38</sup>.

The Congo’s population declined rapidly in the years following 1867, though we do not know if this was due to a high mortality rate or to the integration of Cubans with the native Bubi population through marriage<sup>39</sup>. It is clear, however, that the hopes of Governor La Gándara were unfulfilled even in this case, since the assimilation process had gone in the opposite direction of that desired. The scarcity of women and the difficulty adapting to life on the island had made it either impossible or detrimental for Cubans to maintain their costumes and cultural identity, thereby facilitating their integration with the island’s Bubi people.

#### 4. Cuban Political Prisoners (1866-1869) and the Failure of Fernando Po as a Penal Colony

Despite the problems aroused by the organization and realization of the first expedition, the need for skilled workers induced Fernando Po’s governor to demand that another Cuban contingent be sent in 1862 and again in 1863<sup>40</sup>. However, Domingo Dulce, who replaced F. Serrano as Capitán General in 1862, refused to organize any new expeditions. The reason he gave was that

ber 1867, AGAM, AG, box 672.

<sup>36</sup> De Castro y Antolín, *Fernando*, 13-14.

<sup>37</sup> *Proyecto de Reglamento para el Régimen de los Emancipados de la isla de Fernando Poo*, 28 September 1867, in AGAM, AG, box 672.

<sup>38</sup> Francisco Javier Balmaseda, *Los confinados a Fernando Poo e Impresiones de un viaje a Guinea* (New York: Imprenta de la Revolución, 1869), 148.

<sup>39</sup> De Castro y Antolín, *Fernando*, 14-15.

<sup>40</sup> AGAM, AG, box 672; Transcription of *Reales Ordenes* in Junco, *Leyes*, 42.

all the *emancipados* with professional skills were already employed, so only unskilled workers answered the new recruitment publication. Moreover, he complained in his letter that *emancipados* received worse treatment in Guinea than in Cuba, and refused to send any more expeditions under such conditions<sup>41</sup>.

While this refusal marked the failure of the larger project to transfer the *emancipado* population to Guinea, it did not mark the end of the colonial project to transform Fernando Po into a penal colony for dangerous Afro-Cubans and political dissidents. Subsequent expeditions from Cuba to the African island, in 1866 and 1869, would no longer carry *emancipados* but instead political prisoners accused of being involved in the battle for independence.

In 1867, the failure of the *Junta de Información* – formed to discuss proposals to reform the island – marked the failure of reformism in general and gave new impetus to the independence movement. Moreover, Spain sent to Cuba Francisco de Lersundi, a reactionary captain-general who prohibited public meetings and clamped tight political censure over reformist literature. Spanish authorities had already been using different measures of repression to contrast nationalist efforts: alongside a diffused policy of expropriation, those considered a threat to the maintenance of social order could be condemned to imprisonment in various detention centers around Cuba, forced relocation within Cuba (*reconcentración*) or deportation. Before the radicalization of the clash over independence, the main goal of deportation had been to re-Hispanicize Cuba through the expulsion of *emancipados*. Then, in 1866 and 1869, the majority of deportees were undesirable Creoles – including insurrectionists, political undesirables, reformists and dissidents.

Some ninety Cubans arrived in Guinea in 1866 and another 250 were deported in 1869. These were the last of the expeditions, since Spanish authorities subsequently abandoned the project of using Fernando Po as a penal colony. From the little information we have on the first group, it seems that, as in 1862, they were mainly black Cubans from the lower classes:

Most of them were colored: ten of them were accused of being professional assassins or thieves, though with no charge against them; the government considered the others to be layabouts, drunks [...] many were totally innocent, but had enemies among the police officers, and some had committed the crime of loving honor and having beautiful daughters<sup>42</sup>.

The deportees were decimated by the poor hygienic conditions and yellow fever. Those who survived were shipped off to Madeira, where their traces were lost after Portuguese authorities refused to receive them<sup>43</sup>.

The deportees of 1869, on the other hand, belonged to the Cuban bour-

<sup>41</sup> AGAM, AG, box 672.

<sup>42</sup> Balmaseda, *Los confinados*, 142.

<sup>43</sup> Juan B. Saluvet, *Los deportados a Fernando Poo en 1869* (Matanzas: Aurora del Yumurí, 1892).



geoisie, including such distinguished Cubans as Carlos Castillo, the director of the *Caja de Ahorros de Cuba*, plantation owner José Manuel Ponce de León and Pedro Barrenqui, the vice-consul in Cardenas<sup>44</sup>. We have more information on this expedition, since the diaries of two of the prisoners who arrived that year, Francisco Xavier Balmaseda (a nationalist writer) and Juan B. Saluvel, allow us to reconstruct their experience on Fernando Po in detail.

The fact of belonging to the Cuban upper class assured these prisoners of a better destiny than that reserved for participants in previous expeditions. For many of the island's merchants their arrival represented an occasion to make good deals, providing whatever might be necessary for their survival, but some also felt genuine sympathy and helped the new arrivals to escape<sup>45</sup>. Spanish authorities did not put much effort into trying to retain the Cuban deportees, who organized several plans to escape, probably because of the scarcity of food caused by the excess foreign population. The testimony of a British merchant who lived on Fernando Po at the time, John Holt, confirms the benevolence of Spanish soldiers towards their escape attempts and the benignancy of the island's population towards these forced immigrants.

From his diary, as well as from Balmaseda's account, we know that these Cuban deportees also had the occasion to take control of Fernando Po during their stay: "We had two-hundred rifles, gunpowder and bullets to surprise the garrison and take possession of the island in the name of our republic, to name the colored man who deserves it most as governor and then leave"<sup>46</sup>. Though Holt shows some sympathy towards the Cubans, he blames their failure to take over the island on their laziness and lack of organization, which he wrote was also what had prevented them from reaching independence for their country<sup>47</sup>.

Fundamentally, the plan to take control of Fernando Po failed because the Cubans preferred to escape it. The majority of prisoners succeeded, or they managed to obtain a transfer; only some remained there after completing their sentence.

## 5. Preliminary Conclusions

As we have seen in the case of the relations between Fernando Po and Cuba in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, slavery remains a central issue in the struggle over empire and nationhood. The struggles for and against slavery, and for and against independence in Cuba, took place in a society shaped by centuries of European colonization and the African slave trade. The contours of this world can therefore only be understood by taking into account the complex interactions between Africa, Europe and the Americas.

<sup>44</sup> Holt, *The Diary*.

<sup>45</sup> Balmaseda, *Los confinados*; Saluvel, *Los deportados*; Holt, *The Diary*.

<sup>46</sup> Balmaseda, *Los confinados*, 146-147.

<sup>47</sup> Holt, *The Diary*.

In particular, the organization and realization of the 1862 expedition illustrates the difficulties caused by the growing number of *emancipados* in Cuba towards the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This new class of Afro-Cubans represented a powerful threat to the maintenance of the slave order since they had lived much of their lives outside the strict control of that system, therefore Cuban authorities tried – illegally – to reduce them again to the condition of slavery. The issue was even more controversial for Cuban elites since the growth of the Afro-Cuban and *emancipado* populations was, for that part of society in favor of independence, a powerful reminder of the “risk” of a racial war such as that which had taken place in Haiti. Slavery and the African slave trade always figured centrally in the Cuban nation-building process, not least because slaves themselves took up arms to fight for liberation.

The project to make Fernando Po a penal colony for political dissidents or a relief valve for Cuban *emancipados* failed for a number of reasons: first, for the lack of a clear colonization plan; second, because of colliding Spanish interests, divided between the need for a Cuban sugar economy and the development possibilities of the African colony; and third, because any initiative taken regarding Fernando Po was a consequence of Cuba’s African trade, making it an isolated episode without a coherent plan.

In the case of the 1862 expedition, we know Cuba’s need for labor played a major role in the decision to refuse to send more *emancipados*, but it would nevertheless be interesting to analyze thoroughly the debate in Cuban society at the time. Who were those in favor and those against its organization? The interests of Cuban elites and those of the Spanish colonial administration seem to coincide on this occasion, but one could argue it was likely for opposite reasons. As mentioned above, Spanish authorities were worried not only about the effect *emancipados* would have on the maintenance of the slave order but also, and especially, about “how much greater would be the danger if the incendiary spirit of Independence is communicated to the slaves, making a common cause”<sup>48</sup>.

As is evident from this quotation, if for the Cuban elite in favor of independence the worst obstacle to its realization was precisely the fear of a racial war, colonial authorities, on the other side, feared the possibility of a coalition between slaves and political dissidents. While it is clear that Cuba’s intention with this expedition was to expel a good number of “undesirable Afro-Cubans”, it would be worthwhile to better define the concept of “dangerous” for colonial authorities, to see if it carried political implications in addition to those of race and public security. For the implicit and unsolvable contradiction present in the opposing intentions of the three parties involved, the colonization plan for the Spanish possession in Africa had been destined from the beginning to disappoint authorities in Spain, Cuba and Fernando Po.

<sup>48</sup> Midlo Hall, *Social Control*, 132.

## Chapter 3

# Identidades raciales, nacionalismo, jerarquías sociales: los líderes “de color” en Cuba (1902-1912)\*

El 20 de mayo de 1902 nacía la república cubana, después de más de treinta años de lucha por la independencia. El proceso de consolidación del nuevo estado fue acompañado de una renovada presencia de tensiones y conflictos raciales, que se desarrollaron siguiendo pautas inéditas con respecto a las décadas anteriores.

Dos factores principales condicionaron el despliegue de las relaciones raciales, influenciando las visiones y estrategias de los actores político-sociales y poniendo límites a sus acciones. Por un lado, el nuevo estado independiente se caracterizó por un contexto excepcional de igualdad formal y de extensión de la ciudadanía a través del sufragio universal masculino. Este factor determinó la presencia de un electorado “de color” numéricamente relevante, que iba a condicionar las dinámicas de la política institucional y las estrategias de los partidos<sup>1</sup>. Sin embargo, la situación de igualdad formal tropezó con la persistencia de prejuicios raciales, justificados y disimulados con discursos que hacían hincapié en el menor nivel de instrucción de la población de color. Estas discriminaciones contribuyeron a reajustar las jerarquías sociales del nuevo estado, frustrando los anhelos

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<sup>1</sup> En este trabajo se utilizan los apelativos “de color” y “negros y mulatos” – en lugar de “afrocubano” adoptado en la literatura reciente – por su capacidad de reflejar los criterios de inclusión y de marginación usados en la época. Los apelativos “gente de color”, “raza de color”, “clase de color” y “negros” designaron en el lenguaje político de aquellos años entidades colectivas y revelan la intención de identificar en una categoría única a la población de origen africano, superando las distinciones basadas en gradaciones del color. El término “mulato” se usó para indicar el color de individuos y tuvo un significado ambiguo ya que sustituyó otras categorías como “señor” y “ciudadano”. La expresión “negros y mulatos” adoptada en este estudio discrepa pues de la categoría de “negros” que se usó en la época y revela el intento de conciliar modalidades distintas que designaron individuos y entidades colectivas.

de igualdad de muchos negros y mulatos.

La situación de dependencia económica y política de Estados Unidos, en las primeras décadas de vida de la república, es otro factor que condicionó de manera relevante las relaciones raciales. En el siglo XIX Estados Unidos había manifestado muchas veces su interés en anexionar la isla<sup>2</sup>. En 1898, al finalizar la Guerra de Independencia, intervino en el conflicto apropiándose de la dirección militar. Treinta años de lucha contra el colonialismo español fueron sustituidos por la “guerra hispano-americana” y por más de tres años de ocupación estadounidense<sup>3</sup>. El estado cubano creado en 1902 iba a ser formalmente independiente, aunque subordinado políticamente y económicamente a la potencia norteamericana<sup>4</sup>. Bajo dicho dominio se frenaron los intentos, que dieron inicio con las guerras de independencia, de derribar las jerarquías raciales y de clase, clara herencia de la esclavitud. En el nuevo estado surgieron ideas inéditas de nación “blanca” – mezcla de concepciones de la época colonial y del racismo importado de Estados Unidos – que debilitarían los ideales de igualdad elaborados durante las guerras de independencia<sup>5</sup>. Sin embargo los proyectos de “blanqueamiento”, voluntad de políticos e intelectuales cubanos, tropezaron

<sup>2</sup> Los proyectos de anexión de Cuba estuvieron relacionados con el mantenimiento de la esclavitud en ambos territorios y fueron soportados mayoritariamente por los estados esclavistas del sur de Estados Unidos. Los intentos de anexar la isla fueron múltiples, desde propuestas de compra dirigidas a España hasta intentos de ocupación armada. También los hacendados cubanos, que vieron con el anexionismo la posibilidad de preservar su status y su patrimonio, apoyaron conspiraciones y ofrecieron sostener económicamente la adquisición de la isla por Estados Unidos. Ver Alessandra Lorini, *L'impero della libertà e l'isola strategica. Gli Stati Uniti e Cuba tra Otto e Novecento* (Napoli: Liguori, 2008), 35-42, Hugh Thomas, *La colonia española de Cuba*, en *Historia de América Latina*, tomo V, ed. Leslie Bethell (Barcelona: Crítica, 1991), 163-164.

<sup>3</sup> Al estallar la guerra en 1895 el gobierno estadounidense apoyó oficialmente a España y actuó de cara a contrastar, desde su territorio, las expediciones en favor de la Independencia. Según Louis A. Pérez la victoria cubana iba a ser evidente cuando Estados Unidos intervino en el conflicto y transformó la Guerra de Independencia en guerra hispano-americana, imponiendo esta última en las agendas y en el lenguaje de la política internacional. Ver Lorini, *L'impero*, 83-84; Louis A. Pérez, *The War of 1898. The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Luis Aguilar, *Cuba, c. 1860-1934*, en *Historia de América Latina*, tomo VI, ed. Leslie Bethell (Barcelona: Crítica, 1991), 220-221.

<sup>4</sup> Una enmienda añadida a la Constitución cubana y conocida como “Enmienda Platt” permitiría al gobierno de Estados Unidos intervenir militarmente para “preservar la independencia” y proteger “la vida, la propiedad y la libertad individual”. Su inclusión en la Constitución cubana dividió en dos la Asamblea Constituyente: quince delegados se opusieron y dieciséis la aprobaron, permitiendo crear el nuevo estado si bien despojado de su soberanía. Al mismo tiempo el *Tratado de Reciprocidad Comercial* firmado en 1902 consolidó la dependencia económica de Cuba por Estados Unidos. Ver *Diario de Sesiones de la Convención Constituyente de la Isla de Cuba* (La Habana: 1901), 482-486; Aguilar, “Cuba”, 225-226; Louis A. Pérez, *Cuba Under the Platt Amendment, 1902-1934* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986), 52-55; Id., *Cuba Between Empires, 1878-1902* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), 323; Jorge Ibarra, *Partidos políticos y clases sociales* (La Habana: Ciencias Sociales, 1992), 26-27.

<sup>5</sup> Ver Loredana Giolitto, *Raza y nación en Cuba durante la primera ocupación estadounidense. Un análisis del periódico Patria*, en Josef Opatrný, ed., *Nación y cultura nacional en el Caribe hispano* (Praga: Karolinum, 2005), 115-122.

con las exigencias de una economía dependiente que dispusiera de mano de obra barata. En aquel contexto el racismo fue funcional a la marginación social de negros y mulatos, que seguían siendo indispensables como mano de obra para caña de azúcar y que habían sido formalmente incluidos en el nuevo estado.

Teniendo en cuenta los límites aquí presentados, este trabajo pretende analizar las propuestas que algunos líderes “de color” elaboraron, con sus escritos y acciones, con el fin de contrastar las discriminaciones raciales en los primeros años de vida del nuevo estado.

## I. Los años del silencio

En la república recién constituida muchas personas de color – intelectuales, políticos, veteranos de la independencia – se opusieron a las desigualdades raciales con escritos, estrategias, proyectos y acciones. Sin embargo sus propósitos tropezarían con la imposibilidad de modificar las jerarquías sociales sin poner en peligro la supervivencia misma de la independencia.

El vínculo entre desigualdades sociales y discriminaciones raciales y su indisolubilidad, en el contexto de soberanía limitada de la república cubana, es el nudo fundamental para leer los proyectos y acciones de los líderes de color, a la luz de las tensiones y contrastes de aquella época. Este entorno, definido a principios del siglo XIX con el derrumbe de la producción de azúcar en Haití tras la revolución de los esclavos en 1791, supuso la expansión de la economía azucarera y de la esclavitud en Cuba<sup>6</sup>. Con la llegada masiva de esclavos muta la relación demográfica entre población blanca y de color, mientras el tránsito hacía una esclavitud sobre todo rural embrutecía las condiciones de vida de los esclavos<sup>7</sup>. La marginación racial y social sobrevivió a la abolición de la esclavitud, en 1886, y a la derrota del colonialismo español, en 1898. La transición, lenta y gradual, hacia el trabajo libre no implicó la distribución de las tierras y mantuvo inalteradas las relaciones laborales<sup>8</sup>. Tampoco el proceso de independencia logró consolidar una idea de nación igualitaria. Después de 1898 junto a las pala-

<sup>6</sup> María Dolores González-Ripoll et al., *El rumor de Haití en Cuba, Temor, raza y rebeldía, 1789-1844* (Madrid: CSIC, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> A principios del siglo XIX el incremento de esclavos en Cuba determinó un cambio cuantitativo y cualitativo: en 1841 la población blanca había bajado al 41,51% pese a su incremento numérico, los esclavos aumentaron al 43,32% y los negros y mulatos libres pasaron del 20,14% en 1792 al 15%. La esclavitud adquirió además una connotación utilitarista que implicó un fuerte deterioro en la vida de los esclavos y en las relaciones raciales. Ver Loredana Giolitto, *Esclavitud y libertad en Cartagena de Indias. Reflexiones en torno a una manumisión a finales del periodo colonial*, en *Revista Fronteras de la Historia* 8 (2003), 67-96; Id., “Participar por igual”. *Il dibattito sulla questione razziale a Cuba, 1898-1912* (Tesis de Doctorado, Universidad de Génova, 2005); Rebecca Scott, *La emancipación de los esclavos en Cuba. La transición al trabajo libre 1860-1899* (La Habana: Caminos, 2001), 28

<sup>8</sup> Scott, *La emancipación*, 317-324.

bras oficiales sobre la igualdad racial, el discurso nacionalista hegemónico se centraría en la preeminencia de la cultura de origen europeo y de la población blanca<sup>9</sup>. Tras el fin de la ocupación militar estadounidense en 1902 permanecieron intactas las desigualdades fundamentales de la sociedad cubana. La supervivencia del estado independiente estaría vinculada, por la Enmienda Platt, al mantenimiento del status quo y de la paz social, indispensables a Estados Unidos para controlar la isla e impulsar el monocultivo de azúcar.

En el nuevo estado la marginación social y racial de negros y mulatos se fue acentuando. Si bien incluidos políticamente por su derecho al voto, tuvieron salarios ínfimos en las plantaciones y fueron excluidos, a todos los niveles, de la pública administración y de los empleos más remunerados<sup>10</sup>. Entre 1902 y 1906 sus márgenes de lucha fueron muy estrictos ante la imposibilidad de derrocar los pilares del colonialismo indirecto de Estados Unidos y de confutar ideologías poderosas que justificaban la situación existente con discursos sobre el patriotismo y la igualdad racial. El miedo, plausible, de perder la independencia iba a ser el centro de discursos oficiales los cuales, al subrayar la situación de igualdad formal del nuevo estado y al ocultar la presencia de discriminaciones raciales y sociales, tachaban de antipatrióticas las reivindicaciones de los negros y mulatos a una igualdad efectiva<sup>11</sup>.

Frente a esa situación, los intelectuales y políticos de color tuvieron actitudes heterogéneas, debido a sus distintas condiciones sociales, políticas y de estatus, así como a diferentes visiones sobre la cuestión racial y nacional. Juan Gualberto Gómez y Martín Morúa Delgado, líderes destacados de la lucha por la independencia y la igualdad racial, decidieron subordinar esta última al problema de la soberanía del nuevo estado<sup>12</sup>. En los

<sup>9</sup> Ver Giolitto, *Raza y nación*, 115-122.

<sup>10</sup> Ver Ibarra, *Partidos*, 26-7 y 36-54; Pérez, *Cuba Under the Platt Amendment*, 58-65 y 89.

<sup>11</sup> La igualdad racial en Cuba y su relación con la cuestión nacional es el centro de un debate historiográfico en el cual destacan dos interpretaciones principales. Aline Helg considera la igualdad racial un mito útil a preservar la marginación de las personas de color. Alejandro de la Fuente prefiere verla como ideología que permitió la inclusión de negros y mulatos, si bien de manera parcial y subordinada. Ver Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Inequality and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Juan Gualberto Gómez fue el más destacado intelectual de color a finales del siglo XIX y a principios del XX. Nacido libre de padres esclavos, estudió en La Habana y en París. En 1898 fundó el *Directorio de las Sociedades de Color* y el periódico *La Igualdad*, orientados a coordinar la lucha por los derechos civiles y contra las discriminaciones raciales. Colaboró con el periódico *La Lucha* y fue diputado y delegado en la Convención Constituyente. Martín Morúa Delgado, periodista, escritor y sindicalista, vivió en Cárdenas y Key West. Regresó a Cuba en 1892 y fundó la revista *La Nueva Era*. Después de la independencia fue director del periódico *La República* y fue el único senador negro en el primer periodo republicano. Ver *Diccionario de la Literatura Cubana*, tomos I y II (La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 1984), 373-374 y 639-641 respectivamente; Tomás Fernández Robaina, *El negro en Cuba, 1902-1958* (La Habana: Ciencias

periódicos que dirigieron y en otros escritos de aquellos años son exiguas las referencias a la cuestión racial, acordes a la conducta del Partido Liberal – del que fueron representantes electos en varias ocasiones – y el contexto más general de silencio sobre esa cuestión. En otros ámbitos, los intelectuales de los sectores más altos de la población de color plantearon el problema racial desde revistas de carácter literario, publicadas por las *Sociedades de instrucción y recreo* y las *Sociedades de color*. Con afán de imitar a la alta sociedad blanca, pero conscientes de ser excluidos, propondrán durante muchas décadas copiar su estilo de vida y potenciar la educación y cultura, como medios para superar las discriminaciones<sup>13</sup>.

La única excepción conocida a la afonía de esos años fue la labor editorial de Rafael Serra, tabacalero, periodista, organizador de la lucha por la independencia junto a Martí en Nueva York y, en los primeros años de la República, exponente destacado del Partido Moderado<sup>14</sup>. Defensor, a finales de los setenta, de la instrucción de negros y mulatos en Matanzas, Rafael Serra afinó su visión de la lucha antirracista durante su exilio en Nueva York. El contacto con la realidad racial de Estados Unidos y la experiencia de la *Liga*, la Sociedad Protectora de la Instrucción que organizó a partir de 1888, orientaron su actividad posterior en Cuba. En el periódico que fundó y dirigió de 1904 a 1906, *El Nuevo Criollo*, y en un compendio de escritos publicado en 1907, *Para blancos y negros*, fueron frecuentes las referencias a la situación racial de Estados Unidos, a las persecuciones y linchamientos por un lado y, por otro, al ascenso cultural, social y económico de muchas personas de color<sup>15</sup>. También los proyectos educativos del líder negro Booker T. Washington fueron un punto de referencia importante en su intento de promover la elevación cultural y económica de las personas de color en Cuba<sup>16</sup>.

La actividad política de Rafael Serra al regresar a la isla fue muy extensa; afrontó la cuestión racial dedicando una atención especial a sus implicaciones en las discriminaciones de clase y denunciando el riesgo de perder la independencia, a causa de la fragmentación de la sociedad cubana. La percepción de una sociedad dividida en dos grupos raciales antagónicos

Sociales, 1990), 23-33; Helg, *Our Rightful*, 36-42 y 122.

<sup>13</sup> Ver, entre otras, las revistas *Minerva* y *Labor Nueva*.

<sup>14</sup> Tras la *Guerra Chiquita* Rafael Serra vivió a Key West y luego a Nueva York donde fue el colaborador principal de José Martí y fundador de *La Liga*, sociedad para el progreso moral, intelectual y económico de las personas de color. Volvió a Cuba en 1902 y en 1904 fue elegido diputado por el Partido Moderado al poder en aquellos años con el presidente Tomás Estrada Palma. Ver Alejandra Bronfman, «'Buenas promesas y malas costumbres': Rafael Serra y Montalvo opina sobre la corrupción y la virtud», en *Ciudadanos en la Nación*, eds. Olga Portuondo and Michael Zeuske (Santiago de Cuba: Oficina del Conservador de la Ciudad, 2002), 25-33; Helg, *Our Rightful*, 133.

<sup>15</sup> Rafael Serra, *Para blancos y negros: ensayos políticos, sociales y económicos* (La Habana: El Score, 1907); *El Nuevo Criollo*, años 1904-1906.

<sup>16</sup> Ver Serra, *Para blancos*, 18-22 y 37-41.

fue elemento recurrente en sus escritos y marcó una discontinuidad no sólo con respecto al silencio de aquellos años sino también en relación a los discursos que habían proclamado el fin de las discriminaciones raciales<sup>17</sup>. A diferencia de la actitud observada en algunos sectores blancos de Estados Unidos – que promovieron la emancipación de los negros, aún manteniéndolos en ámbitos sociales distintos – Sierra vio a la población blanca en Cuba determinada solamente a conservar sus privilegios y su dominio: “existe un elemento que se ha considerado, y se considera, superior [...] El hombre blanco, celoso como debe ser, de su conservación, lucha y luchará, por sostener su predominio en esta sociedad, puesto que no olvida que es aquí el ‘descendiente de los aryas [sic!]’”<sup>18</sup>. Por otro lado, identificándose principalmente con los sectores obreros, vio a la población de color resignada, pobre e incapaz de contrastar las políticas del nuevo estado:

[...] el proyecto de inmigración es atentatorio á [sic!] la vida nuestra, á [sic!] la vida del obrero cubano [...] como terrible espada de Damocles se ciernen sobre nuestras cabezas y amenaza con decapitarnos [...]. Y esto vista la cuestión bajo mi carácter de obrero, que viéndola como hombre negro [...] como negros no nos queda más que resignarnos<sup>19</sup>.

Según la visión de Sierra, los factores que obligaban a la población de color a una condición subalterna – la injusticia social y el bajo nivel de instrucción y cultura de muchos negros y mulatos – iban a ser también un peligro para la independencia, pues una población envilecida era más vulnerable a la opresión extranjera:

Mientras que no se luche para evitar que nuestro pueblo, forzado por la falta de justicia, de instrucción y de pan, viniese a caer en la esclavitud de unos pocos amos y tal vez extranjeros, mientras no luchemos y triunfemos contra la ignorancia y la miseria [...] tendremos que llegar a convencernos que no tenemos país<sup>20</sup>.

Consciente de la imposibilidad de lograr igualdad y justicia en el contexto de soberanía limitada del nuevo estado, Sierra propuso impulsar la elevación cultural y la organización autónoma de las personas de color como procesos posibles para salir de su condición subalterna. La educación y la cultura, que habían sido siempre centrales en su actividad política, implicarían, según su visión, el abandono de toda tradición de origen africano. Concebida para reclamar una plena condición de ciudadanos de la

<sup>17</sup> “Sin preocupaciones”, *Patria*, 12 de mayo de 1900.

<sup>18</sup> “¿De qué nos quejamos? ¿De la culpa que tenemos?”, *El Nuevo Criollo*, 29 de octubre de 1904.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibíd.*

<sup>20</sup> “Justicia, instrucción y pan”, *El Nuevo Criollo*, 1 de octubre de 1904.



nueva república y para rechazar las injurias de quienes seguían declarando la inferioridad de negros y mulatos, esta propuesta suscitó perplejidad entre sus lectores<sup>21</sup>. Una carta dirigida a *El Nuevo Criollo* firmada “El Negro Oriental” explicaba la imposibilidad y la injusticia de renegar sus orígenes y de anular los vínculos con sus antepasados, evidenciando así el aspecto más doloroso de este proceso de emancipación:

[...] por mucho que nos alejemos por el refinamiento [...] no podemos, no, desligado, de toda deuda con la que si no nos pudo dar cultura, nos ha dado al menos un tronco de procedencia, como el Cáucaso se lo ha dado á [sic!] nuestros parientes blancos, y del cual viven orgullosos y recreados<sup>22</sup>.

La aspiración a una mayor cohesión de las personas de color fue otro tema central en las reflexiones de Rafael Serra. Al lado de su constante exhortación a la unidad de todos los cubanos propuso también fomentar la unión de las personas de color con el intento de romper el muro de indiferencia y desprecio que seguía rodeándolas<sup>23</sup>. Su visión de la política cubana había evidenciado la habilidad de los blancos de “dividirnos, aislarnos, de sembrar, en fin, el odio entre los que tenemos, por necesidad imperiosa de nuestra propia conservación, el deber de amarnos como verdaderos hermanos” y la indiferencia de negros y mulatos “hacia todo lo que puede sacarnos del estado de inferioridad en que vivimos, hacia todo lo que dándonos personalidad, haga desaparecer los prejuicios que se forman en nuestra contra”<sup>24</sup>. Según Serra, los negros y mulatos tenían que organizarse antes que nada sobre base racial para lograr mayor educación y fomentar su bienestar<sup>25</sup>. Sin embargo sus proyectos no cobraron fuerza ya que discreparon con su militancia en el Partido Moderado y tropezaron con la realidad social de muchos negros y mulatos. En los años siguientes se reprimió con violencia la organización de un partido “de color”. Además sólo un sector pequeño de la población de color logró elevar su educación y su nivel de vida, alcanzando una inclusión subordinada en la sociedad cubana.

## 2. De la lucha a la represión

El equilibrio precario entre cuestión racial y cuestión nacional acabó en agosto de 1906, tras el levantamiento de militantes del Partido Liberal contra

<sup>21</sup> Ver “¿Ser o no ser?”, *El Nuevo Criollo*, 22 de octubre de 1904; “Al Negro Falucho”, *El Nuevo Criollo*, 5 de noviembre de 1904.

<sup>22</sup> “Al Negro Falucho”, *El Nuevo Criollo*, 5 de noviembre de 1904.

<sup>23</sup> “Nuestro Deber”, *El Nuevo Criollo*, 22 de octubre de 1904; “¿De qué nos quejamos? ¿De la culpa que tenemos?”, *El Nuevo Criollo*, 29 de octubre de 1904.

<sup>24</sup> “¿De qué nos quejamos? ¿De la culpa que tenemos?”, *El Nuevo Criollo*, 29 de octubre de 1904.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibíd.*

el fraude que había asegurado la elección del líder del Partido Moderado a la Presidencia de la República. Frente a la imposibilidad de avalar el gobierno de Estrada Palma, Estados Unidos ocupó la isla por segunda vez hasta 1909, aplicando medidas que limitarían ulteriormente la soberanía del estado cubano<sup>26</sup>. Desaparecidas las concausas que habían detenido las luchas políticas y sociales en los años anteriores, se abrieron espacios nuevos para el activismo de las personas de color. Su participación masiva en el levantamiento del Ejército Constitucional les permitió recobrar fuerza y organización y legitimar nuevas demandas de igualdad formuladas sobre el patriotismo demostrado en las guerras de independencia y en la insurrección de agosto.

Las movilizaciones que se propagaron después de la “guerrita de agosto” trajeron cambios importantes en los actores, perspectivas y organización de las luchas. Los sectores sociales más bajos de la población de color, silenciados y marginados a principios de la independencia, volvieron a ser protagonistas en el debate público, recobrando visibilidad y reclamando empleos estatales proporcionalmente a su presencia en los ejércitos revolucionarios<sup>27</sup>. El intento de hacer explícito el vínculo entre discriminaciones raciales y exclusión social estuvo acompañado además por la búsqueda de nuevas formas de organización. Ya en diciembre de 1906 un grupo de personas de color reunido en Camagüey discutía sobre la exigencia de organizar un “partido negro”<sup>28</sup>. Otros sectores de la población negra y mulata, que siguieron privilegiando el terreno de la educación y cultura plantearon sin embargo el problema de asumir mayor autonomía y de salir del ámbito de los partidos tradicionales<sup>29</sup>.

En los años siguientes los ex veteranos de las guerras de independencia y de la sublevación de agosto fueron autores de escritos e iniciativas que, evidenciando lo urgente e ineludible de la cuestión racial, incitarían a las personas de color a contrastar de manera directa las discriminaciones y los discursos que las sustentaban. Entre ellos destacó la figura de Ricardo Batrell, ex bracero, soldado en las guerras de independencia y luego Comandante en el Ejército Constitucional, quien expresó las visiones, expectativas y frustraciones de los sectores sociales más bajos de la población de color<sup>30</sup>. Nacido en un ingenio azucarero en provincia de Matanzas

<sup>26</sup> Estados Unidos no apoyó la reelección de Estrada Palma debido a la magnitud del chantaje puesto en acto y a la ausencia de un ejército cubano que sostuviera al presidente. Ocuparon entonces Cuba para impedir la llegada al poder del Partido Liberal. En la segunda ocupación potenciaron la guardia rural, crearon un ejército cubano y, sobre todo, determinaron una interpretación más restrictiva de la Enmienda Platt. Ver Pérez, *Cuba Under the Platt Amendment*, 94-7 y 117-122.

<sup>27</sup> “¿Partido Negro?”, *La Discusión*, 17 de diciembre de 1906.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibíd.*

<sup>29</sup> “La nota del día”, *Ibíd.*, 31 de agosto de 1907.

<sup>30</sup> Ricardo Batrell Oviedo, *Para la historia. Apuntes autobiográficos de Ricardo Batrell Oviedo* (La Habana: Seoane y Álvarez, 1912). Entre otros líderes que encarnaron ilusiones y fracasos de los sectores sociales más bajos de la población de color hay que recordar a Quintín Banderas. General en las guerras de independencia, lideró la sublevación de agosto de 1906 en la cual

en 1880, trabajó como peón en el campo hasta los quince años cuando ingresó en el Ejército de Liberación. Al terminar la guerra se alfabetizó de manera autodidacta y convirtió su pasión por la escritura en instrumento de denuncia y de lucha contra las discriminaciones raciales y sociales<sup>31</sup>.

Su visión de la cuestión racial abarcó dos aspectos fundamentales: la asociación entre raza y ciudadanía y el vínculo indisoluble entre discriminaciones raciales y desigualdades sociales. En sus escritos principales – el *Manifiesto al pueblo cubano y a la raza de color* redactado en 1907 y la autobiografía publicada en 1912 – la participación en las guerras de independencia fue el factor primario de elaboración de una identidad racial imprescindible vinculada a la de *ciudadano cubano*<sup>32</sup>. Al igual que muchas personas de color, la razón principal de su entrada en la guerra había sido la ilusión de la igualdad racial, prometida por la independencia y personificada, según él, en la figura de Juan Gualberto Gómez: «Vi el símbolo de mi raza en esa obra grandiosa: Juan Gualberto Gómez [...] la verdadera personificación, de mi raza entonces, en esa Causa»<sup>33</sup>. De esperanza colectiva y catalizadora la participación en la independencia se convirtió en punto de arranque para exigir una inclusión plena de las personas de color en los discursos y recursos del nuevo estado. En el Manifiesto de 1907, tras enumerar la presencia, el talento y el sacrificio de negros y mulatos en todas las batallas cruciales – contrastando así las afirmaciones que iban disminuyendo entonces la magnitud de su participación en la independencia – denunció la asimetría entre el tributo militar pagado al nuevo estado y la creciente marginación racial, política y social de las personas de color:

[...] la participación que la raza de color viene teniendo en la cosa pública de este país desde 1898 [...] no es ni medianamente decoroso para una raza que ha probado su capacidad, heroísmo y suficiencia, al igual que sus hermanos blancos, en calidad; mucho más en cantidad<sup>34</sup>.

Según la visión de Batrell la participación en la independencia había sido el verdadero proceso de legitimación de la ciudadanía para los negros

fue asesinado por una guardia rural. Ver Ada Ferrer, “Rustic Men, Civilized Nation: Race, Culture and Contention on the Eve of Cuban Independence”, *Hispanic American Historical Review* 4 (1998), 663-686; Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba. Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 173-186; Helg, *Our Rightful*, 120.

<sup>31</sup> Sobre los escritos e ideas de Ricardo Batrell ver Fernando Martínez, *Ricardo Batrell empuña la pluma*, en Fernando Martínez, Rebecca Scott y Orlando García, *Espacios, silencios y los sentidos de la libertad. Cuba entre 1878 y 1912* (La Habana: Ciencias Sociales, 2002), 295-313; Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, 159-164.

<sup>32</sup> Oviedo, *Para la historia*; “Manifiesto al pueblo cubano y a la raza de color”, *La Discusión*, 11 de agosto de 1907.

<sup>33</sup> Oviedo, *Para la historia*, 3-4.

<sup>34</sup> “Manifiesto al pueblo cubano y a la raza de color”, *La Discusión*, 11 de agosto de 1907. Sobre la entidad numérica de la participación negra y mulata a la independencia ver Helg, *Our Rightful*, 119; Miguel Barnet, *Autobiografía de un schiavo* (Torino: Einaudi, 1998), 169-170.

y mulatos cubanos y la afirmación de su patriotismo como cualidad inseparable de su condición racial. Sin embargo la realización del nuevo estado no había implicado para ellos un mayor acceso a sus recursos. El *Manifiesto al pueblo cubano* fue entonces un llamamiento obstinado a las responsabilidades recíprocas de blancos y negros. Las personas de color habían demostrado patriotismo y abnegación soportando su marginación en silencio durante la ocupación estadounidense. Después de la independencia siguieron manteniendo sin embargo la misma actitud pasiva, abdicando así de sus derechos y frustrando las batallas de sus antecesores:

[...] quien en cierto momento no ejercita las acciones que le competen [...] ha hecho una renuncia de su derecho [...] ya no nos merecemos el dictado de una raza patriótica, sino, por el contrario, el de una raza incapaz de ocupar la verdadera posición que á [sic!] costa de muchos heroísmos la Historia nos tiene reconocido<sup>35</sup>.

Por otro lado, la élite política blanca seguía excluyendo a los negros y mulatos de los cuerpos militares y de los oficios públicos y favorecía la inmigración desde Europa, en detrimento de la población de color. El Partido Liberal, en el cual Batrell militó, fue objeto de sus críticas más ásperas. Legitimando su política con los ideales de la independencia, había obtenido el apoyo y los votos de muchas personas de color. Sin embargo sus dirigentes no habían adoptado esos criterios y en los cargos que ocuparon iban priorizando el empleo de trabajadores blancos, revelándose así “predicadores de democracia por ellos mismos incumplida”<sup>36</sup>.

A la luz de dicha situación, Batrell declaró la imposibilidad de lograr relaciones raciales igualitarias al amparo de la política institucional y con la mediación de sus exiguos exponentes de color:

[...] no hay una sola fracción de los directores políticos del país en quien podamos esperar el cumplimiento de una democracia [...] nuestros grandes hombres de la raza de color [...] muchas veces tienen que ser cómplices inconscientes y otras conscientes por ser minoría insignificante allá en su altura<sup>37</sup>.

Las personas de color tenían pues que acabar con su pasividad y organizarse autónomamente, identificando un sitio en el cual encontrarse y coordinar sus acciones desde el respeto de sus filiaciones distintas: “debemos de contribuir al sostenimiento de una casa donde podamos reunirnos todos con objeto de tratar los asuntos generales. Así seríamos respetados

<sup>35</sup> “Manifiesto al pueblo cubano y a la raza de color”, *La Discusión*, 11 de agosto de 1907.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

cada cual en la afiliación que nos encontremos”<sup>38</sup>. Sin embargo propondría también desplazarse a otros estados de América al no alcanzar una igualdad efectiva:

Así esperamos á [sic!] nuestros compatriotas si están dispuestos á [sic!] no vivir como parias y si marchar con los progresos de la época [...]. Si así no resultase [...] no sería lejano el día que tengamos que echar la tienda á [sic!] cuesta, como los antiguos ‘girondinos’ y marchar así á [sic!] cualquier república americana en donde no exista tanta preocupación<sup>39</sup>.

El año sucesivo al “Manifiesto” de Batrell se fundó en La Habana el Partido Independiente de Color, primer partido con base racial del continente americano. Confiando en la capacidad de atraer los votos de negros y mulatos, sus líderes Evaristo Estenoz y Pedro Ivonet plantearon la exigencia de afrontar la cuestión racial al nivel político más alto y desde una posición de fuerza<sup>40</sup>. Sus previsiones fueron erróneas ya que la mayoría de negros y mulatos siguió votando a los partidos tradicionales. Además, tras la abierta hostilidad de los blancos, el gobierno liberal de José Miguel Gómez, elegido en 1909, reprimió duramente ese partido, declarándolo ilegal y sofocando luego el levantamiento de sus militantes en 1912. Ese acontecimiento, que según la literatura reciente causó la muerte de miles de negros y mulatos, concluyó una época de ilusiones y enfrentamientos entre dos proyectos nacionalistas: el uno hacia una sociedad blanca y el otro hacia una sociedad racial y socialmente igualitaria<sup>41</sup>. Muchos estudiosos han investigado las razones complejas de la fundación, la vida y la represión del Partido Independiente de Color<sup>42</sup>. Aquí sólo enfocaremos dos aspectos de su trayectoria. El primero fue la discrepancia entre los objetivos que persiguieron sus dirigentes – inclusión política y social en condición de igualdad con los blancos – y la estrategia de lucha, que los alejó ulteriormente de la población blanca y también de muchos sectores de la población de color. En un contexto de progresiva marginación material y simbólica de las personas de color esta divergencia implicó además la elaboración de otra identidad racial. La calidad de *negro* se haría exclusiva y no dejaría más

<sup>38</sup> *Ibíd.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibíd.*

<sup>40</sup> Evaristo Estenoz fue veterano de la guerra de independencia, sindicalista y luego empresario. Fue además General del Ejército Constitucional. Pedro Ivonet fue veterinario de la Guardia Rural en la provincia de Oriente. Ambos murieron asesinados en el levantamiento de 1912. Ver Helg, *Our Rightful*, 157.

<sup>41</sup> A partir de los testimonios de la época, se estima que murieron de 2000 a 6000 personas en la sola provincia de Oriente. De hecho los datos hoy disponibles discrepan mucho entre ellos. Ver Helg, *Our Rightful*, 225.

<sup>42</sup> de la Fuente, *A Nation*; Robaina, *El negro en Cuba*; Rafael Fermoselle, *Política y color en Cuba, La guerrilla de 1912* (Madrid: Colibrí, 1998); Helg, *Our Rightful*; Serafin Portuondo, *Los independientes de color. Historia del Partido Independiente de Color* (La Habana: Caminos, 2002).

espacio a otras identificaciones, rompiendo así el lazo que había existido hasta entonces entre identidad racial e identificación nacional: “[...] o llegaremos los hombres de color [...] a participar por igual de la República, o una de las dos: caemos al peso mismo de nuestra obra o renunciamos para siempre a nuestra condición de cubanos”<sup>43</sup>.

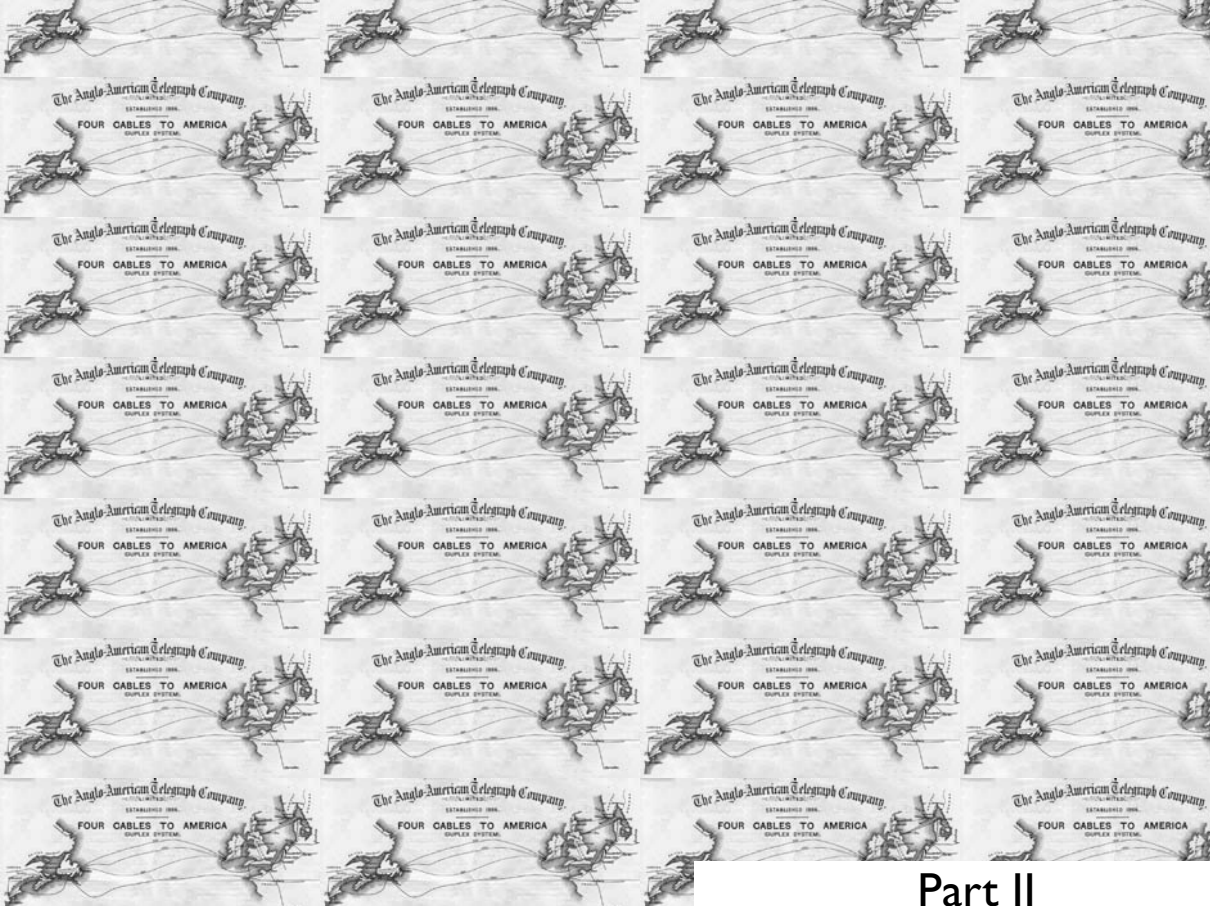
### 3. Conclusiones

Este trabajo analiza las visiones, identidades y estrategias de algunos líderes de color cubanos en los primeros años de la república, tomando en cuenta dos factores principales: sus diferentes condiciones sociales y el contexto político en el cual actuaron.

La incertidumbre política y la inmovilidad social que siguieron a la ocupación estadounidense hasta 1906 detuvieron los intentos de alcanzar la igualdad racial prometida por la independencia. Constriñeron al silencio a los sectores sociales más bajos de la población de color y orientaron a otros negros y mulatos hacia la búsqueda de una inclusión subordinada en la sociedad blanca. El miedo a perder la independencia condicionó profundamente sus identidades raciales y sus estrategias de lucha. Algunos líderes de color se identificaron con el destino del nuevo estado y apartaron momentáneamente la lucha por la igualdad racial en favor de la labor por la independencia. Otros buscaron estrategias de ascenso social a partir de la asimilación de la cultura “blanca” y de la manifestación de una identidad racial depurada de todo elemento cultural de origen africano, incompatible con el discurso nacionalista hegemónico.

En 1906 el cambio de perspectivas políticas y sociales abrió espacios a las reivindicaciones de los sectores subalternos y a la búsqueda de nuevas formas de lucha. La demanda de una igualdad efectiva, legitimada por su pasado patriótico, caracterizó las acciones de los veteranos negros y mulatos. Algunos de ellos buscaron erosionar las jerarquías sociales sin descuidar al mismo tiempo su identificación con la nación cubana. Otros antepusieron la lucha por la igualdad racial a cualquier otra perspectiva. Su intento de contrastar frontalmente los pilares materiales y simbólicos de las discriminaciones raciales los alejó sin embargo del resto de la sociedad cubana y finalizó con un epílogo trágico.

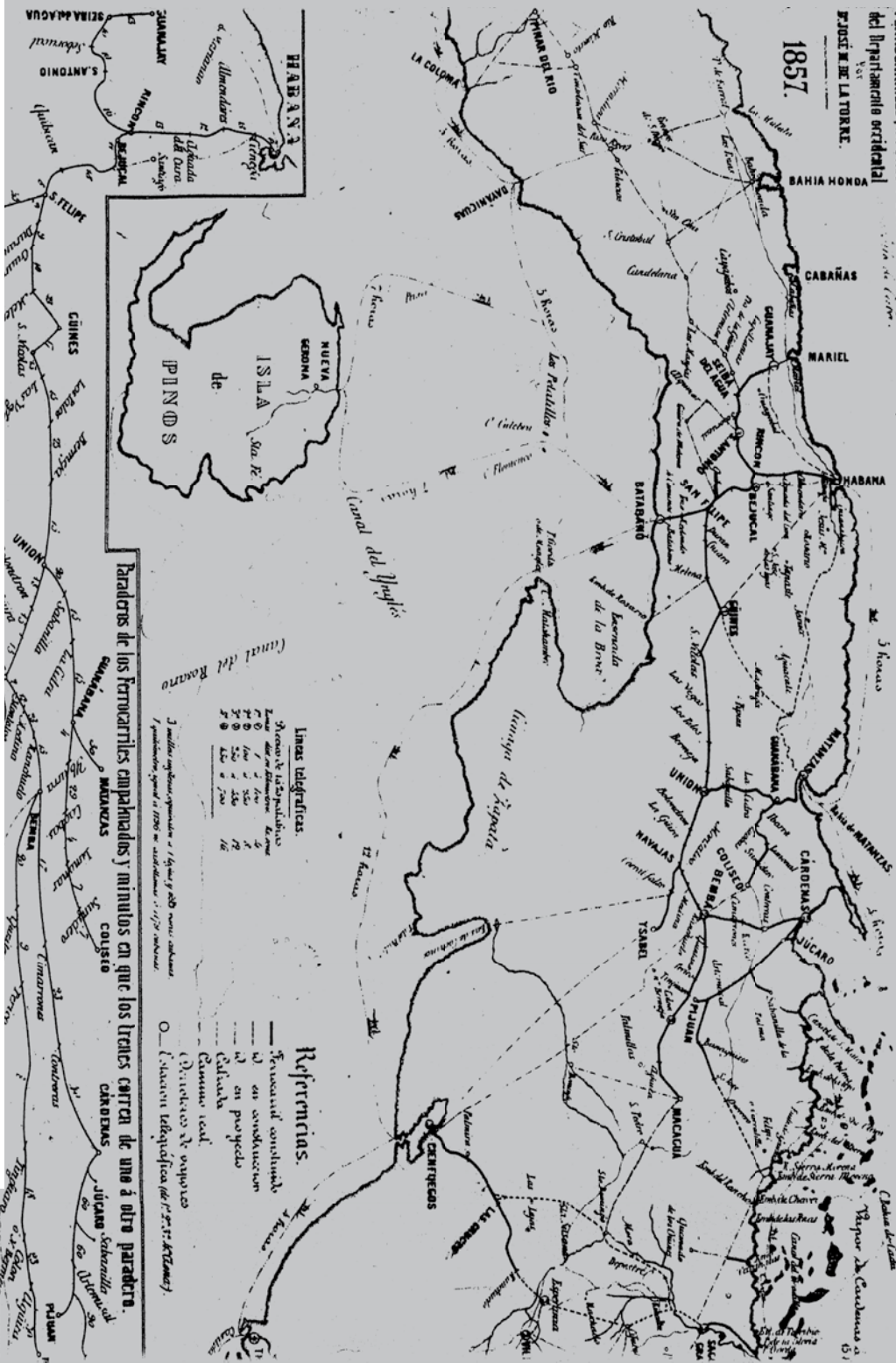
<sup>43</sup> “En nuestro puesto”, *Previsión*, noviembre de 1908.



## Part II

# Science and Technology in Cuba: from Colony to Revolution

1857.



**Lineas telegraficas:**

Numero de estaciones	1
Numero de cables	2
Numero de hilos	4
Numero de postes	100
Numero de cables	100
Numero de hilos	200
Numero de postes	100

**Referencias:**

- Ferrocarril construido
- - - en construccion
- ... en proyecto
- Estacion de vapores
- Estaciones telegraficas (de 25 y 30 kilometros)

Paraderos de los Ferrocarriles empalmados y minulos en que los trenes corren de uno á otro paradero.

Fig. 1 – José M. de la Torre, Mapa: Ferrocarriles, Vapores y Estaciones telegráficas del Departamento Occidental [La Habana: 1857, ANCI]. On the previous page – Anglo-American Company (in History of the Atlantic Cable and Undersea Communications <<http://atlantic-cable.com/CableCos/AngloAmerican>>)



## Science and Technology in Cuba: from Colony to Revolution

During colonial times, Cuba had no autonomous capabilities in technological and scientific development (even though Antonio Meucci did carry out his early experiments with the telephone in Havana's *Teatro Tacón* in the 1840s). However, as Marta Blaquier's essay shows, the island's strategic position between Europe and the United States and the needs of its sugarcane industry facilitated the fast spread of some of the most advanced technologies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Interestingly enough, these technologies were not imported onto the island from the colonial motherland but from the United States and Britain. US dominance remained the source of Cuba's imported technologies throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: radios, TV sets and, as any visitor to Havana can still attest today, automobiles. As Angelo Baracca shows in his essay, it was only with the *Revolución* of 1959 that scientific research became an integral part of the country's autonomous development strategies, starting with the literacy campaign (1961) and the *Reforma de la Educación Superior* (1962)<sup>1</sup>. While facing the constraints of the US blockade on collaboration with US institutions and publications, Cuban scientists operated in conjunction with Soviet and West European research centers throughout the Cold War era. Between 1964 and 1966, several research institutes were created whose objectives were clearly related to the island's social and economic goals, such as the *Instituto de Investigaciones de la Caña de Azúcar*, the *Instituto de Meteorología*, the *Centro Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas* and a variety of medical research institutes. In 1970, the *Instituto para el Desarrollo de la Maquinaria* designed the

<sup>1</sup> On earlier scientific research in Cuba: José López Sánchez, *Tomás Romay y el origen de la ciencia en Cuba* (La Habana: Academia de Ciencias, 1964). On the reforms in the educational field following the Revolution: Hugh Thomas, *Cuba or the Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Da Capo, 1998), 1131-1137.

“Libertadora”, the first sugarcane harvesting machine tailored to the needs of Cuba’s sugar industry. In 1980, with the successful launch of the Soviet *Soyuz 38* spaceship, Arnaldo Tamayo Méndez became the first Cuban to travel in outer space. In 1986, the *Centro de Ingeniería Genética y Biotecnología* was inaugurated. The end of the Soviet Union and the island’s subsequent decision to instate a dual monetary system in the early 1990s was a blow to Cuban science causing as it did a double brain drain both towards foreign countries and, domestically, toward better-remunerated jobs in the hard-currency sectors. But economic necessity also drove Cuba to diversify its economy out of its dependence on sugarcane and investment in scientific capacity thus became a priority<sup>2</sup>. Although subject to controversy over costs and access, Cuba joined the World Wide Web in 1996. Biotechnologies and pharmaceuticals grew to become important island exports, and in 2004, the *Laboratorio de Antígenos Sintéticos* at the University of Havana discovered a vaccine against meningitis B that was acknowledged globally<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> William Schulz, “US Chemists Meet Colleagues in Cuba”, *Chemical and Engineering News*, 14 December 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Dora Pérez Sáez, “Cincuenta hitos de la ciencia revolucionaria”, *Juventud Rebelde.Cu* on-line, 14 December 2008, [www.juventudrebelde.cu/cuba/2008-12-14/cincuenta-hitos-de-la-ciencia-revolucionaria/](http://www.juventudrebelde.cu/cuba/2008-12-14/cincuenta-hitos-de-la-ciencia-revolucionaria/).

## Chapter 4

# Las tecnologías de información y comunicación en Cuba (1850-1902): la telegrafía

El lunes 5 de mayo de 1867 fue un día de fiesta para la Habana. A la luz de un día esplendido de verano, se movían los vapores en la Bahía, engalanados con banderas multicolores, llevando una verdadera muchedumbre de curiosos. Los coches del ferrocarril urbano conducían hacia las cercanías de la Chorrera, a un inmenso público que prefirió la vía terrestre a la marítima, sin excluir a un considerable número de personas distinguidas invitadas especialmente para presenciar la operación. El movimiento era general<sup>1</sup>. Se iniciaba el tendido del primer cable telegráfico submarino del hemisferio occidental que uniría la Habana con Cayo Hueso, y posteriormente con Punta Rassa, dos puntos de la Florida. Con el tendido y funcionamiento de este cable submarino se cerraba un ciclo de desarrollo temprano de la telegrafía en Cuba que comienza a mitad de siglo y se inicia una nueva etapa para esta tecnología que tendrá un importante impacto en la realidad económica, política y social de la Isla.

La red de cables telegráficos submarinos que va a circundar el mundo, lo unifican y lo hacen uno. En el continente americano, el Caribe será marco propicio para este entramado. Cuba, colonia caribeña del Imperio Español, tendrá un desarrollo excepcional de las tecnologías de información y comunicación en este siglo. Evidencia de ello lo son la introducción y desarrollo temprano del ferrocarril, de la telegrafía y de la telefonía pocos años después de su invento y el convertirse en nodo del primer cable submarino telegráfico entre países del hemisferio occidental. La introducción y desarrollo de estas tecnologías van a ser frenados de múltiples formas por España.

El cable telegráfico submarino será un nuevo instrumento de control político social interno en manos de la Metròpoli y la infraestructura tele-

<sup>1</sup> "Gaceta", *Gaceta de la Habana*, 7 de mayo de 1867.

gráfica, un objetivo militar a destruir para los mambises en su lucha por la independencia. A su vez, el cable es para los Estados Unidos y otras potencias coloniales de la época, un instrumento de dominación neocolonial.

### **I. La telegrafía**

Apenas se realizaron en Estados Unidos los primeros ensayos exitosos de la telegrafía hechos por Morse, ya se proponía su establecimiento en Cuba, esto se va a repetir con el cable telegráfico submarino, antes de haberse conseguido su primer éxito en Europa.

El desarrollo de la telegrafía penetra en todas las actividades de la sociedad en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX. Hacia 1837, se inventó un sistema de transmisión de señales por pulsos eléctricos, simultáneamente en Estados Unidos, por Samuel F. Morse, y en Inglaterra por Charles Wheatstone y William Cook, alcanzando fama y éxito. Ninguno de ellos tuvo la primacía del invento, fueron el resultado de años de desarrollo, del esfuerzo de sus predecesores, y del estado del arte del electromagnetismo. Las distancias, que habían empezado a acortarse sensiblemente con el ferrocarril, parecían desaparecer, ahora del todo, para la comunicación.

La invención del telégrafo, en paralelo a ambos lados del Atlántico, provocará en la segunda mitad del XIX, un importante flujo en las dos direcciones, a través de este océano, de intercambio tecnológico, resultados económicos y técnicos e ideas de la más diversa índole, todo ello unido a una encarnizada lucha de intereses económicos y políticos. Posteriormente, con el tendido de los cables telegráficos submarinos el mundo va a alcanzar, por primera vez, su unicidad. El imperio británico y el naciente imperialismo norteamericano – expresado abiertamente en la Doctrina Monroe – serían las primeras figuras en este escenario, mientras que el colonialismo español, solo una simple comparsa.

Al igual que en el resto del mundo, el desarrollo de estas tecnologías tuvo un fuerte impacto en la vida de la Isla. Este impacto se expresa en las múltiples esferas de la vida social, la economía, la política, la cultura, y en general, los modos de hacer y la imaginaria de la época. En este trabajo hemos concentrado la atención en la introducción y desarrollo en Cuba de la telegrafía pero otras tecnologías de información y comunicación, tales como la telefonía, en la cual Cuba tuvo la primacía mundial con los experimentos de Meucci en 1849, y una temprana introducción en el 1881, la radiotelegrafía, introducida en 1905, la radiodifusión, presente en 1922, y la televisión, introducida muy pronto en el país, en 1950, deben ser tenidas en cuenta, para lograr una visión integradora del impacto social de estas tecnologías. Otro tema dejado esta vez en el 'tintero', es el de las características que tuvo el procesamiento de la información – censal, científica y económica – en la Cuba de este período, como resultado del impacto de esas tecnologías. Es nuestro propósito, el desarrollo futuro de este trabajo en esas dos direcciones.

Después de su introducción comercial en Estados Unidos, el telégrafo electromagnético se difunde con increíble rapidez. La multiplicidad de compañías telegráficas existentes en un inicio que operaban en territorio el norteamericano son unificadas por la *Western Union Telegraph Company*, *Western Union* de ahora en lo adelante, formada en 1856. Esta compañía monopoliza la industria telegráfica y se convierte en uno de los más influyentes imperios corporativos en la historia de Estados Unidos. Posteriormente, en 1873 la *Western Union* compró una mayoría de la *International Ocean Telegraph Company*, una compañía que tendrá fuerte presencia en Cuba, entrando en el negocio de la telegrafía internacional. En Gran Bretaña, el proceso monopolizador en la telegrafía se repite, pero va a ser el Gobierno quien lleva a cabo la labor monopolizadora, nacionalizando, en 1868, las compañías telegráficas existentes y poniendo esta gestión bajo el control estatal de la *British Post Office*.

España, la Metrópoli colonial de Cuba tiene, en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX, un menor desarrollo económico que otras naciones de Europa – Inglaterra, Francia y Alemania – y no supo aprovechar su condición de metrópoli para invertir los capitales acumulados en el desarrollo industrial y financiero. Respecto a sus vecinos europeos, va a introducir tardíamente la telegrafía óptica, la telegrafía eléctrica y los cables telegráficos submarinos, a pesar de que, por su condición geográfica peninsular y naturaleza de metrópoli colonial, hubiera sido lógico que desarrollase las comunicaciones telegráficas internacionales con sus territorios de Ultramar. A ello hay que añadir que una vez iniciada la introducción de esta tecnología, sucede también con la telefonía, mantuvo una política de “apertura y cierre” que va a retrasar, aún más, su pleno uso tanto en la Península como en sus posesiones de Ultramar.

## 2. Introducción y desarrollo de la telegrafía en Cuba

A mitad del siglo XIX, Cuba era, distante en el Caribe, una importante colonia de España, pero muy cercana, geográfica y económicamente, a los Estados Unidos, y a los intereses económicos que ya este naciente imperalismo norteamericano tenía en la Isla. Todo ello, unido al retraso de España en la introducción de la telegrafía eléctrica, va a determinar que la transferencia tecnológica de este invento se realice a partir de los Estados Unidos y no provenga, en lo fundamental, del continente europeo, donde estaba situada la metrópoli colonial. Como con el ferrocarril, también con la telegrafía, la colonia se anticiparía a la metrópoli, siendo Cuba, además, uno de los primeros países de América Latina, si no el primero, en introducirla.

La interacción comercial entre Cuba y Estados Unidos constituyó un vehículo de permanente actualización de los adelantos técnicos, hábitos de vida y maneras de hacer del vecino del Norte. Las nuevas tecnologías productivas que se introducían en la industria azucarera, las locomotoras norteamericanas que corrían por las vías férreas, las características del sistema político estadounidense, entre otras cosas, conformaban una imagen

atractiva de ese país. Los muchos emigrantes cubanos que vivían en Tampa y Cayo Hueso constituían también un canal importante de información. Además, eran muchos los norteamericanos presentes en la Isla a la búsqueda de oportunidades mercantiles y alternativas que permitiesen salvar las restricciones establecidas por la Metrópoli.

En 1837 se había establecido la primera línea de ferrocarril que unió La Habana con Bejucal, y los caminos de hierro se desarrollaban de forma vertiginosa. Cuba fue el séptimo país en el mundo en tener un servicio ferroviario, antes que España y los restantes países de Centro, Sur América y el Caribe<sup>2</sup>. Los ferrocarriles cubanos no pasaron, como los de Inglaterra y Norteamérica, por las clásicas fases de madera y tracción animal, se introdujeron en nuestro país con carriles de hierro y locomotoras de vapor.

A Antonio María Escobedo, Administrador del Ferrocarril de La Habana a Guíñes, se debe la primera tentativa de construcción en Cuba de una línea telegráfica eléctrica. En 1840, Escobedo pidió autorización a la Capitanía General de la Isla para tender un hilo telegráfico entre La Habana y Guíñes. Su solicitud fue denegada, aduciendo la autoridad española que *“como la invención del telégrafo de Morse era muy reciente, no se podía garantizar su uso”*<sup>3</sup>. Esta temprana inquietud debería esperar por más de diez años.

Después de los primeros intentos en 1848, el norteamericano David Macomber solicita a la Junta de Fomento el permiso para conectar un telégrafo eléctrico entre La Habana y Matanzas<sup>4</sup>. Más afortunado que los anteriores solicitantes, el ingeniero de telégrafo norteamericano Samuel A. Kennedy, solicitó y obtuvo en 1851, autorización de la Junta de Fomento para tender una línea telegráfica entre el teatro de Villanueva y la plaza de Monserrate, en la ciudad de La Habana, siendo ésta la primera línea que, por vía de ensayo, funcionó en Cuba. Finalmente, la Real Orden 277 del 28 de junio de 1852 autoriza *“la instalación de las líneas telegráficas electromagnéticas”* en Cuba<sup>5</sup>.

La obra se realizó bajo la dirección técnica de Manuel Portillo, Comandante y Director del Cuerpo de Ingenieros<sup>6</sup> y el trabajo fue realizado por José Pagés. La Real Junta de Fomento había determinado sacar a subasta pública la construcción de las líneas y convocó a licitaciones para el 10 de febrero de 1853. El pliego de proposiciones para la obra se insertó en la Gaceta de la Habana el 2 de febrero de ese año. Se presentaron varias proposiciones, entre ellas la de Samuel Kennedy, pero la de Pagés resultó la mejor y ganó la subasta<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Ver Oscar Zanetti y Alejandro García, *Caminos para el Azúcar* (La Habana: Ciencias Sociales, 1987).

<sup>3</sup> *Directorio organizador del Cuerpo de Comunicaciones de la Isla de Cuba* (La Habana: Dirección General de Comunicaciones 1902), 10.

<sup>4</sup> Archivo Nacional de Cuba, La Habana (ANC), Exp. Junta de Fomento, Legajo 129, n. 6366.

<sup>5</sup> ANC, Reales Órdenes, Legajo 163, n.77.

<sup>6</sup> “Comunicación de nombramiento”, ANC, Exp. Junta de Fomento, Legajo 181, n. 8279.

<sup>7</sup> ANC, Exp. Junta de Fomento, Legajo 129, n. 6368.

En el año 1853 se inaugura la línea telegráfica entre La Habana y Bejucal. El Sr. José Sánchez Bermúdez fue su primer Administrador e Inspector. La línea tenía unos 25 km. de longitud y sigue el trazado del primer tramo del ferrocarril introducido en la Isla en 1837. La primera estación telegráfica que hubo en la ciudad de La Habana, denominada “Estación Cañedo” en reconocimiento a los esfuerzos de este en la introducción del telégrafo, estaba situada en la parte nueva de La Habana, donde ocupaba una pequeña casa de madera junto a la puerta de Monserrate de la muralla que todavía rodeaba la parte antigua de la ciudad, frente a la estatua de Isabel II erigida en el Parque Central, inmediatamente detrás del gran teatro Tacón. El primer tipo de telégrafo utilizado fue un telégrafo Morse de cinta, el cual siguió utilizándose en la telegrafía cubana hasta la intervención de los Estados Unidos en 1898.

Hasta el momento, no hemos podido determinar cuál de los dos países, Cuba o Chile, tiene la primacía de la introducción de la telegrafía eléctrica en América Latina, pero si podemos afirmar que fueron los dos primeros países y lo hicieron contemporáneamente, en los primeros meses de 1853. En Cuba, el motor para la introducción de esta nueva tecnología fue la industria azucarera; en Chile fueron las exigencias de la explotación de las minas de plata.

Apenas un año después de la autorización, la Real Orden, de fecha 31 de agosto de 1853<sup>8</sup> va a limitar la instalación de las líneas telegráficas que se ha venido llevando a cabo. Con la telegrafía, España aplica una política de ‘apertura y cierre’ no solo en Ultramar, sino también en la Península, que se repetirá con la telefonía, que va a retardar el normal desarrollo de esta tecnología en el país.

En 1852 se crea una Escuela de Telegrafía bajo el auspicio del Gobierno. El primer Director de la Escuela fue el norteamericano Robert Simpson<sup>9</sup>. Una vez introducido este nuevo medio de telecomunicación, la red telegráfica no cesó de extenderse por el interior del país con el objetivo de intercomunicar las principales poblaciones, sobre todo con la capital. En 1862 las primeras líneas telegráficas llegan a Pinar del Río, Matanzas, Santa Clara y Camagüey, y más tarde, en 1864 llegan a Santiago de Cuba, a 750 Km. al sureste de La Habana. En 1865 existían un total de de 1.540 kilómetros de líneas telegráficas.

El establecimiento de la red esencial de comunicaciones telegráficas del país va a ser de gran ayuda al poder español para enfrentar las sublevaciones de los cubanos en 1868, de manera general, incrementa la efectividad del control político en la Isla. Un ejemplo de ello es el monitoreo por vía telegráfica de un conato de sublevación de esclavos que se produce en El

<sup>8</sup> ANC, Reales Órdenes, Legajo 162, n. 201.

<sup>9</sup> Comunicación de Robert Simpson, ANC, Exp. Junta de Fomento, Legajo 181, n. 8279.

Cobre<sup>10</sup>. Pero este hecho de tipo político no debe ocultar la importancia que tenía este progreso para la unificación y mejora económica del país. Precisamente, uno de los aspectos más significativos de la economía cubana antes de 1868 es su zonificación. Como apunta Ramiro Guerra, la terminación del Ferrocarril Central, el funcionamiento eficaz del telégrafo y la gran penetración al interior de la organización financiera surgida primeramente en la Habana, harían de la Isla un solo mercado y una sola entidad económica a partir de 1878<sup>11</sup>.

El procedimiento del tendido de las líneas telegráficas fue parecido al de los ferrocarriles. El telégrafo se va tendiendo a lo largo de las vías férreas en una suerte de paralelismo o hermandad tecnológica. En el libro *Caminos para el Azúcar*<sup>12</sup>, refiriéndose a las características del trazado de las líneas de ferrocarril, se señala que este trazado se había verificado de manera tal que, los pocos entronques logrados, más que favorecer la fluidez del transporte, ofrecían a los hacendados las opciones entre compañías y puertos que más convenientes le resultaran a sus intereses. La línea central no pasó de Sancti Spiritus, continuando de allí a Santiago de Cuba por entronques locales. Al mismo tiempo que se montaba el sistema oficial de telégrafos, se exigía a las compañías de ferrocarriles que establecieran los sistemas propios de sus líneas que servirían para la mejor operación y protección de las mismas. Estas líneas servían de comunicación adicional entre las grandes ciudades y, sobre todo entre estas y ciertos puntos del interior, que el sistema oficial había dejado al margen. En 1866 muy pocas líneas ferroviarias carecían de telégrafo.

### 3. La telegrafía y las guerras

Durante los diez años que duró la primera guerra de los cubanos por la independencia, el gobierno colonial impulsó extraordinariamente la expansión del telégrafo como mecanismo de control político social. Sin embargo, la telegrafía fue utilizada también por los insurgentes cubanos. Un ejemplo de ello lo es la anticipación del alzamiento revolucionario el 10 de octubre de 1868. Al conocer el grupo independentista la orden de prisión dictada por el Gobierno español contra los principales conspiradores – llegada el 6 de octubre a la oficina de Bayamo, a través de su telegrafista, Ismael de Céspedes, pariente de Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, uno de los líderes de este movimiento – deciden anticipar este alzamiento. Al ser considerada la red telegráfica terrestre un objetivo militar para los revolucionarios cubanos, esta resultaba extremadamente vulnerable. Por esta razón,

<sup>10</sup> ANC, Exp. Fondo Asuntos Políticos, Legajo 226, n. 13.

<sup>11</sup> Ramiro Guerra et al., eds., *Historia de la Nación Cubana*, tomo IV, *Predominio del Ferrocarril. El Telégrafo* (La Habana: Historia de la Nación Cubana, 1952).

<sup>12</sup> Zanetti y García, *Caminos*.



el Gobierno colonial estaba interesado en un enlace telegráfico de mayor fiabilidad entre la capital y el resto del país, especialmente la mitad oriental de éste, teatro de las principales acciones bélicas de la Guerra de los Diez Años, dándose los primeros pasos para el tendido de cables submarinos que permitiera esta comunicación.

Al iniciarse la Guerra de Independencia el 24 de febrero de 1895, los insurgentes cubanos continúan la destrucción sistemática de las líneas telegráficas. El daño causado a la red, sobre todo en la parte oriental de la isla, fue enorme. Al producirse la intervención americana no existía comunicación telegráfica entre la Habana y Santiago y las líneas telegráficas de la zona oriental estaban totalmente destruidas. También los caminos quedaron abandonados e intransitables, a menos que hubiesen sido necesitados por las tropas españolas. Algunos de los ferrocarriles sufrieron pérdidas muy serias. A todo esto hay que añadir, el corte, en la bahía de Cienfuegos, de los cables submarinos de sur de la Isla realizado por la marina de guerra de los Estados Unidos cuando estos iniciaron la guerra contra España en 1898.

El estallido del acorazado USS Maine en la bahía de la Habana, el 15 de febrero de 1898, fue el detonante que desencadenó la guerra entre Estados Unidos y España, que finalizaría con la intervención militar de Estados Unidos a Cuba y frustra los ideales independentistas por los que tanto había luchado y sufrido el pueblo cubano. Era Presidente de Estados Unidos en ese momento, el republicano William McKinley.

McKinley es el primer presidente norteamericano que convierte la Casa Blanca en un centro de comunicaciones en tiempo de guerra, y el primer candidato que usa el teléfono en su campaña presidencial. Los telégrafos militares se encontraban normalmente en el Departamento de Guerra en Washington. McKinley habilitó una oficina en el segundo piso de la Casa Blanca, llamada por su staff 'War Room', donde fueron situados unos 25 telégrafos<sup>13</sup>, que le permitían contactar con el Ejército y con la Marina y seguir los progresos de la guerra sobre los mapas situados en la pared de dicha oficina.

En 1898, en previsión de las operaciones militares, el Cuerpo de Señales del Ejército de Estados Unidos había reunido en un almacén de Savannah, Estado de Georgia, el material necesario para el tendido de 500 líneas telegráficas y 5.000 postes<sup>14</sup>. Luego de la intervención militar, este material fue rápidamente trasladado a la Isla, pudiendo el Cuerpo de Señales acometer, de manea inmediata, la reparación y extensión de las líneas telegráficas en el país y de aquellas que el mando militar estadounidense requería, de manera tal, que en el mes de abril de 1899 ya las líneas estaban funcionando.

<sup>13</sup> Walter Lafeber, transcripción de *Crucible of Empire: the Spanish-American War*, documental PBS por Daniel Miller (1999), en PBS on-line, [www.pbs.org/crucible/frames/\\_film.html](http://www.pbs.org/crucible/frames/_film.html).

<sup>14</sup> Report of Mayor H.F. Hedges in *Civil Report*, Period of January 1901-May 1902, Libros Raros, Universidad de La Habana.

Desde 1876, las comunicaciones telegráficas entre España y Cuba tenían dos posibles vías: la del cable submarino que unía la Habana con Estados Unidos, y de allí con Europa, y el cable que unía a España con Cuba a través de las Canarias, el continente americano y las islas de Caribe, cable que no pasaba por territorio americano. Sin embargo, en esta última vía, la comunicación en muchos de los tramos era responsabilidad de compañías extranjeras, en particular, norteamericanas.

Estados Unidos declara el bloqueo a la Isla, impidiendo la entrada de alimentos y municiones y cortando el servicio postal. El 22 de abril de 1898 apareció la flota norteamericana a la vista de los habitantes de la ciudad de la Habana, moviéndose posteriormente a Matanzas, Mariel y Cárdenas. Pero este bloqueo no era totalmente efectivo, ya que el Gobierno español en la Isla mantenía comunicación con la Península a través del cable telegráfico trasatlántico del sur. Cortando estos cables se impedía la comunicación telegráfica entre, Madrid, la Habana y la flota del Almirante Cervera.

Los cables submarinos que conectaban a Cuba con España, sin pasar por territorio norteamericano, estaban todos en la costa sur, y su trazado en Cuba era Batabanó – Cienfuegos – Santiago de Cuba. Entre Santiago de Cuba y la bahía de Kingston, en Jamaica, existía otra sección de este cable. Por tierra, pasando por San Luis, Cienfuegos, Trinidad y Santiago de Cuba, existía una línea telegráfica que llegaba hasta la bahía de Guantánamo, y desde allí, se prolongaba la comunicación mediante un cable submarino hasta Haití. Batabanó en el sur, y la Habana en el norte, se comunicaban por líneas telegráficas terrestres. El objetivo principal era aislar a la Habana por el sur, ya que los cables que conectaban la Habana por el norte tenían apoyo en territorio norteamericano y no era necesario cortarlos.

La fuerza naval estadounidense que operaba a principios de mayo en la costa sur de Cuba, estaba compuesta por el crucero *Marblehead*, la cañonera *Nashville*, el yate convertido *Eagle*, el guardacostas *Windom*, y la carbonera *Saturn*, los cuales formaban, en aquel momento, la cuarta división de la flota norteamericana. El jefe de la división era el Comandante de la Marina de Estados Unidos B.H. McCalla. El 10 de mayo, el Comandante McCalla comunicó a los oficiales al mando de las naves, la disposición de cortar los cables en la bahía de Cienfuegos y a estos efectos se preparó una expedición para llevar a cabo la operación el siguiente día.

El día 11 de mayo, después de inspeccionar la zona, y mediante el disparo de todas las baterías de cañones del *Marblehead* y del *Nashville*, fue destruida la casa donde estaban anclados los cables – uno a Batabanó y otro a Santiago de Cuba – quedando ambos cables cortados. Posteriormente el *Marblehead* abrió fuego contra las barracas y la estación de señales. La expedición estaba formada por varios botes y un grupo de hombres que, después del cañoneo, bajaron a tierra. Dada la profundidad existente, a pesar de los esfuerzos de dragado que realizó la expedición, los

cables cortados no pudieron ser recuperados. Durante la guerra, fueron cortados otros cables telegráficos submarinos existentes en Cuba y en el Caribe.

#### 4. La telegrafía y la intervención militar norteamericana a Cuba

La guerra duró apenas 100 días, y al cesar las hostilidades el dominio colonial español fue sustituido, a partir de enero de 1899, por la ocupación militar estadounidense y el Gobierno Interventor. Cuba viviría ‘entre dos imperios’, al decir de Louis A. Pérez<sup>15</sup>. Durante el período de la intervención militar norteamericana, en paralelo con el desarrollo de los planes colonialista de Estados Unidos, se llevaron a cabo, de manera incesante, labores de modernización, higienización y cambios en las más diversas esferas en la vida de la Isla<sup>16</sup> y el servicio telegráfico no fue una excepción.

El servicio telegráfico, que en 1898 se había integrado con el correo en una Dirección General de Comunicaciones, fue separado de esta, situándose bajo el mando del Cuerpo de Señales del Ejército de Estados Unidos. La primera medida tomada por el nuevo mando fue la de sustituir los viejos telégrafos *Digney*, utilizados en las estaciones telegráficas de la Isla, por aparatos que usaban corriente continua. Posteriormente se estableció el uso de máquinas de escribir, pues hasta entonces, los mensajes se escribían manuscritos, usando lápiz tinta.

El Capitán Otto A. Nesmith, Jefe del Cuerpo de Señales del Departamento de Cuba, en un informe<sup>17</sup> sobre el trabajo realizado por ese Cuerpo, evalúa del siguiente modo los telégrafos que funcionaban en la Isla: “*las líneas telegráficas funcionaban mediante aparatos de cinta de circuito abierto que se abandonó desde los primeros días de la telegrafía en Estados Unidos*”. Respecto al mal estado de las líneas cubanas, ese mismo informe es ilustrativo. Las comunicaciones telegráficas terminaban en Sancti Spiritus, de esa ciudad hacia el oriente de la Isla, la Guerra de Independencia no había dejado en pie línea alguna.

De manera inmediata, se trajo a Cuba el material telegráfico situado en el almacén de Savannah y se acometieron los trabajos de reparación de las líneas con tal energía que el 1o de abril de 1899 ya estaba terminada la línea principal entre la Habana y Santiago de Cuba. El Secretario de la Guerra de Estados Unidos, que estaba de visita de inspección en Santiago de Cuba, inauguró la línea reparada enviándole un mensaje al Presidente McKinley.

<sup>15</sup> Louis A. Pérez, *Cuba between Empires 1878-1900* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1983).

<sup>16</sup> Para un análisis detallado de esta actividad modernizadora durante la intervención, ver Marial Iglesias Utset, *Las Metáforas del cambio en la vida cotidiana: Cuba 1898-1902* (La Habana: Unión, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> Report of Captain Otto A. Nesmith, Chief of Signal Officer, Department of Cuba, for the Period of January 1901-May 1902 in *Civil Report*, Libros Raros, Universidad de La Habana.

Desde la Habana, el Jefe del Cuerpo de Señales de este Ejército, que inspeccionaba los trabajos en dicha ciudad, telegrafió también al Presidente, comunicándole del funcionamiento prácticamente completo del sistema telegráfico. Se tendieron nuevas líneas como la de Guantánamo-Sagua de Tánamo-Baracoa y la de Pinar del Río a Guanajay y a San Juan y Martínez. Desde Sancti Spiritus hacía la Zona Oriental todas líneas telegráficas tuvieron que ser tendidas nuevamente.

Al inicio de la intervención la Academia de Telegrafía desapareció. En sustitución de esta, los interventores habilitaron un local en el edificio de la Oficina Central para practicar telegrafía con tres aparatos Morse. De los 40 telegrafistas que trabajaban en el Centro Telegráfico de La Habana, solo continuaron trabajando 9 por dominar el inglés y ser capaces de recibir 'al oído'. Esto lo explica el uso por parte de Estados Unidos, del código 'americano' para las comunicaciones terrestres, mientras que los telegrafistas criollos utilizaban el código 'continental'.

En 1901, existían 319 empleados de telégrafo. De estos, 256 eran cubanos y 63 norteamericanos. En la plantilla de ese año aparece, por primera vez, la mujer cubana como telegrafista<sup>18</sup>. En la oficina telegráfica de Cárdenas, trabajaban las hermanas Aurora y María Luisa Delgado, Blanca Pérez en la oficina de Matanzas. Una norteamericana, Guillerma Martin, era la Jefa de la Oficina Telegráfica de Remedios. Esta presencia femenina continuará incrementándose posteriormente.

Es indudable que los efectos de la intervención norteamericana sobre el servicio telegráfico fueron altamente positivos y que muchos de los norteamericanos del Cuerpo de Señales de Estados Unidos que participaron, conjuntamente con los telegrafistas criollos, en las tareas de modernización, reconstrucción y desarrollo de las líneas telegráficas, estaban animados de sanos propósitos de colaboración con el pueblo cubano y ajenos a los intereses anexionistas.

El 14 de julio de 1901, se forma en La Habana el Directorio Organizador del Cuerpo de Comunicaciones, que compuesto por antiguos empleados en servicio activo o que habían quedado cesantes, debían concebir y organizar el nuevo Cuerpo de Comunicaciones dentro de la República. En una asamblea, que tuvo participación masiva de los empleados telegráficos y de correo, se nombró una Comisión Gestora que debía desarrollar una propuesta inicial de la organización y el presupuesto de ese Cuerpo. Fue elegido Presidente de la Comisión Gestora Rigoberto Rodríguez Masvidal y como Secretario Enrique C. Alfonso. Organizativamente se partía de la necesidad de unir, bajo un Cuerpo de Comunicaciones, al servicio de correo y el servicio telegráfico, los cuales habían sido separados durante la Intervención.

<sup>18</sup> Dirección General de Comunicaciones, *Memoria Histórica del Correo y el Telégrafo* (La Habana: Dirección General de Comunicaciones, 1902).

El Reglamento Orgánico y el presupuesto elaborados por la Comisión fueron sometidos, mediante una circular de su Presidente, de fecha 12 de septiembre, al criterio de los hombres más autorizados y notables de Cuba, en la política, la ciencias, la industria, el comercio y la prensa, recibiendo cálidas adhesiones de los consultados<sup>19</sup>. El día 9 de enero se entregó este Proyecto al General Wood para que fuese tenido en cuenta en la nueva organización de los servicios de Correos y Telégrafos. Muchas de las propuestas formuladas por este Proyecto de Reglamento y Presupuesto fueron utilizados en la implementación republicana de la Dirección de Comunicaciones.

El 20 de mayo de 1902 comienza la vida republicana de Cuba, que pasaba, de ser una colonia de España, a ser una neocolonia de Estados Unidos. Al cesar la intervención, se produce, en todo el país, la retirada de los militares norteamericanos de las oficinas telegráficas, siendo sustituidos por personal cubano. Los telegrafistas del Centro Telegráfico de la Habana, cubanos y norteamericanos, realizaron una emocionante reunión de despedida, expresión de la confraternidad existente entre ellos en el plano del trabajo<sup>20</sup>.

El servicio telegráfico nacional pasó a ser atendido por la Dirección de Comunicaciones adscrita a la Secretaría de Gobernación, y en general, el telégrafo se mantuvo precariamente durante décadas y solo, ocasionalmente, se modernizó el sistema con la introducción de algunos adelantos técnicos.

El tendido de cables telegráficos submarinos y con ello la estructuración de la telegrafía como un sistema global, tuvo consecuencias importantes en el mundo en esta mitad del siglo XIX, y en Cuba, en particular. Es por ello que vamos a prestar especial atención al desarrollo de este proceso tecnológico y a sus consecuencias.

## **5. La globalización de la telegrafía y su influencia en la sociedad de la época**

Con el tendido de los cables telegráficos submarinos y la internacionalización de la telegrafía, esta tecnología alcanza su verdadera dimensión. En 1849 C.V. Walker, un ingeniero de la *South Eastern Railway Co.*, logró, utilizando un tramo de cable submarino, establecer comunicación con la ciudad de Londres desde un barco situado en la bahía de Folkestone. Posteriormente, en 1851, se tiende exitosamente, a través de Canal de la Mancha, el primer cable submarino entre Inglaterra y Francia. Esta obra fue realizada por la *Atlantic Telegraph Company* con el apoyo tanto del Imperio

<sup>19</sup> Entre los consultados estuvieron Bartolomé Masó, Enrique José Varona y Martín Morúa Delgado, este último la consideró como una tarea patriótica.

<sup>20</sup> Dirección General de Comunicaciones, *Memoria Histórica del Correo y el Telégrafo*.

Británico como del gobierno de Estados Unidos. El cable tuvo una importante consecuencia: por primera vez la información bursátil de Londres podía ser conocida instantáneamente en París. Después de una vida efímera, el cable dejó de funcionar en septiembre de 1858. Posteriormente, al madurar esta tecnología, fueron tendidos muchos otros cables. Durante la segunda mitad del siglo XIX, Gran Bretaña sería la potencia líder en la creación de una red mundial de comunicaciones por cable submarino.

Uno de los financiadores del cable trasatlántico fue Moses Taylor, Presidente del *National City Bank* desde 1856, un hombre clave en la explotación de las materias primas de las áreas colonizadas y subdesarrolladas del Caribe. Este financiamiento no fue casual. Este cable, y los nuevos que se tenderán posteriormente, hicieron posible la apropiación de la información por parte de grupos financieros, permitiendo el control y la difusión de esta información en función de sus intereses. Mediante la especulación en los mercados se van a crear fortunas y se controlarán y comprarán compañías. El cable, al igual que la bolsa, va a ser un instrumento de dominación neocolonial, que puso los mercados de materias prima al alcance de la mano del gran capital financiero. Esta es su verdadera esencia como negocio.

La red de cables telegráficos submarinos que va a circundar el mundo, determinará el surgimiento de agencias internacionales de noticias y modificará la prensa de la época, impulsará, al igual que lo hizo el ferrocarril en su momento, el naciente turismo, y despertará la imaginaria popular<sup>21</sup>.

Apenas tendido el primer cable a través del Atlántico, y aún antes, se van a levantar voces en Cuba y en España, que reclamaban la comunicación telegráfica con la isla de Cuba, entre otras medidas necesarias, para fortalecer los vínculos con la colonia. Uno de los primeros proyectos que obtuvo una concesión provisional fue presentado por el ingeniero español A. de Marcoartu. Este proyecto, que convertía la Península en el centro de una red mundial de cables, no obtuvo la concesión definitiva. Posteriormente se concibió una ruta alternativa, la llamada 'ruta transatlántica del Sur', que tenía el trazado general Cádiz-Canarias-Cabo Verde-Brasil-Cuba. Múltiples fueron además los proyectos de tender un cable submarino entre Cuba y Estados Unidos.

El Capitán Jarnes A. Scrymser 'aplicó' a la Legislatura del Estado de la Florida solicitando los derechos para tender un cable a Punta Rassa, lo cual le fue concedido por un período de 20 años. Al mismo tiempo, el General William F. Smith hizo la solicitud al Gobierno Superior de Cuba, del derecho de amarre de un cable telegráfico en la Isla. Ambos, representaban los intereses de la *International Ocean Telegraph Company*. Un Acta del Congreso de Estados Unidos aprobada el 5 de mayo de 1866, daba el derecho exclusivo a esta compañía para operar todo el tráfico telegráfico submarino con Cuba por un período de 14 años, este privilegio pasaría años más tarde a la *Western Union*.

<sup>21</sup> Ver el ejemplo del 'telégrafo espiritual' en Antonio Bermúdez, "Notas para la historia del espiritismo en Cuba", *Etnología y Folklore* 4 (1967), 5-22.

Por la Real Orden 631 de 19 de junio de 1866<sup>22</sup> se le concede al Mayor General del Ejército de los Estados Unidos William F. Smith representante de la *Compañía Telegráfica Internacional*, la concesión del derecho de amarre, en la costa de Cuba, del extremo de un cable submarino que con arreglo a la concesión otorgada a dicha compañía por el Congreso de Estados Unidos había de partir de las costas de la Florida. La *International Ocean Telegraph Company*, inscrita en Estados Unidos e Inglaterra, y a principios de la década del 70 una subsidiaria de la *Western Union*, va a operar en Cuba con el nombre de '*Compañía Telegráfica Internacional*'.

El tendido del cable entre la Habana y Cayo Hueso comenzó el 26 de julio de 1867. El buque *Narva*, utilizado para esa tarea, llegó el 5 de agosto a las costas de la Habana, anclando el extremo del cable en la costa habanera. El cable fue ordenado a la *Indian Rubber, Gutta Percha & Telegraph Works Company (IRGPTW)*. El año siguiente esa Compañía tendió otro cable de la misma factura entre esos puntos y se utilizó el mismo barco *Narva*.

El 10 de septiembre 1867, empieza a funcionar el cable submarino, siendo este el primero que comunica dos naciones del hemisferio occidental. La Isla queda así unida a las redes telegráficas de otros países, directamente con Estados Unidos y, mediante las redes de este país, con España a través de Gran Bretaña y Francia. Este evento se reseña el 11 de septiembre en la *Gaceta de la Habana*.

En la prensa habanera aparecen numerosos comentarios satíricos, chistes y caricaturas sobre la relación del cable con el azúcar cubano. Entre ellos se destaca la caricatura de Víctor Patricio Landaluce, aparecida en la revista satírica *El Moro Muza*, en la cual una hermosa mujer, que representa a Cuba, está unida a los Estados Unidos por el cable como un dogal a su cuello. Santiago Spencer, que publicaba en la Habana el *Boletín Comercial* contentivo de información estadística sobre distintos productos, fundamentalmente el azúcar, firma con la *Associated Press* un contrato, y pocos días después, el 23 de septiembre, inaugura en este una nueva columna denominada 'Cable'.

Una vez tendido el cable entre la Habana y Cayo Hueso, quedaban unidos Cuba-New York-Londres, y un grupo privilegiado de hombres pudo, por primera vez en la historia, negociar simultáneamente en los tres mercados más importantes del azúcar: el de la Habana, primer centro exportador de azúcar a nivel mundial, el de New York, primer centro importador del continente americano y el de Londres, primer centro importador de Europa. Esta dinámica económico-informativa posibilitó el surgimiento de grandes transnacionales haciendo obsoleto el rol de los pequeños intermediarios, a los cuales le resultaba imposible competir con estas y evidenció la necesidad de institucionalizar el comercio mundial del azúcar<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> ANC, Reales Órdenes, Legajo 221, n. 763.

<sup>23</sup> Ver Manuel Moreno Fraguinals, *El Ingenio*, tomo I (La Habana: Ciencias Sociales, 1978), iii.

Los comerciantes británicos se encontraron en posición desventajosa para negociar en los mercados del azúcar, por ello, en 1869 fundan tres compañías, la *Cuban Submarine Telegraph Company*, la *Panama and South Pacific Telegraph Company*, y la *West India and Panama Telegraph Company*, con el objetivo de enlazar telegráficamente a Cuba con Europa a través de las islas del Caribe y del Atlántico.

En 1870 comienzan los trabajos de interconexión de las islas que terminan en 1873 con el funcionamiento pleno del sistema. El trazado completo de la ruta era: Santiago de Cuba-Kingston, Jamaica-Colón, Panamá, Kingston-San Juan, Puerto Rico-San Tomas-San Kitts-Antigua Guadalupe-Dominica-Martinica-Santa Lucía-San Vicente-Barbados, San Vicente-Granada-Trinidad-Belem y desde esta última, a Cayena por una línea terrestre. El 2 de septiembre de 1870, la *Cuba Submarine Telegraph Company*, abre al tráfico la conexión Habana-Santiago de Cuba mediante un cable telegráfico submarino a través de Batabanó y Cienfuegos. La *West India and Panama Telegraph Company* tiende el cables submarino entre Santiago de Cuba y Holland Bay, Jamaica.

En 1873 se tiende el cable del puerto de Vigo a Carcavelo, cerca de Lisboa, y en junio de 1874 la *Compañía Telegráfica Brasileira Submarina*, termina el tendido de un cable con el trazado Carcavelos-Madeira-Cabo Verde-Recife, que desde este último se conectaría con las islas del Caribe mediante las secciones Recife-Fortaleza-San Luis-Belem y desde esta, por una línea terrestre, se unía con Cayena, punto final del cable. Para España este cable era vital pues permitía la comunicación entre la Península y Cuba sin necesidad de atravesar el territorio de los Estados Unidos.

La globalización de la telegrafía revoluciona las prácticas comerciales, dando una nueva tónica al mercado mundial. La instantaneidad de la comunicación, el cambio en los 'tiempos', exigieron una modificación de los tradicionales métodos de obtención y procesamiento de la información necesaria para la toma de decisiones mercantiles y bursátiles. Las bolsas de valores sufrieron de inmediato el impacto de este cambio, y tuvieron que reorganizarse, porque esta instantaneidad volvió obsoletos sus reglamentos. Como apunta Moreno Friginals, "telégrafos y cables submarinos, prepararon las condiciones necesarias para el gran desarrollo de las bolsas de productos"<sup>24</sup>.

A finales del siglo XIX otros cables submarinos vendrían a conectar a Cuba con las redes telegráficas mundiales pero, hasta el tendido de los tres cables telefónicos submarinos entre la Habana y Key West en 1921, ninguno sería tan importante, ni capaz de provocar un impacto tan grande en la sociedad, como lo fueron estos primeros cables.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.



## Chapter 5

# Physics in Cuba: a Lag between Technological and Scientific Development

One of the most noteworthy achievements of the Cuban Revolution has been the development of an advanced scientific system. Cuba boasts a high number of physicists, science graduates and doctors – among the highest in the world with respect to its population. The state of physics can be used to represent scientific development in general, even though it only forms a small branch of the field. Reports on physics in Latin America place Cuba (a country with 11 million inhabitants), together with Chile, Venezuela and Colombia, as one of the countries with an intermediate number of PhDs in physics (between 100 and 500), following the three largest and much more populated countries of Brazil (3000), Mexico (2200) and Argentina (2000). Moreover, they include the University of Havana as one of the outstanding institutions in the region for the advancement of physics and recognize the contribution of Cuban physicists to such areas as condensed matter and material physics, solar energy, optoelectronics and medical physics<sup>1</sup>. What makes these results particularly remarkable, however, is the fact that they started from a considerably modest level of scientific development and higher education that existed in Cuba before the 1959 Revolution, lower even than in other Spanish colonies. Indeed, not only was there no original scientific research or development throughout the colonial period, when the country was ruled by a decidedly backward mother country, but neither was there any during the partial independence of the Republican period.

At the same time, Cuba saw the early realization of several advanced technologies at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, even prior to their application in Spain, which is amazing considering the country's underdevelopment, espe-

<sup>1</sup> José Luis Morán-López, "Physics in Latin America Comes of Age", *Physics Today* 12 (2000), 38-43: 38.

cially in rural areas. Such advancements include the application of the steam engine to the *trapiche* in 1817 and the 46-km railway connection for the transport of goods between Havana and Güines in 1837. What follows is an attempt to interpret such early, advanced technological achievements during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> against the much slower and delayed development in science, based first on the commercial vocation, and strategic position, of the island, and then on its peculiar role with respect to the United States.

### I. Late Scientific Development in Cuban Society

In order to pinpoint the problem, the development of physics and higher education in Cuba before the Revolution should be examined in more detail. The wave of the Enlightenment did not reach the Spanish colony until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a delayed reflection of a movement that was already underway in the mother country. It had a lasting impact on Cuba's system of higher education thanks to the teachings of Father José Agustín Caballero (1771-1835) and the vigorous initiatives and material support of Bishop Espada y Landa (1756-1828). It was in this context that Espada's Cuban-born protégé, Father Félix Varela (1787-1853), introduced Cuba to the earliest methods of teaching physics, supported by the first *Gabinete de Física Experimental*, a collection of imported scientific apparatuses given to him by Bishop Espada in 1816<sup>2</sup>. Varela is considered one of the founding fathers of Cuba, a freedom fighter who struggled for the abolition of slavery and was forced to flee the island for his life in 1823.

Despite these innovations, an Aristotelian mentality and curriculum dominated at the University of Havana from its founding in 1728 to its secularization in 1842. Though it would later take the lead in physics education in Cuba, its scientific level remained quite modest until well beyond the end of colonial rule at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It should be noted, however, that some important developments did take place in other fields, for instance medicine, in relation to local problems like tropical diseases (for example, under Tomás Romay, 1784-1849; Carlos Finlay, 1833-1915; and urologist Joaquín María Albarrán y Domínguez, 1860-1912, who was proposed for the Nobel Prize though he performed his work in France). In 1861, Nicolás J. Gutiérrez, a surgeon and professor of medicine at the University of Havana, founded the *Real Academia de Ciencias Físicas, Médicas y Naturales de La Habana*, the first academy of sciences in the Americas (analogous academies were only founded two years later in the US, thirteen years later in Argentina and twenty-three years later in Mexico)<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Felix Varela, *Instituciones de Filosofía Ecléctica Para Uso de la Juventud*, vol. 4 (Pinar del Rio: Vitral, 1814); Id., *Lecciones de Filosofía*, vols. 3 and 4 (La Habana: De Palmer, 1819 and 1820). This textbook was updated in four subsequent editions (printed in New York, the last one in 1835) that were well received and used in various Latin American countries.

<sup>3</sup> Pedro M. Pruna, "National science in a colonial context. The Royal Academy of Sciences of Habana, 1861-1898", *Isis* 3 (1994), 412-26.

By a Royal Decree approved in 1880, an educational system similar to that existing in Spain at the time was introduced in Cuba. It extended studies in the humanities and sciences and replaced the *Bachiller* degree with a *Licenciado* degree. The science faculty was subdivided into three sections – *Ciencias Físico-Matemáticas*, *Ciencias Físico-Químicas* and *Ciencias Naturales* – and two new physics subjects were introduced – *Física Superior* and *Ejercicios Prácticos de Física*. These changes survived until the Reform of Higher Education in 1962. However, the facilities for teaching physics continued to be precarious at the University of Havana, and the scientific level remained quite low throughout this period, with no original research or work carried out. Such backwardness is emphasized by the many developments recorded, for instance, in Mexico during the same time, at least in such fields as mechanics, engineering and probably chemistry, which were connected to the exploitation of mines.

During the US military occupation of Cuba (1 January 1899 – 20 May 1902), and the subsequent six decades (May 1902 – January 1959) of the Cuban Republic's limited independence, some important changes were made to the national education system. Thanks to the initiative and influence of Enrique José Varona (1849-1933), the outlook and organization of both secondary and higher education was significantly improved. The so-called *Plan Varona* (30 June 1900) emphasized active scientific and technological education, in place of the former emphasis on arts and the humanities in which context students had been more or less spoon-fed, so to speak, by mediocre teachers<sup>4</sup>. The organization of the University of Havana generally followed that of American universities. There was, however, an important difference. Not only could professors hold their posts for life but they were also, in a way, allowed to act like academic feudal lords. This tended to degrade the quality of teaching, which often ended up as obsolete routine. The School of Sciences and the newly-created School of Engineers, Electricians and Architects were kept within the *Facultad de Letras y Ciencias*. Physics studies were basically represented by *Física Superior* and *Física General* courses, but in practice they were taught in an essentially descriptive fashion, with little mathematical content, as could be expected from the background of the appointed teaching staff. For the most part, the original goals Varona set forth for the university were frustrated after some time by the sad facts of life in the country as a whole, where hopeless economic underdevelopment, government corruption and submission to foreign imperial interests led the nation into a multi-faceted crisis. This unleashed the radicalization of an important segment of the Cuban population during what has been called the "critical decade" (1923-1933).

<sup>4</sup> Ramón De Armas and Eduardo Torres-Cuevas, "La Universidad de La Habana y la frustración republicana", in *Historia de la Universidad de La Habana, 1728-1929*, vol. 1, eds. Ramón De Armas, Eduardo Torres-Cuevas and Ana Cairo Ballester (La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 1984), 237-365.

Largely inspired by the 1918 university reform in Argentina, and led by an outstanding student leader, Julio Antonio Mella, a reform movement began in 1923 at the University of Havana. Among others, its avowed goals included eradicating the archaic teaching methods then prevalent and the unacceptable performance of certain teachers due either to incompetence, corruption or failure to comply with their daily duties. While in the end the full reform program was not fulfilled, some of the most notoriously incompetent members of the teaching staff were removed and replaced by new personnel deemed better suited for the job, often proposed or backed by the students themselves. Such was the case of Manuel Gran (1893-1962). In March 1923, Gran took over as a substitute assistant professor for the two courses of *Física Superior* because the students refused to attend the poor lectures offered by the assistant professor who was replacing the seriously-ill senior professor. A self-made man with a Cartesian turn of mind, Gran introduced a truly fresh spirit to the teaching of physics, with a consistently rigorous approach to the different topics, an appropriate use of mathematics and a strong link to problem-solving and practical manipulations. By 1929, the subject *Física Superior* had acquired the essentials of the profile it would maintain until the early 1960s.

In the meantime, it must be recalled that the students of the University of Havana were among those strongly opposed to the bloody tyranny of President Machado, who was overthrown in August 1933. That year, important changes were introduced to the degrees offered by the School of Science, which were extended from three to four years. While routine lab work continued to be unsatisfactory, students of physical and mathematical sciences and physical and chemical sciences were now required to perform a set of more sophisticated experiments during their final year in order to obtain their degree<sup>5</sup>. Still, genuine research was not required. An important step was taken in 1933 with the introduction of a *Física Teórica* course, led by professors Enrique Badell (1895-1947) and Miguel A. Maseda (1902-1957), both largely self-made physicists. Moreover, Marcelo Alonso, who had taken graduate-level courses in physics at Yale University, started a modest laboratory for atomic and nuclear physics<sup>6</sup>.

Mention must also be made of a highly motivating course in general physics taught by Roberto Soto del Rey (1913-1995) to engineering students at the University of Oriente from the time of its inauguration in Santiago de Cuba (1949). Furthermore, the teaching of physics at the high school level was updated, and it soon provided a set of trained professors.

<sup>5</sup> Universidad de La Habana, *Memoria-Anuario de los cursos académicos de 1933-1934 y 1934-1935*, 23-24 and 53-55.

<sup>6</sup> José Altshuler, "Visión retrospectiva de un momento de la enseñanza de la Física en Cuba", paper presented at the *Taller Iberoamericano de Enseñanza de la Física Universitaria*, Havana, 20-24 January 1997.

## 2. The Technological Needs of Cuba's Commercial vocation and Strategic Position

Cuba's economic role during the colonial age, and under the rule of the United States, was quite different from that of other Caribbean and Latin American colonies. The island was not particularly rich in valuable natural resources, nor did it abound in ore reserves or develop important transformation industries, apart from that of sugarcane. Instead, the main benefit it had to offer was its strategic geographical position. Moreover, Cuba's commercial vocation as a crucible of trade between Latin America and Europe was enhanced by the supremacy of the United States over Cuba's trade starting in the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>7</sup>. Under such conditions, the island needed neither advanced scientific knowledge and higher education nor technological developments in industrial production, the way they were required for instance, at least in some fields, in Mexico. On this basis, one can understand anomalous Cuban developments like the introduction of the steam engine in the *ingenios* for sugarcane manufacturing, despite the wide supply of slaves, and the construction of the railways, or the advancements made in the fight against tropical diseases. Likewise, since Cuba was a strategic crucible of trade, one might suppose that communication and information technologies played relevant roles that required early and advanced developments. Indeed, it is not surprising that countries other than Spain, in particular the United States, contributed to such advances. This could also explain why Cuba anticipated and even outdid its colonial mother country in these fields, while it lagged behind on the purely scientific side. However, one could also argue that Spain's scanty interest in scientific development and its attitude of pure (pre-capitalistic) exploitation of its colonies contributed to the decline of this field.

Evidently, the situation changed for Cuba during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time, even though the United States was on its way to becoming the world leader in science and economics, its attitude towards the island did not change radically. Cuba remained substantially a land of economic exploitation, or of leisure for the wealthiest classes, and its role was to increase the efficiency of its facilities to such ends, not to be an autonomous player in scientific development.

<sup>7</sup> In 1826, the volume of Cuba's trade with the United States exceeded that with Spain by almost three times: Ramón de la Sagra, *Historia Económica-Política y Estadística de la Isla de Cuba* (La Habana: Arazoza y Soler, 1831), 200-5. Fernando Ortiz, an authority on the subject, emphatically asserted that "in 1850 the trade of this country with the United States exceeds that with its Spanish metropolis, and the United States definitely assumes its natural geographic condition as purchaser market for the nearby Cuban production, but also its privilege as economic metropolis. Already in 1881, the Consul General of the United States in Havana writes officially that Cuba is an economic dependent of the United States even though it is still politically ruled by Spain". See: Fernando Ortiz, *Contrapunteo Cubano del Tabaco y del Azúcar* (La Habana: Consejo Nacional de Cultura, 1963), 64.

One may suppose, however, that Cuba's openness and flexibility towards technological innovation is what contributed, in turn, to its creating a cultural climate and a fecund material basis for its subsequent scientific take-off and development. It is difficult, in fact, to believe that the remarkable scientific advances that have taken place since 1959 could have sprung up from scratch.

### 3. The Leap in Scientific Development after 1959<sup>8</sup>

The revolutionary effervescence in the Cuban universities after 1959 initiated a "romantic" phase in which teachers, students and academic authorities succeeded, albeit with foreign aid and support, to profoundly renovate and update scientific and academic activities in a surprisingly short time. When the University of Havana was reopened after the revolutionary phase, there was an increasing awareness of the need to profoundly reform both the curricula and teaching methods, coherent with the need to develop a modern mentality that would include scientific research, preferably linked to the country's new perspectives on economic and cultural development. The first remarkable step was made, in typical "Cuban style", in the field of information and communication technology. While endless discussions were taking place, the Engineering School of the University of Havana was in fact the first to engage in the modernization of the curricula. This resulted from a critical situation that erupted in June 1960 between students and some faculty members that led to the provisional hiring of a number of capable professionals as teachers<sup>9</sup>. In view of the urgent need of new specialists for the Ministry of Communications, which at the time was engaged in a true technical revolution, the teaching of electrical engineering was immediately modified to deal with the fields of electronics and electrical communications, followed by a radical modification of mathematics and physics teaching. A syllabus based on leading U.S. physics textbooks was drawn up, but it was difficult to find qualified instructors. The task was entrusted to a few senior high school teachers and some of the brighter engineering students. After a truly difficult start, the courses were normalized and incorporated into all the engineering majors.

<sup>8</sup> More-detailed analyses of these developments are reported in: Angelo Baracca, Victor Fajer and Bruno Henríquez, "El desarrollo de la física en Cuba", *Revista Iberoamericana de Física* 1 (2004), 54-61; Angelo Baracca, ed., *History of the Development of Physics in Cuba* (Berlin: Max-Planck-Institute für Wissenschaftsgeschichte, 2005); Angelo Baracca, Victor Fajer and Carlos Rodríguez, "A look at Physics in Cuba", *Physics Today* 9 (2006), 42-48.

<sup>9</sup> José Altshuler, "La especialización en telecomunicaciones y la reforma de 1960 del plan de estudios de Ingeniería Eléctrica en la Universidad de La Habana", in *Estudios de Historia de la Ciencia y la Tecnología*, ed. Centro de Estudios de Historia y Organización de la Ciencia (La Habana: Academia, 1989).

Meanwhile, the newly created School of Physics (1961) would also have to cope with the problem of very limited staff available to teach classes. In this case, too, high school teachers would be hired to cope with the shortage. But during the whole of 1959 and the first half of 1960, courses continued to be taught in essentially the same way as in the 1950s. It became quite clear that a profound reform of the curriculum and teaching methods was urgently needed to develop a modern mentality aimed primarily at engaging in scientific research. The new revolutionary government assumed the explicit goal of improving scientific education as a fundamental factor in the development of a modern and equitable society. The social situation was characterized by new forms of participation. In 1962, months of intense work among university professors, outside professionals and students resulted in the *Reforma de la Educación Superior en Cuba*, which introduced free registration for all eligible students and a strong emphasis on the development of scientific research. Many new degrees were established (including a five-year *Licenciatura en Física*) that had been absent from the old curricula and were needed for the country's economic and cultural development<sup>10</sup>.

Right from its effective start in 1961, the new *Escuela de Física* of the University of Havana faced overwhelming problems, lacking as it did the minimal indispensable means for developing a modern physics school. The training of students was redirected to cover modern conceptions of physics with a view to engaging in scientific research. Those who graduated in 1959 and 1960 were incorporated as "graduate instructors", while final-year students were taken on as "laboratory assistants". Meanwhile, in the context of the new plans for the country's industrial development promoted by Ernesto "Che" Guevara, an important role was attributed to electronics, especially microelectronics. At the request of the revolutionary government, a hundred scholarships were offered by the Soviet Union for Cubans to study engineering and economics at their universities. In 1961, only eighty-five young people could be found who complied with the academic and other requirements. Six of them proposed to major in physics, which was approved by Guevara. In subsequent years, the flow of students towards the Soviet Union grew steadily.

The direct support that came from foreign physicists must be situated in this context, particularly one aspect that is not widely acknowledged, i.e. that a relevant contribution was made by the presence of several "Western" scientists in Cuba. In 1962, a small number of physicists from the Soviet Union began to visit the island, contributing mainly to the organization of the physics curriculum. In addition, during the 1960s, several individual physicists, engineers and technicians from various Western countries (the United Kingdom, Israel, France, Argentina, Italy, Mexico and the United

<sup>10</sup> Consejo Superior de Universidades, *La Reforma de la Enseñanza Superior en Cuba* (La Habana: Universidad de La Habana, 1962).

States) came to Cuba on a voluntary basis, for periods ranging from one to several years, offering to collaborate in the development of the new School of Physics. They taught courses in modern physics, promoted the creation of new laboratories in acoustics, electronics and solid-state physics, set up workshops in electronics, mechanics and glass manufacturing for the creation of scientific instruments, and fostered research. They also played a decisive role in making the development of experimental physics a priority. The Levialdi Scholarship, for example, in memory of Italian physicist Andrea Levialdi who died in Cuba in 1969, was created for post-graduate training in Parma. This initiating a long-lasting collaboration between the Faculty of Physics of the University of Havana, the University of Parma and the MASPEC (Special Materials) Laboratory of the Italian National Research Council (CNR) in Parma, where about twenty Cuban physicists have been trained since 1970. French and Italian physicists also made a very important contribution by organizing summer schools between 1968 and 1973, for which they held advanced courses and brought materials and equipment.

A peculiarity of the new Cuban situation was the lively debate that developed, mainly among professors and students who actively supported teaching and research, over which fields of physics would best meet the needs of the developing country. This discussion partly reflected high-level opinions (Che Guevara, for example, thought that solid-state electronic devices would play a crucial role in the future and that Cuba could offer an original contribution in the socialist camp). Some French and Italian physicists who participated in the 1968 Havana Cultural Congress supported the choice of solid-state physics. In fact, it was decided that research activities should gradually concentrate more on this and related fields, such as electronics, optics and optoelectronics, and atomic physics. In 1967, the first germanium diode “made in Cuba” was performed at the *Escuela de Física*, marking the official birth of research in solid-state physics. These choices were conceived with an applicative goal, one that was based, however, on sound fundamental research. A department of theoretical physics began to take shape in the *Escuela de Física*<sup>11</sup>.

Besides the aforementioned strategic choice, the need for the advancement of other fields was clearly perceived and pursued. Plans for the industrial development of the country assigned an important role to electronics and metallurgy. The *Academia Cubana de Ciencias* (ACC), created in 1962, played a very important part in promoting scientific development in several fundamental branches. Several new fields appeared. Meteorology, geophysics, astrophysics and electronics were soon established as work groups

<sup>11</sup> Fernando Crespo, Elena Vigil, DinaWaisman, “Sobre los primeros resultados en díodos de germanio obtenidos por aleación”, paper presented at the *Conferencia Química de Oriente*, Santiago de Cuba, February 1968.



or departments in the ACC, and were consolidated as institutes during the 1970s. Collaboration with, and support from, specialists and the leading scientific institutions of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries led to the creation of important facilities and services, such as the artificial satellite tracking and monitoring system (connected with the Moscow Cosmos Centre) and the Cuban meteorological service (of the utmost importance in a tropical country), in addition to improvements in communications and seismic, magnetic and gravimetric detection.

In the early 1970s, after the return in 1967 of the first Cuban physicists who had graduated in the Soviet Union, a stable curriculum was set up in the *Escuela de Física* and teaching laboratories were built and equipped. The graduation of more than 100 physicists from the *Escuela de Física* in 1970 and 1971 provided the “critical mass” that made it possible to cover the lack of physics professors at Cuban universities and to devote more people, time and resources to scientific research and postgraduate education, as well as to feed other institutions. About fifty physicists received M.Sc. degrees in solid-state physics from the *Escuela de Física* between 1972 and 1977.

This is not the place for a detailed review of the development of physics in Cuba. However, the growth of microelectronics is worth mentioning as an example of advancements in research. In 1969, a crucial change took place when French physicists introduced the silicon technique in one of their aforementioned summer-school programs. Planar technology was quickly developed in relation to the project of building a pilot plant for the production of semiconductor devices. MOS's (metal oxide semiconductors) and other integrated circuit and silicon solar cells were obtained, while basic studies advanced, and the first pilot plant was established. In 1973, the first laser built entirely in Cuba was constructed. By the mid-1970s, Cuba had already reached a capacity in microelectronics at an intermediate integration that was high for Latin America. It should be pointed out that, for a long time, publishing scientific papers had not been a priority for Cuban scientists. Then in 1975, a large international meeting on physics, the fourth “Latin American Symposium on Solid-State Physics”, was organized in Cuba for the first time, with great success and local impact. Scientific collaboration with Soviet institutions increased, particularly with Moscow University and the “Ioffe” Leningrad Institute of Technical Physics. Undergraduate training of physicists at Soviet universities continued, but postgraduate training and joint research became the main forms of cooperation. Unfortunately, successful advancements in microelectronics were thwarted (in Cuba and other developing countries) by rapid progress in high integration, which only industrially developed countries could sustain. Nevertheless, this development could hardly have been foreseen, and the effort had been worth making. The industrial plant was established, but it could not work at the planned capacity.

Ties with socialist countries were growing, mainly in the ACC, and were becoming crucial for the development of other fields. In nuclear physics in particular, in addition to receiving support in teaching and training, experimental equipment and techniques were introduced with the collaboration of the Soviet Atomic Energy Commission and the Dubna Nuclear Research Institute. Radiotherapy services spread all over the country, starting in the 1960s with a group of physicists working at the Havana Institute of Oncology and, by the end of the 1970s, totaling some thirty medical physicists, a considerable number for a small developing country.

During the second half of the 1970s, the consolidation of the structure of the state led to the institutionalization of higher education and research, with the establishment of the Ministry of Higher Education (MES). This initiated a new phase and provided greater opportunities and resources, though in some sense it also brought the previous, "romantic" period to a close.

#### **4. The Formation of an Advanced Scientific System and Resistance after the Collapse of the Soviet Union**

The first two decades of the revolutionary government represented the boosting phase for further development and the reinforcement of an advanced and solid scientific system during the 1980s. In particular, this decade brought on a substantial increase in physics research, due to the foundation of new research centers and, in already-developed fields, to greater incentives and further renovation. Despite some tension created by the special efforts to promote specific fields (such as the relative autonomy of nuclear physics research with respect to the whole of Cuban science, connected to the decision to build the first electro-nuclear plant in the country), the Cuban scientific community and government succeeded in maintaining a balanced support for other fields, in particular for applied projects, as a strategic political choice. Of particular interest is the fact that the development of such a solid system, the establishment of a "critical mass" of physicists with university degrees or PhDs and the stability reached in this field, have allowed Cuba to withstand and overcome the difficulties that were created by the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Indeed, by 1990, the Havana and Eastern Universities and the Higher Institute of Nuclear Science and Technology (ISCTN) were offering advanced programs in physics, with an average of fifty graduates per year. About forty research groups existed in pure and applied physics. The most-developed areas were solid-state physics, nuclear physics, optics and laser physics, medical physics, biophysics and mathematical and theoretical physics. Physicists were also very active in interdisciplinary groups of meteorology, geophysics, astronomy, microelectronics, metallurgy, metrology, robotics, informatics, neurosciences and molecular biology. Most PhDs were

obtained in solid-state, material and nuclear physics. International events were regularly organized on the island. Cuban physicists also collaborated with Soviet, European and Latin American institutions and actively participated in international organizations related to physics. Moreover, a national network of higher pedagogical institutes prepared secondary-school physics teachers and the Special Vocational Pre-University Institutes for Exact Sciences provided an excellent source of young people well-trained to enter scientific and technical careers.

There is no doubt that with the collapse of the Soviet Union the entire Cuban scientific community has suffered a tremendous decrease in all kinds of resources, both financial and material, and a shortage of international exchange and scientific information. Nevertheless, in spite of profound reorganization, the Cuban scientific system has resisted in its basic features, and shows signs of recovery, even in physics. Some research groups have disappeared, others have had to abandon or reduce their active research. Research centers and universities have frozen their hiring, while the paralysis of industrial activities brought the growing presence of physicists in this sector to a halt. This led, in turn, to a drop in student registration in physics. The equipment in teaching laboratories has aged and decayed. An estimated two-hundred physicists have left the country, and an undetermined number have shifted to activities other than science, in search of better economic conditions. The average age of staff has grown: about half the present physicists with PhDs will have reached the age of retirement in 2010. Long-term programs have been difficult to develop, and physics has fallen behind with respect to the priorities of Cuban science.

Cuban physicists had benefited from access to the most advanced scientific institutions in socialist countries, but now it was the turn of the contacts previously established and maintained with “Western” scientific milieus and institutions to become extremely useful. Scientific exchange and collaboration shifted mainly towards Spain, Italy, Germany and other Latin American countries. Of these, Mexico and Brazil currently play a leading role. Collaboration with the International Centre of Theoretical Physics in Trieste, Italy, has also been very important. And in the year 2000, contacts with the American Physical Society were established.

Though a thorough reorganization was necessary, this has had beneficial repercussions. For instance, during the 1990s, some impulse was given to activities in renewable energies and the environment, and computing capacities have increased, in spite of the shortage of powerful machines for scientific computing. The growth of computer science and communications has improved access to updated technical and scientific information. This progress has induced a shift of several experimental activities towards simulation and modeling. These contributions have been important, but they have also modified the equilibrium between theoretical and experimental activity. All the same, various teams have contributed to resolving

the problems of the country, designing and constructing medical and analytical equipment, performing technical and scientific services for industry, and generating new products.

The new century began with stimulating signals for the recovery and advancement of Cuban physics. In keeping with the importance given to medicine in Cuba, medical physics is one of the branches with the greatest prospects, with investments of some \$400 million in medical equipment currently being made. At present, there are more than seventy-five physicists working in clinical environments, thirty-two of them in nuclear medicine, twenty-eight in radiotherapy and the rest in diagnostic imaging and radiation protection. New equipment for radiotherapy is expected to be installed, requiring at least another twenty physicists in these areas. Diagnostic imaging will be reinforced with the installation of eight new magnetic resonance imaging facilities. A M.Sc. degree in medical physics has started its first program with twenty-five students; a higher degree in radiation oncology is also training specialists in that field; and a degree in health technology has been created, offering specialization in medical radiophysics, with 100 students registered. More than twenty-four laser systems for refractive surgery and other high-technology optical instruments for ophthalmology have been purchased in a plan to provide services to Cuban patients in all areas of the country as well as making them available in other parts of Latin America.

Physicists have played a very important role in establishing and developing meteorological services in Cuba. This sector is being strengthened with important investments in modern equipment, which will result in a new stimulus for physics. The field of renewable energies, in which physicists have always made important contributions, is also expanding at present and there is a plan to install wind power stations in the near future. It is important to note that physics is only a small division of Cuban science compared to biotechnology and other branches of biomedical research. Nevertheless, Cuban physicists are very active and their presence in academic life and technological development, publications, prizes, scientific meetings and the popularization of science is considerably high. Their future success will largely depend on their ability to bring new generations to physics studies and their applications to the problems linked with the economic and social development of the country.



## Part III

# Conflicting Political Cultures: from the First US Occupation to Revolution



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Fig. 2 – Momento de bajar la estatua de Isabel II, parque Central, La Habana, 12 de marzo de 1899, *El Figaro*, 26 de marzo de 1899, n. 12 (Colección de M. Iglesias Utset).



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Fig. 3 – Vista del Malecón habanero.

Fig. 4 – “¿Rue estatua debe ser colocada en nuestro Parque Central?”, *El Figaro*, 30 de abril de 1899, n. 3 (Colección de M. Iglesias Utset).



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Fig. 5 – “Mujer moderna”, *El Figaro*, 15 de enero de 1899, n. 3 (Colección de M. Iglesias Utset).

Fig. 6 – Parque Central, 1899 Pedestal Vacío (Colección de M. Iglesias Utset).

On the previous page – Havana Malecón, early 20<sup>th</sup> century (in *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 22, 1996).



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Fig. 6 – Parque Central, 1899 Pedestal Vacío (Colección de M. Iglesias Utset).



## Conflicting Political Cultures: from the First US Occupation to Revolution

The US military occupation of Cuba (1898-1902), which followed the defeat of the Spanish army, shaped the future of the political system, the economy and the social life of the Cuban republic born in 1902. Along with the Platt Amendment written into the Cuban constitution came political dependence, imposed as a condition of US military withdrawal<sup>1</sup>. However, during the four years of occupation, Cuban society underwent a complex process of interaction and conflict between Cuban popular traditions and North American modernization. Excluded from official ceremonies that marked the power shift from Spain to the United States in Cuba, large sectors of the Cuban population were able to turn the imperial connotation of these ceremonies upside down. As Marial Iglesias Utset shows in this section, in a country where the majority of the population was illiterate, popular forms of mocking authorities and status reversal were rather common. This study of popular forms of transgression and mockery shows their strong nationalist connotations and enriches common interpretations of the first US military intervention in Cuba and explains the tensions and intersections between different forms of Cuban nationalist expression. By blocking Cuban self-determination in a variety of ways, the Platt Amendment was the major target of Cuban nationalism during the early republic<sup>2</sup>. From “monumental nationalism” as the conservative representation of the goals of 19<sup>th</sup>-century *Cuba Libre* to open anti-imperialism, Cuban

<sup>1</sup> Louis A. Pérez, *Cuba under the Platt Amendment, 1902-1934* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1986); Marial Iglesias Utset, *Las metáforas del cambio en la vida cotidiana: Cuba 1898-1902* (La Habana: Unión, 2003); Luis E. Aguilar, *Cuba 1933. Prologue to Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972).

<sup>2</sup> See: Lillian Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí: Conflicting Nationalisms in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2005); Celina Manzini, *Un dilemma cubano. Nacionalismo y vanguardia* (La Habana: Casa de las Américas, 2001).

political cultures erupted during the Machado regime, as Alessandra Lorini discusses in this section. Among the anti-imperialist groups, Spanish anarchists in Cuba played an important role by developing educational centers for the working classes, as Amparo Sánchez Cobos explains in this section. Incited by political corruption, economic crisis and Machado's repression of anarchists, communists and students, a wave of mobilizations throughout the island led to the withdrawal of US support for the dictator, the end of the Machado regime in 1933 and the repeal of the Platt Amendment in 1934 by the F.D. Roosevelt administration. Students in the 1920s and 1930s formed a revolutionary force whose national ideals, symbols and heritage became the language of the student movement of the 1950s. As Michael Lima argues in his essay, students responded to the Revolution of 1959 "motivated by their own historical expectations, ideology and organizational characteristics".



## Chapter 6

# Cultura política popular, “choteo” y nacionalismo en tiempos de la primera intervención norteamericana en Cuba

El primero de enero de 1899, cientos de habitantes de la La Habana se congregaron en el litoral de la bahía para ver arriar la bandera española en la explanada de la fortaleza del Morro. A diferencia de lo ocurrido en otros casos de descolonización, en los que los pabellones de las metrópolis fueron sustituidos por las flamantes enseñas de los estados nacionales, en Cuba el pabellón de España dio paso a la bandera de la nueva potencia imperial en el área: los Estados Unidos de América.

El acto de traspaso de poderes de manos españolas a norteamericanas quedó en la memoria de las generaciones posteriores como símbolo inequívoco del fracaso de las expectativas nacionalistas. La imagen de la enseña norteamericana ondeando en El Morro de La Habana, preservada en fotografías y grabados, o en versos como los celeberrimos de Bonifacio Byrne que cada niño cubano memoriza en la escuela, es, hasta hoy, emblema de la frustración y la impotencia relacionadas con la degradante condición neocolonial asignada a Cuba a inicios del siglo XX: *Al volver de distante ribera / con el alma enlutada y sombría / afanoso busqué mi bandera / y otra he visto en lugar de la mía*. Un examen a fondo de las fuentes de ese período muestra un curioso fenómeno apenas estudiado: la inversión nacionalista y festiva de la connotación imperial de la ceremonia por parte del pueblo habanero.

Cuidadosamente reglamentado por las autoridades de ocupación norteamericanas, el acto del traspaso de poderes – una solemne parada militar, salvadas de cañón a las doce en punto de la noche y cambio de banderas en el Castillo del Morro – perseguía el propósito de confirmar el recién adquirido poderío militar norteamericano sobre la Isla. El montaje escénico ratificaba públicamente los acuerdos sancionados por España y Estados Unidos en un conciliábulo diplomático a puertas cerradas en París. La parte española contribuiría a la representación con un gesto dramático

que ponía punto final a toda una era con la retirada de los supuestos restos de Cristóbal Colón, a bordo de un crucero de su flota militar. España dejaba el último enclave de lo que fuera su enorme imperio en el Nuevo Mundo llevándose los que creía despojos mortales de su insigne descubridor.

Aunque relegados de la ceremonia oficial, los cubanos se apropiaron de la celebración con una lectura diferente de su significado. Lejos de resignarse a constatar la legitimidad del poder norteamericano, una junta de “patriotas” formada en La Habana en los últimos días de 1898, lanzó volantes que llamaban a festejar el cese de la soberanía de España. Interpretaban el izamiento del pabellón norteamericano como el “comienzo de una nueva época de libertades [...] bajo cuya égida la estrella solitaria ha de irradiar en breve sobre los ciudadanos de la gran Nación Cubana”. Pese a indicaciones expresas del gobierno militar yanqui, que acto seguido prohibió los festejos – a contrapelo de lo dispuesto por la misma Junta Patriótica que, intimidada por la prohibición, un día después llamó a la moderación y a celebrar “individualmente” y “con regocijo tranquilo” –, el primer día de enero los habaneros abarrotaron espontáneamente las calles, engalanaron las casas con banderas cubanas y retratos de líderes independentistas, en celebraciones y bailes “patrióticos” que se extendieron por varios días<sup>1</sup>.

Esteban Montejo, ex esclavo de origen rural que llegó a la capital en los primeros días de 1899 formando parte de un regimiento del Ejército Libertador, evocó que hubo fiesta en los barrios más humildes del muelle, los solares “estaban encendidos” y los toques de rumba de cajón y de tambores se escuchaban por doquier. Hombres y mujeres, niños, jóvenes y viejos bailaban al son de esa música enloquecedora hasta caer desplomados de cansancio<sup>2</sup>. Una conmemoración seria y majestuosa, para la que, según la letra de la proclama emitida por el gobierno de ocupación, se contaba con el “orden y el debido respeto que la solemnidad de las circunstancias exigen”, devino orgía de fiestas y manifestaciones de contenido nacionalista que las autoridades norteamericanas no pudieron contener. La ceremonia oficial se tornó fiesta popular. Los redobles graves e intimidatorios de los tambores de la banda militar del ejército norteamericano en la explanada del Morro se vieron emulados por los alegres y rítmicos toques de los timbales en los arrabales habaneros cercanos al muelle.

Las recepciones populares (de discursos, de espectáculos o de gestos simbólicos) son siempre apropiaciones creativas que transforman, reformulan y exceden lo que reciben “desde arriba”. En consecuencia, los textos o espectáculos “oficiales” no tienen de por sí una significación estable y unívoca, siempre son leídos, interpretados de formas móviles, plurales,

<sup>1</sup> “A los habitantes de la Isla de Cuba”, 24 de diciembre de 1898; “Al Pueblo de La Habana”, 31 de diciembre de 1898; “Al Pueblo de La Habana”, 1 de enero 1899, en Archivo Nacional de Cuba, La Habana (ANC).

<sup>2</sup> Miguel Barnet, *Biografía de un cimarrón* (La Habana: Academia, 1966), 193-194.

contradictorias por los destinatarios. En este caso, el sentido original de la ceremonia se descifró de distintas maneras: en términos “patrióticos” pero prudentes y conciliadores en las circulares de la junta patriótica; y de forma exaltadamente nacionalista por el pueblo habanero. La formalidad y la solemnidad de la conmemoración, y con ella el carácter opresivo de su significación simbólica inicial, se disolvieron en la alegría y el desparpajo irreverente de las turbas callejeras, expresados en bailes y canciones, con décimas o guarachas como la que abría y cerraba una popular obra de teatro de ese tiempo:

Habaneros a gozar:  
 Cesó la dominación,  
 y el hispano pabellón  
 a las doce se ha de arriar.  
 En su lugar subirá  
 la bandera americana;  
 pero pronto dejará  
 ese puesto a la cubana.  
 ¡Habaneros, a gozar!<sup>3</sup>

### I. Choteo y cultura política popular

La relectura trasgresora de la ceremonia es sólo uno de los tantos ejemplos de una manifestación que, por su reiteración, puede considerarse como uno de los ingredientes más relevantes de la cultura política popular en Cuba. Por imponente que fuese la formalidad del tono, incluso los contenidos de los discursos políticos oficiales, rara vez la recepción popular dejaba de traducirlos en versiones poco serias, despojadas de su connotación original.

Esta persistente actitud fue objeto de frecuentes análisis y críticas a lo largo de la primera mitad del siglo XX. En un texto pretendidamente etnológico publicado en 1907, pero escrito entre 1899 y 1906, a tenor de la experiencia de las dos intervenciones norteamericanas, el ultraconservador y anexionista Francisco Figueras se lamentaba de que los nativos de la Isla adolecían de una “falta de veneración por todo lo que tiende a realzar y a enaltecer la vida, haciéndola más seria y más dignificada”. El cubano “típico”, un ser de raza mezclada, carnes mórbidas, andar cadencioso, alergia al trabajo duro y apego desmedido al baile y al juego, padecía además de una “afición exagerada a la risa, la burla y la jarana, hasta hacerla degenerar en el vituperable choteo”<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Ignacio Sarachaga, *¡Arriba con el Himno! Revista política, joco-seria y bailable en un acto, cinco cuadros y apoteosis final* (1900); Rine Leal, ed., *Teatro Bufo. Siglo XIX*, tomo II (La Habana: Arte y Literatura, 1975), 230.

<sup>4</sup> Francisco Figueras, *Cuba y su evolución colonial* (La Habana: Avisador Comercial, 1907), 253.

Según este autor, con ese componente étnico y tales costumbres sólo un milagro (o, en su defecto, la regeneración mediante el blanqueamiento y el contacto estrecho con la raza anglosajona) podía hacer de Cuba una verdadera nación, con ciudadanos civilizados. Dos décadas más tarde, en 1928, y aunque desde una perspectiva nacionalista y notablemente menos racista pero igual de elitista, Jorge Mañach expresaría las mismas prevenciones de la falta de seriedad crónica del cubano. En su opinión, el choteo, conducta patógena venida en institución nacional y síntoma de lo que se dio en llamar “la decadencia cubana”, era responsable, en buena medida, de los tropiezos sufridos por el proyecto político de la República<sup>5</sup>. No obstante, pese a toda la irritación de los voceros intelectuales de la élite y a campañas anti choteo en la prensa, este fenómeno pervivió formando parte inseparable de la cultura política popular en la Isla. Con chistes irreverentes, rimas, guarachas o congas mordaces, “el vulgo” expresaba su disenso y se mofaba de políticas y políticos.

Estudios más recientes han realizado, en cambio, la autonomía y vitalidad del repertorio de formas de la cultura popular. Valoran altamente el potencial revolucionario y anti hegemónico de estos modos culturales de expresión, que se desenvuelven en los márgenes del ámbito de la política institucionalizada. El poder corrosivo de la risa quebraba la pompa presuntuosa del culto religioso o del ceremonial estatal y la rigidez de la etiqueta social. El rechazo plebeyo a la seriedad helada y pétrea que caracteriza a la cultura oficial y al tono circunspecto y grave de sus discursos, ha sido abordado por Mijail Bajtín en un texto ya antológico dentro de los estudios de la cultura popular. En su interpretación, la risa forma parte de una cultura pública callejera que se opone con gestos cómicos, bromas irrespetuosas, canciones y rimas burlas a la cultura dominante y encuentra su expresión más depurada en las celebraciones del carnaval, espacio donde el orden y las jerarquías sociales son desafiadas simbólicamente mediante su inversión temporal<sup>6</sup>.

Estos fenómenos relacionados con la “carnavalización” de la vida política y la descodificación en términos jocosos de los proyectos más serios, a pesar de la notoria abundancia de sus manifestaciones en Cuba, aun están por estudiar debidamente. Si las colecciones de décimas y canciones que han llegado hasta hoy, o la riqueza del humor popular atesorada en los libretos de las obras de teatro vernáculo, en la literatura de cordel y la prensa periódica de consumo masivo, o en la memoria oral, permiten conformar una idea de la vitalidad de esta cultura, apenas existen investigaciones que documenten, desde el punto de vista histórico, la recurrencia de estas expresiones y su relevancia para la comprensión de los patrones de comportamiento político de los cubanos.

La palabra “choteo”, significa en el español coloquial, acción, ademán o palabras con que se procura poner en ridículo a alguien o algo, chanza, bromas.

<sup>5</sup> Ver Jorge Mañach, *Indagación del choteo* (La Habana: Libro Cubano, 1955).

<sup>6</sup> Ver Mijail Bajtín, *La cultura popular en la Edad Media y el Renacimiento. El contexto de F. Rabelais* (Madrid: Alianza, 2002).

En sociedades como la cubana de las postrimerías del siglo XIX, con un índice de analfabetismo que sobrepasaba el 66 por ciento de la población, es vital, para el estudio de la cultura política popular, la extensión del análisis a estas otras formas de expresión, transmitidas oralmente, como las bromas, la poesía y las canciones, incluso el baile, inscrito en los movimientos sensuales del cuerpo. Una décima cantada, un chiste que pasa de boca en boca, o un argumento político convertido en estribillo, y no sólo repetido sino bailado a ritmo de conga en manifestaciones callejeras, permiten un tipo de comunicación diferente, que trasciende los límites más estrechos y elitistas de la escritura formal. Estos modos de expresión, reproducidos en espacios plebeyos, muy distintos de los foros y las tribunas donde se “fabrica” la política oficial, o de las formas de sociabilidad burguesa de las elites letradas y urbanas, documentan mejor la participación de los miles y miles de personas carentes de instrucción formal, que en los procesos de formación de la opinión política constituían la mayoría de la población de la época.

El analfabetismo no excluía *per se* a la mayoría de las personas humildes de los espacios de difusión de la palabra escrita. A través de los pregones de los vendedores callejeros de periódicos, la gente común se informaba de los titulares de las noticias de más relevancia. Más tarde, con la ayuda de parientes y amigos que leían para ellos en espacios informales, reuniones familiares, encuentros en el mercado, en la barbería, tertulias en clubes y sociedades de instrucción, o en los mismos lugares de trabajo como las lecturas colectivas de las tabaquerías, los iletrados participaban en la discusión de los tópicos de interés.

Muchas de estas noticias terminaban traducidas en guarachas o décimas cantadas a viva voz, impresas en hojas sueltas o en el periódico local. Cobraban vida propia y se incorporaban a nuevos circuitos de difusión. Así se formaban cadenas de transmisión oral y, lo más importante, “comunidades de interpretación” que a menudo reelaboraban los mensajes originales, reinterpretaban en función de las disímiles experiencias de los nuevos destinatarios. El principal obstáculo para este tipo de estudios es el carácter precario y evanescente – para decirlo de algún modo – de las fuentes. Rescatar del pasado las pocas evidencias escritas que se han conservado de lo que fue una bullente cultura oral y performativa, reconstruir sus circuitos de producción, circulación y recepción, hilvanar en una trama coherente los retazos sobrevivientes de esas formas populares de expresión política constituye un verdadero reto.

Una “arqueología” emprendida para recuperar esas trazas dispersas hace aflorar parte del acervo de las culturas orales, si bien fragmentario y de segunda mano, pero relativamente recobrable por el trabajo de archivo y de interpretación. En el caso del período de la primera intervención norteamericana en Cuba, las imágenes, procedentes de una historia escrita con documentos oficiales – y mayormente desde la capital, donde la presencia yanqui era en verdad imponente –, que representan una sociedad

norteamericanizada, sometida a la humillación más grosera bajo la bota del soldado interventor, deben ser contrastadas con las múltiples evidencias de la existencia paralela de una vasta cultura nacionalista, desbordante de creatividad popular.

## 2. Nacionalismo, guerra y memoria

Pese a la ausencia de un Estado cubano encargado de promover la inculcación del nacionalismo, la época se caracterizó por la participación activa de una influyente élite de intelectuales, que colaborando con las autoridades de ocupación o enfrentándolas, auspició el debate público y la socialización de nociones e imágenes de pertenencia nacional. En Cuba, como en tantas otras partes, las experiencias de las revoluciones anticoloniales constituyeron la fuente principal nutricia de las representaciones, mitos y símbolos que se integraron en el imaginario de la identidad nacional. Las guerras independentistas contra la metrópoli proporcionaron el repertorio simbólico: el Himno de Bayamo, la bandera y el escudo de la República en Armas fueron asumidos como emblemas de la futura república mucho antes de que los sancionara el Estado nacional, advenido en 1902.

Durante los años de la intervención, y por lo tanto, con anterioridad a que una historiografía oficial los erigiese en prohombres nacionales o que el Estado republicano los *canonizase* en bronce y mármol como héroes, las figuras de Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, Ignacio Agramonte, José Martí, Máximo Gómez, Antonio Maceo y Calixto García fueron reverenciadas públicamente como los próceres más relevantes de las guerras de independencia. Las crónicas de los episodios heroicos y las biografías de patriotas circulaban por doquier, publicadas en la prensa periódica y en la folletería circulante, o simplificadas en versiones populares, noveletas, cancioneros con décimas y manuales escolares. Mediante fotografías y grabados con las imágenes de héroes y jefes mambises, himnos y canciones patrióticas, se divulgó y popularizó toda una narrativa y una iconografía sobre los orígenes fundacionales de la nación. El escudo con la palma, tenida como árbol nacional, la bandera con su estrella solitaria, representaciones pictóricas de la patria, se reprodujeron y circularon también por millares de ejemplares, no sólo en dibujos, fotografías, membretes y estampillas, sino impresos en un sinnúmero de objetos de uso diario.

Entonces las guerras dejaron de ser una vivencia real y se tornaron un enorme *lieu de mémoire*, según el término acuñado por Pierre Nora<sup>7</sup>. Los años de la intervención fueron testigos de esta vasta tentativa de recuperación de vivencias pasadas: sustraídas al tiempo, estereotipadas y convenientemente purgadas. Las memorias bélicas se convirtieron en textos, emblemas

<sup>7</sup> Ver Pierre Nora, "Entre mémoire et histoire. Le problématique des lieux", en *Les Lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, tomo I (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 23-43.

e imágenes, actualizadas en ceremonias, reedificadas en monumentos y en el entramado de las calles, inscritas en la topografía de los lugares.

Paradójicamente, el acercamiento obligado, inducido por la ocupación militar, asemejado a las prácticas políticas y culturales norteamericanas, favoreció en Cuba la rápida apropiación de una serie de dispositivos pedagógicos que integraban un nacionalismo “modular”, puesto en práctica en Estados Unidos para “fabricar” masivamente ciudadanos norteamericanos imbuidos del “espíritu nacional”, a menudo con inmigrantes recientes. Así, en los nuevos textos escolares postcoloniales las biografías de los “padres fundadores” Céspedes, Martí y Maceo ocuparon el lugar de las de Washington, Jefferson y Lincoln en los ceremoniales al uso en las escuelas estadounidenses, como los saludos a la bandera y los cantos de himnos patrióticos. Fueron asimilados como componentes indispensables para la formación de sentimientos de pertenencia entre los cubanos de la generación emergente, en el nuevo sistema de escuelas públicas recién inauguradas por el gobierno interventor.

Este proceso de “invención de la tradición” no fue patrimonio exclusivo de las élites nacionalistas. La gente común, en su mayoría analfabeta, también tomó parte activa. Carentes del “capital simbólico” que proporcionan la instrucción, el prestigio social o la riqueza, y despojados por ello de la posibilidad de intervenir directamente con la palabra en los foros de la alta política, o con la escritura en los debates publicísticos, en las nuevas circunstancias del periodo “entre imperios” miles de cubanos anónimos participaron en la construcción simbólica de la nación con gritos, ademanes y cantos, durante encuentros callejeros, mítines y desfiles. Asociaciones de veteranos, clubes patrióticos, juntas de maestros, asambleas municipales y periódicos regionales se convirtieron en sitios de creación de memorias locales, frecuentemente en conflicto o tensión con las narrativas nacionales producidas desde arriba y desde la capital del país.

### 3. Las conmemoraciones solemnes y el relajo patriótico

Aquel nacionalismo construido sobre la memoria sumamente traumática y dolorosa de la guerra, se acompañó de una ardiente retórica sacrificial, a menudo expresada en clave marcadamente religiosa. El naciente culto a los mártires de la Patria, reproducido en discursos y ceremonias reverentes, fue el hilo central de una suerte de “religión civil” al estilo norteamericano<sup>8</sup>. Dotaba a ciertas áreas de la política de un carácter cuasi sagrado y, por consiguiente, a las acciones de los hombres que la encarnaban con una aureola de santidad. La sangre profusa de los mártires, vertida en la lucha por la independencia, asentaba las bases de fundación de la futura

<sup>8</sup> Ver Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant. American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

República cubana. Un ejemplo de esa imbricación entre lo político y lo religioso, entre cientos que pueden hallarse en la prensa y las publicaciones de la época, es la "Plegaria" publicada en el número especial de la revista habanera *Cuba y América* dedicado a conmemorar la inauguración de la República en 1902:

En tus altos designios, Dios, has permitido que Cuba llegue a ser libre [...] Los que gimieron y lloraron ríen hoy con alborozo. Los que murieron como mártires, abonando con su sangre preciosa el suelo que anhelaron ver dichoso, tienen ya templos y mármoles que conserven sus nombres a la memoria, y las bendiciones de las generaciones que han de venir. ¡Has que tanta sangre derramada, tanto llanto vertido, fructifiquen, y crezca sano y vigoroso este pueblo que ahora comienza a ser libre!<sup>9</sup>

Quizás no haya mejor ejemplo de esta conjugación de lo político y lo religioso que la muy temprana sacralización de la figura de José Martí, devenido santo patrón tutelar de la política en la Isla antes de que la República se institucionalizara. Los episodios de su biografía, narrados en el estilo ejemplarizante de las "vidas de santos", culminan con la apoteosis de su martirologio en Dos Ríos. Así como el sacrificio y la muerte de Cristo redimen a la humanidad, la muerte sacrificial del "Apóstol" redime simbólicamente a la nación de sus pecados coloniales instaurando el nacimiento de una nueva era, moderna y republicana.

Habría que preguntarse cómo el carácter solemne y sagrado que reviste ese culto a los mártires fundadores, erigido sobre la santa memoria de las guerras, tan relevante para la construcción del nacionalismo, se conjuga con la desacralizadora tradición de la burla y la fiesta característica de la cultura popular. La respuesta más obvia nos remite nuevamente a las tensiones entre la agenda política nacionalista de las clases dominantes y las apropiaciones populares. En la visión prevaleciente en las fuentes generadas "desde arriba", la Patria (siempre con mayúscula) es cosa seria y solemne, que exige de vocación sacrificial, actitudes reverenciales y nunca objeto de chanza o choteo. El respeto incuestionable a los símbolos sagrados, el reverente culto a la enseña nacional, la veneración a la Madre Patria o a los Padres Fundadores, que encarnan la esencia misma del ser nacional, se acompaña de lealtad a quienes detentan el monopolio de su interpretación.

Desde esa óptica deben ser censuradas y reprimidas como sacrílegas las formas alternativas del nacionalismo popular, que no siempre comparten el tono grandilocuente y sacrificial de su contraparte de élite y, sobre todo, que trastocan ocasiones y mezclan signos provocando la polución del sentido "oficial". Testigo durante las Navidades de 1899 de una de tantas

<sup>9</sup> "Plegaria", *Cuba y América*, 18 de mayo de 1902.



manifestaciones de nacionalismo a escala local, abundantes en los años de la ocupación, una dama villareña, María Escobar, escribió escandalizada al general Máximo Gómez:

Por aquí la gente me parece que se ha vuelto loca pues confunden lo serio con la diversión. En una fiesta de Nochebuena, entre papeles de colores, latas y niños, sacan el busto de Martí, lo colocan en la plaza y luego lo pasean por el pueblo entre chiflidos, vivas y cosas propias de esa noche. Todas cosas muy serias para hacerlas con tanta ligereza y en días que le quitan la magestad [*sic*] al acto.

Ud. no escapó de la quema y el día 25 lo sacaron en un busto (que de Ud. no tiene más que el nombre) en coche con los de Maceo y de Martí por las calles, custodiados por muchachas vestidas de sirenas, hadas y marineras. Yo me indigno por la profanación y el ridículo que caemos<sup>10</sup>.

Los contornos entre la Cuba de la tradición heroica de las guerras, del martirologio de Martí y Maceo, y la Cuba alegre y liviana de la fiesta irreverente y el choteo, se desdibujan en el curso de la celebración popular. Lejos de entenderse como profanación, la espontaneidad del homenaje a Maceo, Gómez y Martí pone en evidencia el alcance y profundidad de la popularidad de estas figuras, como se ha dicho ya, mucho antes de que el Estado republicano oficializara su inclusión en el panteón nacional.

En similar consideración habría que mencionar los intentos de regular los usos desordenados del Himno de Bayamo. El himno compuesto por Perucho Figueredo en tiempos de la primera guerra de independencia, tocado a diferentes *tempos* y con variaciones en su letra, se había tornado una melodía extraordinariamente popular y era un componente invariable de cada celebración, desde las organizadas para conmemorar el 10 de Octubre o el 24 de Febrero, los “días de la Patria”, hasta cuanta fiesta o jolgorio, boda o bautizo se celebrara en la época. A inicios de 1900, para poner término a los usos profanos de la melodía, ya extraoficialmente tenida como el Himno Nacional, fue aprobado un acuerdo del Ayuntamiento Habanero que la prohibía en “teatros, cafés, procesiones, manifestaciones, etcétera” y reservaba su ejecución únicamente para “los actos serios”. En la ciudad de Pinar del Río el alcalde municipal fue más lejos al exponer *in extenso* las razones de la prohibición:

En todos los pueblos cultos los himnos e insignias son los símbolos más sagrados del patriotismo, y por esta razón sin duda se le tributan a unos y otras profunda veneración y grandísimo respeto.

En Cuba, las explosiones de sentimiento patriótico, durante tanto tiempo comprimido y refrenado, han hecho que el himno nacional, popular, como

<sup>10</sup> María Escobar, Carta a Máximo Gómez, 29 de diciembre de 1899, fondo Máximo Gómez, legajo 30, n. 4167, ANC.

los de igual clase, se generalizara hasta tal punto de tocarse en toda clase de fiestas y en toda suerte de espectáculos, algunos de ellos poco serios dando ocasión y motivo a que se haya empleado recientemente la frase “arriba con el himno” en son de burla o crítica de semejante abuso.

Por estas razones la Alcaldía Municipal de Pinar del Río ordena lo siguiente:

1. Desde esta fecha no podrá tocarse públicamente el himno nacional, o sea el de Bayamo, en ningún lugar del término municipal, a no ser en solemnidades oficiales, ceremonias y funciones patrióticas, retretas públicas y actos de verdadero carácter político.

2. Los directores de orquesta que infringieren esta orden y a los que indujeran a desobedecerla indistintamente, incurrirán en la multa de diez pesos de los Estados Unidos o su equivalente<sup>11</sup>.

Las tentativas de controlar el uso del Himno de Bayamo confinándolo exclusivamente a los espacios oficiales y proscribiendo sus usos profanos, fueron severamente criticados en *La Nación*, diario político nacionalista editado por el general Enrique Collazo, que salió en defensa de las apropiaciones populares del himno patriótico: “El Himno bayamés [...] es del pueblo cubano y a nuestro juicio, este tiene el derecho de tararearlo, silbarlo, tocarlo y cantarlo como en voluntad le venga, donde quiera y como quiera. Porque eso es popularizarlo y no profanarlo”<sup>12</sup>.

Evidentemente los acuerdos de los ayuntamientos apenas surtieron efecto. Una crónica publicada en la prensa de una boda celebrada en el Mariel en diciembre de 1900 relata cómo al entrar los novios a la iglesia pudo escucharse el Himno de Bayamo acompañando la ceremonia. Una nota de otro ejemplar del mismo periódico al reseñar la asistencia a una reunión del Partido Nacional en Caimito, alude a una numerosa muchedumbre que marchaba al lugar del *meeting* acompañada de una “charanga” que ejecutaba alegremente las notas del Himno Nacional<sup>13</sup>. En realidad, como muestran estos ejemplos escogidos al azar, la apropiación desordenada e irreverente del himno patriótico continuó teniendo lugar hasta la aprobación, avanzada ya la república, del decreto núm. 154 del 28 de abril de 1906, que regulaba la forma y el uso oficial del himno, el escudo, la bandera y los sellos de la nación<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> “El Himno Bayamés”, *El Telégrafo: Periódico Político*, 22 de febrero de 1900.

<sup>12</sup> *La Nación* (La Habana), 31 de mayo de 1900.

<sup>13</sup> *El Occidente*, Guanajay, 6 de enero de 1901 y 2 de febrero de 1901.

<sup>14</sup> “Expediente que contiene copias mecanografiadas sobre disposiciones legales sobre el uso de la bandera, el escudo y el himno nacional”, Fondo donativos y remisiones, leg. 567, n. 22, ANC. Pese a este y otros decretos hacia fines de la década del 50 Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring lamentaba el uso indiscriminado del himno y la bandera nacionales: “De libre uso la bandera, por todos y para todo, fue empleada por políticos y politicastros y en fiestas de toda índole para adornar mesas, locales, edificios, etc. Lo mismo servía para presidir un acto verdaderamente patriótico que un baile familiar terminado a botellazos o una pelea de gallos. [...] El Himno Nacional se convirtió en música obligada de todo acto al que se quería dar cierta importancia o se pretendía revestirlo de carácter patriótico. Con el himno se compusieron y

De este modo la comprensión de una elite para la cual la manera más “correcta” de expresar la pertenencia a la nación era cantar de forma respetuosa himnos de resonancias europeas en el curso de paradas cívicas, caracterizadas en lo posible por el orden, el respeto y la disciplina, entra en contradicciones con una cultura plebeya que encontraba en toda ocasión festiva el pretexto para el choteo, el “meneo de cintura” y la expansión descontrolada de la sensualidad en el baile popular.

Obviamente, estas imágenes extremas presentadas como antitéticas en el discurso de elite de la época, de “ciudadanos” que desfilan con compostura y orden por una parte, y por la otra de “salvajes” cuyos cuerpos se contorsionan febrilmente al son de un tambor, no son más que estereotipos que pecan de exageración. En el curso real de las celebraciones nacionalistas, en muchas ciudades y pueblos, desfiles patrióticos y bailes populares, solemnes himnos revolucionarios y sabrosos danzones, y hasta quizás, pese a las prohibiciones a que fueron sometidos, algunos “toques de tambor”, se articularon con éxito dentro del esquema o arquetipo de la celebración nacionalista de los “días de la Patria”.

En los ejemplos aludidos esa separación radical entre las diferentes comprensiones, seria y solemne, o relajada y alegre, sacra o profana del simbolismo nacional, se desdibuja en la medida en que dejamos atrás el ámbito discursivo y nos adentramos en el mundo menos retórico y más performativo de la vida cotidiana. Al abandonar el enfoque binario que impone fronteras rígidas entre lo de arriba y lo de abajo, lo culto y lo popular, la élite y la plebe, descubrimos espacios difusos, donde un nacionalismo probablemente fabricado y difundido por una élite intelectual, vive en forma de *habitus* incorporado, pero con significaciones diferentes, en las prácticas que estructuran la trama de vida de la gente ordinaria. En su capacidad de desbordar los confines de las interpretaciones solemnes y oficiales y de trascender, si bien de forma confusa, las prácticas de la gente común, reside la vitalidad y el arraigo, y sobre todo, el extraordinario poder de convocatoria de estas formas de nacionalismo popular, que florecieron por doquier en tiempos de la ocupación militar norteamericana.

En el imaginario de la gente humilde de aquellos años, el José Martí solemne y oficial (con la seriedad helada y pétrea categorizada por Bajtín), el de los bustos y estatuas en los espacios públicos, convivía amigablemente con un apóstol familiar, más íntimo, una suerte de santo popular casero, cuyo retrato, al lado de las fotografías de los parientes muertos y del católico Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, presidía los altares domésticos. Convertida en emblema de la cubanidad, la figura de Martí no solo era invocada en los discursos solemnes de los aniversarios de su natalicio o muerte, sino en las

ejecutaron toda clase de piezas bailables y música anunciadora de productos comerciales e industriales”. Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, “Por el respeto y justo uso de la bandera, el escudo y el himno nacionales”, Fondo donativos y remisiones, leg. 567, n. 22, ANC.

sesiones de espiritismo de cordón celebradas en los barrios humildes, cantada en décimas y guarachas, impresa en tapas de almanaques, botones de solapa, broches y alfileres de corbata.

Los símbolos de la Patria, el himno, la bandera, el panteón de héroes nacidos del imaginario heroico de las guerras de independencia, terminan incorporados a la domesticidad e incluso convertidos en cosas de uso cotidiano. De esta forma, encarnados en objetos con fines corrientes, los tópicos de las narrativas nacionalistas dejan de ser patrimonio de una minoría letrada para ser parte de la esfera pública e invadir los resquicios de la vida diaria. Impresos en etiquetas de productos, bordados en ropas, pañuelos y cintas, grabados en platos, ceniceros, hebillas, botones y broches, esos "símbolos de la patria" recorren los circuitos del tráfico mercantil y en ese peregrinaje incorporan significaciones profanas.

Lo mismo en su variante sagrada que en sus versiones profanas, las experiencias y memorias de las contiendas independentistas, con sus narraciones épicas, su música y su iconografía patriótica, durante los años del "entre imperios" se transformaron en el capital simbólico fundamental para la construcción de la identidad nacional frente a la presencia amenazante del "otro" encarnado en el gobierno de la ocupación norteamericana.

Después de 1902 las elites políticas, ya con el control del Estado, intentaron monopolizar los procesos de constitución y reproducción de la memoria independentista "oficializando" los atributos nacionales, institucionalizando los rituales patrióticos y el calendario festivo, tratando de uniformar en un guión único los múltiples y heterogéneos discursos sobre la nación. El Estado tomaría a su cargo la organización de las conmemoraciones y homenajes nacionales, sufragaría la construcción de monumentos, regularía los cambios de nombres de calles y localidades, financiaría la fundación de los museos y memoriales.

No obstante, en el interregno entre el fin de la dominación española y la creación del estado nacional, la construcción de la identidad nacional y los procesos de institucionalización de la memoria patriótica tuvieron una amplia base popular. Miles de personas, la mayoría de ellas iletradas, participaron activamente en el debate y las luchas por la construcción simbólica de la nación, la representación ciudadana y la institucionalización de la memoria patriótica. En los espacios profanos de la vida cotidiana, tras la aparente promiscuidad con que coexistían fiestas patrióticas con danzones y/o toques de tambor, y solemnes mítines revolucionarios; se entablaron enconadas luchas en el terreno de la conquista de la hegemonía política, por la definición de los contornos de la nación y los límites de la ciudadanía, que pavimentaron el camino hacia la construcción del nuevo estado republicano en el siglo XX.

## Chapter 7

# Revering and Contesting Machado in the Shadow of the Platt Amendment: Cuban Nationalism and Anti-Imperialism in the 1920s

On 10 October 1928, the Cuban magazine *La Epoca*, a “diario Machadista”, dedicated a special issue to an epochal election: “Machado, the national presidential candidate”. Towering amid its illustrated cover is a photographic cutout of a standing Gerardo Machado, his hands in his pockets. In this picture, the smiling and paternal figure of Machado is placed at the center of an allegorically resurrected Cuba, represented as a female figure wearing a Phrygian cap and holding a laurel branch. Behind Machado are symbolic figures representing “Labor” and “Patriotism” to hail an extraordinary event: a constitutional change that would make the three political parties converge on one candidate, extending the presidential term from four to six years and eliminating any form of constitutional opposition. According to the editor of *La Epoca*, that special issue was an homage to “the great man” who would be made president by “national acclamation”. By alternating a photo gallery of Machado’s aides with laudatory articles on their undertakings, this document offers a good example of the main components of what can be called “monumental nationalism”. It is the conservative reinterpretation of the goals of the nineteenth-century “Cuba Libre” movement against Spanish colonialism, through a rhetorical tribute to its heroes – generals, doctors and businessmen; at the same time, Cuba’s ambiguous dependence on the United States under the Platt Amendment was left in the background and basically kept unchanged<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *La Epoca – Edición Extraordinaria Ilustrada*, 10 de Octubre de 1928. The US military occupation of Cuba ended in 1902 with the Platt Amendment – named after the US senator Orville Platt – included in the Cuban constitution. The amendment, which preserved the appearance of Cuban independence and granted self-government, blocked, in reality, any possibility of Cuban self-determination by giving the United States the right to intervene in the island’s internal affairs to preserve Cuban independence and protect “life, property, and individual liberty”. US military interventions occurred in 1906-1909, 1912 and 1917-1922. See: David F.

In this photographic gallery, Machado's men and women are portrayed working in their modern offices and divided according to their institutional roles. Images of celebrated Cuban intellectuals followed those of President Machado receiving various tributes and honors, in addition to celebratory biographical articles by established politicians, generals and doctors. Recurrent photos and articles related to the life and deeds of Doctor Carlos Miguel de Céspedes, the minister of public works in Machado's cabinet, revealed the importance given to what were considered the greatest accomplishments of the Machado presidency. Indeed, Céspedes was in charge of building Havana's Capitol – taking the Washington Capitol as a model – the central highway and the Havana park and plaza dedicated to the victims of the *Maine*<sup>2</sup>. Portrayed as “constructive Cubanism”, symbolic acts such as Machado's ceremonial inaugurations of villages, kindergartens, schools and hospitals, all named after him, showed a type of populism similar to that seen in public ceremonies celebrated by European fascist regimes. *La Epoca* celebrated former officers of the Cuban Liberation Army who had by then become successful industrialists, as well as American men like Colonel John W. Caldwell, “yesterday's liberator, and today's man of iron will and incomparable actions” and the administrator of a large sugar factory. Economic prosperity meant successful patriotism: the rise of talented Cuban businessmen, like the owners of the largest beer company that produced “Polar” and “Trimalta” beer, were defined as symbols of national pride. Similar examples included the “Cerveza Hatuey” – a beer named after the native chief burned alive by Spanish conquerors in 1512 – and the Bacardi rum owned by Don Emilio and Don Facundo Bacardi, who were portrayed as “illustrious figures of Cuban republican honor”.

In the Cuban republic, the phenomenon of *caudillismo* feared by José Martí reached unprecedented levels during the Machado regime<sup>3</sup>. As *La Epoca* showed, Machado became the object of a real personality cult and continuous tributes that were completely disconnected from his real merits. Not only did he receive a *laurea ad honorem*, but he was also called “the country's Savior” and “Cuba's First Worker”. As the last Cuban president who could claim to be a veteran of the Liberation Army, Machado's social origins were humbler than those of his predecessors. He came from a

Healy, *The United States in Cuba, 1898-1902: Generals, Politicians, and the Search for Policy* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1963); Louis A. Pérez, *Cuba under the Platt Amendment 1902-1934* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986). On the origins of the special relationship between Cuba and the US see: Alessandra Lorini, *L'impero della libertà e l'isola strategica. Gli Stati Uniti e Cuba tra Otto e Novecento* (Napoli: Liguori, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> On construction and dedication ceremonies of those magnificent public works see: Emeterio S. Santovenia, *Memorial Book of the Inauguration of the Maine Plaza at Havana* (La Habana: Secretaría de Obras Públicas, 1928).

<sup>3</sup> José Martí, “Letter to General Maximo Gómez”, in *José Martí: Selected Writings*, ed. Esther Allen (New York: Penguin, 2002), 258-259.

family of cattle robbers, became a butcher in Santa Clara, was recruited by the rebel forces of the independence war, promoted to commanding officer and then turned to politics. As a member of the Liberal Party, Machado enjoyed the benefits of the Cuban republic's corrupt political system during the Platt Amendment era. Thanks to his political connections, he became a successful businessman, taking over both an electric company in Santa Clara as well as a sugar factory. In the early 1920s, he became the director of the powerful and US-backed *Compañía Cubana de Electricidad*. His presidential campaign received the strong endorsement of the US business community. In the midst of the worst economic crisis, Machado embarked on a huge public-works program, which temporarily relieved mass unemployment at a time when no sugar cane could be cut. He also successfully promoted tourism from the US during the Prohibition era. Thousands of Americans visited Cuba enchanted by its exotic beaches and its legal drinking, unaware of the growing social conflicts that were being brutally repressed by Machado's police<sup>4</sup>.

"Machado: the tropical Mussolini" was the title of an article published by Cuban student leader Julio Antonio Mella in 1925, shortly after Liberal Party candidate Machado had become the president of the Cuban republic. According to Mella, Machado was "a tyrant and an unscrupulous crook" who, like the Italian fascist generals participating in the march for the conquest of Rome in 1922, would go liberally "beyond constitutional power". Unjustly accused and arrested for terrorism, Mella went on a hunger strike in 1925. Two years later he was forced to leave Cuba and become an exile in Mexico where he was assassinated in 1929, quite likely on Machado's orders. By that time, the number of Cuban journalists, labor organizers and students who had disappeared and later whose dead bodies were found after being tortured and killed by the "Porra" – Machado's special police or, better, "death squad" – and the collapse of the Cuban economy provoked many protests and strikes that threatened American economic interests and properties in Cuba<sup>5</sup>. US official policy towards Cuba, however, did not change until the Machado regime collapsed in 1933 and the US, under F.D. Roosevelt's newly edited "Good Neighbor Policy" towards Latin America, redefined its political intents and commitments towards Cuba.

<sup>4</sup> On US tourists in Cuba in the early 1920s see: Louis A. Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, nationality and Culture* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999), 167-179. On Cuban social movements and repression in that period see: Amparo Sánchez Cobos, *Sembrando Ideales. Anarquistas españoles en Cuba (1902-1925)* (Sevilla: CSIC, 2008), 379-391; Hugh Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Da Capo, 1998), 569-614; Francisca López Civeira, *Cuba entre Reforma y Revolución 1925-1935* (La Habana: Félix Varela, 2007), 31-52.

<sup>5</sup> Julio Antonio Mella, *Documentos y artículos* (La Habana: Ciencias Sociales, 1975), 169-70; Thomas, *Cuba*, 588. Machado's last days in Cuba are described in R. Hart Phillips, *Cuba: Island of Paradox* (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1959), 38-43 and 46-50; Philip Dur and Christopher Gilcrease, "US Diplomacy and the Downfall of a Cuban Dictator: Machado in 1933", *Journal of Latin American Studies* 2 (2002), 255-282.

As historian Louis A. Pérez has convincingly argued, it was the end of the “Platt Amendment” era, whose shadow had penetrated every political, economic, social and cultural level of the first Cuban republic that had been born in 1902<sup>6</sup>.

The anti-Machado movement was made up of various components from all social classes and used every form of opposition, from democratic criticism to terrorist action. But did Machado in fact lean towards fascism? He publicly admitted to an admiration for Mussolini and the way the Italian *duce* handled his legal opposition and the free press. Though never admitting to it publicly, Machado, like Mussolini, also used the practice of ordering the individual assassination of his opponents. Yet Machado’s public image was construed as that of a patriot whose mission was to act as an example for all Latin American countries to follow. He claimed to be the heir of José Martí and portrayed himself as a man sent by Providence with the mission of regenerating the Cuban republic, as he stated in a public speech in 1926<sup>7</sup>.

### **I. The Image of Machado as a Pro-Black, Pro-Women and Anti-Platt Amendment President**

Machado’s speeches often included an appeal to racial fraternity, based on the historical image of racial unity during the Cuban wars of independence<sup>8</sup>. He also signed a law that turned the 7<sup>th</sup> of December 1896, the day famous mulatto general Antonio Maceo had died, into a national holiday. In fact, the number of black men in the army and other important political bodies did increase during his presidency. Although the number of blacks within power structures was still rather insignificant, it was visible enough to make a contemporary American political analyst assert that the “process of re-conquering the negro elector [...] was not attained until Machado’s regime”<sup>9</sup>. Machado’s public image as a pro-black president was also sanctioned by a formal tribute paid to him by elite societies of blacks in 1928. Presented as a demonstration of gratitude by the entire “colored race” for

<sup>6</sup> Pérez, *Cuba under the Platt Amendment*.

<sup>7</sup> Machado claimed to be an optimist, but not a dreamer. His life exemplified this assertion: “I was a farmer, then a trader, and later an industrialist. I faced all sorts of difficulties, fought all sorts of battles, and I can say with satisfaction that I always made progress”. He wanted Cuba to follow the pattern of his life. He claimed to be “a modest soldier who took the task of completing Martí’s ideal of republic *for and with all*”, as he said in another speech. See: *Por la Patria libre. Discursos pronunciados por el General Gerardo Machado y Morales... Junio de 1926* (La Habana: Verdugo, 1926), 16, 27 and 30.

<sup>8</sup> On the importance of this historical image in the making of Cuban national identity see: Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Alejandro de La Fuente, *A Nation for All. Race, Inequality and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2001), 92.



the appointment of several men of color to government positions, the homage was a splendid gesture organized by black politicians such as Martín Morúa Delgado and other eminent black professionals. Yet black politicians and the black professional class were in fact the only beneficiaries of those policies, and all these men (just men, women were not included) were members of the most exclusive of these societies: the Club Atenas. It was the vice-president of this club who acted as the keynote speaker at the magnificent banquet held for Machado. According to *La Epoca*, the tribute was a great success. On 5 September 1928, representatives of 186 black societies from different parts of the island joined the Club Atenas at the Havana National Theater to pay tribute to the president. Machado attended with his entire cabinet, several provincial governors, the chief of the army, the mayor of Havana, the president of the House and other government officials. Black musicians performed a classical opera to show the success of the Cuban *raza de color* in the “conquest of civilization”, as the keynote speaker put it. From the days of slavery to progressive uplift in the new Cuban republic, the speaker eloquently recast the history of the *raza de color* in Cuba according to the principles of Martí by which a Cuban was more than white, black or mulatto, as the participation of blacks in the independence wars had shown. However, while black professionals, intellectuals and government employees paid tribute to the president through the exclusive Club Atenas, most black Cuban workers found it problematic to survive in an economy that was on the edge of a severe depression and would affect workers of all colors. After the fall of the Machado regime and the subsequent dramatic social crisis that has been called the “revolution of 1933”, the memory of the public homage paid to Machado in 1928 by the Club Atenas and other societies of black professionals was used publicly to show that all “blacks” had supported the Machado regime. But working-class blacks, in general, had joined cross-racial labor unions, and young black intellectuals had criticized the conservative and pretentious leadership of societies like the Club Atenas, given their intimate links with Machado<sup>10</sup>.

At a ceremonial level, Machado’s rhetoric of social harmony included women as well. In 1925, a freshly elected Machado participated in the opening ceremony of the second congress of Cuban women and promised that his government would be committed to supporting a project of law to give women voting rights and would cooperate with them in the accomplishment of specifically feminine functions like charity work. Echoing Martí’s words, he declared finally that his party aimed at “making *patria* great and happy, with all and for all”<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 200-201. The origins of the tensions among Cuban leaders of color are explored in this volume in the essay by Loredana Giolitto.

<sup>11</sup> “Discurso pronunciado por el General Machado presidente electo de la Republica, en la ses-

At the Cuban women's conference of 1925, important conflicts and fractures between conservative and radical feminists emerged concerning family, religion and related moral issues. In the following years, these conflicts reached political ground and women divided into groups for and against the Machado regime. By 1928, the political and often physical repression exerted upon Machado's opponents had revealed the real face of his regime. Insurgent students, intellectuals, peasants and unionized workers were arrested and put into jail without trial. Political kidnappings and murders became rather common. While lawyer Ofelia Domínguez Navarro was the most active participant in the anti-Machado mobilization to free student leader Julio Antonio Mella from jail, Maria Collado was, on the other side, the most eminent conservative feminist to actively support the Machado regime. The latter strongly believed that Machado's promise to grant women voting rights and participation in political life, once fulfilled, would end all forms of corruption and repression in the country. She represented those Cuban feminists who were proud to belong to the upper classes and enjoyed making their wealth conspicuous<sup>12</sup>.

This break within the Cuban women's movement occurred at a time when violent means of repression were practiced daily and the dictator skillfully used his promise to give women the right to vote as evidence of his democratic faith<sup>13</sup>. By 1930, because of this conflict among Cuban women, tensions had also grown within the Women's Inter-American Commission chaired by American feminist Doris Stevens, who exchanged letters of clarification with Cuban activist Ofelia Domínguez Navarro. Stevens, taking the victory of women's suffrage in the US as an example to be exported to other American countries, criticized those Cuban women who were turning down the opportunity of gaining the vote because it was being offered by a government with which they disagreed. Navarro replied flatly that in Cuba, it was not just a question of women's rights, it was the notion of right in itself that was at stake: democracy was dying in Cuba<sup>14</sup>. On the other side was conservative nationalist Maria Collado, who stayed loyal to the president because of the promise of women's suffrage and the abolition of the Platt Amendment that

sion solenne de apertures del Segundo Congreso Nacional de Mujeres [...]", in *Memoria del Segundo Congreso Nacional de Mujeres... Abril 12-18 1925* (La Habana: La Universal, 1927).

<sup>12</sup> Ofelia Domínguez Navarro, *50 años de una vida* (La Habana: Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1971), 83-85. In 1920, Collado played a leading role in the Club Feminino. It was her unquestioning support of Machado that made her break with those feminists involved in the anti-dictator protests. Radicals like Navarro, instead, believed in structural changes and the redistribution of wealth with no distinction made for race, gender and class. See: K. Lynn Stoner, *From the House to the Streets: The Cuban Woman's Movement for Legal Reform, 1898-1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

<sup>13</sup> By 1928, the question of women's suffrage on Machado's agenda had become a means to distract public opinion from the authoritarian intent behind his project of constitutional reform. See: Navarro, *50 años de una vida*, 107-108.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 232-237.

he had made in 1925<sup>15</sup>. She was convinced that all women had to stay united in one movement and keep women's issues on their agenda without getting involved in class and racial conflicts, and blamed the break within the feminist movement on those radical and social feminists who joined the anti-Machado protests. According to Collado, suffrage was the main instrument with which to reform society by raising the power of upper-class women, substantially improving their charity work and therefore helping less privileged women, that is, women of color. It was on this platform that Collado founded the Suffrage Democratic Party, an association that she always kept on Machado's side, first as a tactical alliance and later as political complicity.

## 2. Progressive Nationalism and Anti-Imperialism in the Anti-Machado Movement

In her memoirs, Cuban feminist journalist and art critic Loló de la Torriente portrayed the 1920s as a crucial decade of Cuban history and culture. The growth of organized social movements of students, workers and women, all ferociously repressed by Machado, unleashed an extraordinary creativity that shaped all kinds of artistic forms and lifestyles. In Torriente's view, the island's vibrant artistic and cultural life was inseparable from political opposition to corrupt Cuban governments and the Platt Amendment<sup>16</sup>. In the 1920s, in fact, many Cuban intellectuals began formulating a profound criticism of the economic and social conditions of their country by using the category of anti-imperialism in their search for a strong Cuban cultural identity. By the beginning of the decade, several groups in Cuban society had already contested US cultural hegemony: from national businessmen who asked the government to protect their interests, to workers employed by foreign firms fighting for better living conditions, to nationalist progressive intellectuals who despised the growing Americanization of Cuban culture<sup>17</sup>.

In his memoirs, black Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén recalls the early years of the republic when many people would comment naïvely: "Good Heavens, what would the Americans say!" Then he reflected upon the almost sacral meaning that the *yanqui* presence and the Platt Amendment held for many Cubans. It seemed as if one needed to watch one's steps to avoid US military

<sup>15</sup> A conservative nationalist, Collado's feminine ideal was the *mambisa*, the loyal wife and mother of Cuban patriots. Collado strongly believed that the vote would have given women the power to eliminate political corruption and therefore rescue a collapsing republic. See: Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*, 102-105.

<sup>16</sup> Loló de la Torriente, *Testimonio desde adentro* (La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 1984), 158-163.

<sup>17</sup> Many social critics and activists looked at the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917) as the first Latin American upheaval from which a genuinely anti-imperialist political culture emerged. On the roots of Latin-American anti-Americanism see: Mary Louise Pratt, "Back Yard with Views", *Anti-Americanism*, eds. Andrew Ross and Kristin Ross (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 32-46.

intervention. Guillén recalled that there were also those who, less naively, would say “Hah! They’ll intervene? You mean they’re not already here?”<sup>18</sup>.

Anti-imperialist analyses produced by nationalist Cuban intellectuals in the 1920s depicted a positive image of a nation in flux, of an unfulfilled ideal of independence and freedom to which all institutions needed to approximate. Progressive nationalists of the 1920s defined a common culture in which racial differences dissolved. They claimed that skin color did not count, but cultural differences did.

In 1923, historian Roig de Leuchsenring held a conference that later became the basis for a book entitled *Cuba Does Not Owe Its Independence to the United States*. In the same year, charismatic student leader Julio Antonio Mella – the one who defined Machado as the “tropical Mussolini” – published a pamphlet entitled *Cuba: A Country that Has Never Been Free*, and social scientist Fernando Ortiz founded the Cuban Association for National Renovation. Ortiz wrote a “Manifiesto to the Cubans” in which he made a strong call for an active participation of the civil society to counteract Cuba’s degraded political system. Acting as a public intellectual, Ortiz hoped to stimulate “a new civic spirit able to rekindle, as a purifying fire, the energy of the Cuban people [...] to give Cuba a truly free and democratic government that only a vigorous national civilization and an honest political life could defend”<sup>19</sup>. He wanted to recast the relationship between the Cuban and US governments, which he believed should be based on mutual respect. However, Ortiz maintained that the Cuban people at large were too passive and needed to believe again in the importance of a solidly national culture. In a book entitled *The Cuban Decadence* (1924), Ortiz became even more radical in criticizing what he thought had contributed to the intellectual, moral and economic decay of Cuban society. The economic data spoke for itself: two thirds of the sugar industry was in North American hands, and mines, railways, telephones and banks were controlled by US capital too. At a political level, Ortiz stressed the alarming problem that more than twenty percent of the political candidates who had run in the last elections had criminal records. Even police corps hosted criminals. Ortiz’s conclusion was tragic: “Cuban society is disintegrating. Cuba is rapidly precipitating into the abyss of barbarism”. He advocated, accordingly, “a crusade of patriotic renewal and the completion of the old revolutionary program of Cuba Libre” as a means to resurrect a Cuban culture based on ethical and moral principles of responsible citizenship. Cuban decadence also meant a dramatic collapse of social conditions. When compared with the early years of the republic, the collapse of Cuban

<sup>18</sup> Nicolás Guillén, “Drums in My Eyes”, in *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, eds. Aviva Chomsky, Barry Carr, Pamela M. Smorkaloff (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 208-210.

<sup>19</sup> “Manifiesto a los cubanos”, in *Documentos para la historia de Cuba*, vol. 3, ed. Hortensia Pichardo (La Habana: Ciencias Sociales, 1973), 140.

culture in the early 1920s – a period of economic internationalization, diffusion of scientific ideas and rapid development of communications – was, indeed, critical. There could be no “intellectual aristocracy” in a country where fifty-three people out of a hundred were illiterate. The data upon which Ortiz based his analysis was alarming: sixty-eight percent of children did not go to school, and public schools did not exist in rural areas. Compared to 1907, the percentage of illiterate adolescents at the beginning of the 1920s had increased exponentially among both whites and blacks. While in 1900, sixteen percent of the Cuban population was enrolled in some sort of school – data that placed Cuba at the same level as Norway, France and Australia – in 1923, school registration had dropped to a mere nine percent<sup>20</sup>.

Initially, progressive nationalist social critics like Fernando Ortiz and Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring had viewed Machado as a symbol of “regeneration of the Cuban republic” and supported his election in 1924. As the presidential candidate of the Liberal Party and the last Cuban president to be a veteran of an independence war, Machado had promised to end political corruption, stimulate economic growth, launch an extensive program of public works, build new schools and social services and, most importantly, greatly reduce US control of the Cuban economy by encouraging economic diversification and the growth of Cuban companies. Furthermore, he promised to abolish the Platt Amendment and re-negotiate a new treaty with the United States. Machado attracted Cuban nationalists with his slogan “Cuba to Cubans”. By 1928, however, it had become quite clear that Machado could not change the condition of Cuba as a dependent neo-colony. The search of progressive nationalists for a Cuban sovereignty converged on a rejection of the Platt Amendment and US economic and political control of the island. According to historians like Roig, fresh from a reading of Martí’s writings on the United States that had only recently become available to Cuban scholars for the first time, a distinction needed to be made between the honest will of the American people to free Cuba from Spanish colonialism, on the one hand, and the McKinley administration that had turned that will into neo-colonial control, on the other. It was shameful, they argued, that Cuban speakers kept saying in public ceremonies that Cuba had a debt of gratitude to the United States. Roig held that, rather than a debt of gratitude, it was a “permanent debt that we will always have to pay”. By reinterpreting Martí’s warnings in his aforementioned book, he explicitly defined the 1898 US military intervention in Cuba as a plan designed to block actual Cuban independence and prevent the development of a truly national sovereignty<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> See: Carmen Almodóvar, “The Political Ideas of Fernando Ortiz (1906-1933)”, in *Cuban Counterpoints: The Legacy of Fernando Ortiz*, eds. Mauricio A. Font and Alfonso W. Quiroz (Toronto: Lexington, 2005), 92-93.

<sup>21</sup> Roig de Leuchsenring, *Cuba no debe su independencia a los Estados Unidos* (La Habana: Sociedad Cubana de Estudios Históricos y Internacionales, 1950).

How was it that Cuban nationalist progressive intellectuals reached this conclusion? It can be argued that a major role was played by a turning-point event that took place in Havana in 1928: the Sixth Pan-American Conference. This event radicalized their analyses of the relationship between the US and Cuba.

### 3. Redefining Dependence and Anti-Imperialism: the Havana Pan-American Conference of 1928

In 1927, Machado had traveled to the US to personally invite President Calvin Coolidge to open the Sixth Pan-American Conference that was to be held in Havana in January 1928. Coolidge's acceptance would make him the first US president to travel abroad to inaugurate a Pan-American conference. From Mexico, Julio Antonio Mella saw this as a warning signal that the conference could be an "ambush" on Latin American countries and its agenda dictated by the US State Department. He predicted that the question of non-intervention, which both the Dominican and Mexican conference delegates were keen to discuss, would be excluded from debate<sup>22</sup>. He was right.

The Cuban press and illustrated magazines gave wide coverage to the conference's preparation and the fact that American countries, including the US, had chosen Havana as its site. This was hailed as a great achievement of Cuban international prestige. The cover of the illustrated magazine *Carteles* of 8 January 1928 features a drawn caricature of a smirking President Coolidge – a notorious prohibitionist – lifting a glass of a "forbidden" cocktail. The editorial board of *Carteles*, which included writer Alejo Carpentier and historian Roig de Leuchsenring, welcomed the conference as an excellent opportunity for the *Panamericanismo verdadero* to triumph. They thought that such authentic Pan-Americanism was quite distinct from the current version they called "enraged", which had already proclaimed the failure of the upcoming conference for not questioning the so-called Monroe Doctrine as well as Uncle Sam's imperialist cravings. In an article in *Carteles*, Roig wrote that he expected the conference would discuss and eventually resolve such open problems as US intervention in Nicaragua, Haiti and the independence of Puerto Rico, and he explored the continuity between the first Pan-American congress celebrated in Panama in 1826 and the forthcoming conference in Havana of January 1928. He found an extremely enlightening interpretation in Simon Bolivar's ideas of Pan-Hispanoamericanism, upon which José Martí elaborated in 1891 in his most famous essay *Our America*. Far from signaling the end of a friendship between Anglo-Saxon and Hispanic Americas, Roig argued that this version of hemispheric unity stood for the freedom, sovereignty and integrity of each nation<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Mella, *Documentos y artículos*, 329.

<sup>23</sup> Roig de Leuchsenring, "La transcendental importancia de la Conferencia Panamericana",

Hopes were indeed high. The magnificent public works accomplished by Minister Céspedes, which included the park and plaza surrounding the monument to the victims of the *Maine*, created a marvelous context for the inauguration ceremony that received full coverage in both the Cuban and the American press. That conference, however, buried the idea of Pan-Americanism as a pact among equal nations. And this was clear from the beginning, according to English writer Lady Grace Drummond-Hay who visited Havana during the conference as a correspondent for the London magazine *The Sphere*. In an article entitled “Pan-Americanism – The Significance of the Recent Congress at Havana”, she captured those critical issues that undermined any existing idea of Pan-Americanism. First, Lady Drummond pointed out that cultural contact between North American and southern nations was rare. Secondly, she keenly remarked Americans did not understand Cuban sensibility and easily offended the Cuban sense of respect. For example, she noticed that during the inauguration ceremony of the Havana conference the officers of the US Navy accompanying President Coolidge wore their white “tropical” uniforms. Obviously familiar with the rituals of the British Empire, she found that completely inappropriate for such a formal and splendid celebratory event. She was also convinced that Cubans clearly perceived their white uniforms as a colonial message. If Cuba were not a colony of the US, then why would the soldiers wear “colonial” uniforms instead of their full regalia? Another source of misunderstanding and cause of resentment for Latin Americans was the United States’ habit of calling itself “America”, as if by monopolizing the word they pretended to own the entire continent. Adding a British touch to her criticism, she remarked that many Latin Americans found those whom they called “Yankees” to be rude, uncultivated and lacking courtesy and refinement. Shifting then from cultural to political misunderstandings, Lady Drummond disagreed with the enthusiastic reports of President Coolidge’s speech that were circulating in the US press. The emotions and tears that American correspondents saw on Cuban faces during Coolidge’s speech, far from expressions of a permanent feeling of gratitude towards the US for having *given* Cuba freedom and independence, revealed instead a profoundly wounded Cuban pride. Cubans could accept that the United States had *helped* them gain these victories but not that the Americans had *given* them freedom and independence. She also found Coolidge’s speech to be totally inadequate for dissipating Latin American doubts about “Yankee imperialism” and rather unclear about future US policy towards small countries. All things considered, the conference was a failure in Lady Drummond’s view as it simply showed just how much North American interests prevailed: of sixty-six accredited journalists, forty-four were from the United States, five

and “¿Responden las conferencias panamericanas a los ideales de Bolívar?”, *Carteles*, 8 January 1928, 13 and 22 respectively.

were from Mexico and only nine were from Europe. Furthermore, the conference did not represent “America as a whole” since Canadians and British, French and Danish West Indians did not participate. She concluded that US supremacy was simply too much in evidence. Not only did the US delegation represent a country of 120 million people against the less than ninety million of all Latin American countries, but the strength of its economy, its indisputable political power, its expansionism and the Monroe Doctrine all turned the Pan-American Conference into a US hegemonic instrument. By referring to “interposition” instead of “intervention”, the whole issue of non-interference was not even debated. Moreover, the US military intervention in Nicaragua, which most Latin American countries opposed, was forbidden from being discussed because of a US veto<sup>24</sup>.

What Cuban progressive nationalists like Roig abhorred was the position that Orestes Ferrara, the Cuban ambassador to the US at the time, held on the issue of non-intervention at the conference: “We cannot join the non-intervention chorus as in my country the word intervention has been a word of Glory and a word of Triumph: it has meant Independence”. With a series of articles in *Carteles*, Roig contested Ferrara’s speech as instrumental in erasing the crucial issue of non-intervention from the conference debate<sup>25</sup>. He firmly contested Ferrara’s argument that US intervention in Cuba had been a purely humanitarian mission, which implied that the Cuban republic was not the result of the Cuba Libre struggle but a *gift* from the United States. In Roig’s view, the US had intervened several times in Cuba under the Platt Amendment in order to stop healthy forms of popular rebellion against political corruption and economic dependency, or to keep presidents in power who had not been freely elected by the Cuban people.

In 1930, Orestes Ferrara, by then Machado’s Secretary of State, published a pamphlet on Pan-Americanism (*El Panamericanismo y la opinion europea*) that covered the sort of criticism he had received in 1928, without naming his detractors<sup>26</sup>.

Ferrara was a very close friend and supporter of Machado who had arrived in Cuba in 1896 as a young Neapolitan law student ready to join the movement of Cuba Libre, as many Italian republicans and socialists did<sup>27</sup>. Courageous and brave, Ferrara became the assistant of the commander-in-

<sup>24</sup> Lady Drummund-Hay, “Pan-Americanism – The Significance of the Recent Congress at Havana”, *Carteles*, 1 April 1928.

<sup>25</sup> Roig de Leuchsenring, “Cuba y el principio de la non intervención”, *Carteles*, 19 Febrero 1928; “Un fracaso posible y un triunfo efectivo de la conferencia”, *Carteles*, 26 Febrero 1928; “Resultados y enseñanza de la conferencia”, *Carteles*, 4 marzo 1928. Each article explored a period of the Cuban struggle for independence to show that in Cuba the word intervention, far from being glorious, meant “pain, sadness, evil and rebellion”. (19 Febrero 1928).

<sup>26</sup> Orestes Ferrara, *El panamericanismo y la opinión europea* (Paris: Le livre libre, 1930).

<sup>27</sup> See: Alessandra Lorini, “Atlantic Crossings: Race, Nation, and Late Nineteenth-Century Cuba Libre between Italy and the United States”, in *The Place of Europe in American History: Twentieth-Century Perspectives*, ed. Maurizio Vaudagna (Torino: Otto, 2007), 341-369.



chief General Maximo Gómez and established connections with the Italian community in New York in order to raise funds for Cuba Libre. Following Cuban independence, Ferrara collaborated with the US military government, went back to Italy, used his transnational connections to gain political power in the new Cuban republic and built a fortune in the Cuban sugar industry. Besides being one of the most powerful members of the Cuban Liberal Party, Ferrara was also a sophisticated scholar who could write on Machiavelli and the Borgias, a journalist, a Cuban ambassador to the US, and the secretary of state under Machado from 1930 to 1933. A shrewd politician, Ferrara had both connections with the Italian fascist regime<sup>28</sup> and important acquaintances in Washington. A “man for all seasons”, Ferrara’s abilities and sophistication made him one of the most interesting of President Machado’s men.

The booklet published by Ferrara in 1930 on the Havana Pan-American Conference of 1928 was meant as a public justification of his pro-intervention position. In it, he reappraised the historical figure of US president Monroe and his principles, denied the existence of a Latin block opposed to an Anglo-Saxon one in the Americas and rejected the word imperialism when applied to US-Latin American relations, as well as the whole idea of Cuban “dependence” and lack of sovereignty. Unlike Roig, Ferrara thought the conference was a success, and that the presence of President Coolidge was its most relevant note. In Ferrara’s view, both Coolidge and Machado’s speeches emphasized the principles of international cooperation and conceived of Pan-Americanism as a defensive weapon for the ideals of Western civilization. He also showed his historical erudition by quoting documents from the 1820s, the time of President James Monroe. In particular, in order to put Monroe’s speech and Bolívar’s call for unity to all the Americas on the same level, he cited French and Russian pro-monarchy documents. According to Ferrara, Europeans perceived both leaders as part of the American republican and democratic revolution against European monarchies. All European powers, Ferrara argued, were concerned about the growing power of a republican country like the US and its influence on republican movements in Europe. Ferrara, portraying himself as “an impartial historian”, argued that the Monroe Doctrine was a cry of freedom against European tyrannies. He also wanted to show that far from opposing the application of the Monroe Doctrine, many Latin American countries had called for its protection during the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>29</sup>. According to Ferrara’s historical interpretation, with

<sup>28</sup> See: Adys Capull and Froilán Gonzáles, *Julio Antonio Mella e Tina Modotti contro il fascismo* (Verona: Achab, 2005), 140-142. Real evidence still needs to be found in Orestes Ferrara’s papers both in Havana and in Italy.

<sup>29</sup> Ferrara mentioned: Mexico in 1825; Nicaragua in 1847; Venezuela in 1848; Argentina in 1850; Mexico in 1859; Peru in 1860; Chile and Peru at war with Spain in 1866; and Cuban rebels in the Ten Years’ War (1868-1898), the final war of independence of 1895-1898 and again with Venezuela in 1902 and 1903. Interestingly enough, Ferrara never referred to the “Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine”, an early-20<sup>th</sup>-century interpretation that justified US inter-

the exception of the “dollar diplomacy” and the policy of the “big stick”, the United States had not turned the Monroe Doctrine into the guiding principle of US inter-American politics. He claimed that far from sharing US interests, he simply wanted to rehabilitate the historical memory of President Monroe and his principles, and also to defend Theodore Roosevelt’s intents against “enemies” who extrapolated words too freely out of context. These unnamed “enemies” claimed that the US interventions in Haiti, Santo Domingo and Nicaragua were the result of the Monroe Doctrine. Quite likely, the same unnamed “enemies” were Cuban nationalist anti-imperialist intellectuals like Roig de Leuchsenring<sup>30</sup>.

Perhaps among Ferrara’s unnamed “enemies” were also several American women activists who traveled to Havana to participate in the conference and protest US interventions in the Caribbean and Central America. Among these was Alice Park who went to Havana to protest the US occupation of Nicaragua. She soon realized however that protests were going to be suppressed, delegates would be carefully chosen and that the US would dominate the entire agenda. Nevertheless, allied with Cuban women activists, their American counterparts did manage to participate in a session of the conference held in the Aula Magna of the University, after having organized a spectacular parade on Martí’s Day. Linking anti-interventionism and women’s rights, Cuban women made it clear that without greater democracy and self-determination for Cuba, gaining women’s rights would be an empty victory. At the same time, without women’s rights, the struggle for Cuban democracy would be crippled<sup>31</sup>.

#### 4. Conclusion

New questions can be raised over the interactions between different versions of Cuban nationalism and the waves of massive international mobilization in the late 1920s and early 1930s against both European fascist regimes and US imperialism (for example, the recently studied movement against the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti in 1927<sup>32</sup>). It can also

vention to police Latin American countries. *El panamericanismo*, 287.

<sup>30</sup> In September 1928, Roig wrote, “Sólo Sandino representa a nuestra América”, *Social*, Septiembre 1928, 35. By echoing Martí’s words, he pointed out that dictatorships and imperialism were the two evils of “Our America” and sketched out the history of both.

<sup>31</sup> I owe this information on Cuban and American women at the Pan-American conference to Ellen Du Bois. Opposition to the Machado regime and US intervention in Latin American countries caused a dramatic split within women’s movements. Ellen C. Du Bois, “A Momentary Transnational Sisterhood: Cuban/US Collaboration in the Formation of the Inter-American Commission of Women”, in *An Intimate and Contested Relation: The United States and Cuba in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Alessandra Lorini (Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2005), 81-95.

<sup>32</sup> See Lisa McGirr, “The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti: A Global History”, *Journal of American History* 4 (2007), 1085-1115.

be argued that the story of Machado's regime and US-Cuban relations in the 1920s are more complex and intriguing than what national (Cuban and US) historiographies have separately told so far. Mella's definition of Machado as a "tropical Mussolini" could be understood as something more meaningful than just a satirical epitaph. Indeed, it could perhaps help to place Italian fascist attempts to penetrate Latin American countries, where a large number of Italian immigrants lived, in the international context of changing US-Cuban relations.

It is reasonable to view the story of Machado's regime as an example of how US policies lacked evidence of a cultural knowledge of the roots and varieties of Cuban nationalism and so-called Latin "anti-Americanism". Significantly, the word "Pan-American" had disappeared from the name by the time of the Montevideo Conference of American States in 1934. At that conference, Latin American delegates insisted that the US administration make the non-intervention principle, denied in Havana in 1928, official. Franklyn D. Roosevelt's "Good Neighbor Policy" was the result. But what kind of cultural knowledge was this policy built upon?

Technically, Machado asked for "a leave of absence" in 1933 and fled to Miami. Because of the social turmoil in Cuba by then, the US State Department had withdrawn its support for the Cuban dictator, a non-intervention lesson had been learned, and new policies had been tested. F.D. Roosevelt had also made the Good Neighbor Policy the basis of US-Latin American relations. It is tenable that the Havana Pan-American Conference of 1928, which brought about the issue of non-intervention, sanctioned the end of the Platt Amendment era and taught a lesson that Roosevelt was quick to learn. In fact, that same year, Roosevelt published an article in the magazine *Foreign Affairs* in which he criticized the American interventions in foreign countries of the previous decades:

By what right [...] other than the right of main force, does the United States arrogate unto itself the privilege of intervening alone in the internal affairs of another sovereign republic? [...] Single-handed intervention by us in the internal affairs of other nations must end<sup>33</sup>.

According to Carleton Beals, an early American critic of the New Neighbor Policy towards Latin American countries, this was just a reassertion of US imperialism. Writing in 1938 Beals questioned the belief that the Western Hemisphere was a "brotherhood of democracies" in contrast to the "evil dictatorships" of Europe, since such a belief overlooked the fact that there were far worse tyrannies in the Western Hemisphere than in Europe, even if they were less dangerous for the world at large.

<sup>33</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Our Foreign Policy: A Democratic View", *Foreign Affairs* 4 (1928), 584-585.

While Roosevelt was promoting this belief, Trujillo, the dictator of the Dominican Republic, was butchering 12,000 Haitians, and Nicaragua and Honduras were at war for irrelevant motives. Beals also asserted that the US, while offering friendship to certain Latin American governments, did not actually care about the people of Latin America. In fact, it was supporting tyrannies of the same brutal sort as those it had decried in Europe. He concluded that:

The only possibility for sound American influence in Latin America is to stand squarely with the democratic and progressive forces of those countries [...]. In Latin America we are not supporting the forces of democracy and freedom any more than we are in Spain. We are actively supporting Fascist trends, under the noble cloak of brave words about freedom, democracy and international justice. Those sleek words no longer have meaning in connection with our actual policy. We are merely playing a conventional game of power politics on the southern continent. Would we play it better if we weren't such arrant hypocrites?<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Carleton Beals, "A Skeptic Views the Good Neighbor Policy", in *Latin America and the United States. A Documentary History*, eds. Robert H. Holden and Eric Zolov (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 156-158.

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## Chapter 8

# Los anarquistas españoles y la formación de la clase trabajadora cubana: la educación racionalista \*

Fueron muchos los anarquistas españoles que tras la emancipación se asentaron en Cuba. La reorganización de los trabajadores, cuyas sociedades de la colonia habían quedado prácticamente desmanteladas como consecuencia de la última guerra de independencia, estaba entre sus objetivos. Y en ese sentido, la recién estrenada nación les ofrecía un campo de oportunidades sin parangón.

Así, a lo largo de las dos primeras décadas de siglo XX encontramos a muchos españoles liderando las empresas prácticas que los anarquistas pusieron en marcha en la isla. Los vemos constituyendo grupos de afinidad; formando parte de las redacciones de los periódicos libertarios; como oradores en las tribunas; organizando mítines, conferencias y excursiones de propaganda para expandir el “ideal” por toda la isla, pero especialmente entre los compañeros del campo; y, cómo no, los descubrimos también organizando huelgas, boicots y otras medios de presión laboral. Y es que el proyecto implementado por los anarquistas en Cuba incluía toda una serie de prácticas políticas y culturales propias y alternativas al sistema republicano que sirvieran de trampolín para la conquista del poder político y la materialización de la esperada “revolución social”. Y, mientras llegaba ese momento, servirían igualmente para transformar y mejorar la sociedad a partir de su particular forma de ver el mundo<sup>1</sup>.

Donde no podía faltar tampoco la mano ácrata era en las empresas educativas. Y en términos generales, lo que ofrecieron los anarquistas en Cuba respecto a esta cuestión fue un planteamiento educativo alternativo frente al

\* Este estudio se encuentra inscrito en el proyecto de investigación HUM2006-03651/HIST del Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación.

<sup>1</sup> El proyecto ideado por los anarquistas y el papel jugado por los españoles en Cuba después de la independencia, en Amparo Sánchez Cobos, *Sembrando ideales. Anarquistas españoles en Cuba (1902-1925)* (Sevilla: CSIC, 2008).

oficial, vinculado a su proyecto de emancipación social que chocaba directamente con la reciente emancipación de la isla, lo cual no deja de ser significativo teniendo en cuenta la incipiente nacionalización de la sociedad cubana y, en ese sentido, el impulso dado por el Estado a la educación nacional.

Precisamente el análisis de las prácticas educativas que los anarquistas desarrollaron en Cuba será el objeto de este texto. Para ello centraremos nuestra atención en la primera década de República, momento de organización y máximo crecimiento de las escuelas racionalistas en la isla y período de especial importancia para la puesta en práctica de todo el entramado político y legislativo que asegurase la conformación de la nueva nación cubana nacida de la independencia.

### **I. La educación y los anarquistas españoles en Cuba**

Mucho escribieron, y se ha escrito después, sobre la importancia que los anarquistas, y entre ellos los españoles, le dieron a la educación de los sectores populares<sup>2</sup>. Una cuestión que consideraban prioritaria sobre todo para asegurar la formación de los nuevos integrantes de la sociedad futura nacida de la revolución, pero que a su vez, serviría para ayudar a esos sectores a mejorar su “miserable” existencia.

En líneas generales, entre los ácratas existían dos formas principales de entender la educación de los trabajadores y sectores populares. Por una parte, estaban aquellos que, siguiendo a Bakunin, opinaban que estos sectores no podían recibir una educación alternativa a la oficial mientras estuvieran viviendo en la sociedad capitalista, pues el hombre aparecía completamente mediatizado por el medio y las condiciones sociales en las que vivía, de modo que previamente debía terminarse con esos condicionamientos y crear al tiempo un ambiente propicio para otro tipo de formación. La educación para Bakunin y sus seguidores, por tanto, debía dejarse pendiente para cuando se materializara la revolución social<sup>3</sup>. Por otra parte, encontramos a los defensores de la instrucción de los sectores populares no sólo antes de la revolución sino como un complemento indispensable para llegar a ella<sup>4</sup>. En este caso, recogían toda una tradición pedagógica nacida con los ilustrados del siglo XVIII y continuada en los métodos educativos conformados a finales del siglo XIX, desde Rousseau y Pestalozzi hasta Robert Owen o Saint-Simon. Entre estas

<sup>2</sup> Un estudio general sobre la cuestión, en Clara E. Lida, “Educación anarquista en la España del Ochocientos”, *Revista de Occidente* 97 (1971), 33-47.

<sup>3</sup> Mijaíl Bakunin, *La Instrucción Integral* (Barcelona: Pequeña Biblioteca Calamus Scriptorius, 1979).

<sup>4</sup> Un buen ejemplo sobre la visión de los ácratas de Cuba en ese sentido, en el artículo firmado por Justo Derecho, “Nuestra educación intelectual”, *¡Tierra!*, 15 noviembre 1902. Más información sobre las dos formas de entender la educación de los sectores populares entre los anarquistas, en Juan Suriano, *Anarquistas. Cultura y política libertaria en Buenos Aires, 1890-1910* (Buenos Aires: Manantial, 2001), 224-227.

nuevas formas de enseñanza alternativas, la más común entre los anarquistas en la España de comienzos del siglo XX fue el método pedagógico y educativo creado por el maestro catalán, Francisco Ferrer i Guardia, que puso por primera vez en práctica en el año 1901 en la escuela que organizó en Barcelona, pero que pronto se vio imitado no sólo en el resto de Cataluña sino también en otras provincias de la Península e incluso en otros países europeos y de América<sup>5</sup>.

Ferrer defendía ante todo la educación laica, que acabara con el monopolio educativo ejercido hasta entonces por la Iglesia, y al mismo tiempo antiestatal, pues para él tampoco el Estado debía utilizar la enseñanza para reproducir una ideología nacional o política. Además, apoyaba su método en la ciencia y la razón, defendía el igualitarismo y el antiautoritarismo, y apostaba porque la enseñanza fuera integral, es decir, que conjugara teoría y práctica. En ese sentido, el currículum observado en las aulas respondía a esos principios que, a su vez, resultaban muy acordes con el sentir libertario. En principio, el aprendizaje debía estar basado en la experiencia y en la participación activa del alumno, partiendo siempre de las capacidades innatas del niño, y huyendo así de los ejercicios memorísticos y repetitivos tan habituales en otros sistemas de enseñanza y sobre todo en las escuelas religiosas. En el mismo sentido, defendía la interconexión educación-medio, es decir, la formación en el aula debía ser completada con excursiones y paseos escolares a museos, a la naturaleza, etc., para aplicar y completar de forma práctica los conocimientos teóricos. Así incluían asignaturas variadas como matemáticas, ciencias de la naturaleza, educación física, música y trabajos manuales, y le concedían un papel primordial al juego y a los juguetes como elementos integrantes igualmente en la acción educadora.

Al mismo tiempo, se pretendía acabar con las diferencias existentes habitualmente entre el alumnado, y no sólo de status, sino también de sexo. En ese sentido, los racionalistas no le concedían ningún valor a los exámenes que eran considerados una herramienta que sólo servía para catalogar y diferenciar a los educandos de una misma clase. Por otra parte, la relación entre alumnado y profesor debía ser directa, sin ningún tipo de expresión de autoridad por parte del docente ni dentro ni fuera del aula. Frente a la figura autoritaria, los castigos, los premios y la violencia, tan criticados por los racionalistas, proponían el cariño, el trato afable y el ejemplo difundidos a través de la palabra y el acto del educador<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Un interesante estudio sobre las escuelas modernas en España, en Jordi Monés, Pere Solà y Luís M. Lázaro, *Ferrer Guardia y la pedagogía libertaria: elementos para un debate* (Barcelona: Icaria, 1977). Sobre el desarrollo de las escuelas modernas en provincias, véase Pere Solà, *Las escuelas racionalistas en Cataluña (1909-1939)* (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1978); Luís M. Lázaro, *Las escuelas racionalistas en el País Valenciano (1906-1931)* (Valencia: Nau, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> Los anteriores principios fueron recogidos en "Agrupación Racionalista Ferrer. Reglamento Interno", *¡Tierra!*, 9 de marzo de 1912. Para ampliar la información sobre el modelo curricular de Ferrer i Guardia, Buenaventura Delgado, *La escuela moderna de Ferrer i Guardia* (Barcelona: CEAC, 1979), 89-109.

Precisamente el hecho de que encontremos notable presencia de anarquistas españoles en la mayor de las Antillas es una de las razones que explica – además del propio método en sí – la rapidez de la traslación desde la Península y el impulso dado tras la emancipación de la antigua colonia al modelo “ferreriano” – aunque ello no quiere decir que no encontremos entre los ácratas cubanos defensores de este modelo. Su función de introductores y promotores resultó fundamental. Así, por ejemplo, el tipógrafo granadino Francisco González Sola llegó a la isla en el año 1906 con la misión expresa de divulgar sus principios entre los trabajadores de toda la isla<sup>7</sup>. Otro de los ácratas que, junto con el anterior, jugó un papel primordial en la promoción del proyecto racionalista en Cuba fue Abelardo Saavedra, gaditano de profesión tabaquero, que llegó a comienzos del año 1907 para participar en las excursiones de propaganda que se estaban organizando con el propósito de propagar el ideal libertario entre los trabajadores del campo<sup>8</sup>. Y otros anarquistas peninsulares reconocidos por los diplomáticos españoles como principales impulsores de estas empresas fueron José Guardiola, Sebastián Aguiar Mateo, Vicente Ferrer, Roberto Carballo y Vicente Lípiz San Miguel, entre otros. Entre los cubanos, sobresalieron Isidoro Lois, Ricardo Vera o Tomás Echeverría. También encontramos al colombiano Juan Francisco Moncaleano, principal impulsor de la escuela del Cerro, organizada en 1912<sup>9</sup>.

Hemos de tener en cuenta que desde el año 1906 se había producido una nueva intervención de las autoridades norteamericanas en la isla y, seguramente, sus políticas favorables a la inmigración española, favorecieron igualmente la entrada de los anarquistas.

Para los ácratas, llevar a la práctica estas empresas parecía posible a priori pues disponían de espacios idóneos y con el mobiliario indispensable donde albergar sus escuelas. Por una parte, estaban los Centros de Estudios Sociales, primeras instituciones constituidas para organizar actividades culturales; y, de la otra, los locales obreros que por lo general solían estar desiertos prácticamente todo el tiempo, de modo que a ellos podrían asistir los niños por el día y los padres por la noche<sup>10</sup>.

Una vez que crearon organizaciones racionalistas y escuelas modernas encontramos también entre sus organizadores, y por supuesto entre sus profesores, a anarquistas españoles. Por ejemplo, en el primero de estos centros educativos, que se organizó a finales del año 1908 a instan-

<sup>7</sup> “Relación de anarquistas conocidos en Cuba”, Archivo del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores de Madrid (AMAE), Fondo Política Interior Cuba (FPIC), Serie Orden Público (SOP), Leg. H 2753, 1911-1919.

<sup>8</sup> Felipe Zapata, “Esquema y notas para una historia de la organización obrera en Cuba”, *Justicia Social Cristiana* 1, 2, 3 y 4 (1951), 64-65.

<sup>9</sup> “Anarquista Moncaleano. Reservado”, AMAE, FPIC, SOP, Subserie Anarquismo, Exp. P=M=O, Leg. H 2757, siglo XX.

<sup>10</sup> “Enseñanza libre”, *¡Tierra!*, 4 de agosto de 1906.



cias del Centro de Estudios Sociales de Regla, colaboró como docente y director el valenciano Miguel Martínez Saavedra. Martínez fue uno de los profesores de la primera escuela que Ferrer organizó en Barcelona, después fue director de la Escuela Moderna del barrio de Gracia, también en la ciudad condal, trabajó en escuelas ferrerianas en Valencia y fue colaborador de la revista racionalista *Humanidad Nueva*. Comisionado por el propio Ferrer para fomentar su método en la mayor de las Antillas, fue además elegido Delegado de la Sección Cubana de la Liga Internacional para la Educación Racional de la Infancia que se organizó en ese mismo año 1908, precisamente para coordinar la creación de escuelas racionalistas en Europa y América<sup>11</sup>.

Igualmente, en los centros educativos racionalistas que se fundaron fuera de la capital podemos rastrear la presencia de ácratas españoles. Así, por ejemplo, el orensano Dionisio García Martínez trabajó en la escuela moderna que el grupo Soledad Villafranca – nombre de la compañera de Ferrer – organizó en Matanzas. También el tabaquero asturiano Juan Tenorio Fernández, fue profesor en la que el grupo Acción Directa – fundado, entre otros, por los anarquistas españoles Pedro Irazoqui, Paulino Ferreiro e Inocencio Franco – constituyó en Manzanillo, provincia de Oriente<sup>12</sup>.

Otros centros fueron organizados en otras provincias y poblaciones como Pinar del Río, Manzanillo, Cruces, Matanzas o Sagua la Grande, principalmente entre los años 1909 y 1913, y con un ímpetu notable tras conocerse la detención y ejecución del pedagogo catalán<sup>13</sup>. En ese sentido, resultaron fundamentales las iniciativas de la Sección Cubana de la Liga Internacional para la Educación Racional de la Infancia, el apoyo del semanario *¡Tierra!* de La Habana y por supuesto las prácticas propagandísticas y difusoras llevadas a cabo por los emigrados españoles, con la ayuda por supuesto de los anarquistas cubanos. Para dar impulso a las escuelas ferrerianas crearon algunos grupos específicos entre los que destacaron Educación del Porvenir y la Agrupación Racionalista Ferrer<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Luís M. Lázaro Torrente, *Prensa racionalista y educación en España (1901-1932)* (Valencia: Universidad de Valencia, 1995), 91 y 108; “Escuela racionalista”, *¡Tierra!*, 28 de noviembre de 1908; “Notas varias”, *¡Tierra!*, 21 de marzo de 1913.

<sup>12</sup> “Relación de anarquistas conocidos en Cuba”, 9 de septiembre de 1913, AMAE, FPIC, SOP, Leg. H 2753, 1911-19; *Tierra y Libertad*, 4 de septiembre de 1912.

<sup>13</sup> Desde que Ferrer puso en práctica su método educativo estuvo en el punto de mira de las autoridades eclesiásticas españolas que aprovecharon cualquier excusa para denunciar a sus escuelas y desprestigiar a su promotor. En 1909 le hicieron responsable de los disturbios ocurridos en Barcelona conocidos como la Semana Trágica, a pesar de que no se encontraba en la ciudad condal en ese momento. Como resultado del proceso que se abrió contra él fue condenado a muerte y ejecutado el 13 de octubre de ese mismo año. Más información sobre esta cuestión, en Jordi de Cambra Bassols, *Anarquismo y positivismo. El caso Ferrer* (Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 1981).

<sup>14</sup> El desarrollo de los centros racionalistas en Cuba, en Amparo Sánchez, “Una educación alternativa. Las escuelas racionalistas en Cuba, 1902-1925”, en *Nación y cultura nacional en el Caribe Hispano*, ed. Josef Opatrný (Praga: Karolinum, 2006), 143-152.

Reconstruir la historia del anarquismo en Cuba y, en este caso concreto, la de sus centros educativos, resulta especialmente complicado por la falta de registros oficiales y otras fuentes directas que nos hablen de sus actividades. En esta ocasión hemos utilizado los informes que los cónsules y diplomáticos españoles enviaron al Ministerio de Gobernación en Madrid y la información que del tema dieron los propios anarquistas y que difundieron principalmente en las páginas de sus periódicos. A través de ellos podemos saber, por ejemplo, según informaba el cónsul español en la capital cubana en 1913, que a la escuela situada en el número 82 de la calle Oficios de la ciudad asistían entre 30 y 40 alumnos – número de alumnos habitual en estos centros-, entre los cuales se encontraban niños de uno y otro sexo ya que el modelo defendido por Ferrer proponía, entre otras cosas, que la educación debía ser conjunta. Y como no podía ser de otro modo, a ellos asistían generalmente los hijos de los promotores y defensores del racionalismo; así, en la escuela de Regla encontramos a las hijas de Miguel Martínez, y también en la del Cerro, en La Habana, estudiaron los tres hijos de los profesores Juan Francisco y Blanca Moncaleano<sup>15</sup>. Algunas de ellas fueron además escuelas de adultos por la noche, como la de Marianao, al oeste de La Habana; otras prestaron especial atención a la instrucción de los trabajadores del campo, entre ellas la de El Corralito, provincia de Pinar del Río, donde además recibían formación un grupo de noventa niños que allí vivían; y otras incluso funcionaron como escuelas de verano, como la de la calle Oficios de la capital cubana<sup>16</sup>.

Aunque el método de Ferrer estaba pensado para todos los niños, fueran de la clase social que fueran – ante todo el pedagogo catalán pretendía crear un modelo alternativo de carácter universal-, lo más habitual en Cuba fue que acogiera a los hijos de los trabajadores y clases populares. Se explican así en parte los problemas económicos a los que se enfrentaron estos centros – que fueron una de las principales razones de su fracaso<sup>17</sup> – ya que el sistema de pago propuesto por Ferrer incluía un reparto de las cuotas en base a las posibilidades familiares de cada niño. Se pretendía con esto que aquellas más pudientes financiaran la educación de los más desfavorecidos.

Probablemente el hecho de que carecieran de otras fuentes de financiación puede explicar igualmente que durante el período estudiado estos centros quedaran restringidos en su mayor parte a sus promotores<sup>18</sup>. Así lo reconocía el cónsul de La Habana: “No obstante los trabajos de propaganda

<sup>15</sup> “Carta reservada enviada por el cónsul de España en La Habana al Ministro de Gobernación en Madrid el 27 de enero de 1913 sobre anarquismo” y “Carta enviada por el cónsul español en La Habana al Ministro de Gobernación en Madrid el 7 de agosto de 1913 sobre la propaganda anarquista”. AMAE, FPIC, SOP, Subserie Anarquismo, Exp. P=M=O. Leg. H 2757, siglo XX.

<sup>16</sup> Más información sobre estas cuestiones, en Kirwin Shaffer, *Anarchism and Countercultural Politics in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Gainesville, FL.: University Press of Florida, 2005), 179.

<sup>17</sup> Ver “Triste realidad”, ¡Tierra!, 4 de mayo de 1912.

<sup>18</sup> “El cónsul de España informa sobre la propaganda anarquista. La Habana, 7 de agosto de 1913”, AMAE, FPIC, SOP, Subserie Anarquismo, Exp. P=M=O. Leg. H 2757, siglo XX.

de estos elementos anarquistas, sus avances entre los naturales son muy limitados. Los asociados son casi en su totalidad españoles (catalanes y aragoneses en su mayoría) existiendo muy pocos cubanos. Los elementos de color no han aceptado tales teorías pues no existe ningún negro ni mulato entre aquellos, a pesar de encontrarse el Círculo en un barrio compuesto casi todo de familias de esta raza<sup>19</sup>. En este caso, hemos de tener en cuenta que a comienzos de la segunda década republicana, la discriminación de la población de color en Cuba se mantenía y el alzamiento del Partido Independiente de Color de 1912 es un claro ejemplo de ello<sup>20</sup>. Y en ese sentido, como veremos a continuación, la falta de un discurso dirigido por los anarquistas de forma expresa a ese sector de la población seguramente tampoco contribuyera a atraer a los negros a las escuelas modernas.

En resumen, toda esta labor de difusión del nuevo método docente explica sin duda que las organizaciones racionalistas y las escuelas modernas sobrevivieran en Cuba entre 1908 y 1913 a pesar de los problemas a los que se enfrentaron. Pero la propaganda sería insuficiente para explicar su arraigo sin un modelo apropiado y atractivo para los sectores a los que pretendían llegar. Veamos entonces qué alternativas ofrecieron y cómo articularon su discurso con ese objetivo.

## **2. ¿Continuaremos dejando que la ignorancia sea el yugo que esclavice una parte de la humanidad a otra más pequeña? ¡No!**

Los ácratas encontraron en la Cuba de comienzos de siglo XX un contexto político que en algunos aspectos les resultó favorable para llevar a término sus actividades prácticas pero que en otros momentos jugó en su contra. La independencia inauguró un ambiente de libertades y derechos que fueron recogidos en la constitución de 1901 y que, en este caso concreto, establecía, en su artículo 31, el derecho a ejercer la enseñanza privada de cualquier arte, ciencia o profesión, al tiempo que se permitía la fundación y el sostenimiento de cualquier tipo de centro educativo, siempre que la homologación de sus títulos dependiera del Estado que era quien determinaría además los requisitos necesarios para obtenerlos. Así, si por una parte los anarquistas podrían promocionar su nuevo método libremente; no obstante, al mismo tiempo esta apertura no sólo podía aumentar la competencia sino que, además, el texto constitucional – como ya había quedado recogido en la Orden Militar N<sup>o</sup> 226 de 6 de diciembre de 1899-, garantizaba, a su vez, la enseñanza primaria y secundaria, y también la de

<sup>19</sup> “El cónsul de España informa sobre la propaganda anarquista. La Habana, 7 de agosto de 1913”, AMAE, Fondo AMAE, FPIC, SOP, Subserie Anarquismo, Exp. P=M=O. Leg. H 2757, siglo XX.

<sup>20</sup> Sobre esta cuestión, véase Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share to Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

las Artes y Oficios, que serían obligatorias, gratuitas y estarían a cargo del Estado<sup>21</sup>, lo cual, sin duda, debió restar asistencia a las escuelas racionalistas de muchos de aquellos hijos de trabajadores que no podían permitirse destinar una parte de su mísero sueldo al sostenimiento de esos centros.

También, desde el punto de vista del modelo educativo, el método ferriano se vio favorecido y a la vez perjudicado por ese espíritu renovador. En principio, compartía con las construcciones teóricas que arrancaban de la Ilustración el principio de laicidad, una de las principales características que le permitía marcar la diferencia más clara con la educación religiosa preponderante durante la colonia, ofreciéndole por contraposición amplias posibilidades de cambio. Y, en ese sentido, la reestructuración del sistema educativo iniciada por las autoridades norteamericanas desde el mismo año 1898 – que tendría como principales valedores a los intelectuales Alexis E. Frye, norteamericano organizador de la enseñanza primaria, y Enrique José Varona, cubano encargado de la enseñanza secundaria y superior-, abogaba igualmente por la educación laica. Pero, además, el pedagogo catalán se quiso desmarcar asimismo del sistema educativo institucionalizado con la III República francesa que, a pesar de pretender ser universal, en realidad acabó reproduciendo la ideología de la clase dominante. De ese modo, ya no sería Francia el modelo sino una enseñanza que estuviera totalmente desvinculada del Estado y al servicio de fines revolucionarios. En este caso, tampoco serviría el sistema educativo inaugurado en Cuba en 1898 que tenía como principal modelo la educación norteamericana, que consistía básicamente en una combinación de instrucción en las artes liberales y la formación manual, y que, para el caso concreto de Cuba hacía especial hincapié en la agricultura, al tiempo que contribuiría a consolidar y reforzar el sistema republicano<sup>22</sup>.

Precisamente, en contraposición al nuevo sistema preconizado por las autoridades de la isla, lo que los ácratas ofrecieron a los trabajadores, y en general a los sectores populares, fue un nuevo modelo educativo que les liberara de la opresión y les preparara para el cambio revolucionario. Para ellos la educación debía ser, en primer lugar, liberadora de la ignorancia, de las ataduras y la opresión a que el sistema, en ese caso el nuevo sistema político cubano, sometía a los trabajadores, o al menos les enseñaría a sobrellevarlos de mejor forma mientras la esperada revolución les liberara definitivamente. Y en segundo término sería igualadora, pues haría que todos adquiriesen el mismo nivel intelectual acabando así con las diferencias que separaban a explotadores y explotados. Tenían además una fe inquebrant-

<sup>21</sup> La Orden Militar N<sup>o</sup> 226 y la Constitución de la República de Cuba, en Hortensia Pichardo, *Documentos para la Historia de Cuba*, tomo II (La Habana: Ciencias Sociales, 1979), 51-57 y 74-101, respectivamente.

<sup>22</sup> La reestructuración del sistema educativo en Cuba tras la independencia, en Shaffer, *Anarchism*, 166-170.

able en la razón y en la ciencia que, como las bases de la formación, lograrían cambiar y mejorar la situación de esos sectores, así como prepararles para la sociedad futura. Y en ese sentido, partían de la bondad y ductilidad del carácter del hombre que sería mejorado a través de la educación.

Para lograr que su mensaje llegara a sus interpelados, su discurso se orientó en dos direcciones. En primer lugar, se dirigió a la crítica del modelo oficial, ya fuera a su aspecto político y patriótico, como por supuesto a los métodos utilizados dentro de las aulas que fomentaban las diferencias entre el alumnado y perpetuaban sistemas de educación atávicos, anquilosados y dañinos, basados en el temor a la autoridad, de los que sólo se podía esperar la fabricación de buenos y sumisos obreros, ciudadanos, soldados, en una palabra, servidores. Tampoco escaparon de sus críticas las escuelas privadas, sobre todo las religiosas, que recibieron las más descarnadas diatribas<sup>23</sup>. Así sus artículos aparecen plagados de alusiones antipatrióticas, antinacionalistas, antimilitaristas y anticlericales. Sobre lo perjudicial del sistema de enseñanza oficial escribían, por ejemplo:

La enseñanza actual siembra en el corazón del niño una estúpida admiración por todo lo que es nacional, un amor y veneración excesivos a la patria, y sobre todo un odio a muerte al que no haya nacido en ella<sup>24</sup>.

Y añadían:

Con una instrucción sana, exenta de religiones sectarias, de patriotismos asesinos y de políticas embusteras, los cerebros de los seres humanos estarán para un día no lejano preparados para ser los guías que nos conducirán a la finalidad de la emancipación humana<sup>25</sup>.

Al propio tiempo criticaban al Estado por querer monopolizar la cultura y el sistema educativo para perpetuar y asegurar así las diferencias de clase sobre las que sustentaban el sistema burgués, así como a la Iglesia que con el mismo objetivo manipulaba las conciencias. Y en este caso su discurso se dirigía en mayor medida a las mujeres, pues para ellos eran las que con más facilidad caían en las redes de los curas y las que después transmitían las enseñanzas religiosas a sus hijos. En este caso, los anarquistas proponían un obrerismo antiestatalista frente al reformismo nacional implementado por el Estado.

Aunque este tipo de discurso no fue exclusivo de la mayor de las Antillas – aparece de una manera más o menos recurrente en todos los países donde encontramos anarquistas, tanto de Europa como de América-, sin embargo,

<sup>23</sup> Ver, por ejemplo, "Enseñanzas", *¡Tierra!*, 19 de octubre de 1912.

<sup>24</sup> "La educación racionalista. Escuela de odios. Escuela de amor", *¡Tierra!*, 14 de agosto de 1909.

<sup>25</sup> "Enseñanza Libre", *¡Tierra!*, 4 de agosto de 1906.

en la Cuba de comienzos del siglo XX adquiere una significación especial pues se trata de un periodo esencial en la construcción de la nueva nación, donde encontramos un elemento externo que iba a jugar un papel decisivo en esos comienzos – aunque, en realidad, su presencia jalonaría la historia de la isla a partir de entonces–: los gobiernos interventores norteamericanos. En ese sentido, no menos numerosos fueron los artículos publicados en *¡Tierra!* donde denunciaban esta situación de “nuevo dominio” y exhortaban al pueblo a trabajar por su “verdadera independencia”, que no sería respecto a una potencia exterior, solamente, sino a su emancipación social<sup>26</sup>.

Al mismo tiempo, y como complemento al aparato crítico, los ácratas dirigieron su pluma y sus voces a demostrar la idoneidad del nuevo método pedagógico racionalista. Al compromiso de renovación propuesto por el maestro catalán, unieron su objetivo de transformar la sociedad, paso previo a la emancipación y a la formación de la sociedad futura. En contraposición, por ejemplo, al modelo oficial, pretendían diseñar un concepto identitario propio y alternativo para los trabajadores y sectores subalternos de Cuba. Así, frente a los símbolos patrios cubanos, los anarquistas promovieron símbolos internacionalistas y difundieron un discurso clasista. Por ejemplo, en la escuela racionalista de Regla todos los viernes el coro de niños dirigido por las hijas de Miguel Martínez cantaba la internacional en la puerta, que a su vez era coreada por todos los niños del centro<sup>27</sup>. También, frente a la exhibición en las escuelas públicas de representaciones de las personalidades de la política y la cultura cubanas, colocaron en sus aulas los retratos de Ferrer i Guardia y de otros padres del ideal libertario. Asimismo, se declaraban por encima de cuestiones como la nacionalidad, la patria o el color de la piel que frecuentemente eran utilizadas para dividir a la clase trabajadora. Y precisamente sus centros culturales y sus escuelas se hicieron amplio eco de este mensaje. Ya en el año 1903 se organizaba en Guanabacoa un Centro de Estudios Sociales donde declararon que “desaparece ese estúpido odio de color o nacionalidad, sustituyéndose por el amor y la fraternidad, bases de una nueva y próxima organización social resultante de nuestra completa emancipación”<sup>28</sup>. Como avanzábamos más arriba, quizás precisamente este tipo de mensaje explica que los ácratas no desarrollaran asimismo estrategias específicas para atraer a sus centros a la población de color puesto que podrían fomentar diferencias.

Sin embargo, no debe pensarse que las críticas de los anarquistas alcanzaron únicamente a la clase “explotadora”, también los trabajadores fueron blancos de sus reproches. Frecuentemente denunciaban la poca o nula predisposición que los padres con pocos recursos económicos mostraban hacia la educación, y no sólo la de sus hijos, sino también de ellos mismos y de

<sup>26</sup> Ver, por ejemplo, “Consolador contraste”, *¡Tierra!*, 7 de marzo de 1903.

<sup>27</sup> Shaffer, *Anarchism*, 179.

<sup>28</sup> “Centro de Estudios Sociales”, *¡Tierra!*, 15 de agosto de 1903.

sus esposas; les recriminaban que no fueran capaces de advertir la importancia que tenía y sobre todo se quejaban de que no pudieran destinar una parte de su pequeño jornal para el sostenimiento de esos centros cuando lo más habitual era que dilapidaran ese dinero en el juego, la bebida y el vicio en general<sup>29</sup>. En realidad, este tipo de críticas a los trabajadores desmotivados fueron muy habituales entre los anarquistas no sólo con respecto a la educación sino también hacia su actitud para con su vida en general y forman parte de su defensa del obrero consciente en un contexto de marcada inconsciencia para los anarquistas.

El discurso difundido a través de las páginas de sus publicaciones, que sin duda contribuyó a hacer más atractivo aún el modelo ferreriano, nos habla igualmente de los vínculos existentes entre el anarquismo español y el cubano. En este caso, sus artículos reproducen básicamente los mismos argumentos utilizados en la Península aunque, para el caso de Cuba, las referencias a la situación política, social y económica fueron constantes y cobraron especial significado como referente del pensamiento de los que se erigieron como portavoces de los sectores populares, al tiempo que ofrecían un contrapunto al discurso oficial<sup>30</sup>.

Los racionalistas incidieron con igual contundencia en la educación de la mujer, considerada compañera necesaria para conseguir la revolución, para lo cual su formación era igualmente indispensable, así como pieza fundamental en la educación en el hogar. En ese sentido, a los padres y tutores se les pedía que procuraran no debilitar el interés y cariño que el niño demostrara hacia la educación racionalista, y se les aconsejaba que observaran también sus principios para que el esfuerzo del profesor saliera reforzado.

### 3. La trascendencia del Modelo Ferreriano en Cuba

De ese modo, para los anarquistas el sistema educativo y con él los formadores de los trabajadores y los sectores subalternos en general, adquirieron una importancia fundamental pues se convertían en uno de los principales instrumentos para asegurar la consolidación y el crecimiento de la incipiente clase trabajadora cubana, así como para la preparación de la sociedad futura. En el caso de los promotores del método racionalista fueron a su vez propagadores del resto de empresas prácticas puestas en marcha por los ácratas, de modo que, por lo general, fueron estas actividades en su conjunto las que provocaron que fueran perseguidos por las autoridades y en la mayoría de los casos expulsados de la isla.

<sup>29</sup> Un buen ejemplo sobre estas críticas, en "La educación de la niñez", *¡Tierra!*, 4 de febrero de 1905.

<sup>30</sup> Sobre esta cuestión puede verse, Amparo Sánchez, "Metáforas cubanas en el pensamiento anarquista de comienzos del siglo XX", en *El pensamiento caribeño: siglos XIX y XX*, ed. Josef Opatrný (Praga: Karolinum, 2007), 345-352.

De hecho, el ocaso de estos centros aparece ligado, aunque sólo en parte, a la desaparición de estos hombres de la escena cubana. Así, por ejemplo, Francisco González Sola salió expulsado de Cuba el 25 de septiembre de 1911. Igualmente Abelardo Saavedra ya desde su llegada a la isla estuvo vigilado por las autoridades debido precisamente a las actividades de promoción del ideal y fue expulsado por primera vez también en 1911, no obstante logró volver dos años después y en 1915 fue nuevamente deportado con destino a Santander. Del mismo modo, el canario Sebastián Aguiar salió de la isla junto a Saavedra en 1911 bajo acusaciones similares, aunque logró retornar al año siguiente tras demostrar que era ciudadano cubano naturalizado; por su parte, el vallisoletano Vicente Lópiz y el asturiano Juan Tenorio Fernández fueron igualmente expulsados con Saavedra y los también españoles Juan Tur y Pedro Ferrer en 1915<sup>31</sup>.

No obstante, no se puede achacar el final de estos centros únicamente a las expulsiones de sus promotores, aunque fueran un factor añadido. Más bien la inestabilidad y sobre todo las dificultades en la financiación fueron los principales problemas a que se enfrentaron los centros ferrerianos en Cuba, como en el resto de países. Aunque, en este caso, a diferencia por ejemplo de España, no tuvieron que vivir la presión directa de las autoridades y menos de la Iglesia pues, como hemos visto, la República había inaugurado un periodo de apertura y laicización de la sociedad y con ella del sistema de enseñanza. Por lo general, en el contexto estudiado las autoridades fueron "benevolentes" con las actividades de los anarquistas, salvo algunas excepciones como las mencionadas expulsiones que, por otra parte, estuvieron asociadas a coyunturas específicas, generalmente a contextos de crecimiento económico y aumento de la conflictividad social de la que se culpó precisamente a los anarquistas. En este caso, fueron especialmente significativas las huelgas que se produjeron en el contexto de la Primera Guerra Mundial, en las cuales aparecían siempre implicados como promotores los ácratas.

Entre otras cosas, esa labor de persecución de los anarquistas, que respondía a la necesidad del gobierno de librarse de los trabajadores más contestatarios, demuestra la importancia de las actividades de estos activistas en el período señalado. Y entre ellas, la difusión del modelo de Ferrer i Guardia resultó fundamental para ofrecerles una alternativa educativa a los sectores populares. En ese sentido, en su discurso sobre la importancia del racionalismo y las escuelas modernas ferrerianas aparecen estrechamente vinculadas la labor pedagógica con la propagandística. Preparar a los "desheredados" para recibir los frutos de la sociedad futura hacía necesarios que antes estos fueran sacados de la ignorancia e instruidos eficazmente en los medios para conseguirla, y para ello, el

<sup>31</sup> La expulsión de los anarquistas españoles de Cuba en nuestro artículo, "Extranjeros perniciosos. El orden público y la expulsión de anarquistas españoles de Cuba, 1899-1930", *Historia Social* 59 (2007), 171-188.



instrumento más eficaz serían las escuelas donde además de educarlos se difundieran los principios libertarios. En ese sentido, además de las críticas al modelo educativo oficial, que hemos visto que recogían aspectos tan variados como el político y patriótico, el religioso o el militarista, principalmente; los anarquistas planteaban un método educativo alternativo que no sólo acabara con la transmisión de esos valores sino con otras costumbres igualmente atávicas y dañinas dentro de las aulas como los castigos, la memorización, las diferencias entre el alumnado o el temor a la autoridad, planteando en su lugar nuevos y renovados procedimientos que fomentaran la educación fundada sobre una base científica y racional, partiendo siempre del desarrollo y personalidad del niño, y estrechando las interrelaciones entre teoría y práctica.

No obstante, su interpretación sobre el método oficial merece una puntualización. Fieles a sus principios y a su modelo de autogestión educativa, en realidad los anarquistas no apreciaron el sentido de la reforma propuesta por el nuevo Estado cubano; en este caso, sus críticas sobre la cuestión estaban en consonancia con el resto de su análisis sobre la sociedad, limitándose, por tanto, a atacar al sistema burgués. Y tampoco tuvieron en cuenta los resultados de las políticas oficiales. De hecho, el plan de escolarización implementado inmediatamente después de la independencia por la autoridades norteamericanas – el Manuel de Vidal Morales se puso en marcha ya en el año 1901- que fue seguido por el primer presidente de la República, Estrada Palma, daría sus frutos en pocos años. Así, en el Censo de 1907 un 36% de los niños en edad de escolarización – entre 6 y 14 años- aparecen matriculados, lo cual era el doble de los que aparecían en el Censo de 1899. Y si comparamos esta cifra con otros países aún adquiere más relevancia. Por ejemplo, en España ese porcentaje no se alcanzaría hasta el año 1930, incluso para el mismo año 1907 las cifras cubanas de asistencia a las escuelas superaban a las de Estados Unidos. También resulta significativo el avance observado en la escolarización de la población negra y mulata que alcanzó niveles similares a los de la población blanca<sup>32</sup>.

De todos modos, independientemente de lo acertado o no de su interpretación, hemos de señalar también que los principios educativos defendidos por los ácratas excedieron la mera crítica para proponer la confección de un modelo alternativo y mejorado gracias a los recursos que ofrecían los nuevos métodos pedagógicos contemporáneos. En ese sentido, sus propuestas aparecen en clara sintonía con la idea de la crítica constructiva por la cual la valoración o análisis sobre la idoneidad o, ente este caso, la falta de idoneidad de un sujeto u objeto para los fines previstos se realiza a fin

<sup>32</sup> *Censo de la República de Cuba, 1907* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1908), 148-150. Las cifras de España y Estado Unidos, en José Antonio Piqueras, *Sociedad civil y poder en Cuba. Colonia y poscolonia* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2005), 341-342.

de que algo sea creado o genere resultados visibles y no lo contrario. Y ése era precisamente el espíritu del modelo propuesto por Ferrer i Guardia: “trabajar para la transformación de la escuela por el estudio del niño, a fin de probar científicamente que la organización actual de la enseñanza es defectuosa y adoptar mejoras progresivas”<sup>33</sup>.

A mediados del año 1913 cerraba sus puertas la última de las escuelas racionalistas. No obstante, su estela sería seguida por los trabajadores y a comienzos de la década de 1920 los integrantes de la recién creada Federación Obrera de La Habana pusieron en funcionamiento nuevos centros ferrerianos en distintas localidades de la isla.

<sup>33</sup> Francisco Ferrer, “La renovación de la escuela”, *Boletín de la Escuela Moderna* 1 (1908), 6.

M. Lima

## Chapter 9

# Reflections on the Cuban Student Movement: 1952-1961

Upon Fidel Castro's arrival in Havana following the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, one of his first official visits was to the University of Havana to recognize students in their fight for freedom. A ceremony took place on January 7, 1959 at the *Escalinata*, the colossal front steps that mark the entrance to the university. The selected site was no coincidence. It had tremendous symbolism, representing student rebellion across generations. The biggest student demonstrations against the Machado and Batista dictatorships throughout the 1920s, 1930s and 1950s had congregated in the *Escalinata* and then advanced to the streets of Havana. At the steps of the *Escalinata* the new revolutionary government made a symbolic ceremony before a large gathering of young people. Dr. Manuel Urrutia Lleó, the President of Cuba, and every minister in his cabinet made a public oath before students to conduct honest government and to rid Cuba from tyranny<sup>1</sup>. The event revealed the significance of students and young people as protagonists in the struggle that led to the triumph of the Cuban Revolution.

Yet, despite its importance, very little academic research exists on Cuban students in the early stages of the revolution. The only book-length study on the topic was published outside Cuba over four decades ago and focuses mainly on power struggles between the state and students<sup>2</sup>. While this is an important aspect, it does not pay attention to how the politics, organization and characteristics of the student movement in the pre-revolutionary era influenced their response to the revolutionary government. It also neglects to explore how the transition of Cuban society between 1959 and 1961 shaped relationships between students on different sides of the political spectrum.

<sup>1</sup> "Designada la Nueva Directiva de Maestros Normales", *Revolución*, 7 January 1959.

<sup>2</sup> Jaime Suchlicki, *University Students and Revolution in Cuba, 1920-1968* (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1969).

This article focuses on the student movement from 1952 until 1961. It argues that students responded to the revolution of 1959, motivated by their own historical expectations, ideology and organizational characteristics. It is attentive to the heterogeneous responses of young people to the revolution as well as their agreements and disagreements with the revolutionary government. One key question this article considers is: how prepared were students for a revolution as radical as the one that occurred in Cuba after 1959?

## I. Ideology

To respond this question it is first necessary to analyze the ideological affinities between university students and the ideals of the revolution after 1959. The main goal of the student movement, since its inception in 1923 when the Federation of University Students (FEU) was established, had been to carry out a revolution in Cuba<sup>3</sup>. Since the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century wars of independence, the goal of revolution<sup>4</sup> translated into national frustration, particularly after the Platt Amendment<sup>5</sup> which prohibited Cubans from building a republic that could re-distribute national wealth and undertake agrarian and other needed socio-economic reforms. A country that had been ravished by a destructive war of independence emerged into a republic with traditional institutions and parties that were corrupt and ineffective in addressing the pressing issues unsolved since end of the war with Spain in 1898. Students in the 1920s were part of a new generation impacted by unemployment, a backward educational system, corrupt government, economic depression and other social conflicts. Skeptical about the ability of the old Veterans and Patriot Movement, which represented the older generation of politicians with traditional ways of doing politics, they took inspiration from global events and applied it to domestic problems<sup>6</sup>. Influenced by the Cordova Movement in Argentina as well as the nationalist and populist ideas<sup>7</sup> impacting Latin America at the time, students came to define themselves as revolutionaries<sup>8</sup>. Initially they fought for autonomy, but eventually they realized the university could not be reformed without first radically changing society. Together with workers<sup>9</sup> and intel-

<sup>3</sup> Raúl Roa, *En Pie* (Santa Clara: Universidad Central de las Villas, 1959), 173-184.

<sup>4</sup> José Martí, *Obras Completas*, vol. 2 (La Habana: Ciencias Sociales), 93-96.

<sup>5</sup> "Cuban Treaty Signed", *New York Times*, 23 April 1903.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba: Mass Mobilization and Political Change, 1920-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 36-101.

<sup>7</sup> During the 1930s and 1940s populism became a wide spread political phenomenon in Latin America. There were numerous governments and political movements in the hemisphere that presented themselves as populists because they mobilized large masses of workers. See Robert H. Dix, "Populism: Authoritarian and Democratic", *Latin American Research Review* 2 (1985), 29-49; Whitney, *State*, 94-164.

<sup>8</sup> Julio Antonio Mella, *Escritos Revolucionarios* (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1978), 39.

<sup>9</sup> The idea of a collation between workers and students was initiated by Julio Antonio Mella

lectuals, students presided over a nationalist revolution in August of 1933 that overthrew Dictator Gerardo Machado<sup>10</sup>. Although the revolution ended in failure as the United States removed their diplomatic support for the students and the progressive wing of the revolution in favor of backing the army faction led by Fulgencio Batista, students demonstrated throughout this period their endorsement of a radical, nationalist revolution as a solution to Cuba's conflicts<sup>11</sup>.

Revolutionary university students in the 1950s emerged on the political scene inspired by the actions and ideas of the 1930 generation. They extensively read the works of Mella, Rubén Martínez Villena, Pablo de la Torriente Brau, and Raúl Roa to understand how the 1933 revolution was carried out<sup>12</sup>. Like their predecessors, they distrusted the political system<sup>13</sup> and believed that Cuba needed change beyond constitutional boundaries – that essential social, economic and political reform in Cuba could not be accomplished through traditional parties and institutions. This rejection sprang from the inability of traditional parties and institutions in Cuba to offer honest government during the *Auténtico*<sup>14</sup> years of the 1940s or pose any type of effective resistance to the military coup staged by Fulgencio Batista in March 1952<sup>15</sup>.

Thus, students developed political thought in opposition to dictatorship. The conquest of power by military force was not an isolated case in Cuba; it was part of a widespread wave of emerging dictatorships in Latin America and the Caribbean. In Nicaragua, Paraguay, Venezuela, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic, dictators abruptly interrupted national politics and frustrated nationalist democratic and reformist governments. In this crusade, dictators were supported and encouraged by the United States under the new geopolitical realities of the Cold War and its struggle against the Soviet Union and the spread of communism in Latin

who was influenced by the APRA movement in Peru. The APRA was established in 1919 in Lima, Peru and advocated alliances between students and workers. See Steve Stern, *Populism in Peru: The Emergence of the Masses and the Politics of Social Control* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), 129; Mella, *Escritos*, 39.

<sup>10</sup> The 1933 revolution led to the establishment of a nationalist government that lasted for 100 days. *El Gobierno de los 100 días* as it came to be known was led by students and professionals. They decreed significant socio political and economic reforms aimed to restructure the national wealth. There are numerous works on the subject. See for example: Jorge Ibarra, *La mediación del 33: Ocaso del Machadato* (La Habana: Editora Política, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Russell B. Porter, "Students Guiding the Destinies of Cuba", *New York Times*, 15 September 1933.

<sup>12</sup> Julio García Oliveras, *José Antonio Echevarría: Lucha Estudiantil Contra Batista* (La Habana: Editora Política, 1980), 227.

<sup>13</sup> "Manifiesto del Movimiento 26 de Julio y la Federación Estudiantil Universitaria al Pueblo de Cuba" in *¡Presente!: Apuntes para la Historia del Movimiento Estudiantil Cubano* (La Habana: Editora Política, 2000), 211-212.

<sup>14</sup> This refers to the Authentic Revolutionary Cuban Party. They defined themselves the authentic revolutionaries.

<sup>15</sup> "En Cuba", *Bohemia*, 28 December 1952; R. Hart Phillips, "Cuba Recovering After Revolution", *New York Times*, 12 March 1952.

America<sup>16</sup>. Along with their counterparts from other parts of Latin America and the Caribbean, Cuban students shaped their ideas and actions as part of a continental movement against “the dictatorships that oppressed the continent”. Students even went as far as supporting a union of democratic nations of the Americas in a continental campaign to break diplomatic relations with the Batista government and with the rest of dictatorships in the hemisphere that did “not respect the human rights of their people, and used torture against detainees and political prisoners and violate the right to political asylum”<sup>17</sup>. The dictatorial landscape of Cuba in the 1950s helps to explain students’ endorsement of violence: because they did not see any democratic solution to ridding Cuba from the Batista dictatorship, students supported armed insurrection<sup>18</sup>. They believed that only real hope for revolution was “con los hierros en la mano”<sup>19</sup>.

It is interesting to note that students possessed an ideological outlook with an eclectic combination of radicalism, democracy, nationalism, anti imperialism and revolution. They demanded a return to the guarantees of the 1940 constitution, calling for free elections, the respect all individual rights including freedom of expression, assembly, press, and the inviolability of university autonomy. They believed in the separation of powers with an independent judicial system<sup>20</sup>, while at the same time holding radical ideas of change beyond constitutional and legal boundaries of the republic<sup>21</sup>. Students favored an educational reform that would encourage more technical programs of study at the University. A strong nationalist, anti imperialist sentiment prevailed in the student movement. As several speeches of José Antonio Echevarría<sup>22</sup> suggest, students condemned United States interventionism in the Americas, particularly their support for dictatorships in Nicaragua, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic<sup>23</sup>.

Students had a troubled relationship with the Popular Socialist Party and the Socialist Youth. Amparo Chaple, for example, a member of the Socialist Youth was elected Student President in the School of Biology and did not offer her vote for Echevarría as the president of the FEU<sup>24</sup>. Socialists did not approve of students violent methods. The Popular Socialist Party,

<sup>16</sup> See David F. Schmitz “The Lesser of two Evils” in *Problems in Modern Latin American History: Sources and Interpretations*, eds. John Charles Chasteen and James A. Wood (Washington, Del: SR Books, 2004), 281-286.

<sup>17</sup> Oliveras, *José Antonio Echevarría*, 160.

<sup>18</sup> Julio García Oliveras, *Los Estudiantes Cubanos* (La Habana: Abril, 2003), 35.

<sup>19</sup> This phrase translates “With weapons in hand”, *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>20</sup> “Declaración de la FEU desde el Exilio” in *¡Presente!: Apuntes*, 200-201.

<sup>21</sup> José Antonio Echevarría “Letters to the Times”, *New York Times*, 14 November 1954.

<sup>22</sup> Echevarría was the leader of the student urban underground movement. President of the FEU and the Revolutionary Directorate between 1954 and 1957.

<sup>23</sup> Oliveras, *Los Estudiantes*, 37-40.

<sup>24</sup> Departamento de Versiones Taquigráficas del Gobierno Revolucionario, “Segunda Vista del Juicio Contra el Delator Marcos Rodríguez”, *Bohemia*, 3 April, 1964.

for example, characterized the attack on the Presidential Palace and similar actions as “putchists” and “bourgeoisie”, and claimed that their only correct strategy was the popular struggle based on the mobilization of the proletariat<sup>25</sup>. The historic tensions and conflicts between members of the Socialist Youth and students at the University became a constant source of tension during the first months of the revolution<sup>26</sup>. Overall, a close analysis of student’s ideology suggest that their responses to the 1959 revolution (either in support or opposition) were shaped by ideas and expectations developed during years in the urban underground struggle.

## 2. Organization

Political autonomy characterized the Cuban student movement across generations. In the 1950s, the event that demonstrated the possibility of carrying out an armed insurrection against the Batista government without reliance on traditional parties was led by Fidel Castro when he and a group of students and young workers carried an attack on the military headquarters in Santiago de Cuba and Bayamo on July 26, 1953<sup>27</sup>. Both assaults failed in their objectives to capture the military garrisons and initiate a popular rebellion in *Oriente* as most of the attackers were either captured or killed by the Batista army. Despite the setback the Moncada episode was significant as it set a precedent for revolutionary undertakings in the future. The event inspired the university student movement into independent organization and action against the government<sup>28</sup>.

Organizational independence made students a credible force in Cuba. It placed the university at the centre of revolutionary struggle. Throughout the republican period students used the university as the headquarters of revolutionary struggle against dictatorships and corrupt governments. Students relied on the university as a sanctuary to hide from government persecution, conceal weapons and conspire against the government. They transformed university organizations such as the FEU into a means for political mobilization to organize street demonstrations<sup>29</sup>. Students contended

<sup>25</sup> Juventud Socialista, “¡Fuera la Ingerencia Yanqui en Cuba! ¡Cese el Terror del Gobierno de Batista! ¡Unión y Lucha para Derrotar la Tiranía!”, 18 October 1957, in Instituto de Historia de Cuba, La Habana, Organizaciones Juveniles Fondo I, P-2 1094.

<sup>26</sup> Alberto Muller, *La Cruz Sigue en Pie: Biografía y Escritos de Alberto Muller: Ideario de una Nueva Generación* (Caracas: Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil, 1970), 11.

<sup>27</sup> Partido Socialista Popular, *VIII Asamblea Nacional: Informes, Resoluciones, Programas, Estatutos* (La Habana: Ediciones Populares, 1960), 54.

<sup>28</sup> Upon learning about the Moncada assault, university students in Havana discussed possible actions that day (26 July 1953) in support of the attack but it was impossible as the government surrounded the University of Havana. In the next months students in Havana organized a campaign for the liberation of the Moncada assaulters and recognized Fidel Castro as the one who began revolutionary struggle against Batista. Oliveras, *José Antonio Echevarría*, 103-114.

<sup>29</sup> The rich calendar of student martyrs and historical dates served as an opportunity for street

that universities should be free from the ideological and economic pressures of the state, and should act as the social consciousness of the nation<sup>30</sup>. University autonomy eventually precipitated conflicts with the revolutionary government after 1959 as it forged an oppositionist culture that represented an obstacle to their integration with any government.

### 3. Reproduction of Pre-Revolutionary Politics: 1959-1961

In the early years of the revolution students from both sides of the political spectrum responded to the new socio-political and economic realities by reproducing their pre revolutionary tactics, mobilization strategies, values and ideology. Their political views on dictatorship, democracy, nationalism, and communism informed their actions and responses to revolution. They used the physical spaces of the university as their main headquarters for political mobilization and a defense of the organizational independence of the FEU. A resurgence in violence to either assert student support or rejection to the revolutionary laws characterized relationships between the new revolutionary government and students during the early stages of the revolution.

Although the revolutionary government counted on the overwhelming support of the majority of Cuba's younger generation, student responses to the revolution were as heterogeneous and diverse as their political ideas. They were divided among two main groups which responded differently to the revolution. Both favored the revolution, but one expressed unconditional support while the other backed the state conditionally<sup>31</sup>. Members of the Revolutionary Directorate (DR)<sup>32</sup>, which had been a crucial group in the

protests. Some of the more relevant street demonstrations during this period were: The symbolic burial of the 1940 constitution on 6 April 6 1952; The remembrance of Antonio Guiteras, a revolutionary of the 1930 generation assassinated by Batista on 8 May 8 1952; The celebration of the fall of Machado and the 1933 revolution on 12 August 1952; The remembrance of the offense against the Martyrs of the 1933 Revolution on 4 September 4 1952; The anniversary of the assassination of Trejo, a student martyr in the struggle against Batista, on 30 September 1952. On 27 November 1952 students jumped into the field of a baseball game broadcasted on television to display a sign against Batista. See: Special to the New York Times "Student Protest One Year after Batista's Coup", *New York Times*, 11 March 1953; Herbert L. Matthews "Students in Cuba Opposing Batista", *New York Times*, 15 April 1952; Special to the New York Times, "5 Students Shot Over Marring of the Statue", *New York Times*, 16 January 1953; Special to the New York Times, "2 Cuban Students Shot in March", *New York Times*, 14 April 1953. The street protest became a distinguishing characteristic of the student movement in their struggle against Batista. See Mario G. Del Cueto, "El Aporte del Directorio Revolucionario en la Lucha Contra Batista", *Bohemia*, 11 January 1959.

<sup>30</sup> Luis Boza Domínguez, *La Situación Universitaria en Cuba* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial del Pacífico, 1961), 11.

<sup>31</sup> Lloyd A. Free, *Attitudes of the Cuban People Toward the Castro Regime in the Summer of 1960*, (Princeton: Institute for International Social Research, 1960), 14.

<sup>32</sup> The DR was the armed wing of the University Student Movement established by Echevarría in 1956 to carry commando operations against members of the Batista regime. After the failed attack on the Presidential Palace in 1957 it relocated its operations to rural and urban areas in central Cuba.



urban and rural resistance against the Batista dictatorship, demanded more participation in the new revolutionary government. Despite their support, alliance and admiration for Fidel Castro and the 26 of July Movement, the DR led a series of “symbolic” protests during the first months of 1959. These demonstrations by the DR included: refusing to turn their weapons over to the revolutionary government, taking over temporary control over the University of Havana, and occupying the National Capitol. The DR did not agree with government by decree. Instead, they called for the establishment of a legislative body consisting of representation from different revolutionary groups. Whereas these differences were later settled between the DR and Fidel Castro<sup>33</sup>, actions of this type suggested how the students’ ideas on democracy and dictatorship shaped their initial actions. They responded to the new socio-political and economic reality of the nation, by reprising their pre revolutionary tactics, mobilization strategies, values and ideology. In this case, the idea of contesting government by decree, taking over the university and other relevant buildings resembled past republican politics.

Youth political action in early revolutionary Cuba revolved around the educational reform which motivated a mixed response among young people<sup>34</sup>. Support or opposition for the reform differentiated young revolutionaries from oppositionists. Students who were fervent supporters of the revolution passionately favored the reform but perceived the existing institutions and laws as obstacles to its prompt execution. These students reacted autonomously from the state when they started taking over control of several High Schools and Universities across Havana<sup>35</sup>. Through their actions, students pressured the revolutionary leadership to immediately implement the reform clauses that ordered the expulsion of professors and students accused of having collaborated with the previous Batista regime. The protagonists of these acts were both students affiliated to these institutions and young radicals that were outsiders to these educational centers but took an active involvement in student politics. The Instituto de la Vibora, the Colegio Baldor and the University of Havana were three among many other cases of school takeovers that occurred between February and April of 1959, and were extensively reported in the press<sup>36</sup>. In all cases the student rationale was a sense of urgency to take justice in their own hands, to act beyond the established laws of those schools and above the judicial procedures established in the Educational Reform. Students would take control of several buildings and faculties in their institutions to access the files of those professors suspected of collaboration with the Batista dictator-

<sup>33</sup> “Students Yield Their Arms: Revolutionary Directorate Said It Never Planned to Fight Against Castro”, *New York Times*, 11 January 1959; R. Hart Philips “Power Struggle Goes On”, *New York Times*, 10 January 1959.

<sup>34</sup> “Sobre la Reforma Universitaria”, *Revolución*, 4 February 1959.

<sup>35</sup> “Ocupar Planteles es Contrarrevolucionario”, *Revolución*, 17 April 1959.

<sup>36</sup> “Intervienen Alumnos de Institutos y la Normal”, *Revolución*, 4 April 1959.

ship. Then, by force of occupation, they would pressure the school to expel them. The case of Baldor (the founder and director of the Baldor College) was typical. Baldor had been accused of persecuting revolutionaries, of evading taxes for over \$10,000, and of publicly humiliating and even expelling any professors that had criticized him<sup>37</sup>. A similar occurrence took place at the University of Havana where students took over control of the dean's offices numerous times. They argued that current university statutes and legal proceedings were unable to ensure the expulsion of corrupt, inept and professors accused of spying for the Batista regime<sup>38</sup>.

Several factors explained these responses, namely: political behavior acquired and transmitted across generations; continuity in the culture of violence and radicalism that characterized student militancy in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s; the institutional vacuum of the early stages of the revolution that disoriented young people; and, finally, a desire, by those students tortured by the Batista regime, to take justice in their own hands. Young revolutionaries therefore acted as protagonists of radical change, as an autonomous mobilizing force that pressured the leadership into the quick implementation of reforms. Contrary to what some scholars have suggested when analyzing the student movement in the early months of the revolution, young people were not passively targeted and manipulated by the state. Although organized later under government control, in this early moment, young people took independent actions. Students were not manipulated or indoctrinated by the state at this time (1959), as revolutionary institutions were still in the process of been established (only in 1961 was education in Cuba nationalized)<sup>39</sup>. Thus, students' actions and mobilization in support for the educational reform was a consequence of ideological affinities with the revolution. Their ideological convictions from the pre-revolutionary period supported the idea of the socio-political transformation of Cuban society.

The essence that distinguished the student movement (autonomy and rebelliousness) led to problems with the radical nature of the revolution. Cuban society, between the fall of 1959 and the spring of 1961, was in the midst of a radical transition and re-definition of political values, ideology and goals. Unity became the hallmark of the new period as the state eventually considered organizational autonomy out of synch with the objectives of the revolution. All forms of opposition were considered "anti-Cuban" and "unpatriotic"<sup>40</sup>. On the international front, the government's need to obtain economic support from the Soviet Union led to a closer alliance between the revolutionary government of Fidel Castro and the socialists. This in turn

<sup>37</sup> "Acusado Baldor de Graves Irregularidades", *Revolución*, 28 March 1959.

<sup>38</sup> "Dispuesto el Estudiantado a Ocupar la Universidad", *Revolución*, 2 February 1959.

<sup>39</sup> "Intervienen Alumnos de Institutos y la Normal", *Revolución*, 4 April 1959, 13; Editorial, "Y Ahora a Alfabetizar", *Mella*, 27 May 1961, 8.

<sup>40</sup> Partido Socialista Popular, *VIII Asamblea Nacional*, 55, 142 and 157.

brought about a new official discourse that redefined political values and influenced state relationship with students<sup>41</sup>. What it meant to be a “revolutionary” changed drastically from an earlier humanist understanding to a radical and pro-socialist conception. To be a revolutionary in early 1959 meant to support a humanist ideology that equally favored social justice, individual freedoms and human rights<sup>42</sup>. Early revolutionaries were nationalists; they were against all forms of tyranny, supported free elections and reestablishment of the 1940 constitution suspended during the Fulgencio Batista regime in March of 1952. They supported all the socio-economic reforms of the revolution, but some were anti-communists and opposed relations with the Soviet Union<sup>43</sup>. During the radical period, support for the revolution meant unconditional backing of de the state, regardless of its pro-socialist position at home or its alliance with the Soviet Union abroad<sup>44</sup>.

Discrepancies over socialism became a conflictive issue for students. Oppositionists questioned the revolution’s turn to “communism” and its alliance with the Socialist Bloc. They also protested the integration of the FEU to the International Student Union which they claimed was controlled by the Socialist International. They organized a protest against Soviet Vice-Minister Anastas Mikokyan’s visit to Cuba and sabotaged the hiring of professors affiliated to the Communist Party at the University. Together with other oppositionist groups which still held key positions in the media and religious schools, they actively instigated other students to rebel against socialism and government interference in university affairs<sup>45</sup>.

These conflicts were as much over the control of public spaces as they were over ideology. Every protest initiated within university campuses was tremendously harmful for the image of the state since the university was a symbol long associated with martyrdom, heroism and revolutionary struggle. The political instinct of students was to use the spaces of the university as an expression of political discontent, but for the revolutionary government support from youth was a serious matter which helped the emerging state to differentiate itself from the repressive Batista past. In official speeches and newspaper articles, students and young people were praised as a vital political force, a potentially crucial ally to legitimize the revolution. To use the spaces of the university for oppositionist purposes, however, was interpreted by the state as a challenge to the legitimacy from the revolution.

<sup>41</sup> Edward Gonzalez, *Cuba under Castro: The Limits of Charisma* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 118-119.

<sup>42</sup> Fidel Castro, “¿Qué es el Humanismo?”, *Revista Artes Graficas*, 5 July 1959, 5.

<sup>43</sup> US Department of State, Foreign Service Despatch, American Consulate, Santiago de Cuba, “Student Group Protest Communist Action”, 14 May 1959, file 737.00/5-1459, 1955-1959 Central Decimal File, RG 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>44</sup> Partido Socialista Popular, *VIII Asamblea Nacional*, 55-157.

<sup>45</sup> Muller, *Cruz Sigue en Pie*, 11-4.

To control the physical and symbolic spaces of the university from oppositionists, the revolutionary government established the University Brigades in October 1959. Their goal was to establish an armed militia at the University of Havana to protect the university facilities, day and night, from “counterrevolutionary students” and to ensure the “university was only for revolutionaries”<sup>46</sup>. The Brigades guarded every square of the university and every corner. At night, along with members of the State Security, they hid in bushes to prevent “counterrevolutionary” students from attempting to gain control of the institution. University Brigades for example made use of the *Escalinata* as a “sacred site” from where to organize their political acts. In the official ceremony that announced the formation of the Brigades on November 27, 1959, students left from the *Escalinata* and walked through the streets of Havana in military parades<sup>47</sup>. As Alicia Gómez Granada, a former member of the Brigades, expressed: “Students descended from the *Escalinata* which has transformed since the triumph of the revolution in a symbol of joy. The *Escalinata* is the cradle of revolution, from where student rebelliousness gathered and marched so many times in the past”<sup>48</sup>. Another student leader of the time commented: “For the first time in many years student walked down from the *Escalinata* for a purpose other than to turn the flame and protest against a tyrannical government”.

Oppositionist students also gave the *Escalinata* a similar meaning. In January of 1960 they organized a protest that would take it as a starting point. From that point they would then walk to the streets of Havana and meet in the building of a local TV channel to give their support to a document that was going to be read on television expressing university student rejection of communism and relations with the Soviet Union. The University Brigades impeded oppositionists to use the *Escalinata*. Salvador Capote, one of the Brigade leaders recalls what happened that day:

The Student Brigades impeded traitors from using the *Escalinata* to walk out of the university. We told them that counterrevolutionaries were not allowed to use the *Escalinata* as it had represented historical opposition against dictatorship<sup>49</sup>.

For university students, regardless of their ideology, political use of university boundaries was a way to give moral support to their ideological claims and follow on the footsteps of the student movement of the 1950s which had initiated all their actions at this historic site. In contrast to previous years, after 1959 the radical nature of the revolution provided the

<sup>46</sup> María Luisa Lafita de Juan, ed., *La Brigada Universitaria José A. Echevarría y el Bon* (La Habana: Editorial Política, 1983), vii.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-18.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-51.

ideological justification that impeded the use of symbolic or any other sites as an avenue for dissidence against the state. The official discourse supported the idea that only the most unconditional followers of the revolutionary state had the moral authority to use the *Escalinata* as a way to legitimize the revolutionary state itself. The struggle to monopolize physical space inside the university was equated with power in the revolutionary era. Eventually, the reproduction of pre-revolutionary student politics clashed with the new political values and culture that emerged during the radical period of revolutionary transition toward socialism.

On the topic of autonomy, the University of Havana also became a contested site of conflict and resolution. Students debated passionately the issue of university autonomy, which was perceived as one of their main achievements following the 1933 revolution<sup>50</sup>. In the republican era, particularly in the mid-1950s, the autonomy had served as an instrument to guarantee that the university became an independent institution with legal protection from police intervention and the headquarters of oppositionist activity directed to fight dictatorial and corrupt governments. To oppositionists, the theme of autonomy was a legitimate claim based on the student martyrs who had given their lives for the revolution<sup>51</sup>. To supporters of the state, however, there was no purpose to autonomy as government and university were supposed to be united and not in dispute<sup>52</sup>. The new radical mentality of the transition dictated that autonomy was an obstacle to government attempts to open the university for the humble classes and implement a new system based on technical and scientific education in tune with the professional needs of the nation<sup>53</sup>. Eventually, the idea of autonomy did not have state support and the vision of a university united with the government prevailed. The official interpretation was that autonomy was only a means for students to use the university as a space for political organization in order to achieve the ultimate goal of revolution<sup>54</sup>. Among students, there were mixed interpretations about autonomy, as some believed that it was a historical achievement necessary to ensure that those in power fulfilled their promises to the people.

#### 4. Conclusions

In conclusion, a study of Cuban students throughout the 1950s and early 1960s reveals how elements of continuity and change shape Cuban history. Without an understanding of student political activism in the pre-

<sup>50</sup> Boza Domínguez, *Situación Universitaria*, 18.

<sup>51</sup> Muller, *Cruz Sigue en Pie*, 28.

<sup>52</sup> Boza Domínguez, *Situación Universitaria*, 52.

<sup>53</sup> "Sobre la Reforma Universitaria", *Revolución*, 4 February 1959.

<sup>54</sup> Boza Domínguez, *Situación Universitaria*, 84.

revolutionary era it is not possible to broadly assess their heterogeneous responses to the revolution after 1959. The period between 1959 and 1961 revealed the dynamics of transition and how this in turn affected relationships between the state and students. Events in Cuba and student activism cannot be explained in a political void as they were a reflection of broader ideological trends in Cuba and abroad. Students' resistance demonstrated the intersection of the local and the global. Their political activism and militancy was a result of events connected to Cuba's historical evolution but also part and parcel of hemispheric forces of nationalism, populism, dictatorship, communism and revolution. These forces shaped students' actions and motivations.



## Part IV

# Transforming Urban Space: La Habana as a Case Study

On the previous page – *Ricardo Porro's Escuelas de Artes Plasticas* (photo by G. Paolucci, 2007)



## Transforming Urban Space: La Habana as a Case Study

This section is completely dedicated to La Habana, the Cuban capital whose rich history and culture exemplify how Cuba is in the world and the world is in Cuba. By taking distinctive perspectives, an urban sociologist (Gabriella Paolucci), an urbanist (Raffaele Paloscia) and an architect (Luca Spitoni) recast the story of the transformation of the city's space through international processes and social revolutions. The architectural mix of the colonial past, early-to mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century American styles and varieties of modern functionalism make Havana unique. Before the 1959 Revolution, La Habana hosted a fifth of the Cuban population, half of the country's industrial production, eighty percent of Cuban imports and three quarters of the Cuban professional class. Prohibition brought American tourists to drink and gamble in the often US-run Havana bars in the 1920s and the luxurious Hotel Nacional opened in the 1930s. After the Second World War, the Florida mafia made new profitable investments in the growing industry of mass tourism and Havana's restaurants, exotic theaters, casinos and brothels. Pan American Airways operated from sixty to eighty round-trip flights a week between Miami and Havana at a very low fare that the US working classes could afford<sup>1</sup>. Then the early years of the Revolution changed everything. As Gabriella Paolucci argues in this section, La Habana drafted new urban plans and designed new architecture as a strategy to build a new society by exploring the potentialities of new architectonic functions and languages. La Habana's long process to define its urban identity, which Raffaele Paloscia's essay examines thoroughly by moving from early colonial times to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, went

<sup>1</sup> See: Ann Armbruster, *The Life and Times of Miami Beach* (New York: Random House, 1995); Miguel A. Bretos, *Cuba and Florida: Exploration of an Historic Connection, 1539-1991* (Miami: Historical Association of Southern Florida, 1991).

through profound changes from the 1960s to the early 1980s. Finally, Luca Spitoni's mapping of the Habana del Este during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century shows the impact of social and cultural movements on architectural developments.

## Chapter 10

# Transformaciones urbanas y cambios sociales: el caso de La Habana

### I. La visibilidad de la historia en La Habana

¿Cómo sería La Habana de no haber sido testigo y protagonista de los cambios que han determinado su historia en la mitad del último siglo? Es cuanto se pregunta Mario Coyula haciendo una hipótesis sobre el “futuro del pasado” de esta ciudad:

¿Cómo sería *ahora* La Habana si la revolución de 1959 no hubiera sucedido? Probablemente no muy distinta de la que visualizaba el Plan Piloto de Sert en 1955-1958: una gran capital de cuatro millones de habitantes, definitivamente desmarcada de las demás ciudades cubanas, organizada en función del auto privado, con su litoral bloqueado por una pared continua de edificios en altura (un proceso que ya había comenzado en el tramo del Malecón en El Vedado), y un centro terciarizado y a la vez turgurizado y gentrificado, donde el extenso y coherente patrimonio edificado que recogía más de cuatro siglos habría quedado reducido a unos pocos inmuebles singulares. La isla artificial propuesta en el Plan frente al Malecón de Centro Habana, se habría construido y llenado con casinos y hoteles<sup>1</sup>.

En estas páginas trataré de ilustrar algunos de los motivos por los que La Habana, como escribe Coyula, se diferencia tanto de cualquier otra gran ciudad contemporánea. Como veremos, las razones de dicha diversidad se hallan en su historia, especialmente en los años posteriores a la ruptura revolucionaria de 1959. De aquellos eventos La Habana es, al mismo tiempo, testigo y protagonista, convocada a expresar e incorporar los cambios profundos

<sup>1</sup> Mario Coyula, “Vivir La Habana”, *La gaceta de Cuba. Arquitectura cubana entre sociedad y la cultura* 6 (2007), 5.

que transformarán radicalmente la sociedad cubana. Y lo realiza de modo muy original, logrando mantener un pasado denso de memorias y expresando un presente fuertemente proyectado hacia el futuro. Dichas cualidades, según Kevin Lynch, constituyen el fundamento de *aquella apertura al tiempo* y de *aquel sentido del cambio* que la ciudad manifiesta en cada esquina<sup>2</sup>.

La referencia a Kevin Lynch no es casual. Se trata de uno de los testigos más prestigiosos de los cambios del tejido urbano de La Habana, la capital de la primera revolución socialista del Tercer Mundo. A este prestigioso urbanista norteamericano, que permanece en la ciudad en varias ocasiones y que colabora con los arquitectos y urbanistas comprometidos en la transformación de la ciudad, se deben algunas de las páginas más bellas escritas sobre este tema<sup>3</sup>.

Kevin Lynch reputa La Habana el modelo ejemplar por su capacidad de contener, interpretar y manifestar el fluir del tiempo, además de reflejar la mutación de la cual es testigo y protagonista. En el tejido de la metrópoli caribeña, Lynch halla esa “visibilidad de la historia” que para él constituye una de las características más significativas de los ambientes urbanos que poseen una gran “apertura al tiempo” y un enraizado “sentido del cambio”. “El objetivo de la construcción del comunismo en un sólo salto – observa Lynch a inicios de los años 70 – está transformando Cuba. Como receptáculo de dicha transformación, la ciudad colonial de La Habana se resiste, pero a la vez suministra la acumulación de capital que permite a la revolución superar las difíciles fases iniciales. El ambiente de La Habana refleja en modo excepcional este repentino vuelco”<sup>4</sup>.

En el momento en que el estudioso estadounidense realiza sus viajes a La Habana – de los cuales escribirá en *What Time is this Place?* – la ciudad aún está sumergida en la “luna de miel de la revolución”<sup>5</sup>. Si bien han pasado muchos años desde el “triunfo de la revolución”, como suelen decir en Cuba, por las calles de la capital se sigue respirando la atmósfe-

<sup>2</sup> Kevin Lynch, *What Time Is This Place?* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972).

<sup>3</sup> Kevin Lynch, ferviente admirador de la revolución cubana, como tantos intelectuales del mundo, fue invitado por el Instituto de Planificación Física para impartir conferencias y participar en los proyectos innovadores de los primeros años de la revolución. Las huellas de la presencia de Lynch en La Habana son aún muy vivas. Mario Coyula en una entrevista publicada en 2005, recuerda con gran simpatía su presencia en la isla. Roberto Segre “Entrevista al arquitecto Mario Coyula”, *Ciudad y Territorio. Estudios Territoriales* 143 (2005), 209-222.

<sup>4</sup> Lynch, *What Time*, 82.

<sup>5</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *La force des choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963). Simone de Beauvoir se refiere en estos términos a la primerísima fase de la revolución cubana, recordando el viaje que junto a Jean-Paul Sartre hiciera en febrero de 1960. En relación al mismo, cfr. el reportaje de Sartre escrito para *France Soir*, nunca antes publicado en volumen en Francia: Jean-Paul Sartre, *Sartre on Cuba* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1961). Sólo en 2008 el reportaje sobre la revolución cubana ha sido nuevamente publicado en Francia: Jean-Paul Sartre, “Ouragan sur le sucre”, *Les temps modernes* 649 (2008). En Italia la primera traducción de casi todos los escritos de Sartre sobre el tema, ha sido editada sólo en 2005, para la cual escribí la introducción (Gabiella Paolucci, “Introduzione”, en Jean-Paul Sartre, *Visita a Cuba* (Bolsena: Massari, 2005); ver también Gabriella Paolucci, “Sartre’s Humanism and the Cuban Revolution”, *Theory & Society* 36 (2007), 245-263.

ra de grandes cambios sociales. En las calles, plazas y locales se percibe una amalgama entre la potente proyección hacia el futuro y el vínculo igualmente fuerte con el pasado. Un pasado inteligible en la espléndida arquitectura colonial del centro histórico, en los valiosos edificios del movimiento moderno y en la misma estructura del tejido urbano. Un pasado con el cual se truncó, pero que no se pretende ignorar, sino más bien reinterpretar y traducir en diferentes lenguajes y textos, a la luz de nuevos valores que conforman la construcción del presente. Las huellas y sedimentos que la historia colonial dejó en la capital de Cuba son acogidos y reintegrados en el proceso de renovación de la ciudad, como testimonio del “rostro bifronte del colonialismo, que crea belleza y riqueza, pero sólo la distribuye a una parte restringida de la población”<sup>6</sup>. La conservación y tutela de los mismos, no obstante, están sujetos – y en cierto sentido vinculados – a una imagen inédita de la ciudad y al nuevo pensamiento urbanístico. Uno y otro se refleja en la modificación de las funciones y usos del ambiente urbano. Kevin Lynch habla de “reflejo” cuando relata cómo en La Habana aún se perciba el cambio que determinó la nueva forma urbana al día siguiente de la fuga de Batista, en el amanecer de 1959.

Los modos y formas de dicho “reflejo” tienen mucho que decirnos. No sólo porque nos hablan – con el lenguaje de la arquitectura y de la urbanística – de cómo la población habanera lee e interpreta el pasado de su ciudad, sino también cómo sabe modelarlo a las exigencias del presente y a los sueños del futuro. Por tanto está en juego no sólo la salvaguardia del patrimonio arquitectónico de inmenso valor que heredó la ciudad en 1959, sino también el uso – hoy se diría “reutilización” – dado de dicho patrimonio en una situación social que vislumbra y planifica funciones urbanas completamente novedosas respecto al pasado. Y es ahí, además, donde reside la fascinación de La Habana, hoy como ayer.

## 2. La herencia del pasado

La herencia que La Habana recibe de su pasado es muy rica, como subraya Duany en la *Introducción* al libro que Coyula, Segre y Scarpaci dedicaron a la ciudad: *Havana. Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis*:

La Habana contiene la sedimentación de numerosos destinos frustrados. Fue la gran capital colonial de un imperio europeo particularmente arrogante; la heredera republicana de una épica guerra de liberación; la sede estéticamente refinada de una alta burguesía muy culta; y actualmente, es el escenario de un proceso revolucionario que no ha desembocado completamente en el celo ideológico. La pasión del pueblo cubano ha destilado los

<sup>6</sup> Roberto Segre, *Arquitectura y urbanismo de la revolución cubana* (La Habana: Pueblo y Educación, 1989).

sucesivos ideales confiriendo a su capital el rostro trágico y heroico que posee. Quizá la influencia más grande ejercida en esta ciudad se deba a las teorías arquitectónicas internacionales, que han purificado, una y otra vez, los cruces en esta isla. Probablemente los arquitectos cubanos, tan cosmopolitas, ejercieron una influencia dominante. ¿Podemos concluir diciendo que la potencia de la arquitectura sumerge las consideraciones socio-políticas? Probablemente existe sólo una certeza: que la arquitectura y el urbanismo de La Habana son soberbios en sentido absoluto. [...] Leer y visitar La Habana embriaga al punto de convertirnos en fanáticos de urbanismo<sup>7</sup>.

La Habana, nacida a orillas de una bahía y rodeada de murallas, mantiene las iniciales dimensiones y más o menos una cierta homogeneidad hasta principios del siglo XIX, cuando comienza una expansión constante que perdura hasta inicios de los años cincuenta del siglo pasado.

Durante la época colonial, la ciudad, poseía el monopolio legal del comercio en el Caribe, constituía la plaza fuerte donde se concentraba todo el tráfico mercantil hacia España. Por un largo período, es el único centro urbano significativo en toda la zona: después del exterminio indígena, el 40% de la población de la isla se concentra en la ciudad, si bien con el prosperar de las plantaciones de caña de azúcar y tabaco, poco a poco se extiende al resto de la isla una cierta urbanización. La metrópolis caribeña sigue expandiéndose, sobre todo, durante la máxima concentración de la economía en manos estadounidenses. Todo se concentra en La Habana: la cultura, la economía, la tecnología, la industria y el comercio.

La estructura compacta que conserva La Habana durante la expansión decimonónica, con las relativas funciones al interno del tejido urbano, poco a poco comienza a desaparecer con el inicio de la división en zonas funcionales de cada actividad. Por una parte, el sector residencial del núcleo histórico de la ciudad se deteriora – los inmuebles abandonados por la aristocracia y la burguesía son ocupados por el proletariado urbano –; por la otra, se produce una transformación en la zona, debido a las nuevas estructuras bancarias, comerciales y burocráticas. En relación al perfil arquitectónico, la aristocracia y la burguesía logran preservar durante todo el siglo XIX tanto la tradición colonial como una cierta homogeneidad entre la arquitectura urbana y la de las zonas periféricas. Durante los primeros decenios del siglo XX, La Habana comienza a caracterizarse por una mezcla de estilos: neo-renacentista, neo-colonial, neo-barroco, etc.

Las transformaciones más significativas se realizan en los años cincuenta, cuando la mayoría de las funciones del centro histórico son trasladadas a la zona contigua – Centro Habana – que deviene zona comercial, y a los repartos del Vedado y Miramar. En estos años el Vedado se convierte en el

<sup>7</sup> Andres Duany, "Foreword", en *Havana. Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis*, eds. Roberto Segre, Mario Coyula y John Scarpaci (New York: Wiley, 2002), xxiii.

nuevo centro direccional de la ciudad, en punto de atracción turística y de las actividades culturales. Se construyen las torres de varios pisos de lujosos edificios que hoy todavía delínean el Malecón de La Habana. Crece el turismo en modo exponencial, sobre todo norteamericano, atraído por el mar, el clima y por la brillante vida nocturna que se concentra alrededor de los casinos. Invadida por una oleada de hoteles de lujo, casas de juego y burdeles, durante los años cincuenta la capital de Cuba era terminal del eje Las Vegas-Miami-La Habana.

Vinculado a estos procesos, los precios de los terrenos aumentan excesivamente y los especuladores hacen enormes fortunas. Al mismo tiempo, las masas de campesinos, que afluyen a la ciudad en busca de medios de subsistencia, se derraman en las zonas marginales del tejido urbano, donde se construyen sus propias barracas<sup>8</sup>.

La Habana comienza, de este modo, a asumir “una configuración urbana polinuclear”, como observa Roberto Segre:

Fuera de los polos de atracción, el ambiente urbano se caracterizó por una baja densidad y una desproporcionada extensión del “hábitat”, distinguiéndose en relación a las diferencias sociales. Las residencias burguesas ocuparon la nueva urbanización hacia el oeste, aumentando la autonomía individual dentro de la estructura típica de la “ciudad jardín”, a medida que se alejan del centro. La gran dispersión se equilibraba gracias a una red viaria eficiente, que respondía a la difusión del automóvil, a escala similar a la de los Estados Unidos<sup>9</sup>.

Este período reveste de gran importancia no sólo desde el punto de vista del desarrollo urbanístico, sino también desde el perfil estilístico. En efecto, los movimientos internacionales de vanguardia de los años treinta llegan a Cuba sólo entre los años cuarenta y cincuenta, cuando en los barrios más ricos de la ciudad se difunde la arquitectura del movimiento moderno, que va a enriquecer la ya valiosa herencia arquitectónica de La Habana. La misma que aún se percibe – no obstante la precariedad en que se encuentra gran parte del patrimonio histórico de la ciudad – en la magnificencia de los edificios coloniales, en la elegancia de las construcciones *art nouveau*, en las estructuras *art déco* y en el estilo moderno de numerosos edificios construidos durante los años cuarenta y cincuenta<sup>10</sup>.

### 3. La ruptura histórica: nuevas funciones y nuevos lenguajes

La transformación que afecta a La Habana a partir del 1959 es rápida y profunda. En el “receptáculo físico heredado de la historia” se determinan

<sup>8</sup> Roberto Segre, *Cuba, l'architettura della rivoluzione* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1970), 98.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibíd.*

<sup>10</sup> Roberto Segre observa cómo el movimiento moderno comienza a ejercer su influencia en la isla a partir de los años cuarenta. Segre, *Arquitectura y urbanismo*, 16-17.

mutaciones que transforman radicalmente el rostro de la ciudad, como entonces narrara Kevin Lynch, años después del inicio de dicho proceso:

Los cambios que sobrevinieron fueron muy rápidos. La clase media escapó, dejando despobladas zonas extensas de la ciudad. El bloqueo interrumpió la normal importación de material y equipos. Los alquileres disminuyeron con un decreto ley y sucesivamente las casas fueron cedidas gratuitamente a los inquilinos. Muchos sectores fueron nacionalizados y a los precios de los terrenos se les estableció un costo muy bajo. De repente, la especulación inmobiliaria desapareció. El gobierno revolucionario construyó nuevos edificios de apartamentos para colocar a los habitantes de los barrios más pobres y para alojar a la gran masa de desempleados urbanos, pero la operación se reveló costosa. [...] Cayeron las barreras internas; desapareció el control privado del acceso al mar y a las playas. Se disolvieron los filtros económicos que regulaban la admisión a los mejores repartos residenciales. Los clubes privados fueron transformados en restaurantes públicos y en centros sociales. El lujoso reparto de hoteles y rascacielos del Vedado, que en un tiempo era reservado a turistas y a la alta burguesía cubana, hoy es el centro cultural y recreativo de toda la ciudad. En la tarde, las calles del Vedado se aglomeran de gente que pasea o hace colas en los cines, restaurantes y heladerías [...] Los barrios costeros de Miramar, abandonados en gran parte por la clase media, ahora están ocupados por alrededor de 100.000 estudiantes llegados de todo el país con becas. El ex palacio de gobierno es hoy museo. [...] Las actividades están cambiando rápidamente dentro del ambiente físico heredado. ¿Será posible realizar esta drástica transformación social sin perder completamente el carácter y los aspectos positivos del pasado?<sup>11</sup>

Si quisiéramos sintetizar en una única expresión los cambios complejos y heterogéneos que ocurren en el tejido de La Habana a partir de 1959, podríamos referir la rápida transformación *funcional* de la ciudad, que toma cuerpo en los nuevos e inéditos usos de la trama urbana, revelándose “insuficiente” – para usar una expresión de Segre – respecto a las exigencias y a los objetivos del nuevo modelo de ciudad y de sociedad que se está construyendo.

Dicho proceso de mutación se mueve fundamentalmente en dos vías. Por un lado asistimos a una reinterpretación de las estructuras heredadas del pasado, leídas a la luz de una novedosa visión de la ciudad. Es el primer momento de transformación que se materializa en el cambio de funciones de lo que ya existe: “las primeras iniciativas modifican el contenido conservando las formas”, escribe Segre<sup>12</sup>. Por otra parte, poco a poco se hace camino la elaboración de un lenguaje inédito, con proyectos de estructuras arquitectónicas y urbanísticas que sobrentienden concepciones del vivir y del espacio urbano muy diferentes de las heredadas del pasado. La etapa siguiente está caracterizada por lo que Segre llama la “creación de formas representativas

<sup>11</sup> Lynch, *What Time*, 39-40.

<sup>12</sup> Segre, *Cuba*, 74.



de nuevos contenidos”<sup>13</sup>. En este proceso encaminado hacia la elaboración de modelos innovativos, ya sea en el plano del contenido que en las formas arquitectónicas y urbanas, ocupa un lugar preponderante el uso de tecnologías constructivas económicas y veloces: a partir de finales de los años sesenta, la prefabricación se convierte en la clave para resolver los problemas cuantitativos y cualitativos de las nuevas exigencias.

En tema de transformación de los usos y funciones de edificios y de enteras zonas urbanas, podría señalarse una amplia gama de ejemplos que muestran cómo el antiguo entrelazado de la ciudad se adapta, en función de las nuevas perspectivas, sin que esto comporte demolición alguna, exceptuando la eliminación de las habitaciones insalubres de la población más pobre y de los barrios de barracas surgidos en los alrededores de La Habana. Los edificios antiguos del casco histórico y las bellas construcciones del movimiento moderno de los nuevos repartos residenciales de los años cincuenta, abandonados por las clases perjudicadas por la revolución, se convierten en patrimonio público y son usados – entre otras cosas para atenuar la grave situación de la vivienda que atenaza la ciudad – como escuelas, centros culturales o sedes del nuevo gobierno<sup>14</sup>, y como centros para la campaña de alfabetización, con la cual se logra, en pocos meses, disminuir considerablemente la tasa de analfabetismo presente en la isla.

Los cuarteles se convierten en escuelas, los clubes privados en centros sociales, las villas de las familias burguesas son distribuidas a núcleos familiares sin casa o utilizadas como habitaciones para los estudiantes procedentes de la parte oriental del país. Reflexionando sobre este fenómeno que cambia profundamente la composición social de la ciudad y el rostro de sus barrios más elegantes como los de Miramar y el Vedado, Mario Coyula escribe:

La repentina emigración hacia los Estados Unidos de la alta y media burguesía a inicios de los años sesenta, dejó muchos edificios vacíos, provocando una extraña mezcla social en los barrios elegantes de la ciudad. En este proceso se constató un aspecto negativo: aumentaron la negligencia y el abuso, porque a los nuevos habitantes faltaban los medios para ocuparse de la conservación de los edificios, lo que conllevó a modificaciones y restauraciones completamente inapropiadas y fuera de lugar por parte de los nuevos inquilinos. Además, la emigración del campo trajo a la ciudad modelos rurales de vida, cosa que fue particularmente evidente en La Habana, ciudad que se caracteriza más que otras del resto de la isla, por una trama arquitectónica y urbanística típicamente de urbe<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibíd.*

<sup>14</sup> Thomas cuenta que el 8 de enero, día en que Fidel Castro entró en La Habana con su columna, hablando desde la terraza del Palacio Presidencial a la muchedumbre que lo aclamaba, aludió al problema del lugar donde establecer la sede del nuevo gobierno, en desacuerdo con la idea de contar con un palacio presidencial. Hugh Thomas, *Cuba: the Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 793.

<sup>15</sup> Mario Coyula, “Housing in Cuba”, *Designer/Builder* (2000).

Quizá el ejemplo más significativo desde un perfil simbólico sea la variación en el uso de la zona del Vedado en torno al hotel *Hilton* (que más tarde se llamará *Habana Libre*): una isla impenetrable para negros y pobres antes de 1959, que se transforma en centro neurálgico de la vida colectiva de la ciudad. El *Habana Libre*, símbolo histórico de aquellos años, se abre a la población:

El hotel se convierte en] el nuevo parque el nuevo centro de la vida social, que irradia su vitalidad a toda la zona aledaña hasta volverse símbolo de la vida nocturna de toda la ciudad. [...] La *Calle 23* (la Rampa) es el nuevo eje estructural del ambiente recreativo, perdiendo el carácter semiburocrático que antes poseía, no sólo gracias a la vida espontánea que allí surge, sino también al incremento de las construcciones dirigidas a conferir un sentido preciso a la dinámica humana: alternar la vida social que tiene lugar en los hoteles y en la monumental heladería *Coppelia*, con la distracción de cines y teatros, con las actividades culturales en galerías y pabellones para exposiciones y con el contacto con la naturaleza, que se produce en ambos extremos de la *Calle 23*: en dirección al mar con el Malecón y hacia las áreas verdes del parque urbano *La Fumia*<sup>16</sup>.

La elaboración de un nuevo lenguaje – segundo “momento” de la transformación urbana – se concreta en el proyecto de tres obras de gran relieve: la *Unidad Vecinal de La Habana del Este*; las *Escuelas Nacionales de Arte* y la *Ciudad Universitaria José Antonio Echeverría*:

Mediante estas obras – escribe Segre – se afirmaron tres principios diversos como hipótesis de desarrollo; tres metodologías diferentes; tres concepciones de “signo” arquitectónico semánticamente expresivo de los nuevos contenidos germinados en el proceso revolucionario. [...] El carácter ideal de dichos contenidos genera la matriz de la acción arquitectónica, y al mismo tiempo, la libertad para una clara diferenciación formal de las tres obras realizadas en La Habana. [...] El copiar la arquitectura del pasado, habría implicado un freno, un retroceso, la limitación en el logro de una libertad creativa sin obstáculos; habría operado una reducción esquemática del proceso arquitectónico, que ya se ha constatado en otros países socialistas, y que nuevamente no se puede repetir. Es entonces que se fijan los parámetros para traducir en arquitectura los contenidos. Los cuales constituyen las peculiaridades propias de la cultura y su relación dialéctica con la vanguardia universal, la dinámica del proceso social, los recursos técnicos y económicos<sup>17</sup>.

La *Unidad Vecinal de La Habana del Este* está considerada el primer experimento urbanístico que pone en práctica las líneas guías basadas en la

<sup>16</sup> Roberto Segre, *Diez años de Arquitectura en Cuba revolucionaria* (La Habana: Unión de Escritores y Artistas, 1970), 99.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibíd.*, 79.

nueva visión del habitar. Uno de los objetivos que se persigue es la sustitución de las viviendas precarias de los barrios insalubres y periféricos de La Habana, con un complejo de edificios residenciales que ocupa los terrenos que en el pasado habían sido reservados para la construcción de un lujoso centro residencial destinado a la alta burguesía. Sin embargo, en ello no sólo existe la finalidad de tipo funcional. Como bien señalan Segre, Coyula y Scarpaci, las tres “unidades vecinales simbolizan la utopía de la revolución cubana”<sup>18</sup>. La parte que probablemente reveste un mayor significado es la *Unidad 2*, diseñada para cien mil habitantes. Los proyectistas fueron Fernando Salinas y Raúl González Romero, quienes la conciben como una estructura residencial, concentrando su relevancia simbólica y expresiva en los edificios públicos y en los espacios abiertos. Las estructuras curvilíneas y las áreas verdes se complementan con monumentos que representan el símbolo de la búsqueda de un nuevo significado en las relaciones humanas (la iglesia de “todas las religiones” y el centro de reuniones), que constituyen una real centralidad dentro del conjunto construido. El proyecto, bastante complejo y muy costoso, no fue completamente terminado.

La segunda obra de relieve fueron las *Escuelas Nacionales de Arte*, las cuales suponen el complejo arquitectónico más original y más cuestionado en relación a otros proyectos realizados en la primera década de la revolución<sup>19</sup>.

Las *Escuelas* nacen con la idea de constituir un centro internacional de enseñanza para artistas del Tercer Mundo. El proyecto tiene un valor simbólico explícito, ya sea por la localización (ocupa uno de los panoramas más bellos de La Habana, donde con anterioridad estuviera el *Country Club*), que por el contenido: la actividad artística como símbolo de la libertad conquistada. Recordando el modo original en que nace la idea de construir este complejo, John Loomis comenta: “En una tarde de enero de 1961, dos jugadores improbables de golf, Fidel Castro y Che Guevara, jugaban un partido en el prado impecable de aquello que había sido el exclusivo *Country Club* de la alta burguesía habanera. Y allí, planearon el futuro de este lugar único para la nueva sociedad donde, en modo alguno, los country clubs habrían encontrado cabida”<sup>20</sup>.

Para proyectar el complejo arquitectónico que ocupa una de las zonas más fascinantes y extensas, aledañas a la ciudad, se escoge a un arquitecto que hacía poco tiempo había regresado al país tras su exilio en Venezuela

<sup>18</sup> Segre, Coyula y Scarpaci. *Habana*, 190.

<sup>19</sup> Sobre las Escuelas ver entre otros: John A. Loomis, *Revolutions of Forms. Cuba's Forgotten Art Schools* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999); Hugo Consuegra, “Las Escuelas nacionales de Arte”, *Arquitectura Cuba* 334 (1965); Marilyn Garbey, “Entrevista al arquitecto Roberto Gottardi”, *La gaceta de Cuba. Arquitectura cubana entre sociedad y la cultura* 6 (2007), 7-9; Ester Gianni, *Il riscatto del progetto. Vittorio Garatti e l'Ena dell'Avana* (Roma: Officina Edizioni, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> Loomis, *Revolutions*, 19.

durante la dictadura de Batista: Ricardo Porro. A él se unen los italianos Vittorio Garatti y Roberto Gottardi, también provenientes de Venezuela; el primero se había licenciado en Milán con Rogers, y el segundo en Venezia con Scarpa. A los tres jóvenes arquitectos se les deja plena libertad, tanto en cuanto al proyecto como en la elección del lugar donde ubicar cada escuela (Música, Ballet, Danza, Teatro y Artes Plásticas). La única condición era no hacer uso de materiales de importación<sup>21</sup>.

También el proceso de realización comporta métodos y etapas muy originales. Los proyectistas se instalan en el edificio, que antes de la revolución había acogido a la administración del *Country Club*, y desde allí supervisan las obras de construcción que marchan a la par de las del proyecto. Junto a ellos participan en las labores los estudiantes de la Facultad de Arquitectura, durante las horas libres fuera de las clases universitarias. Al equipo de trabajo se une un catalán que vive en Cuba, Gumersindo, quien enseña a los trabajadores la técnica constructiva de la bóveda catalana<sup>22</sup>.

Durante la construcción de las Escuelas, ocurre algo que impide terminar el conjunto arquitectónico. En efecto, las escuelas, comenzadas en 1961, se inauguran, incompletas, en 1965. Y así quedarán hasta inicios del actual siglo, cuando el gobierno cubano, movido por el empuje del debate internacional, decidirá retomar las labores de construcción y restaurar las partes arruinadas por la falta de mantenimiento en los precedentes cuarenta años<sup>23</sup>.

Acerca de la interrupción de las obras, circulan interpretaciones contrastantes. La más verosímil es la que atribuye a motivos políticos la fallida conclusión de las Escuelas, como sostiene John Loomis, que retiene la fuerte influencia soviética sobre la política cultural del país el factor determinante en el cambio de posición hacia el proyecto, con el consiguiente cierre de las obras. De ser considerada “la escuela más bella del mundo”, como afirmara Castro al inicio de las obras, el conjunto, de repente, pasa a ser objeto de duras campañas denigrantes apoyadas por la prensa especializada y por los arquitectos pertenecientes al Ministerio de la Construcción, que escriben absurdas valoraciones. A todo el proyecto arquitectónico se le acusa de representar “un espíritu contrarrevolucionario”, y, por consiguiente,

<sup>21</sup> Sobre esto, Roberto Gottardi recuerda: “[...] Pudimos proyectar con absoluta libertad. Se nos dio un encargo y no tuvimos ninguna censura. [...] Vivíamos en una atmósfera donde todo parecía posible y no nos habían impuesto limitaciones de carácter económico”.

<sup>22</sup> Así se manifestó Roberto Gottardi, en una entrevista concedida a la autora de este ensayo en febrero de 2007, cuando tuvo ocasión de visitar el complejo junto al arquitecto. Cfr. también Ester Giani, “Las Escuelas Nacionales de Arte: una utopía interrotta”, en *Memoria Ascesi Rivoluzione. Studi sulla rappresentazione simbolica in architettura*, ed. Luciano Semerani (Venezia: Marsilio, 2006), 169-221; Id., *Il riscatto del progetto. Vittorio Garatti e l'Ena dell'Avana* (2007).

<sup>23</sup> Actualmente los trabajos de restauración de las Escuelas están en marcha. El gobierno cubano, tras la inserción del complejo en la lista de los monumentos en peligro del “World Monument Watch”, y movido por el animado debate en seno a la II Bienal de Arquitectura de La Habana de 1999, se ha hecho cargo de la restauración y terminación de todo el proyecto.

de ser expresión de una estética pequeño-burguesa. Se cuestionan hasta las soluciones funcionales de las diferentes escuelas y la ubicación de las mismas, contraponiendo, con gran insensatez, a la estética de las Escuelas la “funcionalidad” de la arquitectura de prefabricado<sup>24</sup>. Los mismos arquitectos fueron objeto de ataques personales como en el peor estilo estalinista, a tal punto que dos de ellos se vieron obligados a abandonar el país. El único que se quedó en Cuba fue Gottardi, mientras Porro se trasladó a París a mitad de los años sesenta, y Garatti regresó a Italia en 1974. Todo ello a pesar de que el complejo fuera acogido con gran entusiasmo a nivel internacional. El proyecto de las Escuelas ha sido publicado en algunas de las revistas de arquitectura más importantes como *Architectural Forum*, *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, *Architecture Formes-Fonctions*, *Architectural Design*, *L'Architettura*<sup>25</sup>.

La tercera obra de importancia realizada en los primeros años de la revolución es la Ciudad Universitaria “Echeverría”. Aunque inicialmente se pensó en construir una verdadera ciudad universitaria, se llega a proyectar solamente el plexo de la Facultad de Tecnología, que se asienta en un área cercana a una central azucarera, a doce kilómetros del centro de La Habana. La obra la inicia el arquitecto Humberto Alonso, la continúan Manuel Rubio, José Fernández y Josefina Montalván, bajo la dirección de Fernando Salinas. Rechazada la tradicional ciudad universitaria compuesta de edificios aislados e independientes entre sí, con soluciones en formas autónomas características – tipológica y simbólicamente –, cada Facultad escoge entre las dos opciones que quedan, como observa Segre: “la creación de un tejido homogéneo de funciones intercambiables, como aquélla de la Universidad de Berlín, o la total absorción de las funciones específicas en una única unidad compacta, cerrada, como el Scarborough College de Toronto”<sup>26</sup>. Se optó por un esquema basado en una trama de modulación continua que permitiera una respuesta a las exigencias funcionales planificadas, además de un crecimiento y una evolución que no mellasen, en términos técnicos ni estéticos, las construcciones ya existentes. Por otra parte, considerando la apremiante dinámica del proceso educativo en transformación se intenta obtener un intercambio de las funciones en seno al tejido. Por tanto, para los arquitectos se trata de la posibilidad de concebir una forma abierta y de elaborar principios estéticos “que consideren la forma no como una cristalización estática, sino

<sup>24</sup> En la campaña contra las Escuelas de Arte estuvo involucrado Roberto Segre, uno de los analistas más conocidos de la arquitectura del período revolucionario a nivel internacional. Si bien recientemente ha cambiado en parte su juicio, en aquel período fue uno de los exponentes más sobresalientes en la campaña contra los tres arquitectos y sus trabajos. Al proyecto de las Escuelas, Segre contraponen el de la ciudad universitaria, tercera obra de la revolución, por los métodos constructivos y por el diseño arquitectónico.

<sup>25</sup> A nivel local la discusión se resuelve, esencialmente, en la revista *Arquitectura-Cuba*, donde se enfrentan las dos posiciones pro y contra el proyecto.

<sup>26</sup> Segre, *Cuba*.

como un fluir continuo, de experimentarlo existencialmente a través de los valores contenidos en el proceso de transformación”<sup>27</sup>.

El análisis de los resultados alcanzados con estos proyectos va más allá de la finalidad de este estudio. Sin embargo, es útil señalar cómo los mismos surgen de una profunda reflexión y de un vasto debate sobre la relación que deberían establecer los nuevos criterios constructivos y la nueva planificación con la herencia del pasado. Las cuestiones en torno a las cuales gira la discusión en el mundo de arquitectos y urbanistas (desarrollada, sobre todo, acerca de los criterios funcionales y estéticos de las *Escuelas Nacionales de Arte*) son de gran interés, ya que están relacionadas con la noción de “tradición” y el vínculo entre la herencia del pasado y los valores de la nueva sociedad<sup>28</sup>. Se trata entonces de un tema constantemente debatido en la Cuba de después de 1959, especialmente en los primeros años, los más complejos tanto desde el punto de vista político como cultural.

#### **4. Las primeras medidas revolucionarias: la nueva visión de la planificación urbana y las soluciones para el problema de la vivienda**

Un momento significativo de este debate lo constituye el séptimo Congreso de la Unión Internacional de Arquitectos, celebrado en La Habana en 1963<sup>29</sup>. Es el primero de la UIA llevado a cabo en América, y en él se concentra la atención de más de dos mil arquitectos y urbanistas provenientes de ochenta países. El tema del congreso está al orden del día en la Cuba post-revolucionaria: “Architecture in the Emerging Countries”<sup>30</sup>. Ya sea en los preparativos del evento que durante los trabajos del convenio, se entablan discusiones avivadas – por primera vez en un evento internacional – acerca de la nueva visión de la planificación urbana y sobre los instrumentos más idóneos para traducir las nuevas perspectivas teóricas dentro de una concreta mutación de lenguajes y contenidos.

<sup>27</sup> Segre, *Diez años*, 82-83.

<sup>28</sup> Ricardo Porro, uno de los arquitectos de las Escuelas, afirma en una entrevista publicada en *Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*: “Traté de demostrar en la Escuela de Artes Plásticas, la toma de conciencia de mi país después de la revolución. Por ello, busqué un elemento que se encontrara en todas las manifestaciones artísticas de Cuba, individuándolo en una sensualidad particular que comparece, en mi opinión, de modo constante”. Ricardo Porro, “Écoles d’Art à La Havane”, *Architecture d’Aujourd’hui* 119 (1965); Id. “El Espacio en la Arquitectura Traditional Cubana”, *Arquitectura Cuba* 332 (1961).

<sup>29</sup> Ver entre otros, Segre, *Arquitectura y urbanismo*; Segre, Coyula y Scarpaci, *Habana*; y el reportaje sobre el VII Congreso de la Unión Internacional de Arquitectos, publicado en *Arquitectura Cuba* 331 (1964).

<sup>30</sup> Entre los temas afrontados en las sesiones del congreso, aparecen: “National Planning”, “Construction Techniques”, “Neighbourhood Unit”, todas ellas cuestiones muy debatidas en la Cuba de estos años.

En relación a lo anterior, resulta significativo el discurso que Ernesto Guevara hiciera en la clausura del Encuentro de Profesores y Estudiantes, en el cual afirma, entre otras cosas:

En el ejercicio de la profesión que ustedes representan, se pone a prueba el espíritu creador del hombre. Está pleneado el problema por los materiales que hay, por el servicio que deben prestar, pero la forma de solución es la que nuestros profesionales deben dar. Y allí deben batirse como si se batieran contra la naturaleza, contra medios externos a la voluntad del hombre, para poder realizar de la mejor manera posible el anhelo de dar más a nuestro pueblo, y la satisfacción personal de construir con sus propias manos, con su talento, con sus conocimientos, la nueva sociedad<sup>31</sup>.

Las transformaciones funcionales de zonas enteras de la ciudad y los proyectos relacionados con los asentamientos en las zonas este y oeste de La Habana se ubican en el escenario de políticas de alojamiento y de gestión del territorio radicalmente innovadoras. Las mismas pautas de la planificación urbana – que sustituyen al último plan regulador aprobado por el gobierno de Batista y que afortunadamente quedó en papel<sup>32</sup> – pueden interpretarse correctamente si se colocan en dicho contexto. Las primeras intervenciones en este frente se deciden en las primeras semanas de 1959, con la adopción de una serie de medidas legislativas que abren el camino que modificará profundamente el orden del territorio y las dinámicas económicas que lo determinan. El cese de los desahucios, la disminución de la especulación de los terrenos<sup>33</sup> y la disminución del coste de los alquileres, constituyen las medidas más significativas en esta primera fase<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> Ernesto Guevara, “Discurso en la Clausura del Encuentro de Profesores y Estudiantes. VII Congreso de la Unión Internacional de Arquitectos (UIA)”, *Arquitectura Cuba* 331 (1964), 13-14.

<sup>32</sup> El plan regulador de 1958 preveía la destrucción de una parte considerable de la Habana Vieja y la construcción de nuevas torres residenciales, parecidas a las del Vedado, al lugar del centro histórico. Además, se había planificado la construcción de una isla en el mar, a lo largo del Malecón, donde establecer otras estructuras turísticas.

<sup>33</sup> Una vez eliminada la especulación de los terrenos, se pone en marcha la transformación de los terrenos libres en áreas verdes, subiendo así el índice de área verde por cada habitante de La Habana de uno y veintidós a ocho metros cuadrados. Ver entre otros: Segre, *Diez años*; Leo Huberman y Paul Sweezy, *Cuba. Anatomy of a Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review, 1960).

<sup>34</sup> Las principales medidas son: la ley de la suspensión de los desahucios de las propiedades urbanas destinadas exclusivamente a viviendas (26 enero 1959), con la cual se establece la creación del Instituto Nacional del Ahorro (INA), que transforma el lote en un mecanismo para obtener fondos para resolver el problema de la vivienda. Entre las tareas del Instituto se encuentra la construcción de alojamientos mínimos para los que no tienen casa. Se prevé, además, que “todos los apartamentos construidos pasarán a ser propiedad de los inquilinos mediante el pago del importe del alquiler establecido [...] dentro de un período de diez años” (17 febrero). La ley de la disminución de los precios de los alquileres, con la cual se reducen del 50% al 30% en proporción inversa a su valor (1 marzo). La ley de la venta obligatoria de los terrenos libres, que serán utilizados en la construcción de nuevas viviendas. Con esta ley se establece además la “demolición de los edificios que no ofrezcan las condiciones suficientes

Posteriormente, a través de la Reforma Agraria de mayo de 1959 y la Reforma Urbana de octubre de 1960, se comienzan a sentar las bases que sostendrán de modo estable el cambio urbanístico y territorial en los años sucesivos. Así mismo se pone marcha una nueva política de viviendas, mediante normas que transforman a los inquilinos en futuros propietarios de la casa en que viven, sancionándose, así, el alquiler de los inmuebles urbanos<sup>35</sup>. Se deroga, *de facto*, la renta inmobiliaria. Con la Reforma Agraria se elimina el latifundio y todas las propiedades de una cierta extensión – que varía de caso a caso –, se confiscan y asignan a los campesinos y obreros agrícolas sin tierra<sup>36</sup>.

Estas medidas constituyen el soporte fundamental de una programación que permite a la ciudad de La Habana cambiar rostro abriéndose al cambio, aun manteniendo el carácter que la historia le ha consignado en una síntesis muy original. Realmente, no es una tarea fácil. Y de hecho, ha tropezado con tales obstáculos que una parte de este complejo proyecto no llega a término, o llega en condiciones bastante precarias. No es ésta la sede para tomar en consideración las causas que impidieron la completa realización de los proyectos iniciales de la revolución. Un objetivo que implica la presencia de condiciones que van más allá de la situación específica de la ciudad, e incluso de la isla, así como, en parte, de las estrategias de la dirección política y cultural del país. De mayor relevancia para el tema que se afronta en esta sede es remarcar cómo las dificultades y el asedio (que actualmente resultan más que evidentes en muchos sectores) no cancelan los esfuerzos y aspiraciones concentrados en primer orden en la construcción de un lenguaje urbano que integre el legado del pasado con los procesos de renovación en acto, incorporando en la vieja trama los signos de un texto nuevo. Se trata de un proceso que no ha tenido un desarrollo fácil, como es bien sabido, y que ha contado con grandes dificultades. Basta pensar solamente en uno de los aspectos que todavía hoy representa uno de los problemas más serios para la completa realización de las estrategias pues-

de habitabilidad, higiene, duración y seguridad (7 abril). La ley que “declara de uso público todas las playas y costas del territorio nacional, autorizando a todos a disfrutarlas libremente”. Se declaran también de uso público e interés social las islas y cayos adyacentes a la isla de Cuba que forman parte del territorio nacional, que hayan sido transferidos en pasado a privados (21 abril).

<sup>35</sup> Para la realización de dicho objetivo se prevén tres fases. En la primera fase, se entrega a los inquilinos la propiedad de las viviendas ocupadas en enero de 1959, con una amortización correspondiente al pago del alquiler por un período que varía de cinco a veinte años. En la segunda fase (“Fase del futuro inmediato”) se programa “la construcción masiva de viviendas que serán concedidas en usufructo permanente mediante el pago de un alquiler mensual que no podrá superar el 10% del rédito familiar”. En la tercera fase (“Fase del futuro próximo”) el Estado, con sus propios recursos, construye las viviendas que cederá en usufructo permanente y gratuito a cada familia. Se establecen, finalmente, las normas que disciplinarán los casos en que el Estado indemnizará a los propietarios, y aquéllos en que no será dado ningún resarcimiento.

<sup>36</sup> Ver Huberman y Sweezy, *Cuba*; Thomas, *Cuba*.



tas en marcha a principios de los años sesenta: la escasez estructural de viviendas. A menudo la carencia dramática de recursos financieros ha conllevado que en muchas zonas del casco histórico de la ciudad se consolide la decadencia de las estructuras físicas heredadas del período precedente al triunfo de la revolución. Una decadencia que ya había señalado Lynch a principios de los años setenta:

En un período de estrechez económica, cuando sobre todo se proponía eliminar las pasadas desigualdades de clases y geográficas, en La Habana fueron suspendidas las inversiones en favor de la potenciación de la base agrícola. [...] En la ciudad ya no se construye, solamente en la zona del puerto o por servicios públicos realmente esenciales: escuelas, clínicas, fábricas o sedes administrativas. La estructura física se está deteriorando lentamente. [...] Todavía en la ciudad no se ha pensado en racionalizar la conservación de los inmuebles o de restaurar el patrimonio de las viviendas utilizables<sup>37</sup>.

A pesar de las enormes dificultades y los no pocos errores políticos y económicos, en el tejido de La Habana aún hoy se percibe el significado de la historia. La ciudad refleja la transformación de la cual es protagonista, y todavía conserva las huellas que el pasar del tiempo ha dejado en el espacio urbano.

Como receptáculo de nuevas posibilidades sociales y espaciales, la capital de Cuba parece poseer una apertura al tiempo que otras ciudades no poseen en absoluto, por muy ‘globales’ que sean, y por mucho que dispongan de recursos económicos infinitamente mayores. El hecho es que el tejido urbano habanero no sólo es testigo de “las comodidades y las injusticias del pasado”<sup>38</sup>, sino que además se encarga de mostrar cómo los modelos y lenguajes recibidos en herencia pueden mudar profundamente sin ser destruidos. Hoy en día, aún podemos percibir la “flexibilidad” y “receptividad” que Kevin Lynch auspiciara, hace treinta años, al futuro de La Habana, como testigo del que hacer de una ciudad que, no obstante las dificultades, quizá se empeña todavía en construir un nuevo horizonte sobre las huellas de su rico pasado.

<sup>37</sup> Lynch, *What Time*, 41.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibíd.*



Fig. 7 - La Plazs Vieja, La Habana (Foto por G. Paolucci).

## Chapter 11

# La Habana: formación y evolución del patrimonio urbano\*

La Habana está constituida por un conjunto de ámbitos urbanos, muchas veces de gran importancia arquitectónica, fuertemente caracterizados por tipologías edilicias y modalidades de uso del suelo público que se han formado y se han sucedido temporal y espacialmente sin continuidad.

Una historia condicionada por su propia posición estratégica y, en general, de la isla de la cual es la capital, que se define, desde el año 1500 hasta nuestros días, según parámetros geopolíticos diferenciados en fases temporales.

El resultado es, por un lado, el más grande entre los antiguos centros coloniales de América Latina: La Habana Vieja, hoy en día prácticamente intacto, caracterizado por una arquitectura civil, militar y religiosa de una alta y peculiar calidad formal. Por otro lado, un conjunto de nudos esenciales del tejido urbano, resultado de sucesivas fases de crecimiento de la ciudad: desde las primeras expansiones extramuros de finales del siglo XVIII, hasta los ejes largos aporricados por columnas delgadas, consolidados en la centuria sucesiva, hasta la retícula de calles arboladas y los opulentos *boulevards* (o avenidas), sitios de un variado eclecticismo del siglo XX, hasta el amplio distrito de rascacielos funcionales, testigos de una imitación de los modelos norteamericanos típica de la última temporada pre-revolucionaria.

En cada una de estas fases de construcción se han sedimentado, en partes diferentes de la capital cubana, funciones y lugares específicos de la vida social, que mantienen todavía su propio atractivo a nivel metropolitano y hacen de La Habana una metrópolis multifacética, multiforme y naturalmente policéntrica.

\* Alexander von Humboldt, *Ensayo político sobre la isla de Cuba* (Alicante: Alicante Publicación, 2003 [Paris: 1826]), 55.

El presente ensayo recorre sintéticamente las etapas fundamentales de la historia urbana de la ciudad hasta la revolución Castrista. Respecto a la temporada siguiente, nos acercamos hacia nuestros días a través de resultados de una investigación piloto específica, presentada en el estudio sucesivo sobre el patrimonio territorial de La Habana del Este: extenso municipio de los quince que componen la gran Habana actual, que figura entre los más ricos en vestigios de la historia y la cultura arquitectónica y urbanística de la segunda mitad del siglo XX, y en concreto de la fase anterior y sucesiva a la revolución.

## I. Dónde y porqué

En correspondencia con el acceso septentrional al golfo de Méjico, en el que se cruzan rutas comerciales internacionales, se ubica el puerto de La Habana, dotado por la naturaleza y por el hombre de múltiples obras de fortificación [...]. Es en correspondencia con La Habana que el golfo del Méjico, el Canal Viejo y el canal de la Bahía, se comunican entre ellos<sup>1</sup>.

Esta posición estratégica, descrita con precisión por Alexander von Humboldt en su *Ensayo político sobre la isla de Cuba*, ha determinado el destino de La Habana Colonial, su afirmación como articulación nodal insustituible, militar y comercial, de las corrientes de tráfico transoceánico activadas por la corona española entre la madrepatria y las Indias occidentales. Un protagonismo esencial, otorgado en el momento de la llegada de Colón a aquellas costas, que, si es verdad que el colonialismo empezó con la conquista de América por parte de España en la primera parte del siglo XVI (consolidada a través de la creación inmediata, entre 1530 y 1560, de una vasta red urbana<sup>2</sup>), la convirtió en la más antigua de las grandes ciudades coloniales. La más antigua y, según muchos, la más hermosa<sup>3</sup>, por sus características naturales y por la riqueza del paisaje construido.

Nous entrons de grand matin dans cette rade de la Havane, qu'on dit la plus belle rade fermée du monde. En effet, elle s'enfonce au pied des collines qui la dominant, et va tourner derrière la ville, présentant ainsi l'abri le plus parfait qu'on puisse imaginer. Ces collines sont verdoyantes, tapissées de fleurs jaunes; en quelques endroits, des groupes de palmiers s'inclinent sur leurs flancs. A droite, la ville s'étale avec ses maisons [...] et ses quais magnifiques [...]. Les maisons blanches ou peintes en bleu, en vert, en rose, en jaune, offrent un aspect bariolé qui étonne d'abord le regard, mais qui le réjouit<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Alexander von Humboldt, *Ensayo político sobre la isla de Cuba* (Alicante: Alicante Publicación, 2003 [Paris: 1826]), 55.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Bairoch, *De Jéricho à Mexico. Villes et économie dans l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), 490.

<sup>3</sup> Como tal declarada en 1982 por la UNESCO "Patrimonio cultural de la humanidad".

<sup>4</sup> "Entramos de mañana temprano en la rada de La Habana, que se dice la más hermosa del mundo. Efectivamente esta se adentra en los pies de las colinas que dominan y curvan detrás

Así, otro de los muchos viajeros del siglo XIX fascinados por la isla describe estéticamente el fuerte impacto visivo que provoca la ciudad<sup>5</sup> al primer contacto, llegando desde el mar, y enumera los elementos que lo determinan: la bahía, la arquitectura multicolor, las avenidas, la palma real (Planta del 1591-1601, p. 20)<sup>6</sup>.

## 2. La Llave del Nuevo Mundo

Fundada en 1519, después de dos intentos de asentamiento a lo largo de la costa sur, por parte de los colonos originarios, San Cristóbal de La Habana encontró su ubicación definitiva al norte, en la costa derecha de la bahía ancha y honda, segura y controlable mediante el acceso de su embocadura. Un territorio en el que se asentaron los Siboneyes, de origen sudamericano, los cuales juntos a los Guanahatebeyes localizados más al sur formaban dos de las etnias habitantes de la isla, compuestas por recolectores poco evolucionados, ambos llevados en los siglos anteriores hacia el extremo occidente por la avanzada de los Taínos, tercera etnia mucho más numerosa, de origen antillano, constituida por agricultores culturalmente más avanzados que habitaban el oriente<sup>7</sup>. Poblaciones destinadas todas a una rápida y generalizada desaparición provocada por el traumático impacto con los *conquistadores*. Antes del final del siglo La Habana, a pesar de haber sufrido numerosos saqueos y derrotas corsarias, tenía ya el estatus de Ciudad y un ordenamiento urbano, regularizado por las *Ordenanzas municipales para la Villa de La Habana* del 1574<sup>8</sup>, para recibir después, en 1634, el apellido altisonante de *Llave del Nuevo*

de la ciudad originando el mejor refugio que se pueda imaginar. Las colinas son verdes, tapizadas de flores amarillas; en unas esquinas grupos de palmeras se inclinan hacia un lado. En la derecha la ciudad se expande con sus casas [...] y sus malecones magníficos [...]. Las casas blancas o pintadas de azul, de verde, de rosado, de amarillo ofrecen un espectáculo multicolor que antes sorprende la mirada, después la alegran". Jean Jacques Ampère, *Promenade en Amérique. États-Unis Cuba Mexique* (París: Michel Levy Frères, 1856), 169-171.

<sup>5</sup> El mito de Cuba y de su capital, muy vivo en los ambientes cultos de la primera mitad del siglo XIX, pasaba también a través de la difusión en Europa de publicaciones ricas de detalladas incisiones, como la *Isla de Cuba Pintoresca* de Moreau y Miahle, o la recogida en la Litografía del gobierno *Paseo pintoresco por la isla de Cuba*, ambas editadas entre 1839 y 1842. Reynaldo González, *Cuba. Un'epopea meticcica* (Florenca: Giunti, 1995), 9.

<sup>6</sup> "Una de las palmas más majestuosas entre todas las que se conocen, la Palma Real, otorga al paisaje de los alrededores de La Habana un inconfundible carácter". Humboldt, *Ensayo*, 60. La Palma ha sido elegida como símbolo nacional de Cuba. Ver también *Cristoforo Colombo e l'apertura degli spazi* (Roma: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> FAR, Dirección política, *Historia de Cuba* (La Habana: Ciencias Sociales, 1985). El elevado nivel cultural y tecnológico del pueblo taíno se puso de manifiesto en una gran exposición organizada en el Museo del Petit Palais, en París, en 1994. Jacques Kerchache, ed., *L'art taíno* (París: Paris-Musées, 1994); Irving Rouse, "Les origines et le développement de la culture taíno", en *ibíd.*

<sup>8</sup> María Victoria Zardoya, "Antecedentes históricos: La ley y el orden", en Dirección Provincial de Planificación Física, Ciudad de La Habana (DPPF-CH) y Oficina del Historiador de la Ciudad de La Habana (OHCH), *El Vedado, Regulaciones Urbanísticas*, (La Habana: Union, 2007), 33.

*Mundo y Antemural de las Indias Occidentales*, que determinará la supremacía de su puerto en el ámbito de las Indias Occidentales. Un momento crucial había sido la decisión de Felipe II de contener los ataques corsarios, extremadamente dañinos para las cajas de la corona, imponiendo un organización rígida del transporte transoceánico de las mercancías, el cual otorgaba a La Habana el papel de único punto de llegada desde España, de internación y, una vez recogidos aquí los bienes procedentes de todas las colonias americanas, de salida de la flota comercial hacia la madre patria<sup>9</sup>. Detrás de esta decisión se encontraba también un dato geográfico de extrema importancia: La Habana es el único puerto del área que se encuentra con su embocadura a un kilómetro de la Corriente del Golfo, un verdadero río que corre tibio y rápido en el mar<sup>10</sup>, favoreciendo la navegación de todos los que logran controlar su recorrido. Una posición privilegiada entonces, que, por la larga estancia de los barcos y de los equipajes, lleva la ciudad a la expansión que adquieren los barrios suburbanos: en la primera mitad del siglo XVII, 50.000 habitantes, la mitad de toda la población de la isla<sup>11</sup>. Una población ocupada en el almacenamiento de las mercancías y en los trabajos de mantenimiento y de construcción de los barcos<sup>12</sup> (incrementada con la inauguración oficial del Real Arsenal en 1724), y también dedicada a actividades, legales e ilegales, para la satisfacción de necesidades primarias y no primarias (alimentos, hospedaje, servicios de todos tipo, recreo, sexo) de un enorme número de marineros para aquellos tiempos, estimado entre 6.000 y 9.000<sup>13</sup>, que vagabundeaban durante meses por las calles de La Habana.

Nace en este contexto inusual lo que hoy, lejos de poderse considerar solamente un estereotipo, se consolidará pronto como uno de los elementos específicos de la identidad urbana: La Habana ciudad del recreo y del vicio, pervertida y acogedora, con la complicidad del clima caluroso, pe-

<sup>9</sup> Sergio Baroni, "Venti anni di trasformazione del territorio", *Casabella* 466 (1981), 37.

<sup>10</sup> "La Corriente del Golfo, la masa dorada, casi sólida pero fluida que se desplaza incontinente de Sur a Norte [...] un río dentro del mar, de noche una neblina misteriosa donde brillaban los faroles de los pescadores del alto, de día un hábitat fascinante por los peces que emergían de ella". Guillermo Cabrera Infante, *La Habana para un infante defunto* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janes, 1986), 329.

<sup>11</sup> Carmen Gavira, "Las ciudades en Cuba: fundación y desarrollo (siglo XVI)", *Ciudad y Territorio* 3-4 (1983), 109. Los datos numéricos sobre la población de La Habana en la primera parte del siglo XVII son inciertos: por ejemplo, Marrero habla, para ese mismo período, de 3.000 habitantes, refiriéndose probablemente a los residentes intramuros. Leví Marrero, *Cuba: Economía y Sociedad*, tomo II (Madrid: Playor, 1975), 53.

<sup>12</sup> La construcción de barcos provocó la rápida deforestación en un amplia área alrededor de la ciudad. "Las astillerías de La Habana eran tan estratégicas para la Corona de España, que en un Decreto Real de 1620 se autorizaba el corte libre en toda Cuba de los árboles destinados a ellas". Roberto Segre, Mario Coyula and John Scarpaci, *Havana: Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis* (Chichester: Wiley, 1997), 21.

<sup>13</sup> Carmen Gavira, "Historia de un proceso de urbanización: Cuba", *Ciudad y Territorio* 1 (1976), 65.

ro agradable, de los trópicos, y la belleza y libertad de las costumbres de la gente extrovertida, desde sus orígenes y colores más variados<sup>14</sup>.

La construcción, a partir desde la mitad del siglo XVI, de un imponente sistema de defensa es corolario de las funciones estratégicas otorgadas a la ciudad, y de ser hasta las puertas del siglo XIX el puerto más importante del hemisferio occidental. Inaugurado con el Castillo de la Real Fuerza (primer ejemplo de fortaleza renacentista con planta de estrella construida en el Nuevo Mundo, largamente considerada como una referencia tipológica fundamental a nivel continental)<sup>15</sup> este sistema fue ampliado y modernizado en el curso de más de dos siglos por la persistencia de las incursiones corsarias alimentadas por las nuevas potencias coloniales<sup>16</sup>. El resultado ha sido una red de macizos edificios militares en piedra colocados a lo largo de la costa y en otros puntos estratégicos, los castillos o fortalezas del Morro, de La Punta, de la Chorrera, de Cojímar, de La Cabaña, del Príncipe, de Atarés, y una multiplicación de muros urbanos compactos de casi cinco kilómetros de ancho, la Muralla, que hacen de La Habana una especie de catálogo de la arquitectura militar americana desde el siglo XVI al siglo XVIII (fig. 10, p. 183, El castillo del Morro).

Excluyendo la Muralla, demolida casi por completo según el plano de Albear y Lara de 1861, la ciudad se conserva todavía en buenas condiciones, o al menos en condiciones recuperables; la mayoría del sistema cuenta con elementos singulares que representan puntos fuertes de referencia espacial. Dada su posición la mayoría de las veces dominante y desvinculada del esquema reticular urbano, dichos elementos constituyen, en muchos casos, lugares de particular sujeción, muy amados por los habaneros, desde los cuales se puede disfrutar de vistas de conjunto del paisaje urbano; recordemos, por ejemplo, la emocionante vista de La Habana Vieja desde la fortaleza del Morro y de la Cabaña, ubicadas en el lado opuesto de la embocadura de la bahía. La concentración, por un lado en obras continuas de edificios militares, asignadas a proyectistas de gran profesionalidad<sup>17</sup>, y en intensas actividades navales por el otro (llevadas a cabo por artesanos cada vez más expertos), si en algunas fases han limitado las inversiones en

<sup>14</sup> Se trata de una constante cuyo desarrollo cíclico, con altos y bajos vinculados a las riquezas de la corona española, a la evolución de la política y del comercio internacional y al más reciente predominio del potente vecino de Estados Unidos. Se provocará un momento de corte brutal con el triunfo de la revolución castrista, portadora de valores inconciliables con la misma, para regresar a la superficie en el nuevo contexto a causa de los cambios de los años noventa.

<sup>15</sup> Roberto Segre, "Significado de Cuba en la evolución tipológica de las fortificaciones coloniales de América", *Revista de la Biblioteca Nacional José Martí* 2 (1968).

<sup>16</sup> Enrico Guidoni y Angela Marino, *Storia dell'urbanistica. Il Seicento* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1979), 465.

<sup>17</sup> El más conocido es Giovanbattista Antonelli, que opera en La Habana; Antonelli y otro italiano, Tiburzio Spannocchi, serán protagonistas de las obras de fortificación militar española a lo largo de las costas del Atlántico y del Pacífico. Mario Sartor, "La città latinoamericana tra antecedenti precolombiani, leggi di fondazione e tradizione", *Zodiac* 8 (1992), 39.

obras de carácter civil y religioso, también han determinado condiciones positivas para la construcción de la ciudad en general, gracias a su alto nivel arquitectónico. Así, todas estas competencias fueron empleadas de nuevo en el traspaso, llevado a cabo a finales del siglo XVI, de las comunes casas rurales de origen autóctono, hechas de hojas, barro, madera y guano, a un tejido de construcciones compuesto por edificios de madera, piedra y ladrillo<sup>18</sup>.

Un traspaso que evoluciona junto con el asentamiento en la ciudad de una cuota creciente de habitantes, favorecido no sólo por el negocio marítimo, sino también por una relación más consolidada con el interior rural, que estaba organizado según fines productivos gracias a la distribución por parte de la corona de concesiones de propiedad, las mercedes, y al paralelo incremento del comercio de esclavos. Dada la completa extinción de los indígenas, dichos esclavos se dedicaban al trabajo de los campos cultivados sobre todo con caña de azúcar y tabaco. La ciudad había tomado una forma desde el núcleo original, contiguo al castillo de la Real Fuerza, siguiendo de manera flexible las reglas del diseño de las ciudades del Nuevo Mundo contenida en las *Leyes de los Reinos de las Indias*, ante todo un sistema de parcelización reticular con la plaza principal en el centro<sup>19</sup>, con adaptaciones a las irregularidades del terreno y a la áspera línea de costa. Las expansiones especificadas en el plan de Cristóbal de Roda de 1603 (el primer plan director de La Habana y quizá de América Latina)<sup>20</sup> y concentradas en el arco sur-occidental quedarán todas al interior de la Muralla hasta la mitad del siglo XVIII.

El tejido urbano que generan alterna, excepto en el caso de pocos centros del poder político, residencias y comercio con edificios religiosos, iglesias y complejos conventuales<sup>21</sup>, en cuyos interiores se hospedan escuelas y albergues para pobres y enfermos, estructurándose progresivamente alrededor de una serie de plazas que condensan valores simbólicos y funciones diferenciadas: el poder del Estado en la Plaza de Armas, la práctica religio-

<sup>18</sup> Ernesto Guglielminetti y Cecilia Massignan, *La Habana: Llave del Nuevo Mundo y Antemural de las Indias Occidentales* (Pisa: Centro Studi G. Guidi, 1997).

<sup>19</sup> “[...] y cuando hagan la planta del lugar repártanlo por sus plazas, calles y solares a cordel y regla, comenzando desde la plaza mayor y sacando desde ella las calles a las puertas y caminos principales y dejando tanto compás abierto que aunque la población vaya en gran crecimiento se pueda proseguir y dilatar en la misma forma”. De una orden de Carlos V, de 1526, citada en Rafael Manzano “Prólogo” en Javier Aguilera Rocas y Luis J. Moreno Rexach (compiladores), *Urbanismo Español en America* (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1973), 12.

<sup>20</sup> Mario Gonzáles, “Planos, esquemas y planes directores de la ciudad de La Habana”, *Arquitectura y Urbanismo* 2 (1993), 10.

<sup>21</sup> Llama la atención la secuencia de las edificaciones religiosas del período: “Desde el final del siglo XVI los discípulos de San Francisco y de San Domenico pusieron las bases para sus templos; los discípulos de San Agustino en 1608; el hospital de los hermanos de San Juan de Dios se funda en 1602; el templo de Santa Catalina, en 1689; el Santo Cristo del Buen Viaje, en 1640; el Santuario de Monserrate, en 1690; el oratorio de San Filippo Neri, en 1693; el hospital de Paula, nel 1665”. Eusebio Leal Spengler, *Detén el paso caminante* (Milano: Electa, 1988), 31.



sa en la Plaza del Cristo y en la sucesiva Plaza de la Catedral, el comercio interior en la Plaza Nueva (hoy Plaza Vieja) y con el extranjero en la Plaza de San Francisco (fig. 8, p. 183, La Plaza Vieja en 1762)<sup>22</sup>.

A las macizas arquitecturas del siglo XVII, cuya austeridad se evidencia por el uso de la piedra conchífera local, se añaden más tarde ejemplares de finales de la centuria sucesiva, que terminarán en dos episodios de arquitectura barroca civil y religiosa de mayor relieve para la ciudad, el Palacio de los Capitanes Generales y la catedral. En esta temporada se afirma ese conjunto de elementos tipológicos vivaces, morfológicos y decorativos, muchas veces vinculados a la tradición mudéjar: las cortes y los patios ricos de vegetación, los alfarjes, elaborados techos de madera entrecruzada y trabajada, los arcos *polilobatos* y de medio punto, cerrados por vitrales de colores, los aleros, las rejas, las celosías, las persianas y otros componentes de madera funcionales para el paso del aire y de la luz, los ladrillos decorativos de barro<sup>23</sup>, que han contribuido de manera neta a la elevada y peculiar calidad formal del ámbito urbano de La Habana, y en concreto de La Habana Vieja (Planta de 1742-1762)<sup>24</sup>.

### 3. La ciudad del azúcar

La ocupación por parte de los ingleses en 1762, que duró poco menos de un año, constituye un punto de inflexión para la ciudad que, con la ruptura del monopolio comercial español en las Indias Occidentales, asiste a la caída de la importancia de su posición estratégica, pero que ve cómo se perfila también la apertura de nuevas posibilidades de tráfico directo con otras colonias americanas, en primer lugar las del norte, todas a punto de lograr la independencia. La Habana deja de ser Llave del Nuevo Mundo, para adquirir una función diferente, identificándose cada vez más como capital del azúcar. Paralelamente con las otras dos actividades destacadas de la isla (el tabaco ya desarrollado<sup>25</sup> y el café de introducción más reciente), la industria azucarera empieza su período de máximo desarrollo hacia finales del siglo XVIII, para llegar a representar desde ese momento en adelante, y con continuidad hasta nuestros días, el sector más importante para la economía cubana.

La Habana, además, constituye el lugar privilegiado para la *sacarocracia*, cuerpo central de la nueva burguesía criolla que maneja los cañaverales, inmensas cultivaciones de caña, y los ingenios, los centros de transformación, empleando cuanto gana de los recursos de la isla<sup>26</sup> para construir una ciudad

<sup>22</sup> Segre, Coyula y Scarpaci, *Havana*, 21. Ver también Carlos Venegas Fornias, "Plaza Vieja, textos complementarios", *Arquitectura Cuba* 355-356 (1983).

<sup>23</sup> Rachel Carley, *Cuba. 400 Años de Arquitectura* (Londres: Cartago, 1997), 13.

<sup>24</sup> Leal Spengler, *Detén el paso caminante*.

<sup>25</sup> La industria del tabaco está presente en La Habana con 150 molinos a partir de 1715. González, *Cuba*, 32.

<sup>26</sup> En primer lugar, los inmensos bosques están sometidos a una intensa deforestación para lograr áreas de cultivos y combustible para la elaboración del azúcar. Von Humboldt lamenta

a su imagen y semejanza; una ciudad vivida, cada vez más, con la llegada del siglo XIX, como capital de un Estado que parece existir de hecho, aunque España logrará retrasar su independencia durante mucho tiempo.

Se violan las viejas murallas convertidas en el límite de una población demasiado aglomerada y socialmente indiferenciada, hasta llegar, en 1862, a la autorización por parte del gobierno a su destrucción progresiva, para llevar a cabo una urbanización que se expande rápidamente en los distritos, según los esquemas de asentamiento que más corresponden, en este caso, a una jerarquía del censo y a nuevos modelos funcionales (fig. 9, p. 183, La Habana en el siglo XIX [Deroy]).

La *sacarocracia* prefiere a los suntuosos palacios de La Habana Vieja, de los cuales se realizan todavía algunos ejemplos de interés, las elegantes quintas: residencias rodeadas por jardines tropicales que se suceden en el reticulado de anchas avenidas de los nuevos barrios residenciales, planificados y realizados más allá de las inmediatas expansiones extramuros hacia suroeste y oeste, como el Cerro, primer asentamiento de élite de La Habana<sup>27</sup>, de la primera mitad del siglo XIX; y el Vedado<sup>28</sup>, de la segunda.

Para muchos de dichos palacios empieza un proceso de abandono y de degradación, que muchas veces se concluye después de decenas de años de uso como barbacoas, a los cuales se alternan nuevas intervenciones especulativas de solares y ciudadelas<sup>29</sup>, tipologías diferentes, pero todas correspondientes a los angostos y animados solares en alquiler en los cuales se concentra la parte más pobre de la población libre habanera. A lo largo de las arterias ortogonales que delimitan las manzanas de extramuros del siglo XIX, se alternan edificios residenciales, destinados fundamentalmente a franjas medio-bajas de la población, y a actividades comerciales y productivas. Aquí se impone una tipología con portales frontales continuos que, empleada por primera vez en uno de los lugares más significativos de la ciudad amurallada, la Plaza Vieja, tendrá amplia difusión en el curso del siglo XIX, dando como resultado ese recorrido que desembocará en la imagen de la ciudad de las columnas<sup>30</sup>. Un ape-

que "Alrededor de La Habana, en el Anfiteatro de Regla, estas palmas, que eran mi delicia, van desapareciendo de año en año; desaparecidas las forestas de bambú de un tiempo, los estanques y las lagunas, hoy secos, se cultivan [...] en Cuba, la tierra, ya despojada de su estrato vegetal, ofrece hoy sólo una débil huella de su antigua abundancia selvática". Humboldt, *Ensayo*, 63.

<sup>27</sup> Felicia Chateloin, "Colón, un territorio clave en el desarrollo habanero", en *El barrio de Colón*, ed. Gina Rey (La Habana: Pònton Caribe, 2005), 17.

<sup>28</sup> El Vedado está destinado, en el curso de su progresiva edificación, a convertirse en un lugar excelente y paradigmático durante la sucesión armoniosa de las diferentes tendencias de la arquitectura habanera, acumulando "un rico patrimonio construido que abarca fundamentalmente al Neoclasicismo, al Eclecticismo, Art Decó y Movimiento Moderno [...] con una mezcla balanceada de unidad en la variedad que es la esencia eterna de la armonía". Mario Coyula, "Más acá del río y bajo los árboles a la sombra de un Vedado que ya no es más", en DPPF-CH y OHCH, *El Vedado*, 62.

<sup>29</sup> Carley, *Cuba*, 86.

<sup>30</sup> "[...] una de las más singulares constantes del estilo habanero: la increíble profusión de

lativo que expresa un elemento fuerte de la identidad urbana, destinado a reproducirse en el tiempo de manera capilar, a través de la creación de largas secuencias de pasajes porticados por sutiles columnas (fig. 13, p. 184, La Calzada del Monte).

Los mismos capitales que redefinen la geografía residencial de la ciudad concurren en su desarrollo en general. Un desarrollo que aparece muchas veces como vanguardia (no sólo respecto a la realidad hispanoamericana)<sup>31</sup>, y que se concretiza físicamente en una serie de obras de construcción civil de prestigio, iniciada a finales del siglo XVIII, en concreto con los gobiernos de Fondeviela de La Torre y de Las Casas, y que prosiguen durante toda la centuria siguiente, con momentos de especial activismo bajo el gobierno de Tacón, ya en los años treinta. Las articulaciones nodales del nuevo espacio urbano, las plazas y las anchas avenidas están acompañadas por amplias franjas verdes, arboledas continuas, jardines, áreas de recreo y de paseo (es de este período el paseo habanero más famoso, en las afueras, cerca de las murallas, el Prado, ahora Paseo Martí), en el cual se asoman un número progresivamente creciente de edificios administrativos, mercados, bibliotecas, teatros, escuelas, asociaciones culturales, aduanas, estaciones de ferrocarril y marítimas (fig. 12, p. 184, Edificios en el paseo del Prado).

El elemento unificador de los barrios residenciales, de los lugares del comercio y de los centros administrativos es el estilo neoclásico de inspiración francesa y anglosajona, que caracteriza a la arquitectura y a los espacios urbanos, nuevos o remodelados según los dictámenes de planes y reglamentaciones edilicias de la época<sup>32</sup>. Un estilo que evoca realidades más adelantadas con el papel de representación simbólica de modernidad y liberalismo, en contraposición con obsoletos modelos barrocos de importación española<sup>33</sup>, y que, adaptados en clave local, constituye un sólido momento de búsqueda de una identidad cultural habanera y cubana en

columnas, en una ciudad que es emporio de columnas, selva de columnas, columnata infinita, última urbe en tener columnas en tal demasía". Alejo Carpentier, *La ciudad de las columnas* (La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 1982), 26.

<sup>31</sup> La Habana ha sido un lugar de innovaciones en el pasado como, por ejemplo, en el caso de la construcción del primer acueducto de las Américas, la Zanja Real (1592), hacia finales del siglo XVIII, y ha introducido precozmente muchos símbolos del progreso técnico: sistema postal (1765), pavimentación de las calles (1780), barcos de vapor (1819), ferrocarril (1837), gas (1848), telégrafo (1855), teléfono (1881), iluminación eléctrica (1890), cinematógrafo (1897); y ya en nuestro siglo, el tranvía eléctrico (1901), la radio (1920), la televisión (1950). Este elenco, excepto algunos elementos extraídos de otras fuentes, aparece citado orgullosamente en una publicación del Grupo para el Desarrollo Integral de la Capital, *Estrategia* (La Habana: GDIC, 1990), 10.

<sup>32</sup> En concreto el plan de Carrillo de Albornoz, operativo entre 1830 y 1850, y el de Albear y Lara, desde 1861.

<sup>33</sup> La influencia de la cultura española se destaca todavía en el Plan del Vedado "[...] un proyecto de vanguardia [...] un exponente del inicio de la historia del planeamiento urbanístico moderno [...] inspirado en los ensanches europeos, particularmente el de Barcelona" de Ildelfonso Cerdà. Gina Rey, "Prefacio", en DPPF-CH y OHCH *El Vedado*, 25.

general<sup>34</sup>. Una identidad que tiene que enfrentarse con la homologación con los modelos norteamericanos, tal y como se pone de manifiesto, en el campo de la construcción, en la difusión, sobre todo a lo largo de la costa, de casas unifamiliares de madera prefabricadas, importadas desde Estados Unidos y montadas directamente en el lugar, de las cuales nos habla con comprensible sorpresa von Humboldt<sup>35</sup>.

#### 4. La capital

La Habana inaugura el nuevo siglo como capital de un Estado soberano, aún bajo la presión del control de Estados Unidos, país demasiado cercano y capilarmente involucrado en el tejido económico de Cuba, por no decir que persigue su anexión. Los recorridos y las modalidades de expansión de la ciudad prosiguen con continuidad, según las líneas trazadas en los años precedentes, pero con una fuerte aceleración en la fase post-bélica, gracias al flujo vertiginoso de capitales<sup>36</sup> procedentes del aumento del precio del azúcar en los mercados mundiales.

En las primeras décadas del siglo XX se produce una expansión urbana con una rapidez nunca alcanzada antes. La Habana "crece vertiginosamente en todo. En población, en extensión, en riqueza, en ostentación, en cultura"<sup>37</sup>.

En este período se multiplican las suntuosas quintas en los verdes barrios residenciales en rápida ampliación y, paralelamente se asiste al alejamiento de las clases medias del centro histórico, cada vez más abandonado, con la excepción del área cercana al puerto, en la cual surgieron nuevos edificios financieros y comerciales vinculados a las actividades de las compañías navales, con funciones de residencia de bajo presupuesto, única alternativa de vivienda para los estratos pobres a las "llega y pon"<sup>38</sup>.

En los centros de poder se produce un cambio decisivo. Los distintos dirigentes que se suceden en el gobierno apuntan a una representación del nuevo papel de capital nacional de la ciudad, vinculada a su propio nombre<sup>39</sup>, a pesar de encontrarse en un estado de clara sumisión, incluso estilística, a Estados Unidos. Se edifican, en primer lugar, los símbolos canónicos de la institución estatal, los monumentales Palacio Presidencial (1920) y

<sup>34</sup> Roberto Segre, "Continuità e rinnovamento nell'architettura cubana del XX secolo", *Casabella* 466 (1981), 10.

<sup>35</sup> "Las casas [...] construidas a lo largo de la bahía son verdaderamente elegantes, con una arquitectura ligera. Una vez trazada la planta estas se ordenaban desde los Estados Unidos como si fueran muebles". Humboldt, *Ensayo político*, 63.

<sup>36</sup> En la historiografía cubana esta fase se identifica con el nombre de "la danza de los millores". FAR, Dirección política, *Historia*, 574.

<sup>37</sup> Sergio Baroni, *Hacia una cultura del territorio* (La Habana: Casablanca, 2003), 87.

<sup>38</sup> Versión local de "villas-miseria", compuesta por barracas de escombros, florecidas ilegalmente en las periferias no apetecibles de finales de los años Veinte. Julio Le Riverend Brusone, *La Habana, Espacio y Vida* (Madrid: Mapfre, 1992), 218-219.

<sup>39</sup> Gavira, "Historia", 67.

Capitolio (1929), mientras que en pocos años se suceden tres propuestas de plan director urbano: la de Montoulieu de 1922, la de Martínez Inclán de 1925 y por último el más célebre Plan de Embellecimiento y Ampliación de La Habana, de Forestier, en 1926<sup>40</sup>. De la visión de éste último (una ciudad verde recorrida de avenidas de tipo hausmanniano, que unen polos de referencia espaciales, y dotada de un centro moderno y de amplios parques), quedan las pocas intervenciones puntuales que permitirá la crisis del 29, en concreto la reforma del área alrededor del Capitolio, del Paseo del Prado y de la Avenida del Puerto (fig. 15, p. 184, Palacio Presidencial y Capitolio).

Mientras tanto, la ciudad cambia de manera relevante los detalles arquitectónicos de su paisaje urbano, que ya no se encontraba en condiciones unificadas y homogéneas como en las edificaciones del siglo XIX, sino en una situación muy diversificada en la sucesión de *revivals* y de revisiones formales de lo más heterogéneo, que terminará en los años treinta en una difusión de arquitecturas *art déco*<sup>41</sup>, segunda solamente a la de Miami. Un eclecticismo que se propaga desde una élite en búsqueda de una representación original de la propia riqueza, a través de códigos estéticos ya en auge sobre todo en Europa, penetrando en el fondo de la cultura local para convertirse en un elemento generalmente compartido, “aquel eclecticismo popular, modesto y digno el cual es el alma más visible y difundida de la arquitectura habanera (fig. 16, p. 184, Cine-teatro Fausto)”<sup>42</sup>.

Un elemento fuerte de la identidad urbana, que encuentra su lugar por antonomasia en el Malecón, muy amado por los habaneros “que descubrieron la maravilla de transitar junto a la inmensidad del mar”<sup>43</sup>, construido por fases entre finales de siglo y 1930, desde el Castillo de la Punta hacia la desembocadura del río Almendares, límite tradicional de la ciudad (fig. 11, p. 183, Edificios en el Malecón)<sup>44</sup>.

Recorriéndolo ahora, y dejando de lado la aflicción causada por el grado avanzado de muchas fachadas, la sensación es la de avanzar por un alineado y vivido catálogo de arquitecturas de la época, de diferentes tipologías y colores, unidas en una especie de cortina escenográfica de tonalidades que se modifican con el cambio de la luz intensa del mar del sur.

Y siempre en el Malecón, en una área específica más al oeste delimitada por el mismo (gracias al reflujo conspicuo de capital vinculado a hechos béli-

<sup>40</sup> Mario Gonzáles, “Planos, esquemas y planes directores de la ciudad de La Habana”, *Arquitectura y Urbanismo* 2 (1993), 12-13.

<sup>41</sup> Resulta de notable interés la red de cines *decó* en el interior del centro urbano, “[...] el templo art déco que fueron los cines construidos en los finales de los años treinta”. Cabrera Infante, *La Habana*, 23.

<sup>42</sup> Sergio Baroni, “Rapporto dall’Avana”, *Zodiac* 8 (1992), 181.

<sup>43</sup> Chateloin, “Colón”, 20.

<sup>44</sup> “7 km de fachada marítima, de muro de contención y de paseo que discurre entre [...] diferentes sectores urbanos cuyas características diferenciales acompañan el devenir histórico del desarrollo urbanístico de la ciudad”. Programa Malecón. España + Cuba, “El Malecón de La Habana. Un proceso de transformación y de cooperación”, *Ciudadcity* 3 (1998), 20.

cos europeos), podrán desplegarse libremente, en los años cuarenta y cincuenta, los modelos norteamericanos, con la creación de un distrito de rascacielos (el primero el gran “fuori scala” del edificio Focsa) del que se sentía muy orgulloso el dictador Batista. En el centro de dicho distrito, La Rampa<sup>45</sup> se convirtió en el nuevo centro cosmopolita de La Habana en los años cincuenta.

Posteriormente empieza la fase de la historia de La Habana ligada a la revolución castrista que, junto con el resto, mezclará completamente todas las cartas del juego urbano (fig. 14, Hotel Nacional y Edificio Focsa).

<sup>45</sup> “La Rampa [...] el tramo final della Calle 23 [...] termina en la intersección con el Malecón y la Calzada de Infanta, límite oeste de la ciudad central a principios del siglo XX. Ese tramo fue rellenado con edificaciones en menos de doce años a partir de 1947”. Coyula, “Más acá del río”, 61.



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Fig. 8 – La Plaza Vieja en 1762 (Venegas Fornias, 1983).

Fig. 9 – La Habana en el siglo XIX (Deroy) Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Habana.

Fig. 10 – El castillo del Morro.

Fig. 11 – Edificios en el Malecon.



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Fig. 12 – Edificios en el paseo del Prado (Foto por L. Paloscia).

Fig. 13 – La Calzada del Monte (Foto por L. Paloscia).

Fig. 14 – Hotel Nacional y Edificio Focsa (Foto por L. Paloscia).

Fig. 15 – Palacio Presidencial y Capitolio (Foto por L. Paloscia).

Fig. 16 – Cine-teatro Fausto (Foto por L. Paloscia).



## Chapter 12

# La Habana del Este: territorio y arquitectura en la segunda mitad del siglo XX

Los resultados de una exhaustiva búsqueda capilar en el territorio de La Habana del Este, uno de los grandes municipios de la capital cubana, se encuentran en su parte más específicamente vinculada al patrimonio arquitectónico. El objetivo es demostrar la riqueza de la producción arquitectónica de la segunda mitad del s. XX. Por supuesto, La Habana del Este constituye el lugar probablemente más relevante dentro del complejo de culturas de finales de siglo. Sin embargo, un análisis más profundo y que se extienda por todo el territorio metropolitano puede revelar la existencia de un patrimonio contemporáneo de considerable valor.

### I. El Atlas del patrimonio territorial

La historia arquitectónica de toda la provincia de Ciudad Habana posee una riqueza y una variedad que no se refieren solamente al período colonial. El valor patrimonial de una gran cantidad de obras arquitectónicas del siglo XX todavía no está oficialmente reconocida y, en la mayoría de los casos, se entrecruza con valores que superan el simple contexto arquitectónico formal. En la investigación llevada a cabo durante la elaboración del atlas del Patrimonio Territorial de La Habana del Este, estos valores se han identificado no sólo a través de aspectos formales, estéticos y espaciales, sino también a través de una gama más amplia de factores que se pueden reconducir al concepto mismo de valor territorial, como la significación artística intrínseca, el valor cultural y la calidad representativa de un momento específico y, por lo tanto, de la identidad local del territorio. Se incluyen también factores sociales de especial relevancia debido a las dinámicas comunitarias del contexto en el que se desarrollan. La revolución, sin embargo, no expresó sus mejores contenidos en términos monumentales. En el área del Municipio de La Habana del Este, se

han identificado como valores obras de la arquitectura escolar, que contrariamente con otras de una relevancia expresivo-monumental, intentaron comunicar los símbolos de la sociedad y de su cultura, evidenciados en las escuelas-monumento a la educación de las masas. Más allá de este tipo de arquitectura escolar, encontramos el caso evidente de los edificios multifamiliares, modelos de prefabricación abierta, ligadas a decisiones económicas y políticas, desafortunadamente a corto plazo. La necesidad de construir casas, escuelas y hospitales con rapidez y con recursos mínimos, desembocó en una utilización creciente de elementos prefabricados, con la uniformidad y monotonía consiguientes, en la reducción del nivel estético, llevándolo hacia el formalismo y el tecnicismo. En este ámbito, lo prioritario no es establecer la relación dialéctica entre proceso social y plano formal, entre estética y técnica. El significado cultural de la arquitectura no queda anulado, incluso cuando la rigidez formal y la ausencia de valores simbólicos y expresivos caracterizan a determinados momentos políticos y económicos específicos.

Simplificando mucho, se pueden llegar a considerar las conclusiones de este análisis (los valores arquitectónicos en primer lugar), como el resultado de una ecuación en la que se trata de mantener la mayor cantidad de variables posibles, haciendo referencia a los conceptos de estética y de forma siempre en un plano histórico-social.

Este breve ensayo sobre la investigación llevada a cabo en el Municipio de La Habana del Este se centra en los valores arquitectónicos que han caracterizado la arquitectura cubana de la segunda mitad del siglo XX, a través de una síntesis de las fases principales de la relación entre movimientos sociales y culturales y las consecuencias que se han generado en el ámbito arquitectónico. El desarrollo, los límites de las utopías y las consiguientes respuestas arquitectónicas, la dificultad total en la elaboración de una identidad arquitectónica cubana, que se ha quedado congelada en una fase de gestación que todavía no se ha concluido, y que hoy en día parece definitivamente ser objeto de un nuevo destacado interés.

## **2. Arquitectura y territorio: Años 50**

En todo el país el proceso de sustitución del repertorio ecléctico resulta poco nítido y muy lento. La primera obra reconocida como moderna, que aparece en el Vedado en los años treinta, es el edificio de apartamentos y oficinas Pedro Martínez Inclán, de Justo Carrillo. A pesar de la gran cantidad de modificaciones del estado actual, es posible imaginar el impacto urbano que genera su expresividad, basada en la ausencia total de la decoración y en los volúmenes puros de los balcones continuos. En una misma línea obtiene mayor consenso la obra de Rafael de Cárdenas, que culmina los años veinte construyendo mansiones eclécticas y comienza los años treinta y cuarenta con un énfasis de modernidad que lo convierte

en la vanguardia del momento (fig. 21, p. 196). En este período se desarrolla una especie de regionalismo moderno muy interesante, limitado al tema residencial. Se caracteriza por una particular integración de valores definidos por el movimiento moderno con los valores locales estratificados de la tradición de siglos. En esta arquitectura racionalista cubana reaparecen los códigos de la casa colonial: la relación con la luz, los patios, los portales, las persianas, los cristales de colores, los ladrillos y las tejas, la cerámica y los azulejos. Las obras más significativas de esta tendencia fueron construidas por Mario Romañach, Frank Martínez y Nicolás Quintana. Frank Martínez, que en el sector Santa María del Mar construye la casa de Carlos Estrada y la casa de Ulises Carbó, destaca desde sus primeras obras por el acercamiento estético lecorbusiano, introduciendo el recurrente paralelepípedo sobre pilotes, soluciones más cálidas y locales, a través del uso de materiales a vista. Sucesivamente abandona el uso de los pilotes y de la planta libre y reconstruye una serie de residencias en las cuales obtiene el mayor resultado del período en la búsqueda de una identidad arquitectónica cubana. Las soluciones espaciales propuestas por Martínez eliminan la diferencia entre externo e interno por medio de acogedores patios centrales e interesantes soluciones para mejorar la ventilación interna de los ambientes, como los desniveles de los entrepisos. La otra figura destacada de la arquitectura cubana de los 50 es Nicolás Quintana, que adopta formas más universales y basa sus obras en la diferenciación volumétrica de sus partes. Frecuentemente introduce techos a dos aguas para jerarquizar los espacios, enfatiza la necesidad de obtener un ambiente cubano, y para ello reasume detalles tradicionales como las celosías y las vidrieras de colores. Muchas de sus obras más significativas son realizadas en Varadero; en La Habana destacan la casa de Ramírez Corría y la casa de Mardonio Santiago. En el municipio de La Habana del Este realiza la casa de Eduardo Rivero, en 1954, ubicada en el sector Santa María del Mar. En los edificios públicos que se construyen en este período ya es posible reencontrar las influencias del purismo miesiano como, por ejemplo, en el instituto Edison de La Víbora; la adaptación de las paredes continúa con la aplicación de los rompe soles lecorbusianos, como en el Retiro Odontológico del Vedado de Antonio Quintana. Los clubes sociales y los centros recreativos burgueses permitieron una cierta experimentación formal en el uso de estructuras ligeras para la cobertura y la integración con el ambiente natural. Es el caso del Club Médico de Marcial E. González y Virgilio Chacón, en Santa María del Mar, o del Club Bancario Nacional, hoy Hotel Atlántico (fig. 24, p. 196), de Lanz y Del Pozo, donde se pone de relieve la clara influencia de la arquitectura de Niemeyer.

El ejemplo más significativo dentro de esta temática data de 1951; se trata del salón Arcos de Cristal del Cabaret Tropicana, de Max Borges Jr., con una solución de cobertura a veces telescópica, cuya estructura se re-

duce a una cobertura ligera absorbida por el predominio de la vegetación tropical. Esta búsqueda tecnológica del cálculo estructural en términos expresivos reaparece en una de las primeras experiencias de prefabricación que se realiza en Cuba: los laboratorios de la facultad de Ingeniería Eléctrica de la Universidad de Villanueva, llevada a cabo por Manuel Gutiérrez en el municipio de Playa. Entre 1954 y 1956, se construye en el Vedado el edificio Focsa (400 apartamentos y 28 pisos) de los arquitectos Ernesto Gómez Sampara y Martín Domínguez. El Focsa marca una etapa más urbana que arquitectónica: una ciudad dentro de la ciudad, un hábitat burgués que elude la trama urbana de las grandes mansiones de los años 20. Este momento arquitectónico está marcado también por el importante tema de la integración entre arquitectura, escultura y pintura. En 1952 se promulga un decreto ley que establece que el 6% del coste de los edificios públicos y el 3% de los privados sería dedicado a la realización de pinturas y esculturas de artistas cubanos. De hecho, la mayor parte de los artistas de la vanguardia entre los años treinta y cincuenta realizaron obras integradas con la arquitectura: Mario Románach trabaja con Roberto Diago, Nicolás Quintana con Domingo Ravanet, Ricardo Porro con Portocarrero, Antonio Quintana con Wilfredo Lam. En 1954 se levanta el Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, proyectado por Alfonso Rodríguez, que todavía representa el complejo más significativo a nivel nacional. La entrada al museo está jerarquizada por la escultura de Rita Longa: Forma, Espacio y Luz.

La arquitectura de los hoteles es la última en insertarse en este tema de integración plástica-arquitectura. En 1957 se construye el hotel Habana Riviera proyectado por Polevitzky, Jonson & associates, con obras de López Duribe, Cundo Bermúdez, Hidalgo de Caviedes y Florencio Gelabert, también autor de la escultura del Hotel Atlántico. En el Hotel Habana Hilton (actual Habana Libre) proyectado por Becket, Alfonso y Menéndez, trabajan Portocarrero, Carreño, Cundo, Bermúdez, Juan David y Amelia, autor del mural de la entrada. La búsqueda de las fusiones entre pintura y arquitectura llega a formas plásticas en las cuales el edificio en sí es tratado como una obra escultórica. Más que construir, el arquitecto modela. La obra de Ricardo Porro es tal vez la que más se acerca a la totalidad de esta integración. Su obra se extiende hasta principios de los años sesenta, momento en el que produce una de las obras más relevantes de toda la arquitectura cubana: las Escuelas Nacionales de Arte (fig. 22, p. 196). Las Escuelas Nacionales de Arte de Cubanacán, de 1960-1963, son quizá la síntesis más avanzada de la arquitectura cubana: los elementos que se integran en estas obras recogen una tradición que parte del período colonial, a través de la herencia afro hasta alcanzar la integración entre el arte y la arquitectura, y llega a formas plásticas en las cuales los edificios mismos están modelados como materia escultórica. El uso del ladrillo a vista o enlucidos en cal, las galerías de sombra, los

patios internos, las tramas de cerámica y madera cernedoras de luz y la integración con la naturaleza alcanzaron una nueva dimensión formal y espacial.

### **3. Arquitectura y territorio: Años 60**

El final de los años cincuenta y los primeros años de los sesenta marcan el fin del movimiento moderno. La renovación de la obra de una generación de arquitectos como Romañach, Quintana, Max Borges, Frank Martínez, Eugenio Batista, se puede resumir como la búsqueda de la tipicidad, del espíritu vernacular radicado en el clima y en las costumbres locales. Fueron los únicos verdaderos innovadores e investigadores de un nuevo estilo propio, a través de la reinterpretación de las soluciones esenciales de la arquitectura tradicional cubana en un lenguaje moderno; una investigación que, además de su carácter expresivo-artístico, era el resultado de la adaptación a un determinado ambiente físico. Los radicales cambios políticos se reflejan intensamente en la arquitectura y en su forma de producción. Se produce la emigración en masa de los principales protagonistas del movimiento moderno. Entre 1959 y 1961, año de la declaración del carácter socialista del nuevo gobierno, la prioridad constructiva se traslada radicalmente a los proyectos de contenido social, racionalizando la construcción privada de la burguesía local. En 1959 se crea el INAV (Instituto Nacional de Ahorro y Vivienda) que establece la base para los planos de realización de las viviendas populares y del saneamiento de los barrios degradados.

Se adoptan masivamente los sistemas prefabricados de cemento armado con elementos estructurales producidos a pie de obra, en los cuales se utiliza una tecnología muy simple, con elementos de dimensiones reducidas para ser montadas manualmente. En 1963, en La Habana, se presenta la Unidad Vecinal N1, que posee una clara intención a todos los niveles de sustituir el enfoque individual con el del grupo de trabajo, y la estética exclusivista con la función social. A partir de este momento comienza una larga etapa arquitectónica de ausencia de valores simbólicos y expresivos en las construcciones en masa: la necesidad de construir, en el menor tiempo posible y al mínimo coste, casas, escuelas y hospitales genera una utilización cada vez más creciente de elementos prefabricados, con la consiguiente uniformidad y monotonía que comporta, bajando el nivel estético hacia una gran rigidez formal y hacia el tecnicismo; dicha aptitud se extenderá hasta la actualidad, a causa de las difíciles condiciones políticas y económicas, sin anular por esta razón su valor social: construir para el pueblo con los escasísimos recursos del país. Los parámetros en juego desde los primeros momentos de la arquitectura de masa son la disponibilidad de mano de obra, la participación del pueblo en la construcción, y la escasez de materiales. El camino hacia

la prefabricación pasa por la interpretación de los sistemas constructivos de Europa después de la segunda guerra mundial, como el sistema Gran Panel, que en Cuba es adoptado con paneles más ligeros. Desde el principio resulta evidente que el sistema de prefabricación cerrado que se utiliza para las urbanizaciones a gran escala, como la Unidad Vecinal y la sucesiva Alamar, no son suficientes para generar una diversificación y una organización más compleja del conjunto paisajístico. Todo ello en un territorio que ha sufrido ya una parcelación fragmentada y monótona bajo el mito de la residencia individual y del *sweet home* de los suburbios jardín, "remasticada" en una variedad tipológica infinita y repetida en serie en los repartos especulativos del municipio de La Habana del Este. Se llevan a cabo algunos intentos por salir de la rigidez de la prefabricación por ejemplo con el sistema constructivo Sandino, evolución del sistema Novoa que nace antes de la Revolución como alternativa en la construcción económica. Como en el caso del Novoa, la ventaja principal es la posibilidad de montar manualmente los distintos elementos: las columnas y los paneles de alrededor de 70 kilos. Los paneles tenían un espesor de 6 cms y la cubierta de 10, con un consumo de materiales muy bajo. El sistema Sandino se presta a soluciones tecnológicas más complejas y abiertas hacia la integración con los elementos artesanales. En el municipio de la Habana del Este se encuentran todavía algunos ejemplos en buen estado, entre los cuales hay que citar una casa de dos plantas en la que resultan evidentes las posibilidades de diversificación de las soluciones formales.

El proyecto de Antonio Quintana y Alberto Rodríguez constituye una atractiva experiencia para superar el reductivismo formal y espacial; se trata de un edificio experimental de 17 pisos, realizado en la zona del Malecón, en el Vedado. Es un prototipo de bloque alto construido con la tecnología de moldes deslizantes (fig. 25, p. 196). La investigación de Quintana y Rodríguez se perfila como una interesante aproximación para lograr una célula espacial unitaria de la vivienda. Desafortunadamente, no tiene una consecución adecuada en los sucesivos bloques altos realizados con el mismo sistema constructivo, por ejemplo, en Alamar. Mientras la residencia establece la continuidad con un hipotético colectivo, la necesidad de construir servicios básicos y la infraestructura se basan en las mismas premisas: período corto y recursos mínimos.

En un momento en el cual la arquitectura atravesaba el período del brutalismo de Kenzo Tange, en Cuba continúa la serie y tipificación de los elementos que la componen. La prefabricación y los tentativos de salir de la rigidez serán la constante de todo el proceso arquitectónico hasta la actualidad. El elemento en el que se concentran los esfuerzos, el más complejo y el más conspicuo de la construcción, es la cubierta. La búsqueda de una cubierta ligera renueva el interés por las investigaciones de la pasada década, y desemboca en soluciones interesantes como el

sistema *folded-plates*: parábolas prefabricadas de un espesor mínimo. En 1961 se realizan las cabañas del Mégano, la taquilla de Bacuranao y las de Guanabo. El modelo *folded-plates* se utiliza sobre todo en los centros recreativos balnearios de todo el país. La ligereza de las semi bóvedas de las cabañas y su curvatura contrapuestas a la vegetación se convierten en un elemento identificador de los centros turísticos. Estas cáscaras estructurales que determinan el espacio de la célula ya habían sido experimentadas en algunas residencias privadas de los años 50. En la Habana del Este persisten aún algunos ejemplos muy válidos de esta búsqueda plástico-formal, como la casa de José Fernández Tauler, la casa de Sixto Navarro en Santa María, proyectada por Raúl Gutiérrez, y la casa de Fernando Mimó, proyectada por Evelio Pina. A finales de los años 50, Pina realiza también la iglesia Templo de Santa Catarina Labouré en Puentes Grandes, La Habana. En la cubierta utiliza un cascarón generado por la intersección de formas parabólicas e hiperbólicas que permite cubrir un área notable con un número reducido de soportes. La estructura se apoya sobre cuatro pilares a 16 metros de distancia entre sí, que dejan un voladizo externo de 8,5 metros por 16,5 metros sobre cada lado externo. El espesor de la cáscara es de sólo 6 cm, con acero como refuerzo colocado en el centro.

En general la imagen expresiva lograda con los elementos prefabricados es superior en algunas temáticas que permiten una mayor libertad plástica. En 1966, el arquitecto Mario Girona realiza en el Vedado lo que se convertiría en un ícono de las estructuras: la heladería Coppelia (fig. 19, p. 195), que da lugar a una serie de mini copias que imitan esta imagen: una de ellas, el Mini Coppelia, la encontramos en Campo Florido.

#### 4. Arquitectura y territorio: Años 70-80

[...] Ahora, cuando millones de personas ya han mejorado sus condiciones de vivienda, aparece la posibilidad de dedicar más atención a la calidad de la construcción, la distribución más cómoda de los apartamentos, el aspecto de las viviendas, las calles y los edificios públicos. Nuestros arquitectos pueden y deben acabar con la monotonía en la construcción, con la inexpressividad de las construcciones arquitectónicas (Leonid Brezhnev 1974).

La etapa de los años 70 y 80 está caracterizada principalmente por la búsqueda de una solución a la demanda de casas, por el impulso hacia la industrialización en la construcción, y por salir de la condición de subdesarrollo. Simultáneamente se comienza a desarrollar la participación popular y los mecanismos de autoconstrucción y de participación que se iban definiendo en América Latina, y que generarán los mecanismos de autoconstrucción todavía empleados en Cuba. La ayuda y la influencia de la antigua Unión Soviética resulta evidente en la adopción

de los nuevos sistemas de prefabricado, que en Cuba serán adaptados a las condiciones climáticas locales, resultando más flexibles y económicos. La tecnología del sistema Grandes Paneles de los primeros grandes bloques de edificios es superada por la esclava del sistema IMS, constituido por nervaduras y columnas pre y post-tensadas. Se crea una serie de catálogos de componentes y plantas-polígonos como las de Guanajay y de San José, dedicados exclusivamente a la producción de elementos del sistema IMS. La misma posibilidad de flexibilidad aparece con el sistema Gran Panel 70, versión cubana de la tecnología escandinava Larne Nielsen y con el sistema Moldes Deslizantes, ya experimentado en La Habana en el edificio de 17 plantas de G y Malecón en el Vedado. Todos estos nuevos modelos permiten superar en productividad y en empleo masivo a los sistemas Novoa, Sandino y E14 (fig. 18, p. 195). La cuadrilla de proyectistas del Grupo Nacional de Viviendas realiza en estos años más de treinta edificios altos de hasta veinte plantas, con el objetivo de compactar la urbanización y elevar la densidad poblacional. Vivas formula la teoría de la estructura de las masas y la estructura de la participación popular en la construcción: el sistema de la microbrigada. La participación está concebida no sólo como fuerza de trabajo, sino como integración creativa entre proyectista y población. La solución denominada plus-trabajo es la respuesta de los trabajadores a los problemas implícitos en el desarrollo económico del país, la identificación con el sentido colectivista y con la desaparición de la propiedad privada, que le cede su lugar a la casa concebida como servicio social vinculado al centro de trabajo y al colectivo de trabajadores. La microbrigada es versátil, puede apoyarse en otras brigadas especializadas en el caso de montaje de estructuras prefabricadas. A principios de 1971, más de mil trabajadores participan en la construcción de 1154 unidades habitables en las nuevas áreas de expansión de la ciudad: Plaza de La Revolución, Boyeros, Alamar, etc. En dos años se consolida una fuerza de trabajo estable integrada por más de mil grupos. Debido a la necesidad existente, estos grupos realizan más de 25000 unidades habitables y una notable cantidad de servicios y obras sociales. En los años 80 las microbrigadas llegan a la gran urbanización del Plan Director: Alamar (130000 habitantes), Altahabana (110000) y San Agustín (35000), consagrándola como el principal y gigantesco recurso en el que se basa todo el mecanismo constructivo estatal. El Plan Director de 1970 incorpora un plan de desarrollo intenso del turismo, con el consiguiente incremento de la capacidad de recepción de los hoteles. En 1980 comienzan a funcionar más de 4000 habitaciones nuevas. Las diversas soluciones van del gran hotel urbano alto a los pequeños hoteles de playa de 70 habitaciones. El objetivo no es seguramente el de lograr el lujo o la monumentalidad, sino la creación de arquitecturas de fácil construcción y mantenimiento. Así, se adoptan los mismos sistemas constructivos uti-



lizados para los bloques de viviendas, las escuelas y los hospitales. Una de las mayores realizaciones técnico-formales es sin duda el Hotel Mar Azul (fig. 20, p. 195) de Santa María del mar, proyectado con el sistema Girón de Fernando Pérez y Mario Girona, autor del famoso disco volador de la heladería Coppelia. En Miramar, en el mismo período y con el mismo sistema de moldes deslizantes utilizado en los edificios de Alamar, se erige El Tritón, un hotel de 20 plantas. La técnica de construcción de los hoteles todavía estaba determinada por la necesidad de levantar en tiempos breves y con recursos muy limitados un número considerable de centros turísticos, en un período de grandísimas dificultades económicas y de fuerte devaluación de la moneda, en el cual el turismo constituía sin duda el recurso más consistente al que se podía echar mano. Menos significativo en términos conceptuales y formales es el uso del repertorio llamado aborígen. La verdadera presencia de la tradición Taina y Siboney es únicamente reconocible fragmentariamente en las construcciones rurales espontáneas: los Bohíos (fig. 17, p. 195), que conservan una forma constructiva originaria de la raza aborígen desaparecida en los primeros años de la conquista española. Sobre todo en este período la utilización de los materiales autóctonos como la caña brava, el yarey o el tronco de la palma son aplicados a los temas arquitectónicos recreativos de carácter turístico. Contamos con diversos ejemplos en el área de las playas del Este. Aunque la mayor parte de las veces dichas arquitecturas acaban en el kitch folklórico por la ausencia de verdaderas ideas en los proyectos, al menos no contribuyen a la cementificación. Las instalaciones del Parque Nacional Baconao en la provincia de Santiago de Cuba, realizadas por un grupo de jóvenes arquitectos bajo la dirección de Alberto Arredondo, constituyen una interesante experiencia arquitectónica de los años 80 en la que se logra integrar los valores espaciales con la utilización de los materiales locales, todo ello con un impacto ambiental prácticamente nulo. La búsqueda de contenidos expresivos en los elementos prefabricados y de alta tecnología encuentra su momento más significativo en determinados proyectos y obras del arquitecto Antonio Quintana, ubicados en algunos casos en La Habana del Este. En Santa María del Mar, Quintana construye la casa de Eduardo Rivero. Entre 1972 y 1975 propone una serie de proyectos visionarios de gran interés: el hotel Las Brujas en Santiago de Cuba, el proyecto del acuario de Guanabo en 1972 (que no se llevó a cabo), en el que se planteaba la opción de mantener a los peces en su ambiente natural y de permitir la observación a los visitantes, a través del uso de un sistema de túneles transparentes. Desgraciadamente, los proyectos de Nicolás Quintana se concretizaron en pocas obras, entre las cuales cabe destacar el Palacio de las Convenciones, realizado para la Cumbre de los Países no Alineados en 1979, y la Casa de los Cosmonautas de Varadero. El tema del acuario de Guanabo es también lo aborda el ar-

quitecto Frank Martínez, que realiza en Santa María del Mar la casa de Carlos Estrada. Martínez, al igual que Quintana, utiliza la franja de coral que se extiende delante de la ensenada natural de Sibarimar, moviendo al público con embarcaciones a través de unos cilindros verticales de cemento. Dichos cilindros están provistos de aperturas de cristal que permiten admirar la barrera coralina en su dimensión natural.

Fig. 17 – La verdadera presencia de la tradición Taina y Siboney es únicamente reconocible fragmentariamente en las construcciones rurales espontáneas: los Bohíos (Foto por L. Spitoni).

Fig. 18 – Los nuevos modelos permiten superar en productividad y en empleo masivo a los sistemas Novoa, Sandino y E14 (Foto por L. Spitoni).

Fig. 19 – En 1966, el arquitecto Mario Girona realiza en el Vedado la heladería Coppelía (Foto por L. Spitoni).

Fig. 20 – El Hotel Mar Azul de Santa María del mar, proyectado con el sistema Girón de Fernando Pérez y Mario Girona (Foto por L. Spitoni).



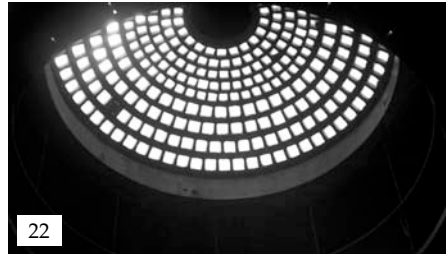


Fig. 21 – Obra de Rafael de Cárdenas, que culmina los años veinte construyendo mansiones eclécticas y comienza los años treinta y cuarenta con un énfasis de modernidad que lo convierte en la vanguardia del momento (Foto por L. Spitoni).

Fig. 22-23 – Las Escuelas Nacionales de Arte (Foto por L. Spitoni).

Fig. 24 – El Club Bancario Nacional, hoy Hotel Atlántico, de Lanz y Del Pozo, donde se pone de relieve la clara influencia de la arquitectura de Niemeyer (Foto por L. Spitoni).

Fig. 25 – Edificio experimental de 17 pisos, realizado en la zona del Malecón, en el Vedado. Es un prototipo de bloque alto construido con la tecnología de moldes deslizantes (Foto por L. Spitoni).



## Part V

Examples of the Transnational  
Dimension of Cuban Culture:  
a Poet, a Painter, Some Musicians

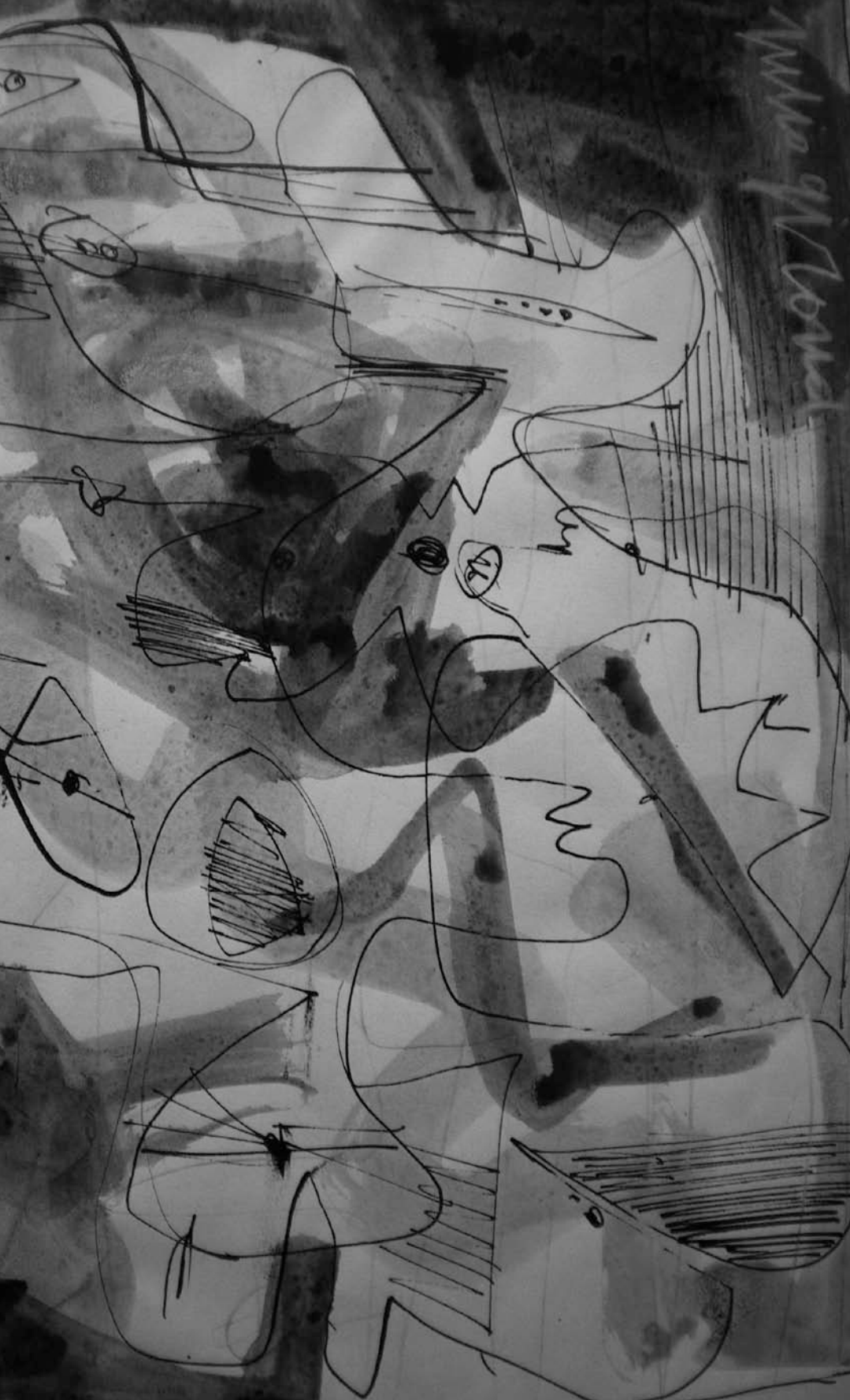


Fig. 26 – Julio Girón, black and white ink drawing on paper, no date (photo by I. Girón).

On the previous page – Julio Girón, abstract painting, oil on cardboard, late 1990's (photo by I. Girón).

## Examples of the Transnational Dimension of Cuban Culture: a Poet, a Painter, Some Musicians

This section offers a few examples of international complexity in Cuban cultural forms. Rather than delving into transformations of Cuban culture since the Revolution of 1959 or trying to say anything new about José Martí, Alejo Carpentier, Nicolás Guillén or other towering Cuban intellectual figures, or exploring new interpretations of canons of Cuban arts and culture<sup>1</sup>, this section looks at examples of tension between “pure” and “social” art in the context of Cuban cultural history. In the 1920s and 1930s, Cuba became an effervescent workshop for ideas and actions related to both aesthetic research and intellectual public commitment. Determined to build a national alternative to American cultural hegemony and imperialism and at the same time fighting Machado’s dictatorship, historians Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring and Ramiro Guerra, social scientist Fernando Ortiz, student leader Julio Antonio Mella and writers Alejo Carpentier, Nicolas Guillén and Juan Marinello argued for the elevation of popular consciousness from a variety of perspectives in what they perceived was an already dying republic. By the 1930s, two opposite cultural trends had clearly emerged: the search for a literature to represent social struggles in order to uplift popular consciousness, and the pursuit of a new aesthetic and refined poetical forms<sup>2</sup>. By the mid 1940s, the latter had led to the founding of the magazine *Orígenes* around the poet, novelist and literary critic José Lezama Lima. Among the poets of that generation who aimed

<sup>1</sup> For a synthesis of the historical forms of Cuban culture from a variety of perspectives, see: Rafael Rojas, “Apuntes para una historia intelectual”; Françoise Moulin-Civil, “Literatura”; Dolores González-Ripoll, “Prensa y cine”; Zoila Lapique Becali, “La arquitectura, las artes plastic y la musica en la cultura cubana”, in *Historia de Cuba*, ed. Consuelo Naranjo Orovio (Madrid: Dos Calles, 2009), 393-474; Anke Birkenmaier and Roberto González Echevarría, eds., *Cuba: un siglo de literatura 1902-2002* (Madrid: Colibri, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Moulin-Civil, “Literatura”, in *Historia de Cuba*, ed. Orovio, 417.

at aesthetic renovation in their search for “pure” poetry was Dulce María Loynaz whose life and works are explored in Coral García’s essay in this section. Born at the same time as the Cuban republic in 1902, Loynaz traveled extensively but never left Cuba where she died in 1987. As García argues, Loynaz’ poetry does not have any social or political content, yet the soul of her beloved island of Cuba is a pervasive presence from which exudes an ideal cultural continuity with Spain. Almost belonging to Loynaz’ generation, but not to her bourgeois background, the Cuban painter Julio Girona (1914-2002) took a different path. Girona lived in some of the most stimulating artistic communities of Paris, Mexico City and New York City from the 1930s to the 1950s and he spent most of his life abroad, yet his works were shaped by Cuban social and political content. As his daughter Ilse Girona recalls in this section, the Cuban painter traveled regularly to Cuba and exulted in the triumph of the Revolution of 1959. During the last fifty years, both inside and outside Cuba, the complexity of the island’s culture can perhaps be captured by two opposite interpretations: the Cuban past as a source of critical reflection on the present and the marketing of the past as nostalgia. Broadly speaking, the old and never-fully-answered question regarding the limits of artistic freedom has constantly generated conflicts and tensions<sup>3</sup>, and the global commercialization of Cuban music reflects one of these tensions<sup>4</sup>. By centering on the bright and dark sides of Wim Venders’ famous documentary film *Buena Vista Social Club*, Vittorio Perna’s essay offers fresh insights on the role that music has in conveying multiple and contradictory images of Cuba’s past and present.

<sup>3</sup> In a often-quoted speech of 1961 Fidel Castro synthesized the Revolution’s attitudes towards intellectual freedom. By making an explicit commitment to artistic freedom he also warned that no citizen had the right to threaten the existence of the revolution: “Within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, no rights at all”. *Palabras a los intelectuales* (pamphlet), English translation available at *Castro Speech Database* on-line, [lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro/1961/19610630](http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro/1961/19610630). On the Revolution’s extraordinary impulse to make cultural expressions accessible to the masses see: Roberto González Echevarría, “Criticism and Literature in Revolutionary Cuba”, *Cuban Studies/Estudios Cubanos* 1 (1981): 1-17.

<sup>4</sup> See: Leonardo Acosta, *Otra visión de la música popular cubana* (La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 2004).



## Chapter 13

### Dulce María Loynaz, entre Cuba y España

La personalidad de Dulce María Loynaz es atractiva precisamente por ser escurridiza, por no ser fácil de encasillar, lo cual puede dar lugar a interpretaciones parciales a las que aludiremos en esta sucinta reconstrucción de la recepción de su obra literaria a ambos lados del Océano Atlántico.

Nuestra poetisa nació en 1902 en La Habana, y aunque viajó mucho por el mundo, nunca abandonó la isla para irse al exilio; de hecho murió en su residencia del Vedado en 1997. Tanto ella como sus hermanos Enrique, Carlos Manuel y Flor recibieron una educación privada y privilegiada en su propia casa. Más tarde, por deseo expreso de su acaudalada madre (que era pianista y pintora), Dulce María se licenció en Derecho por la universidad de La Habana, profesión que ejerció durante más de 30 años (1927-1961), defendiendo, como quería su madre, los intereses de la familia. Desde muy jóvenes, los hermanos demuestran tener una vena artística que desarrollarán individualmente, y organizan en casa unas tertulias denominadas las “juevinas” (se celebraban los jueves), donde parece ser que no abundaban los cubanos, aunque sí pasaron por allí Alejo Carpentier y Emilio Ballagas, a los que hay que añadir los nombres de algunas de las personalidades españolas más relevantes de su tiempo: Federico García Lorca (que bautizó al lugar llamándolo “la casa encantada”), Juan Ramón Jiménez y su mujer Zenobia, Luis Cernuda en visita a Cuba desde su exilio americano o Rafael Alberti. Recordemos también que ese ambiente especial le sirvió de inspiración a Carpentier para recrear el mundo de su novela *El siglo de las luces*.

Dulce María Loynaz se sentía orgullosa de ser hija de Enrique Loynaz del Castillo, general mambí del ejército libertador, que escribió la letra y música del *Himno Invasor*, de valor patriótico para los cubanos. Formaba parte, entonces, de lo que podríamos llamar, utilizando la terminología del

historiador Manuel Moreno Friginals<sup>1</sup>, la oligarquía criolla, que al menos originariamente no era independentista y que había asumido los valores peninsulares. La pérdida de Cuba, acaecida pocos años antes del nacimiento de Dulce María, dio lugar, como sabemos, a una crisis “traumática” en España, aunque las recientes teorías revisionistas concluyan que el desastre de 1898 fue sobre todo un problema o incluso un invento de intelectuales<sup>2</sup>.

Sobre la posición política de Loynaz, sobre sus ideas religiosas o su postura vista desde el versante feminista, también ha habido malentendidos. No escribe poesía de contenido social, no demuestra estar interesada por el contexto político de las dictaduras de Cuba y España. Su vida transcurre entre libros y viajes, en un ambiente burgués del que nunca abdicará. En 1937 se casa con un primo suyo que frecuentaba la casa: Enrique de Quesada Loynaz, protagonista, entre otros, del poema *San Miguel Arcángel*, prácticamente el único en el que se advierte una cierta carnalidad sin ostentaciones, ya que la obra de Loynaz es tan etérea como un juego de agua. Un poema que al lector de poesía española podría recordarle el delicado y sutil erotismo de la contemporánea Concha Méndez<sup>3</sup> (exiliada primero en Cuba, con su marido Manuel Altolaguirre, después en Méjico), o incluso parecerle precursor de las composiciones, ya descaradamente carnales, de la gaditana Ana Rossetti. No en vano, la cubana y la andaluza han nadado en las aguas de la poesía española del Siglo de Oro.

Otro de los equívocos está relacionado con la fe religiosa, y parece haberlo ocasionado ella misma, ya que se declara católica no practicante en un documental de 1987, titulado *Una mujer que no existe* (dirigido por Vicente González Castro), pero pocos años después afirma que la confesión ha sido algo ajeno a su carácter, y el ir a misa un ritual presente sólo mientras vivió su segundo marido, llegando incluso a declararse atea. Además, ha destacado el carácter irreverente de la composición *La novia de Lázaro*, hasta el punto de contar en el documental apenas mencionado una anécdota burlona en la que su marido invita a comer a casa a tres obispos para pedirles su opinión al respecto. Después de la excelente comida, abundantemente regada con los mejores vinos, recibe, por supuesto, la aprobación de la iglesia.

Según la interpretación que prevalezca a la hora de leer el *Canto a la mujer estéril*, tendremos una Loynaz más o menos ligada a los estereotipos femeninos. Fina García Marruz<sup>4</sup> puso el dedo en la llaga al recordar que, junto a la lectura de la ausencia de maternidad entendida como “maldición”, aparece otra en la que se pretende llegar a la “fundación de un nue-

<sup>1</sup> Manuel Moreno Friginals, *Cuba/España, España/Cuba. Una historia común* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Véase a título de ejemplo el revelador estudio de Santos Julià, *Historias de las dos Españas* (Madrid: Taurus, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Véanse los versos de cierre del poema “Te vi venir, presintiéndote”: Con el brillo de tu espada / las sienes se me encendieron”, en C. Méndez, *Vida a vida* (Madrid: Hiperión, 1995), 63.

<sup>4</sup> Fina García Marruz, *Valoración múltiple* (La Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1991), 170.

vo linaje". Con los ojos del hoy, muy parciales hay que ser para no destacar que la intención de la autora es ya, desde los primeros versos, destruir la convención, para afirmar incluso orgullosamente su diferencia. El poema parte, es cierto, con la constatación de que la esterilidad lleva a ser "Madre imposible: Pozo cegado, ánfora rota, / catedral sumergida", pero verso a verso, se llega a la exaltación de la "Unidad perfecta", a ser "(Estrella que en la estrella se consume, / flor que en la flor se queda)". La cuarta estrofa reza así:

Nada vendrá de ti. Ni nada vino  
de la Montaña, y la Montaña es bella.  
Tú no serás camino de un instante  
para que venga más tristeza al mundo;  
tú no pondrás tu mano sobre un mundo  
que no amas... Tú dejarás  
que el fango siga fango y que la estrella  
siga estrella...  
Y reinarás  
en tu Reino. Y serás  
Unidad  
perfecta que no necesita  
reproducirse, como no  
se reproduce el cielo,  
ni el viento,  
ni el mar...

Su diferencia está marcada por su dedicación a la literatura, de ahí que *Juegos de agua* sea una ofrenda a Pablo Álvarez de Cañas, "en vez del hijo que él quería"<sup>5</sup>.

Cómo no recordar entonces, entre otras, la diferente perspectiva adoptada por su contemporánea canaria, Josefina de la Torre, que expresa su angustia y frustración por la falta de descendencia en el poema "Dentro de las paredes de tu casa" (cuyo título nos lleva enseguida a pensar en *Últimos días de una casa*), donde "la vida estéril" condena a la protagonista a una vida difícil, "sin el techo seguro, / sin el hijo ni el árbol", a un vacío que ni el éxito artístico puede compensar. Con Josefina de la Torre, Dulce María comparte la necesidad y la exaltación del omnipresente mar. Y también con la madrileña Concha Méndez, ya que, como podemos leer en *Jardín*, "las niñas de tierra adentro sueñan con el mar"<sup>6</sup>.

Dulce María Loynaz ha sido encasillada, además, en los manuales de literatura, donde aparece bajo el epígrafe "poetisas del posmodernismo" o

<sup>5</sup> Dulce María Loynaz, *Homenaje a Dulce María Loynaz. Premio Cervantes 1992* (Miami: Universal, 1993), 104.

<sup>6</sup> Dulce María Loynaz, *Jardín. Novela lírica* (La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 1993 [Madrid: 1991]), 34.

“posmodernismo intimista”, que, como señala Selena Millares de la Univ. Autónoma de Madrid (pero también otros, como Pablo Armando Fernández) es una etiqueta errónea que de algún modo ha impedido reconocer el valor autónomo de su producción poética. Sea como fuere, lo que ya parece indiscutible es que, tras su recuperación por parte de la crítica, ha pasado a formar parte de ese grupo reducido de grandes figuras de la literatura femenina hispanoamericana, en el que figuran por supuesto Delmira Agustini, Gabriela Mistral, Juana de Ibarbourou y Alfonsina Storni. Pero la cubana no ha admitido afinidades con ninguna de ellas, independientemente de su relación de amistad con Gabriela Mistral (empañada por algunos roces) y de su inclinación confesada hacia Delmira Agustini.

La poesía de Loynaz sin duda tiene puntos en común con la de Juan Ramón Jiménez, y tal vez por eso mismo el andaluz incluyó su “retrato” en *Españoles de tres mundos*<sup>7</sup>, aunque en un primer momento demostrara más interés por la obra del hermano. Pero es posible que esté más relacionada en ciertos aspectos con Leopoldo Panero y Luis Rosales, a los que conoció personalmente.

Es hora de decirlo ya, Dulce María Loynaz se sintió siempre muy ligada a España, a la que considera su segunda patria, el territorio del que le llegaron, como dice ella misma, siempre las mejores cosas de su vida. Tras el divorcio de su primer marido (entre otros motivos tal vez por la falta de descendencia), en 1946 se volvió a casar con Pablo Álvarez de Cañas, un canario que se había trasladado de una isla a otra para hacer las Américas, y que desde la nada había conseguido entrar a formar parte de la alta sociedad habanera, convirtiéndose en su cronista por excelencia. Tuvo que cortejarla insistentemente y esperar durante años antes de poder casarse con una mujer cuya familia rechazaba sus orígenes humildes<sup>8</sup>.

Dulce María Loynaz da todos los méritos del reconocimiento de su obra a la labor diplomática del marido. Emprenden un viaje por España, donde será invitada a dar recitales y conferencias, pero sobre todo donde se publicarán prácticamente todas sus obras, primero *Versos (1920-1938)* en Canarias, y sucesivamente, ya en Madrid, *Juegos de agua*, en el que recopila poemas escritos previamente con otros redactados en el hotel Ritz de la capital. Todo ello en medio de un conflicto diplomático entre los gobiernos de Cuba y España, a causa del voto negativo de la isla a la entrada de la Península en la ONU. Recordemos, claro está, que nos encontramos en pleno período franquista.

Mientras tanto, Dulce María Loynaz recibe muestras de aprecio por parte de los autores de la generación del 27 que no habían abandonado el país y que le dedican reseñas: en primer lugar, Gerardo Diego y Vicente Aleixandre,

<sup>7</sup> Juan Ramón Jiménez, *Españoles de tres mundos* (Madrid: Alianza, 1987 [Buenos Aires: 1942]). La semblanza en cuestión había aparecido en 1942 en la revista porteña *Sur*.

<sup>8</sup> Dicho sea de paso, este caso podría hacernos pensar que había dejado de estar vigente en Cuba la costumbre de casar a las hijas criollas con peninsulares.

pero también Adriano del Valle, José García Nieto, Antonio Oliver Belmás y Concha Espina. No tengo constancia de que la poetisa cubana conociese la poesía de Pedro Salinas, al que se recuerda de inmediato, al leer el poema de ecos juanramonianos “Yo te fui desnudando”, casi una respuesta en femenino al “Perdóname por ir así buscándote” del madrileño:

Yo te fui desnudando de ti mismo,  
de los “tús” superpuestos que la vida  
te había ceñido...

Te arranqué la corteza – entera y dura –  
que se creía fruta, que tenía  
la forma de fruta.

Y ante el asombro vago de tus ojos  
surgiste con tus ojos aún velados  
de tinieblas y asombros...

Surgiste de ti mismo; de tu misma  
sombra fecunda –intacto y desgarrado  
en alma viva... –

En la capital española seguirán apareciendo otros títulos: en 1951, la novela lírica *Jardín*, seguida dos años más tarde por “Carta de amor al rey Tut-Ank-Amen” y *Poemas sin nombre*, cuyo éxito tuvo como colofón la organización de un homenaje por parte de varias escritoras, entre las que cabe destacar a la poeta Carmen Conde, que catorce años después la incluirá en su antología *Once grandes poetisas americanas*<sup>9</sup>. En 1955 se recopila toda su poesía publicada hasta entonces en *Obra Lírica*, y en 1958 aparecen *Últimos días de una casa* y *Un viaje a Tenerife*.

Como se ve, los lazos con España son muy fuertes, pero no lo son menos las raíces que la ligan a la isla de Cuba, que se hacen más o menos explícitas en *Los últimos días de una casa*, poesía narrativa, y en *Jardín*, su novela lírica. De todos modos, ambas obras se pueden relacionar con composiciones como “Eternidad”, de *Versos (1920-1938)*, “Marinero de rostro oscuro”, “Isla” y “Al Almendares”, de *Juegos de agua*, o con el “Poema CXXIV”, de *Poemas sin nombre*, que son composiciones en prosa:

Isla mía, ¡qué bella eres y qué dulce! [...] Tu cielo es un cielo vivo, todavía con un calor de ángel, con un envés de estrella.

Tú mar es el último refugio de los delfines antiguos y las sirenas desmaradas. Vértebras de cobre tienen tus serranías, y mágicos crepúsculos se encienden bajo el fanal de tu aire.

<sup>9</sup> Carmen Conde, *Once grandes poetisas americanas* (Madrid: Cultura Hispánica, 1967).

Descenso de gaviotas y petreles, avemaría de navegantes, antena de América: hay en ti la ternura de las cosas pequeñas y el señorío de las grandes cosas. Sigues siendo la tierra más hermosa que ojos humanos contemplaron. Sigues siendo la novia de Colón, la benjamina bien amada, el Paraíso encontrado.

[...]

Isla esbelta y juncal, yo te amaría aunque hubiera sido otra tierra mi tierra, pues también te aman los que bajaron del Septentrión brumoso, o del vergel mediterráneo, o del lejano país del loto.

Isla mía, Isla fragante, flor de islas: tenme siempre, náceme siempre, deshoja una por una todas mis fugas.

Y guárdame la última, bajo un poco de arena soleada [...] ¡A la orilla del golfo donde todos los años hacen su misterioso nido los ciclones!

En todos los títulos mencionados antes estamos anclados en Cuba, independientemente de que aparezca citada de manera explícita o no. Estamos en las residencias en las que vivió la autora, y que al final parecen reducidas a una sola en el recuerdo y en el espacio de la escritura. Porque en la literatura se desdibujan las fronteras temporales y geográficas. La casa rodeada por un jardín vallado, las rosas, el jardín y el mar, iluminados por una luna triste que cae despedazada, como un espejo, soltando astillas, están ubicados en Cuba. Por ese mar entrevisto desde la ventana que da a un jardín que amenazadoramente crece y trepa por las paredes, hay un marinero náufrago que viene, desde otros mares, a salvarla, que incluso se atreve a acercarse y besar su mano a través de una verja que impide ver el horizonte sin estrías. Puede ser que España esté al final de ese viaje tan temido como soñado mediante los libros. Si son ciertas las conclusiones de Antón Arrufat, en *Jardín* se siente el eco de los siguientes versos de Antonio Machado:

Y algo que es tierra en nuestra carne, siente  
la humedad del jardín como un halago.

Sin olvidar un fragmento crucial de *El caballero inactual* de Azorín, que, según el mismo crítico, será fuente de inspiración para esta peculiar novela lírica:

Muchas veces siente en el fondo de su organismo, a manera de un violento tirón, que una sensibilidad primitiva, ancestral, irrumpe, partida de paisajes milenarios, a través de las inmensas cadenas de las generaciones. Una sensibilidad primigenia, sí, el antecesor milenario en la selva aborígen, solo, la cabeza apoyada en el tronco de un árbol.

Azorín, Machado, pero también Cervantes, Quevedo, San Juan de la Cruz... Son nombres que se unen al extenso listado de escritores españoles que acompañaron a Loynaz en su formación y en su vida de lecturas, en

esa isla dentro de una isla que fue su casa y su poesía. Junto a ellos, por el estanque, se mueven los célebres cisnes azules de Rubén Darío, los versos encendidos de José Martí o de Julián del Casal, sin olvidar la poesía francesa y anglosajona... En una lectora insaciable como Loynaz, la búsqueda de fuentes acabaría por llevarnos hasta la sequía propia de los desiertos.

Lo que sí podemos afirmar es que ella se ha creado su isla de soledad donde ser libre, aunque sea entre barrotes<sup>10</sup>. Pero se trata de barrotes o puertas cerradas que parece haberse impuesto ella sola, espacios privados donde el anhelo del amor y el deseo de escapar encuentran siempre barreras y obstáculos difíciles de sobrepasar: su jardín se erige en muro entre la casa y el mar, el jardín mismo se cierra como una planta carnívora, la convierte en planta, y por eso le nacen raíces que la atan a la tierra, que la condenan a la inmovilidad. La *insularidad* hace gala de sí misma como característica enraizada en la sangre, como una herencia acumulada durante generaciones de la que no se puede o no se quiere escapar. La libertad se encuentra entonces ligada a la literatura, vista como un inmenso océano por el que caminar siguiendo su propio rumbo:

En mi verso soy libre: él es mi mar.  
 Mi mar ancho y desnudo de horizontes...  
 En mi verso yo ando sobre el mar,  
 camino sobre olas desdobladas  
 de otras olas y de otras olas... Ando  
 en mi verso; respiro, vivo, crezco  
 en mi verso, y en él tienen mis pies  
 camino y mi camino rumbo y mis  
 manos qué sujetar y mi esperanza  
 qué esperar y mi vida su sentido.  
 Yo soy libre en mi verso y él es libre  
 como yo. Nos amamos. Nos tenemos.  
 Fuera de él soy pequeña y me arrodillo  
 ante la obra de mis manos, la  
 tierna arcilla amasada entre mis dedos...  
 Dentro de él, me levanto y soy yo misma.

Su país le concederá reconocimientos en cadena que culminan con la concesión en España del prestigioso premio Cervantes en la fecha emblemática de 1992, galardón para el que había sido propuesta, sin conseguirlo, en 1984 y en 1987<sup>11</sup>. La noticia causó sorpresa, hasta el punto de que el mismo Pablo Armando Fernández<sup>12</sup> se hace eco de la pregunta que resonó entre el jurado:

<sup>10</sup> Aludo al título del ensayo de Juan Ramón de la Portilla, *La mirada entre los barrotes* (Pinar del Río: Loynaz, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> En dichas ocasiones el premio fue a manos de Ernesto Sábato y Carlos Fuentes, respectivamente.

<sup>12</sup> Pablo Armando Fernández, "El agua fina y alta", en *Sobre Dulce María Loynaz*, eds. Carmen

“¿Quién es esta dama cubana?”. La respuesta, como señalara el mismo Pablo Armando, llegó de la voz de Francisco Ayala, presidente del jurado: Dulce María Loynaz era una poetisa que conseguía eliminar “la desconexión, la incomunicación que puede existir entre países con la misma lengua”<sup>13</sup>.

Tengamos en cuenta que se trata de la segunda mujer que lo recibe, detrás nada menos que de María Zambrano<sup>14</sup>, a la que se le había otorgado en 1988. Sorprende sin duda la ausencia de referencias por parte de Dulce María Loynaz a la insigne filósofa y poeta española, que vivió durante diez años en Cuba, y cuya voz resultó tan especial para la joven alumna que era entonces Fina García Marruz.

Y surge sin pruebas la sospecha de que Zambrano se esconda detrás de esa mujer del poema *La extranjera*:

Adormecía con su voz lejana,  
con sus palabras quietas  
que caían sin ruido, semejantes  
a escarcha ligera  
de marzo en las primeras  
rosas, sin deshojar  
los pétalos...

Alguien por retenerla  
quiso hacer de toda su vida  
un lazo... Un solo lazo fuerte y duro...  
Ella  
con sus frágiles manos rompió el lazo  
que era lazo de vida...  
(A veces, nieblas  
de otro país pasaban por sus ojos...)

María Zambrano, que estableció una relación epistolar con Lezama Lima<sup>15</sup>, unidos ambos por el deseo desgarrado de encontrar un espacio donde pudiese unirse la esencia de lo hispánico universal. María Zambrano, que se sintió tan arraigada en Cuba que llegó a considerarla

Alemany Bay y Remedios Mataix Azuar (Madrid: Verbum-Universidad de Alicante, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> Francisco Ayala, *El Mundo*, 6 de noviembre de 1992.

<sup>14</sup> María Zambrano (1904-1991), reconocida como la mayor filósofa española del siglo XX, discípula del célebre Ortega y Gasset. Su pensamiento plantea una interesante dicotomía entre la actitud filosófica y la actitud poética (no en vano es también poetisa). Sobre la relación de Zambrano con Cuba, véase García Marruz, *La espada intatta di María Zambrano* (Venecia: Marietti, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Javier Fornieles Ten, *Correspondencia entre José Lezama Lima y María Zambrano y entre María Zambrano y María Luisa Bautista* (Sevilla: Espuela de Plata, 2005). José Lezama Lima (1910-1976): poeta hermético y ensayista cubano, cuya breve obra ha ejercido una notable influencia en otros escritores posteriores de lengua española. De su poesía cito el poema *Muerte de Narciso* (La Habana: Úcar, García y Cia, 1937). Es autor de una novela, *Paradiso* (México: Era, 1970), de gran repercusión internacional, que ha sido llevada al cine.



su patria pre-natal. María Zambrano que afirmó que España volvía a recuperar su ser más auténtico al renunciar a sus ambiciones imperialistas. María Zambrano, ubicando en Segovia la quintaesencia de lo castellano y español. La meseta, tan admirada también por Dulce María Loynaz, que a la hora de evocar el lugar que más le había impresionado de España, no menciona la isla de Tenerife a la que dedicó un libro entero, sino Segovia.

Después de años y años de intensa actividad cultural y poética, Dulce María Loynaz entra en una extensa etapa de silencio creativo que durará dos décadas. Se ha dicho que fue un silencio voluntario, pero hay que recordar que coincide con un período en el que su marido se exilia a las Canarias, marcado, además, por el luto en familia: mueren sus padres, y poco después el hermano Enrique. La vuelta de Pablo Álvaro de Cañas a Cuba en 1972, en tristes condiciones, terminará con su muerte dos años más tarde, seguida por la desaparición del hermano menor, Carlos Manuel, en 1977. Le quedará sólo su hermana pequeña Flor, pero morirá también antes que ella, en 1985.

En los ochenta y noventa empiezan a llegar los reconocimientos por parte del Ministerio de Cultura de Cuba, unidos a la publicación de *Bestiarium*<sup>16</sup> y *Poemas naufragos*<sup>17</sup>. El primero es una colección de poemas “zoológicos” escritos en los años 20 que, de haber aparecido en su momento, habrían sido catalogados como poesía de vanguardia. En 1987 se le concedió el Premio Nacional de Literatura, ocasión en la que declara su emoción por tratarse de un premio cubano, “y me lo ofrece mi país para demostrarme que aun en medio de mi clausura voluntaria o involuntaria, no se me había olvidado [...] el premio de Cuba me da o me devuelve lo que di por perdido”. Así, Dulce María se desprenderá al fin del desencanto hacia su patria. A este respecto, recordemos que en una carta fechada dos años antes y dirigida a Aldo Martínez Malo, Loynaz afirmaba tajantemente tanto su condición de burguesa como su deseo de quedarse en Cuba, a pesar de no compartir la ideología del régimen y a pesar de haber recibido propuestas para ir a Estados Unidos y a España, donde la invita, ofreciéndole casa y medios de subsistencia, su editor Aguilar. Y dice textualmente: “Yo estoy aquí por mi voluntad y a todas sus consecuencias [...] sucediera lo que sucediera, preferiría quedarme y correr la misma suerte de mi país”. El final de la carta resultó profético: “Seguiré pues viviendo en Cuba, espero que sin mayores sustos, sin pedir nada a nadie y con un gobierno que aún sabiendo que no comparto su ideología, creo que me lo agradece y hasta hace lo posible por reparar los viejos errores que pudo tener conmigo”<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Dulce María Loynaz, *Bestiarium* (La Habana: Ministerio de Cultura y Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba, 1991).

<sup>17</sup> Dulce María Loynaz, *Poemas naufragos* (La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 1991).

<sup>18</sup> Dulce María Loynaz, *Cartas que no se extraviaron* (Valladolid: Fundación Jorge Guillén – Fundación Hermanos Loynaz, 1997), 171-172.

Los poetas cubanos responden y se vuelcan en estudiar su obra: Gastón Baquero, con un ensayo de título significativo, *Acercamiento a Dulce María Loynaz*, en el que la define “poeta-fuente”<sup>19</sup>; Pablo Armando Fernández, por su parte, establece relaciones entre su poesía y la de Emily Dickinson<sup>20</sup>; Fina García Marruz<sup>21</sup> desentraña los hilos del *Canto a la mujer estéril*; César López<sup>22</sup> realiza un exhaustivo ensayo sobre *Los últimos días de una casa*, de su obra se ocupan también Emilio Ballagas<sup>23</sup>, Eugenio Florit<sup>24</sup>, Margara Russotto<sup>25</sup> y un largo etcétera.

Reconciliada ya con su patria, y ante la insistencia de Aldo Martínez Malo<sup>26</sup>, Dulce María Loynaz vuelve a coger la pluma para redactar *Fe de vida*<sup>27</sup>, obra en prosa en la que se propone dejar constancia no tanto de su propia vida, como de la del que fuera su marido, Pablo Álvarez de

<sup>19</sup> Gastón Baquero, *Acercamiento a Dulce María Loynaz* (Madrid: Cultura Hispánica, 1993). Gastón Baquero (1914-1997) fue uno de los prohombres intelectuales de la Cuba de los años cincuenta, antes de la revolución de Fidel Castro, tras la cual se exilió en España. Acogido por el régimen franquista, la intelectualidad antifranquista le volverá la espalda. Son, evidentemente, motivos políticos los que impiden durante años el reconocimiento merecido de su obra poética, que llegará más tarde de mano de poetas más jóvenes como Francisco Frines. De Baquero cito, entre otros, su *Memorial de un testigo* (Madrid: Rialp, 1966) y sus *Poemas invisibles* (Madrid: Verbum, 1991).

<sup>20</sup> Pablo Armando Fernández, “El agua fina y alta”, en *Sobre Dulce María Loynaz*, eds. Alemany Bay y Mataix Azuar, 32-39. Fernández (1930-) vivió en Estados Unidos, pero regresó a Cuba en 1959, donde ha desarrollado una intensa vida cultural. Ha representado a Cuba como diplomático y como poeta (también ha escrito novela y teatro). Entre sus obras, cito el *Libro de los héroes* (La Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1964). Ha recibido el Premio Nacional de Literatura de su país.

<sup>21</sup> García Marruz, *Valoración múltiple*, 170. Fina García Marruz (1923-). Perteneció al grupo de poetas de la revista *Orígenes*. Casada con el célebre poeta Cintio Vitier, alumna de María Zambrano, reconocida ensayista, es una de las poetisas cubanas más destacadas del siglo XX. Ha recibido el Premio Nacional de Literatura de Cuba y el Iberoamericano de Poesía Pablo Neruda. Entre sus obras cito *Visitaciones* (La Habana: Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1970).

<sup>22</sup> César López (1933-), poeta, traductor, ensayista e intelectual, forma parte del grupo que permanece en Cuba. Recibió el Premio Nacional de Literatura de su país. Es autor de *Silencio en voz de muerte* (La Habana: Unión, 1963).

<sup>23</sup> Emilio Ballagas (1908-1954), poeta y profesor, fue uno de los primeros cubanos en abordar la literatura afrocubana; de hecho publicó una *Antología de la poesía negra Hispano Americana* (Madrid: Aguilar, 1935). Entre sus obras más destacadas figura su *Elegía sin nombre* (La Habana: [s.n.], 1936). Colaboró, con G. Baquero, E. Diego, F. García Marruz y C. Vitier en la revista *Clavileño*.

<sup>24</sup> Eugenio Florit (1903-1999), poeta y diplomático cubano, nacido en Madrid, amigo de poetas españoles exiliados de la generación del 27 como Jorge Guillén, Luis Cernuda y Pedro Salinas, a los que conoció en la universidad, en Estados Unidos. Es autor de *Doble acento* (La Habana: Ucacia, 1937), prologado por J.R. Jiménez.

<sup>25</sup> Margara Russotto (1946-), de origen italiano, estudia en Venezuela y Brasil. Profesora universitaria, ensayista, se ocupa sobre todo de literatura femenina. Como poetisa es autora, entre otros, de *El diario íntimo de Sor Juana (poemas apócrifos)* (Madrid: Torremozas, 2002).

<sup>26</sup> Aldo Martínez Malo, “Fe de vida: un libro escrito a través de una correspondencia”, en *Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes* on-line, [www.cervantesvirtual.com/bib\\_autor/Loynaz/fedevida.shtml](http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/bib_autor/Loynaz/fedevida.shtml).

<sup>27</sup> Dulce María Loynaz, *Fe de vida* (Madrid: Libertarias, 1999). Se publica póstumamente, por deseo de su autora.

Cañas. La conclusión final, a pesar de los “trece años perfectos los que pasé a su lado”, en los que “volcó en mi canastilla de bodas los días más felices de mi vida, los días de España”<sup>28</sup>, adquiere tonos resignados al llegar a la meta, porque “Sé que los dos hemos vivido en vano”. Y entonces “Empieza a llover”<sup>29</sup>. Dos años antes habían aparecido *Las cartas que no se extraviaron*, publicadas en Valladolid. Ambos textos, como suele ocurrir en estos casos, nos ofrecen pistas interesantes para entender determinados acontecimientos de la vida de la autora, y para la comprensión de su producción poética.

En la madrugada del 27 de abril de 1997, Dulce María Loynaz murió en su casa. Pocos días antes había recibido un homenaje del Centro Cultural de la Embajada de España en Cuba. En los años siguientes aparecen biografías sobre la autora como la de Ana Cabrera, titulada *La voz del silencio* (2000), *Amor sin alas*, de Aldo Martínez Malo (2001) o *Dulce María Loynaz, la agonía de un mito*, de Ileana Álvarez y Francis Sánchez (2001).

Los homenajes se duplican tanto en Cuba como en España. El punto final para nosotros se traslada al año 2002, en el que se celebran dos congresos, uno a cada lado de las dos orillas: en noviembre, el Seminario organizado por el CEMAB (Centro de Estudios Iberoamericanos Mario Benedetti) de la Universidad de Alicante; y en diciembre el V evento Iberoamericano, en Pinar del Río, Cuba. Con la excusa de celebrar el centenario del nacimiento de la autora, se nos ofrece una excelente panorámica de toda la obra de la escritora cubana: la poesía, la prosa y sus opiniones literarias<sup>30</sup>. Recordemos que la Universidad de Alicante ha publicado las intervenciones de diversos estudiosos, entre los que destaca el ensayo de Pablo Armando Fernández (leído en Pinar del Río), con otras contribuciones sin duda excepcionales de profesores de las Universidades de Madrid y de Alicante. Además, un año antes se había creado en el “Cervantes virtual” la biblioteca de autor Dulce María Loynaz, donde se ha recopilado una serie de materiales críticos y audiovisuales de consulta obligada para los que se interesen por la producción de nuestra poetisa<sup>31</sup>.

Se han cumplido, por tanto, las conocidas y proféticas palabras del poeta Ballagas, y más allá de parcialidades, Loynaz ha entrado por la puerta grande en la posteridad, en la “eternidad”, título de uno de sus primeros poemas:

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

<sup>30</sup> Dichos ensayos aparecen recopilados en *Sobre Dulce María Loynaz*, eds. Alemany Bay y Mataix Azuar.

<sup>31</sup> *Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes* on-line, [www.cervantesvirtual.com/bib\\_autor/Loynaz](http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/bib_autor/Loynaz).

ETERNIDAD

*No quiero, si es posible,  
que mi beneficio desaparezca,  
sino que viva y dure toda la vida de mi amigo.*

SENECA

En mi jardín hay rosas:  
Yo no te quiero dar  
las rosas que mañana...  
Mañana no tendrás.

En mi jardín hay pájaros  
con cantos de cristal:  
No te los doy, que tienen  
alas para volar...  
En mi jardín abejas  
labran fino panal:  
¡Dulzura de un minuto...  
no te la quiero dar!

Para ti lo infinito  
o nada; lo inmortal  
o esta muda tristeza  
que no comprenderás...

La tristeza sin nombre  
de no tener que dar  
a quien lleva en la frente  
algo de eternidad...

Deja, deja el jardín...  
no toques el rosal:  
Las cosas que se mueren  
no se deben tocar.

## Chapter 14

# Julio Girona: A Cuban Painter at Home and Abroad

My father grew up in the literary circles of his home town, Manzanillo. His father was a lawyer, but also a member of the “Grupo Literario de Manzanillo”, which arose around the magazine *Orto*<sup>1</sup>. Young Julio was not, it seems, a good pupil: he did not like mathematics, nor was he interested in learning how to read or write. As far back as he could remember, he loved to draw. He set up his “studio” under his parents’ bed, where he would spend hours lying on the floor, escaping from the heat of Oriente and from his numerous family, drawing on scrap paper given to him at the typographer’s. His father, who in later years would become a teacher and a volunteer in the public literacy campaign, despaired of his son’s lack of interest in school. “All right”, he said to him. “You will be a painter. But you will be an ignorant one”.

Actually, although my father never made peace with mathematics (he used to say, even as an elderly man, that numbers above ten confused him), he learned to read on his own. A passionate viewer of silent films, he fell in love with Chaplin and William S. Hart, the idealist cowboy who never smiled. It irritated him not to be able to understand the subtitles of films, so he gave in. This approach to learning, his love for cinema, and the contrasting figures of Chaplin and Hart help to portray my father: never academic, with an approach to art that was above all practical, inspired by values that combined the idealism of the fighter Hart with the humor of Chaplin.

One day my grandfather decided to take his son to see an artist friend, to ask, as is the custom, “if the boy had talent”. The artist was a caricaturist

<sup>1</sup> *Orto* was a literary magazine founded in Manzanillo in 1912. Published for 45 years, its circulation spread to various countries of the Spanish-speaking world.

of international renown, Conrado Massaguer<sup>2</sup>. Massaguer received the boy as if he were a colleague. He presented him in the Teatro Manzanillo, drawing caricatures together with him, live, on stage. He published the boy's drawings in the prestigious magazine *Social*, and introduced him to members of the literary avant-garde in Havana<sup>3</sup>. My father had his first show at the age of twelve, exhibiting caricatures of politicians, writers, and other personalities which he had drawn on silhouettes in wood. Thus, when the entire Girona family moved to the capital in 1929, Julio was already at home in the circles where illustrious Cuban and foreign writers, such as Alejo Carpentier and Federico García Lorca, gathered.

One day I went to visit José Maria. We sat in the large rocking chairs on the porch. After a little while, a man who looked Spanish came in through the gate of the garden fence. He was wearing a white shirt with wide sleeves and no tie. His hair was very black and his beard bluish, even though he appeared to have shaved that morning. I thought he was a waiter in some café. I was introduced to him, and with a firm voice he said, "Hello". He didn't sit down but instead started talking, pacing from one end to the other of the ample porch, as if he were on stage in a theater. I didn't know who he was, but José Maria called him Federico. Later I found out that it was Federico García Lorca<sup>4</sup>.

In the early 1930s, Havana entered a period marked by the great economic crisis that followed the 1929 stock market crash, which affected poor countries even more than rich ones. In Cuba, these were the years of the Machado dictatorship, when the country was governed by the police and the military. My father enrolled at the Academia de San Alejandro, where he studied sculpture with Juan José Sicre, known still today for his portraits of public figures and, in particular, for his colossal monument to José Martí in the Plaza de la Revolución<sup>5</sup>. However, with the intent of checking social ferment, Machado closed institutions of higher learning, including the Academy, considered hotbeds of revolt. Sicre invited his pupil to continue studying in his private studio. He did portraits of well-known figures such as Raúl Roa and Juan Marinello, he did death masks of historical figures, and he met the habitués of Sicre's studio, such as Pablo de la Torriente Brau, who would die in 1936 in the Spanish Civil War.

<sup>2</sup> Conrado W. Massaguer (1889-1965), Cuban caricaturist and editor whose work was widely published in Europe and the United States, as well as in Cuba.

<sup>3</sup> *Social* was a monthly magazine of art and literature founded by Massaguer in Havana in 1916. It was published until 1938.

<sup>4</sup> Julio Girona, *Memorias sin título* (La Habana: Letras cubanas, 1994), 59. Alejo Carpentier (1904-80), Cuban novelist, essayist, and musicologist. Federico García Lorca (1898-1936), the Spanish poet and dramatist, was in Cuba in the spring of 1930. José Maria Chacón y Calvo (1892-1969), Cuban literary critic, essayist, and scholar.

<sup>5</sup> Juan José Sicre (1898-1974), Cuban sculptor and professor of sculpture at the Academy of San Alejandro.

After the fall of Machado, when they freed many revolutionaries and others returned from exile, I did a number of portraits. I did a head of Juan Marinello and also one of Raúl Roa and Ramón Guirao, the poet. They would come by the studio in the afternoon. Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, Pablo de la Torriente, and Navarro Luna gathered there, among others<sup>6</sup>.

In 1933, after the fall of Machado, the Mendieta government granted fifty scholarships for study abroad “with the intention of sending ‘young trouble-makers’ out of the country”<sup>7</sup>. My father received one of these scholarships, to study something of which he did not know the meaning: “the pedagogical methods of teaching”. For this reason, in 1934, at the age of nineteen, he left Cuba, traveled around the Mediterranean, spent some time in Berlin, and settled down in Paris, where, instead of pedagogy, he studied sculpture. He attended the Académie Ranson, patronized by Aristide Maillol<sup>8</sup>, and the Académie de la Grande Chaumière. His decision to leave Cuba, like that of many other artists and writers in the thirties, was conditioned not only by his natural interest as a young man to see the world, but by the socio-political situation, the impossibility of finding work, and poverty. Even in a middle-class family like his, poverty meant hunger and eviction for not paying the rent. My father told heart-rending stories about how, as the oldest of seven children, he would often go to pawn his father’s law books, in search of some money for lunch, and would come back home ashamed at not having succeeded in obtaining more than a few insufficient cents.

Although he found himself in a relatively rich country like France with the privilege of having all his expenses paid, the young scholarship student Julio did not forget his past nor lose his social consciousness. While studying and living in Paris, fascinated by the artists who regularly frequented the cafés of Montparnasse and Boulevard Saint Michel, he joined the “Comité Iberoamericano para la Defensa de la República Española”, together with other Latin American foreigners, such as Carpentier, Neruda<sup>9</sup>, César Vallejo<sup>10</sup> and Anaïs Nin<sup>11</sup>, and followed political events with increasing anti-Fascist sentiment.

<sup>6</sup> Girona, *Memorias*, 65. Raúl Roa García (1907-1982), essayist, journalist, and politician. Juan Marinello Vidaurreta (1898-1977), Cuban essayist and poet. Pablo de la Torriente Brau (1901-1936), Cuban journalist and writer who went to Spain in 1936 as a war correspondent and died fighting in the defense of Madrid. Ramón Guirao (1908-1949), Cuban journalist, essayist, and poet. Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring (1889-1964), Cuban historian and journalist. Manuel Navarro Luna (1894-1966), Cuban poet and journalist. Member of the Grupo Literario de Manzanillo.

<sup>7</sup> Ana Suárez Díaz, “Andar y desandar hacia la verdad”, *Revolución y Cultura* 1 (1997), 32.

<sup>8</sup> Aristide Maillol (1861-1944) French sculptor.

<sup>9</sup> Pablo Neruda (1904-1973), Chilean poet, assigned to the Chilean Consulate first in Barcelona and then in Madrid during the Spanish Civil War.

<sup>10</sup> César Vallejo (1892-1938), Peruvian poet.

<sup>11</sup> Anaïs Nin (1903-1977), French writer, daughter of the Cuban-Spanish musician-composer Joaquín Nin.

When the war broke out in Spain, we Latin Americans organized a group to support the Spanish Republic in its struggle against Fascism. We would meet in a café, the Dupont on [Boulevard] Saint Michel. We had our weekly meetings in the basement, where they held banquets. The people who attended were, among others, Pablo Neruda, his wife Delia del Carril, who they called *La hormiguita*, César Vallejo with Georgette, Alejo Carpentier, Félix Pita Rodríguez, the Mexicans Andrés Iduarte with his wife, Graciela, and Renato Leduc, the poet-telegraphist of John Reed's reports during the revolution of Zapata and Pancho Villa, in addition to some students from Central and South America.

On one occasion, we had to meet on Anaïs Nin's barge, which was docked on the banks of the Seine, in front of Notre Dame<sup>12</sup>.

It is not surprising, therefore, that, after his scholarship, when he landed in New York, attracted to the city's cultural ferment but also looking for work, he found a steady job as a political cartoonist for a Spanish language newspaper, *La Voz*, dedicated primarily to the cause of Spain. Thus, from 1936 until the defeat of the Republic in 1939, he published daily political cartoons. These drawings earned him recognition, for example from the Congress of American Artists of 1937, which invited him as "Guest of Honor" for his commitment as an "anti-Fascist artist". One cartoon, in particular, even provoked a diplomatic incident, when the German and Italian diplomatic representatives in Havana denounced the editor of *Pueblo*, a Cuban newspaper which had reprinted the cartoon from *La Voz*, for "offending the dignity" of Hitler and Mussolini<sup>13</sup>.

In 1939 Julio returned to Havana: "With the defeat of the Republic, those of us who had dreamed of a better world, the anti-Fascists, were left devastated. It was the end of many illusions; and a million people had died. The Civil War ended; the Republic fell; the newspaper closed, and I felt very depressed, so I went home".<sup>14</sup> He worked as a political cartoonist for the newspaper *Noticias de Hoy*. However, as he would explain, in that period in Cuba, it was almost impossible, especially for artists, considered idlers, to earn a living. Sculptors, like journalists, often had to cater to the powers that be, and graphic artists could not find work, because all the graphic art – illustrations for books, posters for the film industry – was imported from the United States. Although his drawings were published daily, my father was not able to earn a living. For this reason, in 1940, he went to Mexico, attracted by the social, political, and artistic atmosphere there. He associated himself with the Taller de Gráfica Popular, founded in 1936, the first publishing house in Mexico to print political mate-

<sup>12</sup> Girona, *Memorias*, 73.

<sup>13</sup> An article in *La Voz*, a magazine published in New York, reproduces the political cartoon itself and reports on the legal action solicited by the German and Italian diplomats. *La Voz* comments: "The creative mind and sharp pencil of 'our Girona' are raising a storm in international journalism." *La Voz*, 21 February 1938, 5.

<sup>14</sup> Girona, *Memorias*, 73.



rial (posters, flyers) as works of art for sale: “In very little time”, writes Cuban art critic Carmen Bermúdez, “[the Taller de Gráfica Popular] became a prestigious school of graphic techniques. [...] Mexican graphics was committed to popular culture, social struggle, and social problems. As the semiologists have said, signs have memory; thus, the socio-realistic memory of graphic art penetrates Girona’s universe, giving his drawings force, civic-mindedness”<sup>15</sup>. He was given a position selling prints on commission at the gallery of the Taller, but all the same, he suffered hunger – and what is more, he ended up in El Pocito jail, detained together with all the other members of the workshop on the day after the first assassination attempt on Trotsky. His stay in Mexico, nevertheless, had an important effect on his career, because there he met the Mexican painter Pablo O’Higgins, one of the founders of the Taller, who offered him hospitality and encouraged him to become a painter.

[...] [A]fter my stay in Mexico, I was convinced that although caricatures were published in the newspaper –it is true – three days later that same newspaper would be used only to wrap fish, or something like that [...] whereas a serious drawing, what I call ‘serious’ has permanent value.

Perhaps it was Pablo who made me start to think more as a painter than as a caricaturist; because being a caricaturist presupposes looking for the ideas one shares with others, while being a painter requires another mentality, less public, more private, isolated, if you want.

For me it was a difficult decision [...]<sup>16</sup>.

At that point, my father’s life developed in two separate directions. Returning to New York, he dedicated himself to his own, personal creative activity. On the other hand, with the advance of Nazi-Fascism in Europe, he felt that his convictions demanded that he contribute more than political cartoons. When the United States entered World War II, he decided, inspired by the International Brigades, to enlist in the American army. “Now, in retrospect, I think that basically it bothered me that I had not gone to fight in Spain”, he confessed in an interview in 1997<sup>17</sup>. It should be said, however, that the cause of the Spanish Republic was felt with particular intensity by the Cuban people, who, in proportion to their population, provided the highest number of volunteers among the 52 nations represented in the International Brigades.

Although I volunteered to fight, I was not a John Wayne in a Western film. I was just an anti-Fascist.

We soldiers said goodbye to our girlfriends and wives on the long platform of Pensilvania [sic] Station, in New York. The women cried, and the

<sup>15</sup> Carmen Paula Bermúdez, “Apuntes de la guerra: Un estudio a los dibujos de Julio Girona”, *La Gaceta de Cuba* (January/February 1999), 17.

<sup>16</sup> Suárez Díaz, “Andar y desandar”, 33.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

soldiers, embracing them, would say, "Don't cry, honey. I will come back". The only woman who was not crying was Ilse, my wife; I was the one with tears rolling down my cheeks, and she was saying, "Don't worry, you'll be back".

Hemingway, an imposing figure in a war correspondent's uniform, was standing next to us<sup>18</sup>.

For three years, from 1943 to 1946, he was a soldier in England, France, and Belgium. But what he found in the army was very different from what he had imagined.

Undoubtedly, in World War II, there were many American soldiers committed to the defeat of Nazi-Fascism. But in the specific experience of my father, he found himself among men who had been drafted against their will and who were often very poorly educated and lacking in political consciousness. The soldiers in his company ridiculed him for having volunteered for the service.

"Gentlemen", announced Louis, in one of the stories about the war that my father would later write, "if you have never seen an idiot", he said, turning Julio around as if he were a mannequin, "here you have one. Take a look at him from the front, from the side, and from the back"<sup>19</sup>. Years later, among family and friends, we heard and savored so many anecdotes about this world in which my father, as an idealistic but rather naïve soldier, would remind us of his beloved Chaplin. To begin with, since his English was so poor, he would misunderstand what was said to him. They gave him a small package the size of a matchbox, containing a disinfectant powder. "To kill germs", said the sergeant. Julio understood "to kill Germans". Demonstrating how to use it, the sergeant pressed the box a couple of times, "shooting out" a yellow powder to a distance of about two feet. "It frightened me to think that the fight would be at such close quarters", my father would later comment<sup>20</sup>.

Many of the accounts of these years as a Cuban soldier in the United States army – collected in 1990 in his first book, *Seis horas y más*, which won the Premio de la Crítica of that year in Cuba – although written in a light vein, constitute a strong denunciation of war and of the absurdity of life in the army. My father noticed from the start the total lack of reference to anti-Fascism; it was not mentioned in their weekly political education classes, nor did they speak about events leading up to the war or its causes. Instead, a typical subject for these classes was "the cowardice of Negroes". In an episode of the book, a lieutenant explains:

"If they kill one of our boys in combat, we fight like tigers to retaliate for his death. A Negro doesn't react in the same way. He doesn't care about anything. He has no principles. He's slack, lazy, cowardly [...]"

<sup>18</sup> Girona, *Memorias*, 74-75.

<sup>19</sup> Julio Girona, *Seis horas y más* (La Habana: Letras cubanas, 1990), 31.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

“Sir”, I said, “I come from Cuba. In the history of my country, we have had true heroes, men who sacrificed their lives fighting for freedom. Maceo, our general, was a mulatto, and many of those who fought for our independence were Negroes”.

“Look, soldier”, the lieutenant replied. “I don’t know about those bastard countries. I’m talking about our son-of-a-bitch niggers, who I know well”<sup>21</sup>.

Julio was given the nickname “nigger-lover” – an insult, it must be said, which was quite common in that period in the United States and which reflected the fact that the army was still racially segregated. He noticed that the language in the army generally expressed racism, even towards their allies: the British were “lemons”, the French “frogs”.

“How come you talk so funny?” a soldier asked my father. “You don’t talk like us”. He was referring to his accent.

Another soldier offered an explanation: “It’s because he comes from Cuba”.

“What does that have to do with it?”

“Well”, the second soldier added, “because in Cuba they don’t have the same name for things”.

The first soldier was amazed. He didn’t know that things could be called by other names.

Suspicious, not wanting to be duped, he asked: “Are you telling me that a house is not a house?...”

“Well”, my father answered, “house is *casa*”.

“You’re kidding”, said the soldier, surprised. “How about sky?”

“It’s called *cielo*”.

“Snow?...”

“Don’t be stupid”, the other soldier replied. “How could they have the word ‘snow’ if it’s always hot in Cuba?”<sup>22</sup>.

Looking back, he would later comment:

In this war, Fascism was defeated in Europe, and I participated in its defeat. But at the same time, in the army, I experienced acts of racism [...]; injustice, privilege, inequality, violence, and abuse, among other things that I would have preferred had not existed<sup>23</sup>.

In his backpack, the soldier Julio carried a pencil, India ink, and a notebook, and, at moments of repose, he drew. The result was a collection of portraits that in recent years have been the subject of exhibitions, publications, and critical commentary. The drawings form a social chronicle of the

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 92-93.

<sup>23</sup> Suárez Díaz, “Andar y desandar”, 34.

ordinary figures that surrounded him: common soldiers, prisoners, women in cafés, docharchs, elderly people in the metró or on park benches. Instead of drawing an apocalyptic picture, he drew a human picture, “delicate”, “subtly moving”, observes Carmen Bermúdez in an article in *La Gaceta de Cuba*<sup>24</sup>.

[...] [I]n the hallway, I saw my first German prisoner. I was relieved to see his size. He was thin and not very tall. He didn't resemble the 'superman' that we saw in the documentaries, the invincible soldier who had conquered almost all of Europe. He was a corporal and he wore a red and black medal on his chest.

I took my sketch book out of my backpack. I told him to sit down so I could draw him. He sat quietly, without saying a word. He seemed sad. While I was drawing I thought that he should have been glad to be alive [...] <sup>25</sup>.

From a purely aesthetic point of view, there are clear references to the painters that my father admired: above all Picasso and Matisse, but also Modigliani and Cézanne. There are also elements drawn from his experience as a caricaturist: his use of black and white, the importance of line, the neutrality of the background, the economy of composition, an almost implicit text.

After the war, when my father returned to his family in New York – he had married Ilse Erythropel, his fellow sculpture student at San Alejandro, and he had a daughter, Annie – he took advantage of the G.I. Bill, the Roosevelt program that paid veterans to study. He enrolled at the Art Students League, where he studied with Morris Kantor, a well-known abstract painter out of whose classes came many of the painters of the New York School<sup>26</sup>. In this period he was a member of the Tenth Street “Club”, a group of avant-garde artists animated by the critic Harold Rosenberg<sup>27</sup>.

[...] I was a member of the so-called Tenth-Street Club, an informal circle of abstract painters which brought together, in a building on Tenth Street in Manhattan, the most famous painters in New York, artists like [de] Kooning, Motherwell, Klein [sic]<sup>28</sup> [...]. They would talk about painting, and I enjoyed it because I saw that nobody had the truth in his hand. Everyone had his own way of seeing things. I never took an active part in the debates because then, as now, I found it difficult to talk about art [...] <sup>29</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Bermúdez, “Apuntes de la guerra”, 16.

<sup>25</sup> Girona, *Seis horas*, 119.

<sup>26</sup> The Abstract Expressionist movement in New York in the late 1940s and 1950s.

<sup>27</sup> Harold Rosenberg (1906-1978), New York intellectual and art critic who played a major role in the affirmation of the New York School painters.

<sup>28</sup> Willem de Kooning (1904-1997), Robert Motherwell (1915-1991), and Franz Kline (1910-1962) were among the most prominent artists of the New York School.

<sup>29</sup> Suárez Díaz, “Andar y desandar”, 39.

In 1953, in the context of what Rosenberg defined as “Action Painting”<sup>30</sup>, he had his first one-man show in New York, followed by regular exhibitions at the Bertha Schaefer Gallery, one of the most prestigious galleries on 57<sup>th</sup> Street in those years. Nevertheless, despite his position in the United States art world, he always felt that he was a Cuban painter, and as such he was known. He traveled regularly to Cuba, exhibited in Havana, and took his New York experience with him:

[...] I arrived in Cuba enthusiastic about this experience; and I am very pleased to read the comments about that period by the artist Fayad Jamis<sup>31</sup>, with regard to the influence which this abstract painting of mine exerted among the members of the then nascent ‘Grupo de los Once’<sup>32</sup>, in Cuba. Some painters confess to having seen in it a different path; it opened up new possibilities of expression<sup>33</sup>.

He also maintained contact with fellow Cuban painters and intellectuals who, like him, were outside their country – with Nicolás Guillén<sup>34</sup>, for example, whom he had known since the years when they would converse afternoons at the Café El Lucero in Old Havana. Many years later, Raúl Roa<sup>35</sup>, referring to my father’s persevering “Cuban-ness”, supposedly said: “The Yankees have a piece of Cuba at Guantánamo, but the Cubans have a piece of the United States at Julito’s house”.

In the 1950s, my father reached the peak of his career as a New York painter, affirming himself in the difficult world of the art market. His abstract oil paintings were acquired by museums in many parts of the United States, Latin America, Europe, and Japan. He was invited to teach in an art school in Germany, working two years at the Werkkunstschule in Krefeld, where his spontaneous character, progressive ideas, and humor came as a surprise in the somewhat formal atmosphere of the school, winning him a great deal of affection. His experience in Germany was also important because, aside from introducing him into German avant-garde art circles, it led to a friendship with the director of the school, who was the person who convinced him to write down the stories with which he had entertained students and teachers for the two years of his teaching appointment. In fact, *Seis horas y más* is dedicated to Professor Fritz Winter.

<sup>30</sup> Harold Rosenberg, “The American Action Painters”, *Art News* 8 (1952), 23-39.

<sup>31</sup> Fayad Jamis (1930-1988), Mexican-born Cuban poet and painter.

<sup>32</sup> The ‘Group of Eleven’ was composed of eleven Cuban painters and sculptors who exhibited together in the 1950s, “understanding that the basis of art today is the total freedom of the individual artist” and claiming that “the sculpture and the painting of today aspire to being an object in its own right.” *Pintores cubanos* (La Habana: Ediciones R, 1962), 40.

<sup>33</sup> Suárez Díaz, “Andar y desandar”, 39.

<sup>34</sup> Nicolás Guillén, (1902-1989), Cuban “national” poet.

<sup>35</sup> Roa was Cuban Foreign Minister from 1959 until 1976. See also note 9.

On 1 January 1959, when the “barbudos” entered Havana, my father exulted. With our old short-wave radio, he listened continuously to the news. He came to my elementary school to “explain” the Revolution to the children and teachers. However, tension between the United States and Cuba rose vertiginously. In 1961, Eisenhower broke diplomatic relations; the embargo, the Bay of Pigs, and the missile crisis followed. Cuba entered a condition of economic isolation that has lasted until today, one of the longest in world history. In 1963, under the Trading With the Enemy Act, Washington imposed heavy sanctions on United States citizens who traveled to the island. It was only in 1968 that my father, who had acquired United States citizenship as a veteran, was able to obtain permission from the State Department for one trip to Cuba. From that year until his death in 2002, he went to Cuba regularly.

In the last thirty-five years of his life, in Cuba, in New York, he continued to paint. With ease, he would alternate figurative compositions, especially of women (“Julio Girona’s Women” was the title of an exhibition in Havana in 1995) with abstract compositions. Sometimes he claimed that “a good drawing or a good painting is always an abstraction”<sup>36</sup>. Other times he would say, however, that he was not really an abstract painter, that in his work “one could always discern female forms”<sup>37</sup>. At one of his exhibitions, he relates in an article in *Bohemia*, “someone was looking at an image that suggested a woman’s breasts, and he asked me, ‘Girona, do I see what I see?’ I answered him directly, ‘Yes, you see what you see’”<sup>38</sup>.

After 1990, encouraged by the reception of *Seis horas*, he also dedicated himself to writing. He put down on paper many episodes from his vast repertoire of memories; he wrote his stories of contemporary life in Havana, New York, Florence, where he frequently came to visit. He published *Memorias sin título* (1994), *Café frente al mar* (2000), and *Páginas de mi diario* (2005, published posthumously). He started writing poems, which appeared in his paintings, first as scattered words – “primavera”, “tarde”, “noche”, “mañana” – then, one day, as a complete sentence: “Ella, moviendo los brazos, como una araña, se quita la ropa”. From that moment on, urged on by the poet and critic Luis Suardiáz, he came out with torrents of poems. Some of these were published in *Música barroca* (1992) and later in *La corbata roja* (1996). His verses are fragments of images or memories that have much in common with his paintings. Indeed, according to the critic Orlando Hernández, Girona’s work contributes to the “confusion” that *should* exist between art and poetry<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> Suárez Díaz, “Andar y desandar”, 39.

<sup>37</sup> Sahily Tabares, “No soy un pintor ‘abstracto’”, *Bohemia*.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Orlando Hernández, “Otro piropo para Julio Girona”, *Desde la ventanilla. Pinturas de Julio Girona* (La Habana: Centro Cultural Cinematográfico Charles Chaplin, 1990), 4.

All his life my father had Cuba in his heart, but like many other Cubans who the journalists of other countries tend to forget, he left his country in the difficult 1930s, in order to realize his dream of becoming an artist. He claimed that today, differently, the Cuba that is trying to create a society with greater autonomy, dignity, and justice, although economically modest, sustains its culture and its artists, young and old. He found that the artists in Revolutionary Cuba are even privileged .

[...] (T)he Revolution has given artists prestige, it has taken them into account, and today, more than ever, painters and sculptors develop their art under favorable conditions, receiving moral and material encouragement. Before, this wasn't the case, just the opposite [...]. Today, a young painter, not even 25 years old, has already had the opportunity to exhibit in a dozen European capitals and in other parts of the world. And this gives him the inspiration to continue working and all the freedom he needs to create<sup>40</sup>.

He too received a great deal of recognition, for his paintings as well as for his writings. In 1986, the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes dedicated a first large retrospective exhibition to his work<sup>41</sup>. In 1989, he was named honorary member of UNEAC [Unión de escritores y artistas de Cuba]. In 1998, he received the Premio Nacional de las Artes Plásticas. I know he was very pleased with the great honor that was awarded him; I also know that he was very happy with the large turkey sent to him by the Ministry of Culture<sup>42</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> Rudel Zaldívar, "Julio Girona: Retrospectiva de un pintor", *La Nueva Gaceta* (October/November 1986), 25.

<sup>41</sup> A retrospective exhibition "Julio Girona: Una Historia Personal" is currently on view at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Havana. It opened on January 23, 2009.

<sup>42</sup> This essay, now revised, was originally presented in Italian with the title "L'opera artistica e letteraria di Julio Girona" at the conference *Cuba dentro e fuori*, University of Florence, 6-8 May 2008.



Fig. 27 – Drawing of woman with yellow background, 1970s(?); particular.

Fig. 28 – Profile of woman with hat. Black and white ink drawing on paper, dated 1975.

Fig. 29 – Photo of Julio Girona, working in his studio in Teaneck, New Jersey, early 1960s(?).



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## Chapter 15

# Recovering from the “Buena Vista Syndrome”. Cuban Music on Film

*People think because of Ry Cooder and Buena Vista that Cuban music became better known.*

*That may be true, but it set us back 40 years. Now we are fighting against the mythological vision of the old Cuba, the Cuba of the Tropicana Club and old cars.*

X Alfonso, Cuban rock musician<sup>1</sup>

Today people around the world are probably aware of the existence of Cuba mainly because of its revolution and its music. Cuban politics has inspired analyses, controversies, and mythologies for almost fifty years; and Cuban music has been central to both the island’s self-representation and its international image for at least a century. In the last decade, the global discourse on Cuba has received a powerful boost from Wim Wenders’ documentary *Buena Vista Social Club* (Germany, 1999). Since 1999, the film has generated an enormous attention in the international press and media, reviving the fortunes of artists such as late Compay Segundo and Ibrahim Ferrer and putting Cuba again on the international cultural map. By mixing images of elderly musicians and Havana’s architectural grandeur with a sense of musical intimacy and nostalgia, *Buena Vista* has offered international audiences an intriguing, seductive portrayal of the Caribbean island.

A critical assessment of the role of music in mediating the image of Cuba, however, requires looking beyond the charm of reminiscence and the depiction of music as a natural vehicle for Caribbean exuberance. In this article, I discuss some recent foreign films on Cuban music, reflecting on the contribution of music – via the silver screen – to the construction of global representations of Cuba<sup>2</sup>. In the first part of the article, I look briefly at the history

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in David E. Thigpen, “Hidden Havana”, *Time* on-line, [www.time.com](http://www.time.com), 15 September 2001.

<sup>2</sup> In this article I will focus exclusively on Western film productions dealing with Cuban music. For an overview of post-1959 Cuban cinema, see Michael Chanan, *Cuban Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

of the popularity of Cuban music on the international arena and at its use by Hollywood. I then focus on the case of *Buena Vista Social Club*, analyzing how the film has set an enormously influential discourse on Cuba and its music. In the final section, I examine two documentaries screened at the 2007 edition of *Festival dei Popoli*<sup>3</sup>, discussing them in the light of the social and artistic changes that have taken place on the island during the *período especial*<sup>4</sup>.

This overview, I believe, emphasizes the central role played by music in old and new cinematographic representations of Cuba. It also shows how recent foreign film production on Cuban music seems to have shifted from a distant, politically disengaged, neo-colonial angle to an increasing incorporation of Cubans' views and perspectives. Such shift, in a sense, has been made possible by the very economic crisis, which has laid bare social contradictions, given birth to new expressive forms, and tied the island to Western economic and cultural markets, allowing foreign directors to explore everyday life and art on the island and engage in a dialogue with contemporary Cuban society.

### I. The Music of Cuba on the Global Arena

The music of Cuba has long enjoyed an exceptional international popularity. After successfully exporting *habanera* to the US, Latin America, and Europe in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Cuba made a wide international impact in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with popular genres such as *danzón*, *son*, *bolero*, and *conga*, and, after WWII, *mambo*, *chachacha*, and later *salsa*. On another level Afro-Cuban jazz instigated *bebop* in the 1940s, and influenced generations of US jazzmen<sup>5</sup>.

In the 1930s and 1940s, in particular, Cuban music and dance became a mainstay of US 'Latin' musicals and films produced by Broadway and Hollywood. Often based on incoherent stories and responsible for the construction of the frivolous/sensual/exotic Latin American stereotype, those films proved nonetheless porous to the sounds of countries like Argentina, Brasil, and Cuba, and played a crucial role in the popularization of Latin music in the West<sup>6</sup>.

Consider, for example, *The Cuban Love Song*, a 1931 MGM movie directed by W.S. Van Dyke. The film was a story of love and adventure set in an exotic Cuba and constructed around "El manicero" ("The Peanut's

<sup>3</sup> *La Fabri\_K – The Cuban Hip-Hop Factory* (Lisandro Pérez-Rey, 2004) and *El telón de azúcar* (Camila Guzmán Urzúa, 2006). The Florentin Festival dei Popoli hosted a special section on Cuba during its 2007 edition.

<sup>4</sup> The euphemistically-called *período especial en tiempo de paz* was proclaimed by Fidel Castro in 1990. As Castro announced his retirement from public office in early 2008, however, ordinary Cubans were still struggling with the same harsh economic reality of the previous decade.

<sup>5</sup> John Storm Roberts, *Latin Jazz. The First of the Fusions. 1880s to Today* (New York: Schirmer, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> John Storm Roberts, *The Latin Tinge. The Impact of Latin American Music in the United States* (Tivoli, NY: Original Music, 1985).

Vendor”), a Cuban song that had just achieved an extraordinary success in the US. The film had its main characters played by US operatic singer Lawrence Tibbett as the highbrow, sophisticated, white male American, and Mexican actress Lupe Velez as the lowbrow, sensual, female Latin.

As Jonathan Greenberg observes, through its particular construction, “*Cuban Love Song* becomes the fictional story of the genesis of ‘El manicero’. In depicting this hit in a pre-commercial setting, and setting up its popularity in the US, the movie creates a mythology about the migration of Cuban music into the North American market”<sup>7</sup>. In other words, by drawing the story of an individual who brings the untamed tune to the First World, the film uses Cuban music to both celebrate and hide the dominant/dominated relationship and the ‘epistemic violence’ of colonial power<sup>8</sup>. Such narrative would prove a recurring *topos* in subsequent representations of Cuban music.

Fig. 30 – Promotional brochure of the 1950s distributed by a New York club (from the exhibit *American Sabor: Latinos in U.S. Popular Music*, ottobre 2007 – settembre 2008, EMPFSM, Seattle, USA).



After WWII, the popularity of Cuban music in the US was reinforced by its resonance among Latino communities, particularly in New York City, where the fad of *mambo* spread in the late 1940s, followed by that of *chachacha* in the mid-1950s. It was also there that in the 1960s Latin musicians produced the heady mix of Cuban *son*, jazz and pan-Latin rhythms that became later known as *salsa*. In the 1950s, Cuba became also an important focus for US elite tourism, a tropical destination hosting international entertainment stars and renowned for its gambling places, sex industry, and music<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Greenberg, “The Performance of Assimilation: Power and Commerce in *The Cuban Love Song*”, paper presented at the 13th Biennial Conference of The International Association for the Study of Popular Music, Rome, 25-30 July 2005.

<sup>8</sup> On the concept of ‘epistemic violence’, see Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> Cristóbal Díaz Ayala, *Música del areyto a la nueva trova* (Miami: Universal, 1993).

The advent of the revolution had deep effects on the production and consumption of music in Cuba<sup>10</sup>, making an impact on the international arena as well. On the one hand, US political hostility and embargo increasingly marginalized music originating from the island. On the other hand, the new Cuban leadership proved scarcely enthusiastic about pursuing cultural contacts with the West, leading to what one Cuban author has described as a “cultural self-blockade”<sup>11</sup>. With few and selected exceptions, all this resulted in the virtual disappearance of music made on the island from the Western scene for almost three decades<sup>12</sup>.

Cuban music re-emerged on the international arena on a massive scale only during the 1990s, and mainly as an indirect result of the economic crisis produced on the island by the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which forced the Cuban government to open to tourism and foreign investors, including foreign record labels. As it had already happened in the 1930s, much of the responsibility for the renewed global interest in Cuban music and Cuba fell on movies.

## 2. Enter *Buena Vista Social Club*

In fact, such responsibility virtually fell on a single film, a documentary made by well-known German director Wim Wenders (b. 1945). *Buena Vista Social Club* took its title from an album produced in 1997 by US rock guitarist Ry Cooder for a small British independent label, and born from an almost casual encounter with musicians who had never played together before<sup>13</sup>. Since, the impact of the film has largely redefined Cuban music at a global level, setting a new musical and narrative standard.

The film told the story of the recording of an album by a group of elderly Cuban musicians and of their concerts abroad (in fact *not* the story of the album with the same name, but of a subsequent one made by singer Ibrahim Ferrer with the same artists and producers). Both the film and the CD were defined by a reference to the past contained not only in their title

<sup>10</sup> The revolutionary government, for example, abolished gambling, established state control over media and music venues, made it difficult for musicians to travel abroad, and obviously influenced musical tastes. See Robin Moore, *Music and Revolution. Cultural Change in Socialist Cuba* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Leonardo Acosta, “The problem of Music and its Dissemination in Cuba”, in *Essays on Cuban Music*, ed. Peter Manuel (Lanham: University Press of America, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> The same, it must be noticed, was not true for the music made by Cuban expatriates, which continued to enjoy international exposure and success. It was only in 1988 that the Berman Amendment to US embargo laws made cultural trade between the US and Cuba possible again.

<sup>13</sup> The film *Buena Vista Social Club* was produced in Germany in 1999. The CD, produced by World Circuit in 1997, won a Grammy and sold 7 million copies, a figure previously unthinkable for a ‘world music’ album. Among the many exceptional factors surrounding the success of *Buena Vista*, we could mention the absence of involvement of major record labels and international stars, and the album’s stylistic remoteness from Anglo-American pop in terms of both sounds and language.

(the name of a long-disappeared recreational club in Havana), but also in their old-fashioned sounds, in the portraits of wrinkled faces and in the bleached images of crumbling Havana, offering multiple signs of an exercise in the celebration of vintage music, people and places.

All those aspects point to a number of issues. First, the film did not portray a pre-existing local band, but an outfit and an event created by the interest of a handful of foreigners with a limited knowledge of Cuba and its music<sup>14</sup>. Second, the music of the album and film did not offer a coherent picture in terms of style and repertoire, but a collection of disparate artists and genres from different periods, pasted together by Cooder's 'retro' sound production. And third, the music and the artists featured had no specific local audience: at the time most Cubans considered them as *passé* and irrelevant, and were listening to completely different sounds<sup>15</sup>.

By focusing on the artists' old age and apparent naïveté, on the nostalgic allure of the music, and on images of urban decay, however, Wenders' film was able to produce a captivating picture of Cuba that appeared at the same time intimate and epic. This image was reinforced by a narrative of discovery of a "hidden musical treasure" in Cuba that was central not only to the film, but also to the subsequent interviews released by Cooder and Wenders.

Such narrative was taken for granted by most Western commentators, who bought the rhetoric of *Buena Vista* as 'Cuban traditional music' without questioning who discovered what, and what 'traditional music' meant<sup>16</sup>. Western journalists and audiences, thus, reacted enthusiastically to Cooder's and Wenders' feat. After the release of the film, English-language publications released hundreds of articles proclaiming a 'Latin invasion' and a 'Cuban musical revolution'<sup>17</sup>, and the UK press commented, "The album opened your ears-The film will touch your soul" (*The Times*), "a warm, relaxed and colourful presentation of inspirational music makers" (*Time Out*), "moving and uplifting" (*The Guardian*)<sup>18</sup>.

The joint success of the album and the film eventually transformed its musicians into cultural and political icons, symbols of the resistance

<sup>14</sup> Juan de Marcos González (Artists & Repertoire for *Buena Vista Social Club*), interview with the author, London, November 1999.

<sup>15</sup> The same can be said for Latin American audiences, who were hardly impressed by *Buena Vista* because they were already quite familiar with the sounds of *bolero* and *son* (Vincenzo Perna, "Dancing the Crisis, Singing the Past. Musical Dissonances in Cuba during the *Periodo Especial*", *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 2 (2002), 213-229.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Italian TV reportage in the Italian tour of the I. Ferrer Orchestra: Daniela Tagliafico, "In viaggio con i supernonni", TG2 Dossier, Rai/Italy, July 1999. The music of *Buena Vista* did not reflect any national folk 'tradition', but assembled a series of popular genres and styles from the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s that incorporated ample foreign influences and were already mass-produced in their own time. Think, for example, of the strong US jazz influences found in the style of *Buena Vista* pianist Rubén González (1919-2003).

<sup>17</sup> Vincenzo Perna, *Timba, the Sound of the Cuban Crisis* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> The film received an Academy Award nomination, a Best Documentary Award from the European Film Awards, and various other prizes.

of Cuba the David to the arrogance of the US Goliath. At the close of the 1990s, a *Buena Vista* big band offered a concert to UN delegates at their headquarters in New York, and the film was projected in the presence of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. According to a document issued in 2000 by an International NGO, “[today] Americans are more open than ever to Cuba [...]. What some have called the ‘Buena Vista Social Club syndrome’ [...] is a desire by many Americans to learn about Cuba, to visit Cuba, and one day, to trade goods with Cuba”<sup>19</sup>.

By bringing to the fore its lively *viejitos*, nonetheless, the success of *Buena Vista* produced a distortion of historical perspective, deflecting international attention towards Cuban vintage sounds and artists and completely bypassing contemporary production.<sup>20</sup> The international success of *Buena Vista*, therefore, generated in the West a number of significant effects. It essentialized and stereotyped specific segments of music of the past as the only relevant type of Cuban music. Through its fairytale of ‘discovery’ and success abroad, it portrayed such music and its musicians from an angle that was strikingly reminiscent of the narrative of old Hollywood films. It obliquely suggested that, on a musical/cultural level, nothing important had happened in Cuba after the revolution – except, perhaps, that socialism had unwillingly preserved some ‘treasures of the past’. And, most disturbingly, it offered a patronizing portrait of Cuban artists as children and *bon sauvages*, waiting in the shadow of history to be discovered by the world (read: sold to the Western market). Some critics of the film have noticed its complete silence on the political confrontation US-Cuba, the embargo and the *período especial*<sup>21</sup>. The favourable reception of the film by both US liberals in New York and conservative Cuban-Americans in Miami is, perhaps, another indirect indicator of its political ambiguities<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> ‘Epilogue: Trade Partners, not Trade Enemies’, in Oxfam America 2000, *Going Against the Grain*, [www.oxfamamerica.org](http://www.oxfamamerica.org).

<sup>20</sup> The 1990s economic crisis, in fact, had produced a flourishing of live music bands in the field of jazz, folklore, rap, and *música bailable* or *timba* (a variant of Cuba dance music mixing son, rumba and jazz), none of which was reflected by *Buena Vista*. *Timba*’s eclecticism and ties with tourism, in particular, had made it into a soundtrack for tourists’ *dolce vita* and a social chronicle of the *período especial*. But they also made dance music appear as far more commercial and contentious, and far less romantic than ‘traditional’ son as celebrated by *Buena Vista*. As a result, *timba* was eventually censored by the Cuban authorities and remained at the margins of the international discourse on Cuban music. See: Perna, *Timba*.

<sup>21</sup> For Wenders’ reply, see Richard Phillips, “The culture of independent film criticism has gone down the drain”, *World Socialist Web Site*, [www.wsws.org/articles/2000/jan2000/wwen-j10.shtml](http://www.wsws.org/articles/2000/jan2000/wwen-j10.shtml).

<sup>22</sup> See Art Levine, “Viva Buena Vista Social Club”, *Salon.com* on-line, 9 March 1999, [www.salon.com](http://www.salon.com). *Buena Vista* caused also considerable effects in Cuba, generating controversies between ‘retro’ and ‘modern’ musicians and a delighted reaction by the state media (with a later dismissal). It also made an obvious impact on the local presence and visibility of ‘traditional music’: “In the tourist quarters of Old Havana it can seem at times as if every Cuban with a guitar has come out to sing the songs that *Buena Vista* made famous. It’s as if you were to go to Liverpool and find bands singing Beatles songs on every street corner.” “Now we make politics”, *The Economist* on-line, 15 December 2006, [www.economist.com](http://www.economist.com).

### 3. What Kind of Music?

The success of *Buena Vista* paved the way to an exponential growth in cinematographic portraits of Cuban music. It is interesting to look here briefly at *Música cubana* (Cuba-Germany-Japan, 2004) and *Havana Blues* (Spain-France-Cuba, 2005), two films that work on broadly similar narratives, but produce significantly diverging representations.

*Música cubana* is a film produced by Wenders himself and directed by Argentine film-maker Germán Kral (b. 1968). The movie shows one of the survivors of *Buena Vista*, singer Pio Leyva (1917-2006), in the process of putting together a group of young musicians in Havana and leading them to a (fictional) success in Japan. In contrast to its antecedent, the film claims to be presenting “this time, new Cuban music” (Italian brochure, 2004), and does introduce some young Cuban talents.

The outcome, however, is a sort of docu-fiction with a very thin story, constructed around a permanent confusion between fiction and reality. The characters are real musicians who perform as themselves in a fictional story, play the fairytale of the happy ending, and have all their aspirations to success resting with the condescending presence of Leyva and two Japanese tourists/entrepreneurs. In other words, young artists’ validation comes to depend entirely on the old hero of *Buena Vista*. Wenders’ film therefore acts as both a mythological and a real reference point for the new film: it supplies its rhetorical structure (discovery, tour abroad, success); it is incorporated into its discourse (Leyva is popular in Cuba because of his participation to *Buena Vista*); it provides a justification and a central element in its marketing<sup>23</sup>.

*Havana Blues*, by contrast, is a fictional film made by Benito Zambrano (b. 1964), a successful Spanish director who studied film in Cuba. The plot sets off from the usual trials and tribulations of musicians: young Cuban rockers Ruy and Tito try to make a living out of their passion for music, and one day are offered the chance of a recording contract and a tour abroad by a Spanish entrepreneur. But Ruy’s marriage collapses: caught between conflicting loyalties, Ruy rejects the offer and breaks the artistic project with Tito. During their farewell concert in Havana, Ruy has a glimpse of the conclusion of the story, with Tito leaving for Spain with the rest of the band and his family boarding on a boat for Florida.

Despite a story derived from a variation on the familiar *Fame* structure, the movie is well interpreted and offers credible characters. By keeping away from retro clichés, it provides a sympathetic and realistic picture (if anything, a bit rosy) of the life and troubles of contemporary Cubans, presenting a face of Cuban music made of rock, funk, rap, and salsa that was almost completely unknown to global audiences.

<sup>23</sup> The Italian promotional brochure reads, “After Buena Vista Social Club, Wim Wenders presents *Música cubana*”, describing Wenders as “the father of *Música cubana*” (2004).

Interestingly, all three films discussed above employ loosely similar plots, with obscure musicians facing new opportunities offered them by foreigners. It is perhaps ironic that the most realistic portrait of music and life in today's Cuba should emerge from the entirely fictional *Habana Blues*, which manages to touch on themes very familiar to the Cubans of the *período especial*, such as lack of money and perspectives, disintegration of family, exploitation by dodgy foreigners, migration, and exile.

#### 4. Filming a Different Cuba

Zambrano's work takes us back to the present, reminding of two aspects of life in Cuba that are completely missing from Wenders' and Kral's movies: the fight (*la lucha*) of Cuban people to keep afloat under the difficulties of the *período especial*, and the new expressive urge emerged during such period. In this sense, two documentaries screened in the *Cuban Stories* section of the *Festival dei Popoli* of 2007 touch on different but central aspects of the crisis, and complement each other.

*El telón de azúcar* (Cuba-Spain-France, 2006) is an autobiographical film made by Chilean director Camila Guzmán Urzúa (b. 1971), who migrated with her family to Cuba after Pinochet's coup, and grew up there<sup>24</sup>. The movie, whose title makes reference to both the iron curtain and sugar (which was bartered for Russian oil), is based on interviews with old school mates and friends and evoke their years of childhood and adolescence.

By recalling a golden age of youth and optimism, those memories reflect an era of collective confidence and hope that makes a sharp contrast with present-day uncertainties and worries. The documentary thus becomes a painful assessment of the broken dreams of Cuban socialism and of the disillusion of a whole generation, many of whose members have now left the island. The result is an intriguing film that keeps away from explicit political issues, but helps to understand the material and moral crisis of the *período especial* (the past as a source of critical reflection *vs* the marketing of the past as nostalgia in *Buena Vista*, one might say).

The film pays only a marginal attention to music, most notably in a scene that shows the return concert of members of Havana Abierta, a Cuban fusion band of musicians in their 30s, who have lived several years abroad. Yet their very presence, and the minimalist soundtrack provided by Omar Sosa (a talented pianist and a rising star of Cuban jazz, who now lives in Spain), become part of the reflection on the diaspora of post-1959 generations.

Urzúa's exploration introduces us to another remarkable aspect of the last two decades in Cuba. Against all economic odds, the *período especial* has proved an extremely creative period, characterized, in particular, by an

<sup>24</sup> She is the daughter of Patricio Guzmán, a well-known Chilean director who documented the years of the Allende government.



Afro-Cuban cultural renaissance encompassing religion, poetry, visual art, dance, and music. Indeed, one could say that most of the expressive forms that have been coming out of Cuba since the early 1990s – be they oral poetry, sacred drumming, rumba dancing, traditional *son*, Afro-Cuban jazz, and timba – can be traced back to African origins.

Fig. 31 – Habana Blues; poster of the Spanish edition of the movie.



Within such trend a special place has been occupied by Cuban rap, a movement emerged in Havana in the early 1990s and now boasting a national festival, hundreds of bands and a certain degree of institutional support<sup>25</sup>. Its popularity reflects both the recognition of US popular culture in Cuba and the proximity between Afro-Cuban and US black urban culture<sup>26</sup>. Proud of its own *barrio* origins, marginality and cultural

<sup>25</sup> Deborah Pacini-Hernandez and Reebee Garofalo, "The Emergence of Rap Cubano: An Historical Perspective", in *Music, Space, and Place*, ed. Sheila Whiteley, Andy Bennett and Stan Hawkins (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 89-107.

<sup>26</sup> Music styles like rap and rumba, for example, originate from similar conditions of marginalization, and are both based on verbal/physical dexterity and performed by voice on percussive sounds (in its early days, in fact, Cuban rap was accompanied by beating on wooden crates, just like early rumba). Internationally, Cuban rap has acquired resonance with the Orishas' album *A lo cubano* (2000), and has generated a number of (mainly US) documentaries such as *Cuban Hip Hop All-Stars* (Joshua Bee Alafia, 2004); *Cuban hip hop. Desde el principio* (Vanessa & Larissa Diaz, 2006); *East of Havana* (Emilia Menocal and Jauretsi Saizarbitoria, 2006); and *Guerrilla Radio* (Thomas Nybo,

bricolage, Cuban rap dismisses cultural nationalistic criticisms and incorporates Afro-Cuban themes, often commenting in local street slang on issues such as social injustice and racial prejudice<sup>27</sup>.

In the documentary *La Fabri\_K – The Cuban Hip-Hop Factory* (2004), Cuban-American director Lisandro Pérez-Rey (b. 1975) employs a rapid, music-video style to narrate the story of a project involving rap bands Doble Filo and Obsesión – thus offering yet another variation on the theme of musicians aspiring to tour the West. This time the tour was real and involved young, mostly black Cuban musicians, who managed to perform to knowledgeable audiences (as opposed to the well-meaning, but generally uninformed audiences of *Buena Vista*) in Miami and New York City, where they met personalities such as Harry Belafonte and hip-hop luminaries like Fab Five Freddy, The Roots and Afrika Bambaataa.

The film was commissioned by the Miami Light Project, a non-profit US cultural organization promoting live art in South Florida. Although it is not clear to what extent it documents a tour, or produces a tour in order to film it, the documentary portrays Cuban music as a dynamic practice, showing musicians while preparing for the trip, rehearsing, and reflecting on the social and artistic circumstances of today's Cuba. It offers interesting views on issues of creativity and daily life, crisis and blockade, freedom and censorship, black identity and discrimination in Cuba. Together with views of Miami politics and images of the commercialization of US hip-hop, the movie portrays the cultural shock experienced by the Cubans in their first contact with US multicultural society, and draws into the picture second-generation Cuban-Americans (like Pérez-Rey himself), who appear to be far more curious and interested in dialogue with Cuba than most of their parents.

## 5. Conclusions

Music has proved crucial to the international image of Cuba for at least a century. In the 1930s and 1940s, Cuban sounds and dance featured generously in Hollywood films that were built around narratives of discovery and disclosure of 'wild' people and music, playing a decisive role in stereotyping Latin Americans as sensual, passionate, but essentially inferior individuals. Hollywood's celebration of Cuba as a source of 'hot' music and people thus became strategic to a discourse that sought to naturalize the asymmetry of power between the West and its peripheries.

A comparable narrative of musical revelation, migration to the West, and success, has recently re-emerged with films like *Buena Vista Social Club*,

2007). Despite being the expression of a fascinating subculture, however, local rap in Cuba is today certainly *not* as popular as reggaeton among street kids, or as timba among working-class adults.

<sup>27</sup> Geoff Baker, "La Habana que no conoces. Cuban Rap and the Social Construction of Urban Space", *Ethnomusicology Forum* 2 (2005), 215-246.

and their portrait of Cuba as a backward, declining, romantic destination. Following neo-colonial representations of First *vs* Third World, Wenders' movie offered world audiences a compassionate, yet patronizing and pathetic picture of Cuban musicians as disadvantaged, submissive others rescued by a benevolent self. In the film, music not only provided the main focus for the story: through its own specific appeal, music helped to bestow persuasiveness to the plot, genuineness to the characters, and deepness to their mythology, constructing a rhetorical model for a number of subsequent films.

Narratives of musicians' progression from local obscurity to accomplishment abroad, however, have been employed by other directors to set up quite different pictures of Cuba. By following the preparation, US tour, and return to the island of two Cuban hip-hop bands, for instance, Pérez-Rey offers with *The Cuban Hip-Hop Factory* a vision that eschews nostalgia and escapist definitions of national culture. He chooses a perspective that explores everyday life and raises a number of social and political issues, questioning, for example, the absurdity of US embargo laws and the role of black identity in modern Cuba.

It could be objected that all cinematographic narrations examined here have a common element, their reference to foreign audiences, their wish to bring (and sell) Cuban music abroad, both symbolically *and* literally. These representations might echo a condescending attitude: but they also reflect an obvious economic reality, Cuba's dramatic dependence on foreign capital in the form of tourism, investment, loans, and family remittances. As *El telón de azúcar* shows, the obsessive idea of going abroad, so widespread among young Cubans, is revealing of their necessity to reflect on their own past, break the present sense of seclusion, and face the challenges of the future.

In a moment of rising global interest – and controversy – on Cuba, (see, for example, the June 2007 *querelle* on the Italian leftist daily *Liberazione*)<sup>28</sup>, breaking the island's international isolation and trying to look sympathetically, yet realistically, at its society and culture becomes particularly important. *La Fabri\_K* and *El telón de azúcar* manage to avoid political polarization and cultural stereotyping, offering a reflection on everyday life and issues of identity, artistic freedom, self-empowerment and exile brought by young foreign directors who speak the language, are familiar with Cuba, and explore the island with an enquiring spirit. In this sense, the two documentaries should perhaps be seen not only, or not so much, as *documents* about today's Cuba, but as acts of cultural militancy in favour of dialogue.

<sup>28</sup> In June 2007, Italian leftist daily *Liberazione* published a series of highly critical reportages on present-day Cuba, written by Angela Nocioni. The articles caused an outrage among many readers of the paper, and were criticized by a Cuban journalist's website, which published an insulting personal attack on Nocioni (Miguel del Padrón, "La indecencia se sube hasta las conciencias. Los periódicos mafiosos e indignos de Miami insultan al pueblo cubano y el italiano los imita", *Unión de Periodistas de Cuba* on-line, [www.cubaperiodistas.cu/noticias/junio07/04/05.htm](http://www.cubaperiodistas.cu/noticias/junio07/04/05.htm)).

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Fig. 32 – Commercial ad of Wim Wenders' Buena Vista Social Club, published by a British magazine in September 1999.



**Part VI**

Cuba and the International Scene  
of the Cold War: the African Case

On the previous page – *Ernesto Che Guevara in the Congo* (anonymous author, Museo Che Guevara, Centro de Estudio Che Guevara, La Habana, Cuba).

## Cuba and the International Scene of the Cold War: the African Case

The *Revolución* immediately hurled Cuba onto the world stage. Objectively, Cuba became a model of revolutionary tactics for anti-colonial movements, a thorn in the side of the United States, a highly-prized ally for the Soviet Union and a model of development for post-colonial states. Subjectively, the young revolutionaries conceived of themselves as part of a larger anti-imperialist movement in the so-called Third World. Ernesto “Che” Guevara’s invitation to world revolutionaries to create “two, three, many Vietnams” was consistent with Cuba’s leading role among the Non-Aligned Countries, its position at the General Assembly of the United Nations in support of national liberation movements in Africa and Asia, its material support for Latin American guerrilla movements and the creation of the Tricontinental conference (1966)<sup>1</sup>. Greater alignment with the Soviet Union after the first half of the 1960s only partially smoothed Cuba’s active revolutionary internationalism. While Che’s death in Bolivia (1967) gave rise to the worship of the *guerrillero heroico* worldwide, it was his previous mission in Zaire (1965) that had brought Cuba in close connection with revolutionary and anti-colonial movements in Africa. The strength of such links emerged clearly a decade later in newly independent Angola, as discussed by Candace Sobers and Maria Stella Rognoni, from different standpoints, in their essays. In the wake of the fall of the Portuguese empire in 1975, civil strife broke out between the Marxist *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA) and the competing *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA) and *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola* (FNLA) backed by the United States, Zaire, China and the apart-

<sup>1</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2004; Jeffrey Frieden, *Global Capitalism* (New York: Norton, 2006), pp. 334-337.

heid regime of South Africa. Heeding the MPLA's call for support, Cuban combat troops (with logistical support from the Soviet Union) quickly intervened with Operacion Carlota and helped block a South African invasion from the south<sup>2</sup>. This was the beginning of Cuba's longest and most extensive military mission abroad, which lasted until the Lusaka peace accords of 1989 reached after Cuba's victory over South African troops at Cuito Cuanavale following the largest field battle in Africa since the Second World War (1987-1988). In terms of world history, Cuba's "African odyssey" showed that the confrontation between the two superpowers is far from having exhausted the spectrum of international relations in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>3</sup>. In fact, according to Pablo Arco Pino's essay, all that ended with the Lusaka accords was Cuba's military projection in Africa, while the internationalist project still continued for years in the form of medical and technical cooperation.

<sup>2</sup> Piero Gleijeses, "Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976", Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Piero Gleijeses, "Moscow's Proxy? Cuba and Africa 1975-1988", *Journal of Cold War Studies* 2 (2006), 3-51.



## Chapter 16

# La presencia cubana en África (1963-1989)

### I. La excepcionalidad del caso cubano

Desde su ascenso al poder en 1959, enfrentado a los difíciles obstáculos que ha tenido que vencer tanto en el orden interno como externo, el gobierno de Fidel Castro ha aplicado estrategias sociales muy ambiciosas que, para muchos, convirtieron a Cuba en un referente mundial de utopía política<sup>1</sup>. En el plano de las relaciones internacionales este país subdesarrollado alcanza, en varias ocasiones, durante las últimas décadas, proyecciones de gran potencia, basta solo recordar el papel central que desempeñó durante la “crisis de octubre” o “crisis del Caribe”, considerada una de las situaciones más álgidas y peligrosas de la “guerra fría”<sup>2</sup>, así como su excepcional influencia dentro del movimiento de países no alineados. Pero el protagonismo más espectacular de la isla, a contrapelo de sus limitadas potencialidades estratégicas y económicas, lo constituyó y constituye la ayuda brindada a diversos pueblos especialmente a los del continente africano.

Recordemos que entre los años 1961 y 1989 cerca de medio millón de cubanos entre civiles y militares prestaron su ayuda solidaria en distintos países africanos luchando contra las enfermedades, el neocolonialismo y el apartheid<sup>3</sup>. ¿Cómo puede explicarse que un país bloqueado y hostigado

<sup>1</sup> Sergio Guerra Vilaboy y Maldonado Gallardo Alejo, *Historia de la Revolución Cubana* (Quito: La Tierra, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Carlos Lechuga, *En el ojo de la tormenta. F. Castro, N. Jruschov. J. F. Kennedy y la crisis de los misiles* (La Habana: Si-Mar, 1995); Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy J. Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964. The Secret History of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Piero Gleijeses, Jorge Risquet y Fernando Ramírez, *Cuba y África historia Común de lucha y sangre* (La Habana: Ciencias Sociales, 2007); Piero Gleijeses, “Cuba and the Independence of Namibia”, *Cold War History* 2 (2007), 285-303; William M. Leogrande, *Cuba's Policy in Africa*,

por la principal potencia mundial y situado a 90 millas de la misma, con una población de apenas 10 millones de habitantes y con todo tipo de limitaciones materiales pudiera emprender y cumplimentar tamaña empresa?

La “odisea cubana en África”<sup>4</sup> es un capítulo de la historia contemporánea poco conocido en occidente, especialmente en el llamado “primer mundo”, donde la interpretación de los acontecimientos relacionados con la isla se han visto tradicionalmente manipulados o silenciados por los grandes medios de comunicación. A esto se han unido las limitaciones del “gran público” en el conocimiento de la historia latinoamericana en general y cubana en particular. En especial el apoyo militar a gobiernos y movimientos progresistas africanos ejercieron un significativo impacto sobre la política internacional de la época, sin embargo son escasas las investigaciones de fondo dedicadas al tema.

## 2. Tradiciones de solidaridad latinoamericanas

Para entender las verdaderas causas y el sentido del accionar cubano en tan lejanos territorios hay que tomar en cuenta toda una serie de antecedentes, circunstancias y fines. En primer término, se debe recordar que el fenómeno de la solidaridad internacional de que diera muestras la revolución cubana a partir de la victoria de 1959 forma parte de una larga e imprescindible tradición latinoamericana practicada por unas u otras regiones de este subcontinente durante las luchas independentistas contra el coloniaje europeo. Luego, durante la primera mitad del siglo XX, fueron múltiples los movimientos democráticos y antiimperialistas que recibieron y/o brindaron su apoyo solidario. Tal fue el caso del movimiento protagonizado por Augusto César Sandino en la Segovia nicaragüense, junto al cual combatieron revolucionarios de diversa procedencia como el venezolano Carlos Aponte y el salvadoreño Farabundo Martí<sup>5</sup>, el régimen presidencialista de Lázaro Cárdenas en México, que junto al soviético constituyeron los únicos apoyos gubernamentales recibidos por la república española en su lucha contra el falangismo, así como el gobierno antioligárquico de Gustavo Arbenz en Guatemala en 1954, apoyado por la opinión pública progresista de toda América, incluida la del joven médico argentino Ernesto Guevara

1959-1980 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

<sup>4</sup> *Cuba: An African Odyssey* (Jihan El Tahri, 2007) es un film documental sobre la presencia cubana en África desde el arribo del Che a territorio congolés en 1965, en compañía de un grupo de combatientes, hasta la firma de los acuerdos de paz de Lusaka entre los gobiernos de Sudafrica, Cuba y Angola en el marco de la Organización de las Naciones Unidas (ONU) el 22 de diciembre de 1988.

<sup>5</sup> Carlos Aponte se relacionó más tarde con el movimiento revolucionario de Cuba y cayó combatiendo contra tropas del ejército de este país junto al destacado dirigente cubano Antonio Guiteras Holmes. Por otra parte, el salvadoreño Farabundo Martí devino bandera del movimiento nacional liberador de su país que tomó su nombre.

de la Serna, presente en aquel país cuando se produce el golpe de estado que lo derrota, del cual muchos responsabilizan a la CIA, por citar solo algunos ejemplos.

En lo referido a la historia específica de Cuba dichas tradiciones son notables. Muchos hijos de la mayor isla antillana, durante la época colonial, brindaron su contribución y en ocasiones su sangre, participando en las luchas anticolonialistas continentales. En reciprocidad, durante las guerras de independencia cubanas, varios cientos de combatientes procedentes de diversos países americanos y europeos se unieron a los “ejércitos mambises” en su enfrentamiento al yugo español.

Sin embargo, el más importante exponente del internacionalismo revolucionario cubano durante el siglo XIX lo constituyó la figura de José Martí quien fuera organizador y líder de la gesta emancipadora iniciada en 1895. Este hombre, de excepcional calibre intelectual y político, patentizó reiteradamente en su obra literaria y en su acción un profundo sentimiento de hermandad y solidaridad con los pueblos oprimidos. Algunas de sus máximas: “patria es humanidad” y “con los pobres de la tierra quiero yo mi suerte echar [...]” resumen su estirpe ideológica. Días antes de caer en combate, en carta inconclusa a su entrañable amigo mexicano Manuel Mercado escribía:

Ya estoy todos los días en peligro de dar mi vida por mi país y por mi deber, puesto que lo entiendo y tengo ánimos con que realizarlo – de impedir a tiempo con la independencia de Cuba que se extiendan por las Antillas los Estados Unidos y caigan, con esa fuerza más, sobre nuestras tierras de América. Cuanto hice hasta ahora y haré, es para eso [...] viví en el monstruo, y le conozco las entrañas: -y mi honda es la de David [...]<sup>6</sup>.

Este documento, considerado como su testamento político, devela el profundo alineamiento latinoamericanista y la aguda percepción de los peligros que encerraba la creciente voracidad del “gran vecino del norte” por parte del “mayor de los cubanos”.

### 3. Solidaridad durante la república y la revolución

Después de la retirada de las tropas intervencionistas norteamericanas (1902), durante los años de la llamada “república mediatizada”<sup>7</sup>, el pensamiento martiano constituyó un referente obligado para los movimientos sociales, democráticos y anti imperialistas cubanos. No resulta extraño que

<sup>6</sup> José Martí, *Obras Completas*, tomo XX (La Habana: Editorial Nacional de Cuba, 1965), 161.

<sup>7</sup> Calificativo asignado a la república que se funda tras la ocupación estadounidense de la isla caracterizada por la corrupción y el latrocinio y la dependencia respecto a Estados Unidos. Véase el alegato que constituye el trabajo de Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, *Males y vicios de Cuba republicana sus causas y sus remedios* (La Habana: Oficina del Historiador de la Habana, 1959).

tras el triunfo de la revolución soviética las ideas del internacionalismo socialista promulgadas por ella, encontraran tierra abonada en Cuba y que durante la guerra civil en España fuera la brigada cubana de combatientes voluntarios a favor de la república, la mayor de cuantas se organizaron en el continente americano<sup>8</sup>.

Un ejemplo significativamente promisorio, aunque poco conocido, fue el escenificado por el propio Fidel Castro a la edad de 21 años, cuando siendo estudiante del segundo año de la carrera de leyes en la Universidad de La Habana se enroló en una fallida expedición organizada con el fin de derrotar la sangrienta dictadura del General Trujillo en la vecina isla dominicana<sup>9</sup>.

Sin embargo las cotas más altas y extendidas de solidaridad internacional lo alcanza el pueblo cubano dentro del periodo revolucionario iniciado en 1959. Esto se debió, en primer término, al hecho de ser organizada y llevada a cabo por un gobierno constituido, con mayoritario apoyo popular y con una muy clara voluntad política, lo que le imprimió, desde un inicio, un especial carácter y potencia.

Aunque serían algunos países de América Latina, dirigidos por deleztables regímenes, los primeros en conocer del envío de pequeñas expediciones militares, como señalamos anteriormente, fue en el continente africano donde por primera vez esta actividad se hizo sentir de forma masiva y plena.

#### 4. Carácter y objetivos de la solidaridad

El primer envío de tropas cubanas al continente africano en 1963 tuvo como destino el territorio de la recién liberada república argelina invadida por el ejército marroquí. Las fuerzas cubanas, acompañadas de un equipo de personal médico y comandadas por el entonces comandante Efigenio Almejeras, constituyeron un importante elemento de disuasión frente a las tropas del país vecino<sup>10</sup>. Menos de un año y medio más tarde, a mediados de 1965, el comandante Ernesto Guevara, al frente de otro grupo de combatientes cubanos inicia la lucha en el Congo contra los aliados del poder colonial y los mercenarios blancos<sup>11</sup>. La campaña no brindó los frutos esperados y el Che tuvo que retirarse para reiniciar la lucha en Bolivia donde terminó siendo asesinado. Este periodo marcó también el inicio de la ayuda de los instructores cubanos, en territorio congoleño a grupos de combatientes del MPLA (Movimiento para la liberación de Angola) dirigido por Agostino Neto<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Aurea Matilde Fernández, *Segunda República y Guerra Civil* (La Habana: Ciencias Sociales, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Volker Skierka, *Fidel Castro: A Biography* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 26.

<sup>10</sup> Luís Báez, *Secretos de generales. Desclasificado* (La Habana: Si-Mar, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> Ernesto Guevara, *Pasajes de la guerra revolucionaria: Congo* (Barcelona: Grijalbo, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> Piero Gleijeses, *Misiones en conflicto. La Habana, Washington y África 1959-1976* (La Habana: Ciencias Sociales, 2007).

La década del 70 conoció de un reforzamiento de la lucha por parte de los movimientos de liberación nacional, especialmente en las posesiones del debilitado imperio portugués. Al calor de esta situación los vínculos de Cuba con los movimientos independentistas en Angola, Cabo Verde y Mozambique, y más tarde con el gobierno etiope se fortalecieron<sup>13</sup>.

Ahora bien, para el estudio del capítulo principal de la historia del internacionalismo cubano en África: su participación en la guerra de Angola, se impone esclarecer algunas cuestiones básicas. En opinión del gobierno cubano, la importancia de la salvaguarda de la independencia de Angola no estaba determinado solo por la importancia de apoyar el derecho legítimo de cualquier nación africana a defender la libertad alcanzada tras décadas de lucha contra el colonialismo, sino, y quizás principalmente, por el hecho de que era el gobierno racista de Sudáfrica, apoyado en los grupos contrarrevolucionarios de Savimbi y Holden Roberto, quienes amenazaban intervenir en aquel país con vistas a abortar su proceso independentista y así reforzar su influencia sobre todo el cono sur del continente. Las amistosas relaciones existentes entre el gobierno sudafricano y el norteamericano constituían un incentivo complementario a la toma de partido junto al gobierno dirigido por Neto, por parte de la dirigencia cubana.

En cuanto a la incidencia de las relaciones con la Unión Soviética sobre la ejecutoria cubana en África, es bueno comenzar reconociendo que sin el suministro de las armas que la gran potencia euroasiática había prestado durante años a Cuba, cualquier intento de ayuda nunca hubiera tenido la dimensión y eficacia que alcanzó. Ahora bien, esto está muy lejos de significar que el gobierno cubano actuara como un peón de la política soviética. Por el contrario, infinidad de documentos desclasificados en los Estados Unidos, así como las opiniones vertidas por diversos políticos soviéticos y norteamericanos que desempeñaron responsabilidades “de primera línea” durante aquella época han corroborado, en entrevistas y publicaciones, el hecho de que los cubanos actuaron, no solo independientemente de su “partenaire” europeo, sino en ocasiones, en contra de sus designios. De hecho, casi todos los envíos de personal militar cubano hacia África fueron dados a conocer al gobierno soviético después de que estos partieran de la isla, y eran considerados muchas veces, “a sotovoce”, por la dirigencia soviética, como decisiones aventureras e irresponsables del gobierno de la Habana<sup>14</sup>.

Otro aspecto objeto de debate es el referido al papel que correspondió desempeñar al gobierno estadounidense en el conflicto angolano. Durante el periodo que va desde la llegada de los primeros contingentes de soldados cubanos a Angola hasta la firma de los tratados de Paz en la ONU (1975-88)

<sup>13</sup> Charles Zorgbibe, *Historia de las relaciones internacionales*, tomo II, *Del sistema de Yalta hasta nuestros días* (Madrid: Alianza, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> Piero Gleijeses, “Moscow’s Proxy? Cuba and Africa, 1975-1988”, *Journal of Cold War Studies* 2 (2006), 3-51: 8.

los Estados Unidos conocieron de tres administraciones. La primera, encabezada por Gerald Ford, tuvo un activo desempeño en cuanto a la problemática angolana. Para algunos autores la influencia de su secretario de estado Henry Kissinger en el diseño de esta política fue clave. Deseoso de recuperar parte del prestigio perdido por su país tras la derrota en Viet Nam y consciente de la importancia estratégica que representaría para Washington un África Austral controlada por su aliado, el gobierno de minoría blanca sudafricano, Kissinger decidió brindar apoyo a este último<sup>15</sup>. El momento era oportuno porque los soviéticos, interesados en no malograr las negociaciones que mantenían con los Estados Unidos sobre el tratado SALT II, de seguro no prestarían una ayuda seria al gobierno angolano.

El apoyo estadounidense a la oposición en Angola indiscutiblemente animó la actitud intervencionista de Pretoria, independientemente del grado de coincidencia política existente entre ambos gobiernos. La entrada de fuerzas sudafricanas en territorio de aquella nación acarreó la respuesta cubana, acordada con Luanda, de desembarcar a varias decenas de miles de combatientes a partir de noviembre de 1975. Por último y tras duros combates en compañía de las Fuerzas Armadas para la Liberación de Angola (FAPLA), las fuerzas sudafricanas fueron echadas de territorio angolano.

El subsiguiente mandato, el de Jimmy Carter, se distanció un tanto de las duras posiciones adoptadas por sus antecesores frente a Cuba, decidiendo “normalizar” las relaciones con la isla. Uno de los requisitos que el nuevo presidente exigió para ello, fue la retirada de las tropas cubanas de Angola. El gobierno cubano, dando muestras nuevamente de gran lealtad hacia sus amigos en el “continente negro”, respondió que para Cuba el tema africano no era negociable y que en todo caso Estados Unidos de Norteamérica tendría que discutir el asunto con Luanda y no con la Habana<sup>16</sup>.

Independientemente de otros factores, la negativa cubana contribuyó a malograr un acercamiento que en términos económicos podían, según los mediadores enviados por Carter, haber proporcionado grandes beneficios al estado cubano. En el fondo se trataba de que el gobierno cubano hiciera dejación de un derecho elemental: el de ayudar a cualquier gobierno legalmente constituido y a cambio, la dirección norteamericana prometía abandonar algunos puntos de su tradicional política de bloqueo y agresiones contra Cuba. Por último Castro no cedió.

## 5. El último golpe

Durante el mandato de Ronald Reagan en el otoño de 1987, se produce un ataque sorpresivo de tropas sudafricanas a Angola. Nuevamente el es-

<sup>15</sup> Ver, por ejemplo, Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 401-10.

<sup>16</sup> Gleijeses, “Moscow’s Proxy?”, 12.

tado cubano decide ayudar con todos sus medios al gobierno de aquella nación sin avisar a los soviéticos, ocupados entonces en la instauración de la “perestroika” y en su “política de distensión” con los Estados Unidos. Pero esta vez el objetivo que se planteó la dirigencia cubana fue el de propinar una derrota definitiva a las fuerzas sudafricanas y dar un vuelco fundamental a la correlación de fuerzas en aquella zona de África. Para ello trasladó a territorio angolano a tropas élites de las fuerzas armadas cubanas acompañadas de una buena parte del mejor armamento con que contaba la nación en momentos en que se hacía patente la creciente agresividad del gobierno republicano estadounidense hacia la isla.

A pesar de la superioridad inicial de los invasores las tropas cubanas, en unión con las FAPLA, resistieron la ofensiva del enemigo combatiendo con intensidad especialmente en puntos neurálgicos del territorio como fue el caso de Cuito Cuanavale, pequeña aldea alrededor de la cual se enfrentaron grandes contingentes y donde se decidió el desarrollo posterior de los acontecimientos.

Con las victorias de Cuito Cuanavale y la de Cualueque se abrió la posibilidad de avances en profundidad de las tropas cubanas hacia la frontera con Namibia, territorio colindante con Sudáfrica. En tales circunstancias al gobierno de Pretoria no le quedó más remedio que sentarse en la mesa de conversaciones junto a funcionarios estadounidenses y frente a la delegación cubano-angolana, para terminar aceptando las demandas formuladas por el representante cubano: Sudáfrica tendría que retirar sus tropas de Angola en el plazo de 30 días. Cinco meses más tarde, en Nueva York, el enviado de Sudáfrica firmaba los acuerdos de paz que incluían el reconocimiento de la independencia de Namibia. Era el comienzo del fin del gobierno de minoría blanca en Sudáfrica y con ello, del “apartheid”<sup>17</sup>. Finalizada la contienda angolana los soldados cubanos desplegados en África iniciaron el regreso a casa, a lo cual siguió el traslado de los restos de 2077 combatientes caídos en combate.

## 6. A manera de resumen

En lo referido al apoyo civil, en el continente se mantuvo y se ha incrementado progresivamente hasta nuestros días la presencia de especialistas que prestan su ayuda en diversas áreas socioeconómicas, especialmente en la atención sanitaria y científico- técnica. En la actualidad la ayuda cubana se extiende a 69 países de los cuatro continentes. En África el número de colaboradores alcanza la cifra de 3,374, repartidos en 36 países<sup>18</sup>.

¿Que conclusiones pueden extraerse sobre la presencia cubana en África? Estas pueden ser muy variadas, su tónica dependerá, en primer

<sup>17</sup> *La paz de Cuito Canavale: Documentos de un proceso* (La Habana: Editora Política, 1989).

<sup>18</sup> Ver el ensayo de Fernando Ramírez en Gleijeses, Risquet y Ramírez, *Cuba y África*, 112.

término, de la mentalidad y el grado de información de quien las formule. Para algunos fue una sangrienta aventura sin sentido, para otros uno de los acontecimientos más inesperados e incomprensibles de la segunda mitad del siglo pasado en el que una pequeña nación de escasos recursos pudiera desplegar acciones armadas con tropas voluntarias de tal envergadura en sitios tan distantes. Para muchos la ayuda cubana a los pueblos de África mostró y muestra, en primer término, la necesidad y las posibilidades de la solidaridad entre las naciones pobres, que en aquella coyuntura histórica asumieron determinadas formas, pero cuyos imperativos se mantienen con igual o mayor urgencia en la actualidad.



## Chapter 17

# Investigating Cuban Internationalism: the First Angolan Intervention, 1975

Historian Gaddis Smith once characterized United States policy toward Latin America as “long periods of ignoring [the region] alternating with moments of frantic obsession”<sup>1</sup>. Smith was referring the long-standing American tradition of intervening militarily and economically in Latin American affairs. This statement seems broadly applicable to African affairs as well. In the twentieth century it can seem as though every fifteen years or so, an event on the African continent briefly captures Western attention<sup>2</sup>. If this is the case, then the mid-1970s were one such moment. Caught up in the whirlwind of the Cold War, the Angolan Crisis of 1975 brought together two “moments of frantic obsession”, one African and one Latin American. Somehow, a localized war of national liberation escalated sharply into an international incident.

During Angola’s anticolonial struggle the liberation party leaders attempted to “domesticate” the revolution – that is, link their specific vision of development, modernity and nationhood to the particular racial and ethnic circumstances of Angolan society. In the period of intense armed resistance, from 1961 to independence in 1975, the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola, FNLA), Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola, MPLA) and National Union for the Total Independence of Angola Party (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola,

<sup>1</sup> Gaddis Smith, *The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine, 1945-1993* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 6.

<sup>2</sup> For example, the so-called “Scramble for Africa” ushered in the twentieth century, followed by the Abyssinian [Ethiopian]-Italian Crises of the 1920s and 1930s. Post-1945 the general process of decolonization saw several African crises, including the Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya (1952-60), and the Congo crisis (1960 to roughly 1965).

UNITA), waged a dual struggle for the soul of the nation, competing as much for internal legitimacy (from ethnically diverse Angolans) as for external recognition (from the international community). Simultaneously, at the high point of the conflict, no less than six external powers provided weapons and materiel: US support bolstered the Portuguese metropole, contiguous African states harboured competing revolutionaries, and great and medium powers, including Zaïre (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), the People's Republic of China (PRC), apartheid-era South Africa, the Soviet Union, and most surprisingly, Cuba, provided weapons, combat troops, and mercenaries to the three main liberation parties.

A generation after the historic first military intervention, the Cuban involvement in Angolan Crisis continues to fascinate historians and political scientists<sup>3</sup>. The Cuban military intervention in Angola was decisive, and took the international community (even the Soviet Union) by surprise. Yet upon reflection, it appears entirely in keeping with the nature of Fidel Castro's Cuba. The Angolan intervention culminated a decade of interest in African affairs, and was a prime example of Cuban internationalism. Cuban internationalism denotes the duty of every Cuban to support fellow revolutionary movements in Latin America and beyond. It is virtually impossible to view Cuban foreign policy except through the prism of its recent revolutionary past. This is not just a western conceit, born of the fifty-year adversarial relationship between the Cuba and the United States. Rather, the Cuban government has explicitly historicized, conceptualized and projected its image as that of a revolutionary state and, that most elusive category, a revolutionary power<sup>4</sup>. Necessary to the goal of being a revolutionary power is an explicit commitment to the projection of power and influence – military, economic, ideological – known in the Cuban context as 'internacionalismo'. It is largely this experience of Cuban internationalism which catapulted Angola into the international spotlight, confounded the US and forced the Soviet Union to scramble to keep up.

Angola was not Cuba's first foray into African politics, nor was it the last. Other important interventions included Algeria, 1963, and Ethiopia, 1977<sup>5</sup>. Yet Angola was undoubtedly the most successful, stabilizing the MPLA until it formed a government in Luanda. Recently Cuban scholars have begun to resurrect la epopeya – "the epic feat" – adding the Angolan intervention to the canon of revolutionary triumph, in line with the 1953 raid on the Moncada

<sup>3</sup> Cuban forces intervened in Angola again in 1988 to support the Communist Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (*Forças Armadas Populares de Libertação de Angola*, FAPLA) against a resurgent UNITA. The final withdrawal took place in 1991.

<sup>4</sup> See Louis A. Pérez, Jr., "In the Service of the Revolution: Two Decades of Cuban Historiography, 1959- 1979", *Hispanic American Historical Review* 1 (1980), 83.

<sup>5</sup> The Cuban government also deployed military aid to Congo-Brazzaville (1965) and Guinea (1966).

Barracks and the 1961 Bay of Pigs<sup>6</sup>. The Cuban intervention in Angola can thus be seen as providing an informative case-study of Cuban internationalism. As such, it is worth investigating, not simply because it is a fascinating story, but also because of what it suggests about the nature of Cuban internationalism and Cuba's distinctive place in the history of the twentieth century.

### I. Investigating Cuban Internationalism

Certainly the Cuban state has not been the only one to tie its existence to the principle of revolutionary internationalism. The twentieth century manifestation of socio-political revolution often takes internationalization as a given – revolution is a political commodity to be exported<sup>7</sup>. However, Cuba remains the only small, Third World nation, to explicitly project its military and ideological influence outside of contiguous states. Some form of internationalismo had been present since the beginning of the revolution. In February 1959 Ernesto “Che” Guevara established an informal “Liberation Department” in Havana. Referencing orthodox Marxist-Leninism as well as nineteenth century nationalists such as Simón Bolívar, Máximo Gómez and José Martí, in 1960 Guevara published the Cuban variant of Marxist-Leninist revolution, *La Guerra de guerrillas*. Simplified, Guevara's foco principles were: that popular forces could defeat a conventional army; that revolutions could, and should, be created by a dedicated vanguard; and that rural Latin America was the best battlefield for revolution<sup>8</sup>.

Castro and Guevara split, and Guevara's last point was entirely discredited in the jungles of Bolivia. Most Cuban attempts to export the revolution failed: the US convinced the Organization of American States (OAS) to expel Cuba in 1962 and Cuba's policy of encouraging socialist revolutions among its Latin American neighbours culminated in the murder of Guevara in Bolivia in 1967 (though by this point Che was acting largely independently). However, the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis – the latter of which infuriated Castro when the settlement was negotiated between US President John F. Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev without his input – highlighted

<sup>6</sup> Said one Cuban author: “The history of Europe's imperialist and neocolonial pillage and plunder of Africa, with the full support of the United States and NATO, as well as Cuba's heroic solidarity with its sister nations, have not been sufficiently known, if only as a well-deserved reward for the hundreds of thousands of men and women who wrote that glorious page, which, as an example for the present and future generations, should never be forgotten. That does not negate the need to continue making it known”. Rose Ana Dueñas, “Cuba in Africa: Internationalists tell their story”, *Digital Granma Internacional* on-line, [www.granma.cu/ingles/2007/junio/vier29/cuba-in-africa.html](http://www.granma.cu/ingles/2007/junio/vier29/cuba-in-africa.html) (cited 29 June 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Fred Halliday, “Revolutionary internationalism and its perils”, in *Revolution in the Making of the Modern World: Social Identities, Globalization and Modernity*, eds. John Foran, David Lane and Andreja Zivkovic (London: Routledge, 2008), 65.

<sup>8</sup> Gerald M. Houser, “US Policy in Southern Africa”, in *US Policy Toward Africa*, ed. Frederick S. Arkhurst (New York: Praeger, 1975), 18.

Cuba's insecurity. Although the island aligned with the Soviet Union, tensions emerged quickly in that relationship. Never a member of the Warsaw Pact, Cuba actively sought allies in the socialist brotherhood. Strategically, the principle of internationalism was in part an attempt to repair Cuba's hemispheric isolation. Supporting socialist states in Africa became the Cuban iteration of Norberto Ceresole's *geopolitica de liberación* pursued, as William LeoGrande noted, "on the fringes of the bipolar system"<sup>9</sup>. As scholar Jorge Domínguez asserted in 1989, "[t]he support of revolutionary movements, in Cuba's view, is an effective means to combat the United States and its allies throughout the world"<sup>10</sup>. In Angola, Cuba launched the largest military and economic intervention in its history, successfully propping up the failing MPLA. This internationalist act helped transform a localized war of national independence into a key Cold War battlefield, and arguably gave Cuba its highest international profile since the Cuban Missile Crisis thirteen years earlier.

## 2. The International Context

The international dimensions of the Angolan Crisis - roughly from the Lisbon Coup, on 24 April 1974, when a left-leaning military coup toppled the Portuguese government, to 1976 - and the Cuban intervention should be considered in reference to at least four interrelated global currents: US intervention in Latin America, postwar decolonization, Cold War tensions and the politics of *détente*.

The US has a long tradition of intervention in Latin America, with numerous ideological and geostrategic justifications. From the Monroe Doctrine (1823) and the Roosevelt (1904) and Wilson Corollaries (1914), through the Platt Amendment (1901), US attitudes shifted from "Big Stick" through "Dollar diplomacy" to the "Good Neighbor" policy. What remained more or less constant was the idea that geography (or history or providence) had positioned Latin America in the US' "backyard", and thus America had the right to invade or intervene whenever necessary to keep its house (read: the Western hemisphere) in order<sup>11</sup>. Decolonization and socialism also upset the delicate postwar balance of power. The 1960s had been a precarious decade - American political analysts watched helplessly as one by one former colonies fell to communism, beginning with the 'loss' of China in 1949. Communist insurgencies quickly appeared in Indonesia, Malaya, Burma, Indochina, Thailand, the Philippines, and Cuba. Despite the "Year of Africa" in 1960, when seventeen Africa nations achieved independence, the continent remained a low priority

<sup>9</sup> Gerhard Drekonja-Kornat, "Review: Understanding Cuba's Presence in Africa", *Journal of Interamerican Studies* 1 (1983), 127.

<sup>10</sup> Jorge I. Domínguez, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution: Cuba's Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 114.

<sup>11</sup> See for example Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and US Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 58-62.

for both the US and the Soviet Union. Ironically, both sides excelled in spouting anticolonial rhetoric and highlighting their own statuses as kindred free states born of revolution – yet neither side committed human or financial resources to actively aiding African anticolonial struggles.

The Angolan Crisis and the Cuban intervention thus took place within the backdrop of US intervention in Latin America and preoccupation with communist radicalization and hemispheric disorder. Since Castro seized power in January 1959, US policymakers had devoted astonishing amounts of resources to getting rid of him. In the understanding of many US policymakers, Castro was not only a declared Marxist with close ties to the Soviet Union, but was also vociferously hostile to American intervention in Cuban affairs, having denounced capitalism and nationalized millions in US assets. Communist Cuba's geographical proximity to the US was particularly intolerable, and much was made of the security risks of having a Communist satellite “ninety miles from American shores”<sup>12</sup>.

The Angolan Crisis is also firmly situated in a Cold War context. Since 1968 the US and the Soviet Union had made significant efforts at détente, lessening the tensions and limiting the arms race<sup>13</sup>. However, détente's parameters were never clearly articulated, particularly with respect to interventions in the Third World. While the public dialogue spoke of rapprochement and cooperation, realistically the US-Soviet adversarial relationship remained. There was no specific treaty outlining the “rules” of détente. The closest statement, the Basic Principles Agreement of 1972, was a statement of intent rather than a binding contract<sup>14</sup>. While the US understood the process to mean a halt on all global interventions, the Soviets likely conceived of the process with respect to the European continent. Neither side was prepared for Cuban unilateralism.

### 3. The Case Study: Angola, 1975

Though it shared some characteristics with other recently decolonized African states, the Angolan case is marked by the vehemence of its inter-partite conflict and the unprecedented level of external intervention. The intricacies of the liberation party politics are too complex to recount here. In brief,

<sup>12</sup> Smith, *The Last Years*, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Implications for US-Soviet Relations of Certain Soviet Activities”, *Interagency Intelligence Memorandum* (NIO IIM 76-D30J), est. pub. date 1 June 1976 (declassified: 13 November 1997), 3.

<sup>14</sup> The Basic Principles of Relations between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was signed on 29 May 1972 on the last day of the Moscow summit meeting. Historians debate the relative importance of the document. Raymond Garthoff holds that while Brezhnev held the agreement in high regard, particularly since it acknowledged the Soviet Union's need for “equal security”, Nixon and Kissinger merely found it a useful gesture of goodwill. Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1994), 326-7 and 332-3.

the political development of the liberation parties reflected Angola's domestic ethnic, social and ideological stratification. The MPLA, led by committed Marxist Dr. Agostinho Neto, received nominal military assistance from the Soviet Union throughout the late 1960s. A 1976 CIA memorandum noted that Soviet aid was halted in 1973 when it became apparent that the MPLA had made little progress toward an independent socialist Angola<sup>15</sup>. The FNLA, led from Kinshasa, Zaïre by Holden Roberto, was the first favourite of international backers, including the US. Roberto was European-educated, seemingly competent, and decidedly anticommunist. He had been on the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) payroll since 1961 in the wake of Congolese (Zaïrian) independence<sup>16</sup>. In 1966 Jonas Savimbi's UNITA entered the fray. Savimbi's carefully calculated portrayal of UNITA as rural and populist exploited Angola's racial and ethnic tensions. By 1974 the three liberation parties had been fighting each other and collecting external support for fifteen years.

It is generally held that Angolan independence was contingent upon Portuguese collapse. Perhaps Europe's weakest state, Portugal was the least willing to relinquish its colonies, and claimed its ultramar territories were essential to its very existence as a nation. Rejecting decolonization, Portuguese leader Dr. António de Oliveira Sálaraz clung tightly to his overseas empire, citing the same *missão civilizadora* arguments recently discredited in the former European empires: that economic integration was essential to the metropolitan economy, and that the African territories were underdeveloped and unfit for self-government, all tinged with thinly-veiled racism. Portugal's colonial stranglehold differed from that of minority regimes in the other African hot-spots, South Africa and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). While all three advocated racial segregation, Smith's Rhodesia and Vorster's South Africa justified their racist rule by reasserting the white minority's right to rule as a settler people. Portugal was the only case with blatantly indirect rule, and as such was the focus for much of the region's discontents and international attention. Nevertheless, between 1940 and 1970 the white settler population in Angola increased from 30,000 to 350,000. The programme of massive immigration was designed to perpetuate the fiction of the African colonies as overseas provinces of the Portuguese metropole<sup>17</sup>.

Whereas earlier anti-colonial movements sought a *modus vivendi* and the gradual replacement of a Portuguese colonial élite with a black or native Angolan élite, by the 1960s the emphasis was on revolution, not evolution<sup>18</sup>. In the early 1960s a wave of violent African uprisings upset Sálaraz's

<sup>15</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, Interagency Intelligence Memorandum (NIO IIM 76-004), "Soviet and Cuban Aid to the MPLA in Angola from March through December 1975", 24 January 1976, in Central Intelligence Agency, *Freedom of Information Act* on-line, [www.cia.foia.gov](http://www.cia.foia.gov).

<sup>16</sup> John Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies: A CIA Story* (New York: Norton, 1978), 67.

<sup>17</sup> John A. Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: Exile Politics and Guerrilla Warfare (1962-1976)*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978), 2.

<sup>18</sup> Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution*, 38.

right-wing, authoritarian Estado Novo regime, already a weak state, was forced to spend the next decade quelling unrest on the African continent. The collapse of the Sálazar successor-regime, led by Prime Minister Marcelo Caetano, came as a surprise to most observers, though cleavages within Portuguese society had been apparent for several months<sup>19</sup>. According to historian Gerald Houser, by early 1974 Portugal was forced to employ over 150,000 troops and commit over half of its annual budget to fighting its three colonial insurrections, in Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and Angola. In the same year the Portuguese military authority reported over 100,000 draft dodgers, a sure sign of the unpopularity of the African wars<sup>20</sup>. On 24 April 1974, a military junta replaced Caetano. The new Portuguese government ceased all hostilities with the Angolan opposition in May 1974, and negotiated official cease-fire agreements with UNITA in June and with the MPLA and FNLA four months later<sup>21</sup>. The new government recognized Guinea-Bissau's independence in September 1974, and reconciled with FRELIMO for Mozambican independence in June 1975<sup>22</sup>. Angola's agony, complicated by the largest white settler population, the most valuable natural resources and the weakest liberation movements, would last for decades<sup>23</sup>.

Despite historian Piero Gleijeses' impressive account, it remains difficult to reconstruct the early months of the Angolan crisis. On 25 January, the signing of the Alvor Accord created a provisional tripartite government and set a timeline for independence. Despite the ceasefire, fighting erupted within weeks<sup>24</sup>. As November closed in, fighting around the capital intensified as each party vied for control of Luanda before Independence Day, 11 November 1975. During several rounds of fighting, military supremacy oscillated between the FNLA and the MPLA<sup>25</sup>.

By this point, as Gleijeses notes, "Pretoria and Washington had been engaged in parallel covert operations in Angola since July 1975 (codenamed Operation IAFEATURE), first supplying weapons. Then, in late August, South Africa sent military instructors and the United States sent CIA advisers"<sup>26</sup>. With the combined weight of CIA funds and the South African Defence Force (SADF) behind it, the FNLA advanced rapidly. Under intense pressure, in May the Marxist MPLA had placed a desperate call to the so-

<sup>19</sup> Indeed, one story which remains to be written in English is the history of Portugal's *Revolução dos Cravos* (Carnation Revolution).

<sup>20</sup> Houser, "US Policy", 97-98.

<sup>21</sup> Garthoff, *Détente*, 558.

<sup>22</sup> Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 233.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> It is generally held that the FNLA broke the ceasefire.

<sup>25</sup> UNITA combatants generally fought guerrilla campaigns in central and southern Angola. Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 257.

<sup>26</sup> Piero Gleijeses, "Conflicting Versions: Cuba, the United States and Angola", 120, in *Instituto Português de Relações Internacionais* on-line, [www.ipri.pt/eventos/pdf/FLAD05\\_PGleijeses.pdf](http://www.ipri.pt/eventos/pdf/FLAD05_PGleijeses.pdf).

cialist brotherhood. According to historian Vladislav Zubok, despite early attempts to support “progressive” regimes in Africa, by 1975 the Brezhnev Politburo had little stomach for Angola. Brezhnev already faced three “visible international setbacks” – the collapse of the socialist government in Chile in 1973, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat’s turn toward the West and the failure of a Communist government to take root in Portugal<sup>27</sup>. Brezhnev initially refused to offer any Soviet assistance to the MPLA. Surprisingly, Cuba too ignored Neto’s first call for help. Castro took over six months to reply, ostensibly concentrating on domestic matters such as the first Congress of the Cuban Communist Party, scheduled for December 1975<sup>28</sup>.

When Cuba finally responded, however, the results were astonishing. In early October 1975, Operación Carlota, the advance assault force of the Cuban Military Mission (CMM), so named after the African slave who led the 1843 rebellion in Matanzas province, confronted a combined SADF/FNLA/mercenary force (codenamed Operasie Savannah) en route to Luanda<sup>29</sup>. After four months of brutal fighting, the SADF retreated across the South West African border. In Washington, an incensed Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had his plans for increased financial assistance to the FNLA frustrated by a Vietnam-weary and increasingly angry Congress. In November 1974, exactly the period of Carlota, Kissinger requested \$28 million in additional funds for IAFEATURE, fearful of ceding territory and influence to the Cubans<sup>30</sup>. In response, Congress enacted the Clark-Tunney Amendments, which severely curtailed federal funds for overseas covert operations. In Pretoria, news of the defeat of the whites electrified the townships, shattering the myth of white supremacy and shaking the very foundations of apartheid<sup>31</sup>:

In Angola, Black troops – Cubans and Angolans – have defeated White troops in military exchanges. Whether the bulk of the offensive was by Cubans or Angolans is immaterial in the color-conscious context of this war’s battlefield, for the reality is that they won, are winning, and are not White; and that psychological edge, that advantage the White man has enjoyed and exploited over 300 years of colonialism and empire, is slipping away. White elitism has suffered an exploited over 300 years of colonialism and empire, is slipping away. White elitism has suffered an irreversible blow in Angola, and Whites who have been there know it<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 253.

<sup>28</sup> Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 256.

<sup>29</sup> Mary Alice Waters, ed., *How Far We Slaves Have Come!: South Africa and Cuba in Today’s World* (New York: Pathfinder, 1991), 8.

<sup>30</sup> House of Representatives, *United States Policy on Angola: Hearing before the Committee on International Relations*, 94<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Section, 26 January 1976, 5-6 and 11-12.

<sup>31</sup> Piero Gleijeses, “Moscow’s Proxy? Cuba and Africa 1975-1988”, *Journal of Cold War Studies* 2 (2006), 9.

<sup>32</sup> Roger Sargent, “Commentary”, *Rand Daily Mail*, 17 February 1976, 10.



The immediate consequence of the Cuban intervention was a series of military victories, which enabled the MPLA to take power and form the government in Luanda. Neto became the first President; upon his death in 1979 he was succeeded by Jose Eduardo Dos Santos, who remains president to this day.

#### 4. Consequences of Cuban Internationalism in Angola

Why had Castro risked Cuban prestige and credibility, not to mention antagonizing both superpowers, on a risky operation in a low-priority zone? What could be gained by a show of force 11,000 km away, on a continent that rarely figured in Cold War calculations? The particular circumstances of Angola in 1975 provide at least a partial response to the above questions. Historically, the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade gave Cuba a substantial African demographic, many of whom were from the region that became Angola. More important, the MPLA's socialist credentials were beyond reproach. Leader Agostinho Neto was an established Marxist intellectual and poet, and a personal friend of the Castro brothers.

There was also a formal-legal aspect to the Cuban intervention. Cuba's support bolstered a nationalist movement in defense of an established nation-state, with inviolable boundaries and international recognition. The Cuba action was approved by the Organization of Africa Unity (OAU, now the African Union). Tactically, it appears that Castro learned much from Guevara's failed Congolese and Bolivian campaigns. In the Angolan intervention, Cuban forces joined an existing armed liberation struggle, rather than attempting to foment one from scratch. On a strategic level, Cuba's force projection into Angola displayed its military and technical acumen to the entire world, and especially to the US. Though Brezhnev later authorized Soviet logistical assistance, Cuba's feat remains unparalleled. At the international level, superpower détente provided a "permissive world-context"<sup>33</sup>. With both the Soviet Union and the US preoccupied with arms control and limiting each others freedom of movement, Cuban actions—while still scrutinized—were more difficult to contain.

Perhaps most significantly, the Cuban intervention came at the direct request of Neto, and was directed against a clear case of external aggression from the US and South Africa. The arrival of the SADF and their reported collusion with retreating Portuguese troops, the CIA and UNITA, completely discredited the FNLA and UNITA and legitimized Cuban intervention in the eyes of most black African states<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> See for example James De Fronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements* (Boulder: Westview, 2007), 17.

<sup>34</sup> With the notable exceptions of the former Belgian and French territories of Zaïre, Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, and former British territory Zambia.

Yet another potential way to answer these questions is to address two ways of characterizing Cuban foreign policy, considering Cuba both as a state and Cuba as an idea<sup>35</sup>. Cuba as a state has similar foreign policy imperatives as any small country, especially one in close proximity to a hostile power, namely security<sup>36</sup>. Cuba as an idea, or indeed as an ideal, is positioned as a model of Third World leadership, with a revolutionary ethos that is both nationalist and internationalist. Both aspects are telling with respect to the motives and nature of Cuban internationalism.

The ideological consequences are almost more compelling than the strategic ones. Aspiring to Third World leadership was not only a strategic manoeuvre, it was also entirely in keeping with Fidel Castro's revolutionary ethos. Since 1959 Cuban rhetoric and policy reflected a strong commitment to anticolonialism and antiracism, influenced largely by Cuba's own experience of Spanish colonisation and US imperialism. Despite the vagaries of the liberation parties, at its root the Angolan crisis was an anticolonial struggle of national liberation, made more acute by the collusion of South Africa and the CIA and presence of the SADF on Angolan territory. Cuba also had a socialist imperative to support the oppressed classes in the spirit of Marxist "proletarian internationalism"<sup>37</sup>. Always ideologically prepared to "export the revolution", Angola provided an excellent arena for a multi-pronged activist internationalism. Prominent African leaders, including Nelson Mandela, drew a direct line from the Cuban challenge, via the Soweto Uprisings, to the end of apartheid<sup>38</sup>.

For the US, the Angolan episode became a foreign policy crisis. IAFEATURE was a complete failure, of policy and of intelligence. It neither achieved the limited goal of bolstering the FNLA, nor the expanded goal of driving out the Soviet/Cuban presence. Association with the CIA and SADF irrevocably weakened UNITA and permanently damaged Savimbi's credibility in Africa, thereby neutralizing the other non-Communist option. Savimbi's death in 2002 garnered little attention and UNITA faded into obscurity.

In the wider Cold War calculus, the Soviet Union and Cuba emerged with reputations as liberators intact (even though Cuba really led the way)

<sup>35</sup> For a recent photographic examination of this theme see Alex Harris, *The Idea of Cuba* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007).

<sup>36</sup> While scholars are still divided on Gleijeses' interpretation of events, his key postulate – that Cuba acted independently, in keeping with Castro's revolutionary ethos and security demands – is the most plausible. The "Moscow's proxy" argument, most popular in the 1980s, has been largely discredited.

<sup>37</sup> Wolf Grabendorff, "Cuba's Involvement in Africa: An Interpretation of Objectives, Reactions and Limitations", *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 1 (1980), 9.

<sup>38</sup> Despite an awkward period in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Cuban-Angolan relations remain strong. A recent *Toronto Star* photograph depicted a frail but smiling Fidel Castro in reunion with Dos Santos. At the time, Dos Santos was the first foreign leader to meet with Castro in four months. See *The Toronto Star*, 24 September 2007.

while the US' tacit collusion with South Africa only reinforced its image as a neo-imperialist hegemon. Domestically, revelations about IAFEATURE confirmed every negative assumption about the US intelligence community and the policy of covert action. Though Angola stopped making headlines, the Ford Administration never regained the public's confidence.

Castro emerged from his calculated risk in Angola as the near-undisputed leader of the Third World. No other power, revolutionary or otherwise, could point to such a specific and successful instance of Third World solidarity. In 1976 the Nonaligned Movement (NAM) unanimously elected Havana as the site of its next summit meeting<sup>39</sup>. Despite being accused of causing rifts in the NAM, Cuba's aggressive action in Angola was rewarded by the Third World community.

One of the clearest iterations of the internationalist nature of Cuban foreign policy is Castro's speech of 4 February 1962, known as the Second Declaration of Havana. In it Castro outlines a program for a revolutionary foreign policy committed not only to revolution, but also to activist internationalism. Said Castro in 1962:

What is Cuba's history but that of Latin America? What is the history of Latin America but the history of Asia, Africa, and Oceania? And what is the history of all these peoples but the history of the cruellest [sic] exploitation of the world by imperialism? [...] The duty of every revolutionary is to make revolution. We know that in America and throughout the world the revolution will be victorious. But revolutionaries cannot sit in the doorways of their homes to watch the corpse of imperialism pass by. The role of Job does not behove a revolutionary<sup>40</sup>.

In 1991 Castro's rhetoric remained remarkably consistent:

We are internationalists, we are not narrow nationalists or chauvinists. We have shed our blood in other parts of the world, such as Latin America and Africa. As Mandela recalled, for each person who went on an internationalist mission, there were ten who volunteered to go. Is there a more noble people, a people more willing to express their solidarity, a more revolutionary people? The blood of the Angolans is our blood, the blood of the Namibians is our blood, and the blood of the South Africans is our blood! Humanity's blood is our blood! Our ideas go beyond chauvinism or narrow nationalism. Our ideas extend beyond all borders [...]<sup>41</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> H. Michael Erisman, *Cuba's Foreign Relations in a Post-Soviet World* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2000), 102.

<sup>40</sup> Fidel Castro, "Second Declaration of Havana", 4 February 1962, in *Internet Modern History Sourcebook* on-line, [www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1962castro.html](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1962castro.html). Also, Domínguez, *To Make*, 116.

<sup>41</sup> Fidel Castro, "We Will Never Return to the Slave Barracks", speech at rally on the thirty-eighth anniversary of the raid on the Moncada Barracks, Matanzas Province, Cuba, 26 July 1991, in *How Far*, ed. Waters, 67.

## 5. Conclusion: on “Cuban Exceptionalism”?

A recent study presented a brief description of some Cuban singularities:

Cuba is the only communist-ruled country where the local Communist Party did not play a leading role in the seizure of power; where the Soviet Union was not expecting, let alone directing, the takeover; and where the ruling party was not even formally constituted until over a decade after the revolution. It is the only communist-ruled country where the “class war” was waged principally by means of the wholesale expulsion of the propertied class to a neighbouring country (“externalizing” that class but leaving it substantially intact). [...] It is the only country in the world to have been directly and continuously ruled by the same individual for over 46 years [49 by the time of Castro’s retirement in early 2008]<sup>42</sup>.

Cuban actions have always been enigmatic to outside observers; Cuba’s mere existence (and resilience) posed a challenge to the international system. Through its alliance (however tense) with the Soviet Union it introduced a European power into the Western hemisphere thus challenging the Monroe Doctrine and nearly a century of American dominance in the region. Most significantly, Cuba has presented a different and apparently successful model of modernity and development. Cuban internationalism, while addressing practical security needs of a small state, suggested the viability of revolution as a tool of rapid political change. The Angolan intervention highlights both the strategic weight and ideological power of Cuban revolutionary internationalism. Simply put, Cuba is different. Its status as a revolutionary model is unparalleled in the twentieth century world, for several reasons. First, Cuba is small, with a limited population and limited natural resources. Second, it has managed to survive as a Marxist state despite the loss of its main benefactor and the continued hostility of the most powerful nation in the world. Third, though its explicit attempts at exporting revolution were often tactical failures, Cuba’s symbolic influence as a revolutionary-internationalist state at times trumps its actual foreign policy successes. The Angolan intervention is one occasion where the Cuban leadership can point to a strategic, military and ideological success – briefly transforming the Cuban Revolution into a global revolution.

<sup>42</sup> Laurence Whitehead, “On Cuban Political Exceptionalism”, *Debating Cuban Exceptionalism*, eds. Bert Hoffman and Laurence Whitehead (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 3.

M.S. Rognoni

## Chapter 18

# Cuba and Angola in the 1970s: War, Revolution and Nation-Building

The present essay raises and addresses questions about the roots and consequences of Cuba's role in Angola. Following a brief outline of the conditions surrounding the Angolan war for independence, the external attention attracted by the crisis, especially from the world's superpowers, will be considered in order to contextualize Cuba's position. The post-independence phase will subsequently be examined and a set of issues advanced – namely the domestic effects of the foreign involvement, in particular the unresolved question of government legitimization and the nation-building process – which deserve further analysis and debate<sup>1</sup>.

### I. The Angolan Context

The 1970s marked the beginning of a post-colonial phase for most sub-Saharan African countries. Development and economic growth were the imperatives, and some results were actually achieved, though often at the expense of initial expectations linked to the very idea of independence like peace, democracy and social development. The colonies of Portugal, on the other hand, were just beginning their struggles for national liberation against a repressive and obsolete colonial power<sup>2</sup>. This discrepancy between the political evolution of Portuguese African colonies and most other European colonies could be traced back to the 1930s and would have

<sup>1</sup> The present contribution is mainly based on primary sources available at the National Archives and the National Security Archive in Washington D.C., as well as the most relevant literature. Some of the subjects addressed here will be expanded during the next stage of this research once new documentary evidence from the Cuban and South African archives is obtained.

<sup>2</sup> See Basil Davidson, *L'Angola nell'occhio del ciclone* (Torino: Einaudi, 1975 [London: 1972]), 157-158.

important consequences on the subsequent development of nationalist movements within Lusophone Africa.

Thanks to the relative openness introduced by the new republican government in Lisbon, the political life of the restricted elite of African *asimilados*<sup>3</sup> in the Angolan capital of Luanda around 1910 was not too different from that of their homologues in Accra or Brazzaville<sup>4</sup>. However, with the advent of the Salazar regime and its colonial policy in the early 1930s, the evolution of Angolan nationalism became less predictable with respect to that of other colonies<sup>5</sup>. At the same time, the consequences of the Second World War, so crucial for other African countries, barely touched Portuguese territories overseas. While London and Paris had, willingly or not, accepted the idea that a transformation of their empires was necessary during the postwar period, Lisbon remained attuned to the old refrain: “Portugal há de continuar a ser mestre e exemplo dos povos educadores de outros povos”<sup>6</sup>.

Highlighting a gap that would soon become impossible to fill, all of the poetry published in *Mensagem* – the journal promoted from the 1940s on by a group of *asimilados* in Luanda led by Viriato da Cruz – pointed in a different direction. Building an Angolan identity, they wrote, meant re-Africanizing oneself, getting back in touch with one’s roots – roots that lay in the Angolan bush, not in Lisbon or even Luanda<sup>7</sup>. Something was beginning to move in the Angolan capital amid the difficulties caused by Portugal’s rigid control of its colony, echoed in the writings and debates circulating within a small group of Angolan expatriates in Lisbon formed by Agostinho Neto, Mario de Andrade, Amílcar Cabral, Francisco José Tenreiro and Alda de Espírito Santo, among others<sup>8</sup>. There in 1951, they managed to found a Centre for African Studies, where poetry was to become, as in *Mensagem*, a political instrument. However, as Basil Davidson explains, like other African nationalists, they were unable count on the support of any Portuguese political party except for the Communist one, which was, of course, banned and clandestine<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Christine Messiant, “Angola, les voies de l’ethnisation et de la décomposition”, *Lusotopie* (1995), 159-167.

<sup>4</sup> Malyn Newitt, “Angola in Historical Context”, in *Angola. The Weight of History*, eds. Patrick Chabal and Nuno Vidal (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 71.

<sup>5</sup> On Salazar’s colonial policy, see *inter alia*, Malyn Newitt, *Portugal in Africa: The Last Hundred Years* (London: Hurst, 1981); G. Clarence-Smith, *The Third Portuguese Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985); Fernando Rosas, *História de Portugal*, vol. 7, *O Estado Novo* (Lisboa: Estampa, 1998), 109-126.

<sup>6</sup> M. Da Silva Cunha, *O Sistema Português de Política Indígena* (Coimbra: Lda, 1953), cited in Davidson, *In the Eye*, 159.

<sup>7</sup> See Inge Brinkman, “Language, Names, and War: The Case of Angola”, in *African Studies Review* 3 (2004), 154-155.

<sup>8</sup> On those formative years, see the personal recollection of Mário de Andrade in Mário de Andrade and Christine Messiant, “Sur la première génération du MPLA: 1948-1960. Mário de Andrade, entretiens avec Christine Messiant (1982)”, *Lusotopie* 1 (1999), 185-221.

<sup>9</sup> Davidson, *In the Eye*, 167-168.

Indeed, Marxist ideas had an important impact on those few African intellectuals in Lisbon. Yet it soon became quite clear that in order to promote change at home it would be essential to adapt those principles to a totally different context and, at the same time, to fill the immense gap between themselves, privileged but deracinés, and the rest of the population in Angola. The process of re-Africanization as envisaged by the pioneers of Pan-Africanism during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century required a complete reappraisal of African history and called upon the members of the continent's diaspora throughout the world along the slave trade route, especially in the Americas<sup>10</sup>.

White exploitation based on racial discrimination<sup>11</sup> was still strongly perceived and suffered in 1950s Angola, especially in the agricultural sector, which had long been the backbone of the colonial economy. As David Birmingham makes clear, the anti-colonial war that started at the beginning of the 1960s did not result from the actions of an intellectual avant-garde but was instead mainly triggered by the grievances of exasperated peasants in different parts of the country. Furthermore, the "virulence of rivalry between different colonial peoples with different experiences of exploitation"<sup>12</sup> was at the roots of the division of the nationalist movement itself. Economic and social factors interlinked with the evolution of the colonial system gave rise to a political divide expressed by the foundation of three liberation movements, each with separate social, economic and cultural backgrounds and distinct political agendas<sup>13</sup>. Agostinho Neto's MPLA was basically an urban political movement rooted in the old<sup>14</sup> and new middle class of *asimilados*<sup>15</sup>, with its largest following composed of people from the region around Luanda, who defined themselves as Mbundu. Holden Roberto's FNLA (initially the UPA), the strongest of the three movements from a military point of view and the best organized, had deep

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, the quotations from Viriato da Cruz's poem, *ibid.*, 165.

<sup>11</sup> Franz-Wilhelm Heimer, *The Decolonisation Conflict in Angola, 1974-1976* (Geneva: Institute for International Studies, 1979), 10-2. See also Patrick Chabal, "E Pluribus Unum: Transitions in Angola", in *Angola*, eds. Chabal and Vidal, 3.

<sup>12</sup> David Birmingham, "Angola", in *A History of Postcolonial Lusophone Africa*, ed. Patrick Chabal (London: Hurst, 2002), 140-145; Newitt, "Angola", 56-65; Sousa Jamba, "The Idea of Angola", *The Times Literary Supplement*, 8 June 2001, 12.

<sup>13</sup> There was also a fourth movement, the FLEC (Cabinda Enclave Liberation Front), which aimed at the secession of the Cabinda region and did not take part in the independence negotiations. For a thorough analysis of the revolution in Angola before and immediately after independence, see, among others, the classical two-volume text by John Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: the Anatomy of an Explosion (1950-1962)* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1969); and *Id.*, *The Angolan Revolution: Exile, Politics and Guerrilla Warfare (1962-1976)* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978). See also W. Martin James, *A Political History of the Civil War in Angola, 1974-1990* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1992); Patrick Chabal, "Angola e Mozambico: il peso della storia", in *Africa e Mediterraneo 1* (1998), 23; Davide Tramontano, "La decolonizzazione angolana: lotta per l'indipendenza e Guerra civile", in *Il colore rosso dei jacaranda. A 30 anni dalle indipendenze delle ex colonie portoghesi*, eds. Livia Apa and Mario Zamponi (San Marino: AIEP, 2005), 59-73.

<sup>14</sup> Newitt, "Angola", 19-37.

<sup>15</sup> Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: Exile*, 18.

roots in the Bakongo in the North and strong links with Mobutu's Zaire. And Jonas Savimbi's UNITA, the latest to come on the scene, gained consensus mainly among the Ovimbundu<sup>16</sup>, the majority ethnic group in the country, by emphasizing the differences between the urban sectors (closer to the MPLA) and the mass population of the countryside.

This tripartition, bound to survive the end of the colonial regime and mark the political evolution of the country until recently, implied certain domestic and international consequences<sup>17</sup>. At home, the harsh confrontation between the three factions paralleled the anti-colonial struggle, creating splits that would encumber the subsequent nation-building process as well as the chance of the final prevailing group, the MPLA, of claiming actual legitimacy. In the international arena, the existence of three competing movements initially not so easily distinguishable from ideological and political points of view, only contributed to the influence of 'third' powers<sup>18</sup>. The international factor, i.e., the support of outside or third countries, took on a primary role because of the overwhelming colonial repression of the 1960s and the difficulty maintaining domestic consensus, while at the same time strongly influencing the prospects of each movement<sup>19</sup>.

Another crucial issue was the bond between Angola's struggle for independence and the anti-apartheid fight in South Africa. What the leaders of each of the Angolan movements decided to do in this respect acquired a special relevance. In particular, Savimbi's choice to accept military aid from South Africa, as wise as it might have seemed initially since it nearly led UNITA to prevail in the autumn of 1975, eventually turned out to be counter-productive for two main reasons. On the one hand, fearing a negative impact on public opinion, in both Africa and the global context, South African forces ended up retreating from Angola in March 1976<sup>20</sup>. On the other hand, the ideological factor – i.e. the idea that one should fight against the Pretoria-backed UNITA just to avert the South-Africanization of Angola – strengthened the international prestige of the MPLA and the steadfastness of its main supporter, Cuba.

This brief outline is intended to reflect the complexity of the Angolan fight for independence in the 1960s and 1970s. The independence formally gained in November 1975 posed new challenges to the emergent and fragile Angolan State. During the previous decade, Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana, had been able to make a plea for the "political king-

<sup>16</sup> Linda Heywood, *Contested Power in Angola, 1840s to the Present* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> Chabal, "Angola e Mozambico".

<sup>18</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 218-227.

<sup>19</sup> Chabal, "E Pluribus", 4. See also the curious but significant quotations that open the volume by Daniel Spikes, *Angola and the Politics of Intervention* (Jefferson: McFarland, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> Piero Gleijeses, "Moscow's Proxy? Cuba and Africa 1975-1988", *Journal of Cold War Studies* 2 (2006), 3-51.



dom”, which was the core, at least initially, of independence. More than fifteen years later, however, that “political kingdom” had proven not to be enough. Victory over colonial power would come to mean instead the initiation of real change and social revolution.

## 2. The International Context: Bipolar Confrontation during the 1970s

The 1970s marked a new step in the evolution of relations between the world’s superpowers with the bipolar confrontation. Technological developments and détente had allowed the US to shift from the “European bias” to a more global approach, as epitomized by the Nixon-Kissinger diplomacy. The USSR, on the other hand, while engaged in détente policy, showed no will to abandon its leading role as the engine of the socialist revolution. To the contrary, the contemporary evolution of China-US relations called for more assertiveness wherever possible in order to counter the setbacks in the Pacific and the Middle East<sup>21</sup>, and Angola looked like a great opportunity<sup>22</sup>. Nevertheless, as Arne Westad points out, “Soviet involvement in Africa was slow to come”, and it was not until late 1975, under Cuban pressure, that Moscow “finally made a major investment in one of its Southern African alliances, and thereby made the MPLA a regional ally second in importance only to the South African ANC”<sup>23</sup>.

On the field in Angola, after the collapse of the Alvor agreement<sup>24</sup>, the conflict that opposed the MPLA to the other two national liberation movements, the FNLA and UNITA, reached a climax between the summer and autumn of 1975<sup>25</sup>. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, in his turn, saw the situation in

<sup>21</sup> Arthur Gavshon, *Crisis in Africa. Battleground of East and West* (Boulder: Westview, 1981), 223-257; see also Jay Klinghoffer, “The Soviet Union in Angola”, in *The Soviet Union in the Third World: Successes and Failures*, ed. Robert H. Donaldson (Boulder: Westview, 1981), 99-100 and 115-116; Westad, *The Global*, 214-215.

<sup>22</sup> While this new African approach prevailed among Moscow’s leaders, Agostinho Neto was faced with a Soviet offer of military and logistical assistance. Showing a remarkable ability to read between the lines of the Sino-Soviet split and make good use of it, he was ready to strengthen the MPLA’s commitment to the Soviet Union, considered “the party’s main international ally”. Though Moscow’s support for the MPLA declined during this period, until late 1975, Neto’s movement remained the “main Angolan connection” of the Soviets. See Westad, *The Global*, 217.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>24</sup> Following the “carnation revolution” in Portugal, the destiny of Portuguese colonies was marked by the decision to grant independence as fast as possible. In the case of Angola, after a diplomatic mediation promoted by Kenya’s president Jomo Kenyatta in January 1975, an agreement was reached at Alvor by the Portuguese and the three Angolan liberation movements: independence by 11 November and a coalition government. In the meantime, a transitional government with representatives of the three movements was to work together with a Portuguese High Commissioner. The agreement collapsed a few weeks later as the result of the external fuelling of the rival parties and their inability to reach a satisfactory compromise. See José Marques-Rocha, *A descolonização. 24 de abril de 1974 a 11 de novembro de 1975. Os mensageiros da Guerra* (Braga: Grafibraga, 2002), 289-294. See also Witney Schneidman, *Engaging Africa: Washington and the Fall of Portugal’s Colonial Empire* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> Westad, *The Global*, 228-241.

Angola as an opportunity to demonstrate the ability and willingness of the US government to meet the Soviet challenge not long after the Vietnamese debacle. Meanwhile, Havana, with the rather reluctant but essential assistance of Moscow, was increasing its support for Neto's movement<sup>26</sup>. As Raymond Garthoff has observed, Kissinger's formulation of American policy in Angola implied a direct challenge to American prestige during a particularly delicate phase, in terms of both domestic consensus and relations with Moscow<sup>27</sup>. With two subsequent decisions, the first one taken shortly after the signature of the Alvor agreements, the second reached by mid-July 1975, the American secret intelligence and covert operations committee (the "Forty Committee") approved secret funding for the FNLA. These decisions marked an important contribution to excluding a political settlement while giving a green light to the military option, which resulted in the massive Cuban and Soviet intervention to support the MPLA, as well as the involvement of the South African government on the side of UNITA<sup>28</sup>.

Kissinger's estimate turned out to be wrong, both militarily and politically. Thanks to Cuban military assistance, the MPLA was already holding the capital city of Luanda, even if it did not control much of Angolan territory, by the time Agostinho Neto announced the constitution of the new independent government of the People's Republic of Angola (PRA) on 11 November 1975. To crown his political defeat, Kissinger had to fully disown his Angolan policy<sup>29</sup>. Two amendments – one made by John Tunnel to the Department of Defense appropriations bill and a second by Dick Clark to the foreign aid bill, expanding on the first – were to reassert the full responsibility of Congress over fundamental foreign-policy choices. American covert assistance to anti-Communist forces in Angola had therefore to terminate and could not be renewed<sup>30</sup>. Soviet leadership, on the other hand, thanks to Cuban mediation and advice, was able reap the rewards

<sup>26</sup> See, in particular, State Department, Memorandum for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "U.S. Policy Towards Angola", 16 December 1975, doc. 37, in *South Africa and the United States: The Declassified History*, ed. Kenneth Mokoena (New York: The New Press, 1993), 220-225.

<sup>27</sup> Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation* (Washington: Brookings, 1994), 574-582.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 560-565; see also House Select Committee on Intelligence, "Selection from the Pike Report Relating to Angola", February 1976, doc. 38, in *South Africa*, ed. Mokoena, 226-227.

<sup>29</sup> See Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger. A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 673-85. Commenting on the Angolan issue, Isaacson states: "Angola was a paradigm of an unnecessary, self-inflicted defeat" (p. 684). See also William Burr, ed., *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top-Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow* (New York: The New Press, 1999), 453, and National Security Archive on-line, [www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/publications/DOC\\_readers/kissinger/notes.htm](http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/publications/DOC_readers/kissinger/notes.htm).

<sup>30</sup> Robert D. Johnson, "The Unintended Consequences of Congressional Reform: The Clark and Tunney Amendments and U.S. Policy towards Angola", *Diplomatic History* 2 (2003), 215-243; *Id.*, *Congress and the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). On the Ford Administration's reactions to these amendments see also William Burr, ed., "Launch on Warning: The Development of U.S. Capabilities, 1959-1979", in National Security Archive on-line, *Electronic Briefing Books*, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB43/>, in particular doc. 18 (Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, "SALT (and Angola)", 22 December 1975, top secret).

of an involvement initially marked by skepticism and cautiousness but fully endorsed at the proper time, when it was needed most.

Following the success of Castro's 1959 revolution in Cuba, the issue of a possible replication of a 'Cuban-style' revolution elsewhere was relevant not just for subsequent Cuban leaders and their friends but, even more so, for their opponents. This relevance increased with the evolution of Cuba's position within the bipolar confrontation. By the end of 1959, when relations between Havana and Washington had rapidly deteriorated and Castro effectively turned to the Soviet Union for aid, Cuba's role as promoter of new revolutions in Latin America and elsewhere had become concrete<sup>31</sup>. Both internal concerns and idealism were guiding Cuba's stance on exporting revolution, not only by example but also by direct Cuban involvement. Assistance to various Latin American insurgencies thus became a priority of Castro's agenda. From 1961 onwards, he found a vivid ambassador in Che Guevara and the operational structure he needed in the General Directorate of Intelligence within the Ministry of the Interior<sup>32</sup>. By the end of 1964, however, Castro had become disillusioned with the Latin American field and decided to turn his attention towards a new theatre of intervention: Africa<sup>33</sup>.

It is beyond the scope of this contribution to shed light on the political, ideological and economical reasons behind this shift in Cuba's interests<sup>34</sup>. Suffice it to say that Castro's increased attention to the African context was translated into a multifaceted presence, one that went from military aid to technical and medical assistance in different countries over a long period, from Algeria in 1962 to Angola until 1988, passing through Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Congo Brazzaville, Benin and Ethiopia. The scope and results of this involvement varied greatly, depending on the local situation, but it testifies to an attention to the political and social evolution of Africa that goes beyond Cold War concerns (as much as they certainly still mattered), proving the existence of other levels of commitment<sup>35</sup>.

Among all the African countries that in one way or another received Cuban assistance from the mid-1960s onwards, Angola stands out as a peculiar case in terms of the duration of the intervention, its quality (military and technical) and quantity (36,000 soldiers dispatched between November 1975 and April 1976, growing to 52,000 by the peak of Cuban

<sup>31</sup> See Westad, *The Global*, 170-174; Olga Nazario and Juan F. Benemelis, "Cuba's Relations with Africa: An Overview", in *Cuba Internationalism in Sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. Sergio Díaz-Briquets (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1989), 12-15.

<sup>32</sup> See Juan F. Benemelis, *Castro, Subversión y Terrorismo en Africa* (Madrid: San Martín, 1988), 207-210.

<sup>33</sup> Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions. Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 21-29.

<sup>34</sup> On this issue, see, among others, Westad, *The Global*, 175-7; William Ratliff, "Cuban Military Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa", in *Cuba Internationalism*, ed. Díaz-Briquets, 30.

<sup>35</sup> Nazario and Benemelis, "Cuba's Relations", 18-20; Ratliff, "Cuban", 33-34.

involvement in 1988)<sup>36</sup>. What was it about Angola that made it so appealing to Castro, leading him to make it the expression of Cuban internationalism in Africa? Was it just a matter of exploiting an opportunity at the right time? Or was there a political design that Angola could fulfill better than any other African country despite the high costs that implied?

### 3. The Nation-Building Process and Cuba's Influence

The Angolan crisis of 1975 has been studied in terms of a decolonization process; a field of confrontation for the world's superpowers; and, more recently, from the point of view of competing socialist models. Thanks to recent historiographical contributions, we know that Cuba did not play a "simple" proxy role in Angola but rather implemented its own agenda. The establishment of this point has opened the way for new and important lines of research and analysis in Cold War studies. At the same time, however, the consequences of Cuba's autonomous role in relation to the Angolan leadership have not yet been deeply explored. Analyses of Cuba's role in the Angolan crisis that focus on Havana's motivations grasps certain important aspects of the issue but tends to underestimate others that deserve further investigation, such as the crucial question of power legitimization. The long years of the national-liberation fight had witnessed the bitter antagonism of three major movements. When the MPLA proclaimed the new People's Republic of Angola on 11 November 1975, thanks to Cuban and Soviet military support<sup>37</sup>, the immediate reaction of its opponents, the FNLA and UNITA, was to proclaim an alternative government of the Democratic People's Republic of Angola<sup>38</sup>. At this point, as Marcum has underlined, Neto was "clearly relying on the MPLA's 'internationalist' (rather than Pan-African) orientation and alliances"<sup>39</sup>. Furthermore, in the absence of solid, widespread internal support, he could benefit from the diplomatic recognition of various socialist and non-socialist countries, thereby acquiring an external legitimacy that the majority of African states were not so eager to recognize<sup>40</sup>. However, it was precisely South Africa's support of non-MPLA forces that contributed to the rise of the reputation of Neto's government even in the eyes of those African states that had criticized the MPLA's strong reliance on the Soviet Union<sup>41</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> Gleijeses, "Moscow's Proxy", 98.

<sup>37</sup> See Messiant, "Angola", 171.

<sup>38</sup> See Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: Exile*, 276; Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 311.

<sup>39</sup> Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: Exile*, 272.

<sup>40</sup> See Inge Tvedten, *Angola. Struggle for Peace and Reconstruction* (Boulder: Westview, 1997), 68. On the issue of recognition see also, Abegunrin Olayiwola, "Angola and the Soviet Union Since 1975", *Journal of African Studies* 1 (1987), 26. On Kaunda's position in favor of Savimbi, see, *inter alia*, Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 285 and 297-298.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 273-299; Westad, *The Global*, 234 and 237.

While external recognition had represented a crucial step forward for the PRA's image, one cannot forget that the civil war continued, as did internal strife within the MPLA. But from 11 November 1975 onwards, Cuban commitment aimed at preserving the newborn government in Luanda against both internal and external threats – a commitment that was presented as a question of principle as well as a sound political choice. This issue can be traced back to the mid-1960s when the MPLA managed to win the competition for Cuba's exclusive attention to its own fight against Portugal at the expense of its rivals, the FNLA and UNITA. Not surprisingly, these groups started complaining that the "Tricontinental [conference] gave the MPLA a platform from which to fabricate and distort facts"<sup>42</sup>. But this achievement was possible because Neto's movement was able to assert itself as the most credible third-world revolutionary force in Angola long before 1975, thus building personal connections that would count a great deal in the future<sup>43</sup>.

But Castro's choice does not come as a surprise if one considers the origins of the MPLA leadership as described by Christine Messiant:

Alors qu'ils rompent, en Angola ou en Europe, avec leur situation d'élite privilégiée, ces militants qui dénoncent la domination raciale qu'est la colonisation et les limites et les vices de la politique d'assimilação adoptent un nationalisme progressiste et socialisant, mais qui est aussi un nationalisme fondé sur des valeurs typiquement 'créoles', universalistes, nationales, multiraciales, et fortement influencé par des idéologies européennes, humanisme chrétien ou surtout marxisme<sup>44</sup>.

Starting in November 1975, the main issue on the field was not only to increase support to a movement that shared close cultural ties, but also to become the determining factor in a confrontation that opposed socialist forces with "imperialist forces". The choice to sustain Neto's MPLA would produce major results for Havana's position in the international arena and in particular among third world countries. Castro's proud words on the occasion of Neto's visit to Cuba in July 1976 seem particularly significant in this respect:

This attitude of our country, willing to fight, to help, on one terrain or another, is a good way to measure its maturity and its revolutionary conscience.

<sup>42</sup> Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution: Exile*, 225. On the Tricontinental Conference and the Cuban attitude, see Benemelis, *Castro*, 211-219.

<sup>43</sup> See Westad, *The Global*, 212-213.

<sup>44</sup> Messiant, "Angola", 162. The FNLA is in turn described as an ethno-nationalist movement and its ideology is defined as "un nationalisme libéral mais africain radical car très opposé non seulement au colonialisme mais aux colons et à l'imposition de la culture européenne", *ibid.*, 163. Whereas UNITA "s'oppose comme le FNLA à l'aristocratie créole' du MPLA vue comme une 'caste', elle se définit face à celle-ci comme 'africaine' (et non comme 'angolaise'), valorise sa communauté culturelle, linguistique et raciale avec le peuple, et oppose à cette caste sa propre supériorité, de 'fils du peuple'", *ibid.*, 166.

That is why the imperialists always make mistakes with Cuba; because they have no equipment to measure this moral attitudes. They have no way of measuring the spirit and morale of the people. They made a mistake at the Bay of Pigs. And now, when they planned the invasion of Angola, they again made a mistake [...]. The most important thing about a country is not its wealth. The imperialists have a lot of wealth, but they do not have moral spirit. The most important thing about a country, a society, is its morale and its spirit<sup>45</sup>.

Against this backdrop, it is easier to understand why, in spite of local difficulties, a new leadership crisis and the continuation of a civil war, Cuba remained firmly in favor of Neto's government. The assumption of being on the "right" side responded to concerns linked to a precise Cuban agenda. Angolan events were perceived from the perspective of a relationship that could cast Havana in a peculiar role: the defender of the Angolan people and the promoter of a South-South collaboration rooted both in a shared past of subjugation and in the present fight against minority rule in Southern Africa and imperialist forces in the world arena<sup>46</sup>.

Cuba's role in Angola raises several questions that have not yet been fully addressed and could represent a fertile point of departure for the present debate and future research projects. For one, did it make any difference to the leadership of the MPLA that Cuba had a prominent independent role in Angola? And what role, if any, did Cuba play with respect to the MPLA's evolution between 1976 and 1977, the year the party officially adopted a Marxist-Leninist ideology for its First Congress?

We know that Castro showed sensitivity towards Soviet concerns over primacy within the socialist camp<sup>47</sup> but, at the same time, he underlined the importance of leaving the newborn Angolan government with enough freedom to develop its own path towards socialism. Was this a subtle way of leaving room for the construction of a special relationship between two developing countries? In other words, was there a "Cuban model" exercising an influence on the field with the potential to open a special channel of connections not only with Angola but also with other developing African countries? Did the MPLA leadership prefer to deal with Cuba because of its own revolutionary experience and its nature as a developing country? Were there concerns over the necessity to maintain autonomy and keep a certain distance from Moscow through Cuban mediation?

An analysis of the Cuban-Angolan relationship as it developed after the PRA took power seems to indicate that the essential goal for Havana remained the very survival of the MPLA government throughout the period of 1975-88. Since independence did not mean the end of conflict but a new

<sup>45</sup> Fidel Castro, "Speech on the 23<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the Assault on Moncada Barracks", 26 July 1976, Castro Speech Database on-line, [www1.lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro.html](http://www1.lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro.html).

<sup>46</sup> Ratliff, "Cuban", 30-33.

<sup>47</sup> Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 372; Westad, *The Global*, 238-41.

phase of it, Cuba's military aid remained crucial throughout this period, even if civilian support continued to mark an important aspect of the island's assistance to Angola<sup>48</sup>. From a local perspective, however, the awareness of the support granted by Cuba, against not only external pressures but also internal threats, might have been the factor that prevented the development of an open political debate among different currents within the MPLA<sup>49</sup>, leaving room for a centralization and personalization of power. Three subsequent crises, one internal and two external, while calling for a different kind of involvement from Cuba, seemed to push in this direction: the attempted coup by Nito Alves in May 1977 and the two Shaba crises of 1977 and 1978.

In May 1977, while discontent over the direction taken by the MPLA's leadership spread among young people, some branches of the army and the urban unemployed in particular, an attempted coup promoted by Nito Alves and José Van Dunem (both key members of the MPLA belonging to the current of "internationalists", the supposed Soviet favorite)<sup>50</sup> failed. The prompt military response of Cuban troops, who seized the radio station that the insurgents had been unable to control, allowed Neto himself and most members of the government to survive (while other government and military leaders were killed during the uprising). The situation was brought back under control, but the abortive coup had heavy consequences. Though little evidence has surfaced regarding the post-coup phase, there is a general agreement among scholars that the official reaction to the coup was not limited to hitting the insurgents but also inaugurated a period of massive repression of any form of dissent, thereby enforcing the divide between the power elite and the population<sup>51</sup>. At the same time, the dissent brought dramatically to the surface by the coup failed to be addressed in any form thereafter.

The two Shaba crises erupted in March 1977 and May 1978 respectively when guerrilla forces (Zairian exiles) calling themselves the *Front de Libération National Congolais* attempted to invade the Shaba province of Zaire from the Angolan territory. Cuba denied any involvement, despite allegations from the West<sup>52</sup>. Nevertheless, a "side-effect" of both crises was a new increase in

<sup>48</sup> Sergio Díaz-Briquets and Jorge Pérez-López, "Internationalist Civilian Assistance: The Cuban Presence in Sub-Saharan Africa", in *Cuba Internationalism*, ed. Díaz-Briquets, 48-77.

<sup>49</sup> Birmingham, *Portugal and Angola*, 143 and 149.

<sup>50</sup> For the roots of the coup and an accurate analysis of the ethnic and political background of its promoters, see, in particular, Messiant, "Angola", 172-3. See also Birmingham, *Portugal and Angola*, 151-5; Westad, *The Global*, 239-240 and 244; Lara Pawson, "The 27 May in Angola: A View from Below", in *Relações Internacionais* 14 (2007), 1-18.

<sup>51</sup> Regarding the evolution of the MPLA's leadership after the attempted coup, see Messiant, "Angola", 173-176. See also Tvedten, *Angola*, 44.

<sup>52</sup> At the outbreak of the first crisis, in March 1977, the US government adopted a cautious position. See, for example, Z. Brzezinski to J. Carter, 18 March 1977, secret, in Jimmy Carter Library, Atlanta (JCL), Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, box 41, WNSR 5. However, in May 1978, under pressure from Belgium and France, the US administration agreed to give logistical support to their mission in Shaba. This decision seemed to validate the unconfirmed hypothesis that Katangans had been trained by Cubans and that the whole operation against

Cuban military presence in Angola. Furthermore, the whole affair gave new political strength to Neto when he needed it most<sup>53</sup>, since the May 1977 coup had revealed old but unresolved divisions among MPLA ranks and notable weaknesses within the Angolan leadership, which could remain thus thanks to the “external crisis”. Consequently, as was long the case in the war against UNITA<sup>54</sup>, Shaba I and II gave the government in Luanda new arguments with which to avoid facing the most crucial problems of the country, including severe shortages in agricultural production, poor food distribution and a lack of basic viable infrastructures<sup>55</sup>. After José Edoardo dos Santos’ appointment as president following Agostinho Neto’s death in 1979, the concentration of power increased and the government was formally subordinated to the party until the constitutional changes of the early 1990s<sup>56</sup>. At the same time, rising oil revenues allowed the regime not just to survive but to prosper unchecked in terms of its legitimacy and accountability<sup>57</sup>.

#### 4. Conclusions

Despite the many expectations for the Angolan independence that started in November 1975, the country did not enter a phase of peace and democracy. On the contrary, civil war continued in various forms for over twenty-five years. The MPLA government, which had managed to declare the foundation of the People Republic of Angola amidst a ferocious internal fight for power, was unable to live up to its promises.

The consequences of a continuous civil war added to the already heavy burden inherited from Portuguese colonialism, creating a situation in

Mobutu’s regime could not have been planned and organized without Luanda and Moscow’s consent. New evidence produced by Gleijeses rules out any direct Cuban involvement. On this issue and American reactions, see Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 686-695; Gleijeses, “Truth or Credibility: Castro, Carter, and the Invasions of Shaba”, *The International History Review* 1 (1996), 70-103; Birmingham, “Angola”, in *A History*, ed. Chabal, 153-5. On the Angolan and Soviet points of view see also memo of conversation (Loginov with Luvualu), 27 June 1978, secret, in Cold War International History Project, *Virtual Archive Collections* on-line, “The Cold War in Africa”, [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic\\_id=1409&fuseaction=va2.browse&sort=Collection](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=va2.browse&sort=Collection). For the new evidence on Cuba’s role during both crises, see, in particular, Gleijeses, “Moscow’s Proxy”, 9-21.

<sup>53</sup> The global repercussions of the two Shaba crises were twofold. While Mobutu’s regime was spared, Neto denied any involvement and managed to achieve significant diplomatic success by receiving a commitment from Mobutu to end all interference in Angolan affairs, i.e. his support for the FNLA and the FLEC, in return for Neto’s similar assurances to maintain peace along the border.

<sup>54</sup> On the absence of effective political and social dissent against the increasingly oppressive nature of the MPLA regime, Messiant argues that this was a by-product of the prolonged civil war in Angola: Christine Messiant, “The Mutation of Hegemonic Domination”, in *Angola*, eds. Chabal and Vidal, 97.

<sup>55</sup> See D. Birmingham, *Portugal and Africa*, 146-152.

<sup>56</sup> Messiant, “Angola”, 175-176. See also Tvedten, *Angola*, 46.

<sup>57</sup> Messiant, “The Mutation”, 95-98.



which the centralization of power in the hands of a restricted elite seemed to be the only solution to promote efficient economic policies that required heavy investments and measures of austerity. From the 1977 Party Congress onwards, Angola was ruled by a single-party regime and the revolutionary agenda was entirely absorbed by “war imperatives”<sup>58</sup>. The time for filling in the gaps and mending the disarticulations of the country never came. Angola, like other African states, became a “gatekeeper state” able to survive mainly thanks to the exploitation of its natural resources, especially oil<sup>59</sup>. Against this backdrop, the role of Cuba, not originally meant to be just ‘military’, seemed to adapt itself to this evolution and serve primarily as a bastion in defense of a party-leadership that was not to be questioned.

Of course, one cannot underestimate, or forget, Nelson Mandela’s personal tribute to Cuban internationalism and its “contribution to African independence” during his first visit to Cuba in 1991. Regarding the results of Cuba’s involvement in Angola, Mandela’s judgment was very clear: “The decisive defeat of the apartheid aggressors broke the myth of the invincibility of the white oppressors!” He went further to stress that “Cuito Cuanavale has been the turning point in the struggle to free the continent and our country from the scourge of apartheid”<sup>60</sup>. Cuba’s intervention in the Angolan crisis, in defense of a more just and equal order that would also contribute to the disappearance of apartheid, is due above all to the Cuban spirit and morale, and it certainly needs to be recognized, as Mandela believes<sup>61</sup>. However, a fair assessment of the impact of that involvement should not be confined to the celebration of an unquestionable and crucial victory, thereby grasping only one dimension of a multifaceted relationship, but should rather be widened to explore all the social and political fall-outs on the African country as a whole. According to Patrick Chabal, outside interference “fuelled rather than caused internal divisions, violence and civil war” and “the foreign aspect is important but it’s by no means unique to Angola”. If we share this view and at the same time look at Angola’s internal affairs and developments, especially after 1977, the role of “outside interference” can be seen in a new light.

<sup>58</sup> “By the early 1980s, as much as 50 per cent of the foreign exchange came to be used for military purposes and another 20 per cent for food imports”, *ibid.*, 72.

<sup>59</sup> Jakkie Cilliers and Christian Dietrich, eds., *Angola’s War Economy: The Role of Oil and Diamonds* (Pretoria: ISS, 2000); Tony Hodges, *Angola from Afro-Stalinism to Petro-Diamond Capitalism* (Oxford: James Currey, 2001); Philippe Le Billon, “Angola’s Political Economy of War: The Role of Oil and Diamonds, 1975-2000”, *African Affairs* (2001), 55-80; Messiant, “Angola”, 176-8. On the concept of “gatekeeper state” in post-colonial Africa, see Frederick Cooper, *Africa Since 1940* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 156-189.

<sup>60</sup> The battle of Cuito Cuanavale (1988) was a turning point in the Angolan civil war. Nelson Mandela and Fidel Castro, *How Far We Slaves Have Come* (New York: Pathfinder, 1991), 20.

<sup>61</sup> It is also important to recall that domestic criticism of Cuba’s involvement in Angola increased over the years. See, *inter alia*, Olga Nazario, “Cuba’s Angolan Operation”, in *Cuba Internationalism*, ed Díaz-Briquets, 120-2. On the domestic impact of internationalism, see, in particular, Juan M. del Aguila, “The Domestic Attitude Towards Internationalism: Evidence from Emigre Interviews”, *ibid.*, 124-143.

Field research and multidisciplinary studies on the Angolan political process have shown that after 1977, in particular, the regime in Luanda was increasingly driven by an authoritarianism based on and fuelled by a thorough party apparatus and a constant flux of oil revenues, at least until the oil crisis of the mid-1980s, which forced some things to change<sup>62</sup>. In fact, from 1977 onwards, nationalism was no longer the driving force of the competition. New imperatives surfaced and the fight between the MPLA and UNITA looked increasingly like a zero-sum game for power<sup>63</sup>. At the same time, with the reversal of American policy towards Southern Africa during the Reagan presidency in the 1980s and Pretoria's determination to pursue SWAPO forces on Angolan territory, the prosecution of the conflict, thanks again to the military presence of Cuban forces and Soviet assistance, allowed Edoardo dos Santos a sort of legitimacy *per se*.

It is true that by the end of the decade, the settlement of the Namibian issue and the withdrawal of South African and Cuban forces from Angola, along with economic and political changes imposed by internal and external pressures, could have represented a chance for a new start. Once again, however, the weaknesses of the Bicesse agreement (1991) and the short-lived Lusaka peace phase (1994), followed by the resumption of war from 1998 until the death of Jonas Savimbi in 2002 justified the government's adoption of new emergency powers and more-refined techniques of political and social control while cementing its hold of Angolan wealth<sup>64</sup>. Whereas the political transition of the 1990s caused 'prominent casualties' in neighboring countries, including that of Angola's eternal rival Mobutu, the American diplomatic recognition of 1993 and the increased importance of Angola as an oil-producing state<sup>65</sup> not only spared the Luanda regime but also its consolidation. Against this backdrop emerges a twofold understanding of Cuba's role in Angola that deserves further analysis and debate: the 'epic' one, confirmed by the moving words pronounced by Nelson Mandela in Santiago in 1991; and that which addresses the long-term consequences of keeping in power a regime that was freed from accountability and was therefore able to defer, *sine die*, issues crucial to a more balanced economic and social development.

<sup>62</sup> Nuno Vidal, "The Angolan Regime and the Move to Multiparty Politics", *cit.*, 131-143. See also Mathieu Petithomme, "The Instrumentalization of Disorder in Angola", *Human Security Journal* 4 (2007), 82-95.

<sup>63</sup> Chabal, "E Pluribus", 6.

<sup>64</sup> Nuno Vidal, "Post-Modern Patrimonialism in Africa", in *Community and the State in Lusophone Africa*, eds. Malyn Newitt, Patrick Chabal and Norrie MacQueen (London: King's College, 2003), 1-14. Christine Messiant, "Angola: Why Did Bicesse and Lusaka Fail? A Critical Analysis", in South African Regional Poverty Network on-line, [www.sarpn.org.za/documents/d0001958/Bicesse\\_Lusaka\\_2005.pdf](http://www.sarpn.org.za/documents/d0001958/Bicesse_Lusaka_2005.pdf); Id., "Angola: le retour à la guerre ou l'inévitable faillite d'une intervention internationale", *L'Afrique Politique* 1 (1994), 201-229.

<sup>65</sup> Alex Vines et al., *Angola. Drivers of Change: An Overview* (London: Chatham House, 2005).



## Part VII

# The Contemporary Scene: Cuban Strategies for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

On the previous page – *La Habana Vieja, Calle Obispo* (photo by D. Basosi, 2007).

## The Contemporary Scene: Cuban Strategies for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

For Cuba, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of the Eastern bloc at the beginning of the 1990s implied a loss of more than four fifths of its foreign markets. From 1990 to 1993, Cuban GDP fell by one third. Years of shortages of virtually everything followed in what soon came to be known as the *período especial* (the “special period”, which has not formally ended yet in 2009). The hostile attitudes among US political elites did not end, however, with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The US Congress passed two distinct acts – the Torricelli Act of 1992 and the Helms Burton Act of 1996 – aimed at exploiting Cuba’s dramatic economic crisis in order to provoke a regime change on the island<sup>1</sup>. While most of the scholarship from that same period anticipated the end of the revolutionary experience, such predictions did not come true and, by the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, Cuba seems to have recovered, at least in part, from the shock. Domestic economic recovery went hand-in-hand with the reconstruction of diplomatic, political and economic international ties. One notable recent development is the strengthening of Cuba’s ties with its close neighbors – particularly Hugo Chávez’s Venezuela – in an increasingly left-leaning Latin America. According to Duccio Basosi’s essay, however, the origins of such rapprochement date back to the second half of the 1980s when a well-orchestrated diplomatic offensive brought Fidel Castro to denounce the “neoliberal” restructuring of Latin America’s heavy foreign debts. Many

<sup>1</sup> Richard Gott, Cuba. *A New History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). Different perspectives on Cuban economy and society in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century are in Jorge I. Domínguez, Omar E. Pérez Villanueva and Lorena Barberia, eds., *The Cuban Economy at the Start of the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Carlos Mesa-Lago and Jorge F. Pérez-López, *Cuba’s Aborted Reform: Socioeconomic Effects, International Comparisons and Transition Policies* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005).

challenges still face the Cuban government on its way towards a renewal of socialism. Its dual currency system in particular (introduced as an emergency measure to earn hard currency in 1993, and kept in place since then, notwithstanding the formal substitution of the US dollar with the *peso convertible*) seems one of the hardest to overcome, as discussed in Davide Gualerzi's essay. At the same time, as Filomena Critelli maintains in her essay on Cuba's resilience, the choices of the *período especial* (aimed at keeping social expenditures high regardless of growing material constraints) helped the Cuban leadership maintain its legitimacy domestically while also providing Cuba with some highly-prized assets (knowledge, medical doctors, teachers, technicians) to exchange for much-needed goods (energy, foodstuffs) in global and regional markets.

## Chapter 19

# In the Shadow of the Washington Consensus: Cuba's Rapprochement with Latin America in a World Going Unipolar, 1985-1996

The late 1980s and the early 1990s are often described as a period of great loneliness for Cuba. The retrenchment, and then the fall, of the Soviet Union deprived the island of its main ally. The US government's hostility towards the *Revolución* remained unwavering. Economically, the decline and collapse of the Eastern Bloc forced the Cuban economy into a period of adjustment that ended in the dramatic *período especial*. Despite the seemingly unstoppable advance of capitalism that marked those years, however, Cuba did not follow in the footsteps of the former Soviet Union and the other members of the Eastern Bloc. The Cuban government, led since 1959 by Fidel Castro, confirmed instead its commitment to socialism<sup>1</sup>.

The Cuban anomaly seemed particularly striking in the context of the processes that had been taking place in the Western Hemisphere from the early 1980s on. Faced with deep financial crises, the major Latin American economies took a drastic turn towards unfettered capitalism. The US Treasury's participation in the process, as well as its powerful influence in multilateral organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, made the US government's footprint on the economies of Latin America so heavy that the policies adopted by most governments in the region were soon known worldwide as the policies of the "Washington Consensus"<sup>2</sup>. However, while the hegemonic role played by the United States in Latin America in the twilight and immediate aftermath of the Cold War cannot be seriously ques-

<sup>1</sup> On Cuba and the Cuban revolution: Richard Gott, *Storia di Cuba* (Milano: Mondadori, 2007 [New Haven: 2005]). Among the many biographies of Castro, see: Volker Skierka, *Fidel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> John Williamson, "What Washington Means by Policy Reform", in *Latin American Adjustment: How Much Has Happened*, ed. John Williamson (Washington DC: Institute for International Economics, 1990), 7-20. Also: Jorge F. Pérez-López, "The Cuban Economy in the Age of Hemispheric Integration", *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 3 (1997), 3-47.

tioned, this essay argues that the Cuban government did not merely struggle to survive in the changing international economic and political conditions, but undertook a set of skilled diplomatic moves during the Latin American debt crisis and, somewhat surprisingly, managed to keep a certain degree of “soft power” for the island even during the hardships of the *período especial*.

## I. In the Twilight of the Cold War

Cuba entered the 1980s with a certain political and economic dynamism, but in virtual isolation from most of its close neighbors. Politically, the Cuban government was playing an international role by acting as Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement and by maintaining its extensive military commitments to revolutionary movements in Africa. As far as the Western Hemisphere was concerned, however, the continuing ban from the Organization of American States (OAS) symbolized the solidity of the cordon sanitaire built by the US around the island in the early 1960s. Economically, the blockade established by the United States, and endorsed by most Latin American countries, was still in place. With the virtually lone exception of Mexico, no major Latin American country had substantial trade relations with the socialist island.

Nevertheless, Cuba still capitalized on its own strategic relevance in the global context of the Cold War, which had allowed it to gain from several favorable trade agreements with the Soviet Union, including, in particular, the exchanges of Cuban sugar and Soviet oil at subsidized prices. During the first half of the 1980s, Cuba’s economic performance was a striking exception in the Latin American landscape. Integration into the CMEA (the socialist camp’s Council of Mutual Economic Aid) had helped Cuba reach an average annual GDP growth rate of 6.7% from 1981 to 1985<sup>3</sup>. In the rest of Latin America, during those same years, the combination of large external imbalances (often connected to the energy crisis of the early 1970s) and the high interest rates imposed by the US Federal Reserve on international money markets had led instead to a virtual halt of economic growth<sup>4</sup>. Latin America’s total external debt, calculated at \$30 billion in 1970, reached \$331 billion in 1982 and grew to \$410 billion by 1987 (\$115 billion in Brazil, \$105 billion in Mexico, \$50 billion in Argentina, \$34 billion in Venezuela and \$20 billion in Chile)<sup>5</sup>. With free-falling currencies, inflation sky-rocketed and

<sup>3</sup> C. Tablada, “Les nouveaux agents économiques dans une société socialiste (Cuba)”, in *Cuba, quelle transition?*, ed. Aurelio Alonso Tejada (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001), 27-49: 32.

<sup>4</sup> Latin American GDP had grown at an average of 5.7% from 1961 to 1970 and 6.0% from 1971 to 1980: Inter-American Development Bank, *Economic and Social Progress in Latin America: 1985 Report* (Washington DC: IDB, 1985). More generally: John Ward, *Latin America: Conflict and Development since 1945* (London: Routledge, 1997), 13-20.

<sup>5</sup> Data reported in Rudi Dornbusch, “The Latin American Debt Problem: Anatomy and Solutions”, in *Debt and Democracy*, eds. Barbara Stallings and Robert Kaufman (Boulder: Westview, 1989), 7-22: 12.



production fell. By the beginning of 1987, overall Latin American GDP was 6.5% below 1980 levels. In the same period, real consumption fell by 8% in Brazil and Mexico, 14% in Peru and 17% in Argentina and Chile<sup>6</sup>.

The phrase “Washington Consensus” did not simply hint at the US involvement in the debt crisis but also indicated a discernible set of privatizing and laissez faire-oriented measures that Latin American governments had to undertake in order to enter new agreements for debt-financing and debt-rescheduling with private creditors, foreign governments and international institutions<sup>7</sup>. Such policies were extremely harmful from a social standpoint. The costs of adjustment often weighed more on employed workers than on other social groups, while the concluding sales of public industries often provided comfortable profit opportunities to part of the local elite and to foreign investors (at the same time, they guaranteed the flow of repayments to foreign commercial banks and other lending institutions)<sup>8</sup>. However, since it was consistent with classic liberal assumptions, it was officially assumed that, in the longer term, the “magic of the marketplace” would provide a more efficient allocation of resources with beneficial effects for the greater majority of the population<sup>9</sup>.

In most of the countries involved in the debt crisis, the early phase of structural adjustment was managed by authoritarian regimes, who often assisted in keeping opposition down<sup>10</sup>. Even as new parliamentary regimes entered the scene by the mid-1980s, little changed in government approaches to debt negotiations. In countries where the transition towards parliamentary democracy occurred under close military control (Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Chile), the civilian leaders that guided the transitional governments were often carefully selected from conservative technicians that would not challenge the existing understandings between the outgoing military elite and international financial centers<sup>11</sup>. But even when the transition allowed wider room for political maneuvering, new leaders often campaigned

<sup>6</sup> Data reported in Howard Handelman and Werner Baer, “Introduction: The economic and Political Costs of Austerity”, in *Paying the Costs of Austerity in Latin America*, eds. Howard Handelman and Werner Baer (Boulder: Westview, 1989), 2-15.

<sup>7</sup> For a critical approach, see: David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> The debate over the outcomes of such policies is analyzed in Donald Huddle, “Post-1982 Effects of Neoliberalism on Latin American Development and Poverty: Two Conflicting Views”, *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 4 (1997), 881-97.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, President Reagan’s remarks: “Responses to Questions Submitted by Latin American Newspapers”, 30 November 1982, in University of California at Santa Barbara, *The American Presidency Project* on-line (APP), [www.presidency.ucsb.edu](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu) (cited 25 March 2008).

<sup>10</sup> This was acknowledged in CIA, National Intelligence Estimate, “Brazil: prospects for the regime”, 25 April 1984, secret; CIA, National Intelligence Estimate, “Chile: prospects for a democratic transition”, 1 December 1985, secret. Both documents are in Central Intelligence Agency, *Freedom of Information Act* on-line (CIA-FOIA), [www.cia.foia.gov](http://www.cia.foia.gov) (cited 25 March 2008).

<sup>11</sup> For an in-depth appraisal of this point, see the contributions collected in: Stallings and Kaufman, eds., *Debt and Democracy*.

against the harsh conditions attached to the financial packages, only to end up accepting them shortly after taking office. Relative bargaining weakness, a seeming lack of alternatives and true admiration for what then seemed the miracle of “free market” policies in the US and some developing countries (namely South Korea), often combined with the lures of tangible personal advantages (which sometimes translated into sheer corruption) to determine the new leaders’ adherence to the Washington Consensus. In a complete reversal of the development strategies followed in previous decades, privatizing state-owned companies, reducing tariffs, eliminating controls on flows of capital and limiting the bargaining power of unions all came to be seen as the primary tools to re-launch exports and repay debts.

Protests and revolts against the deteriorating living conditions did take place in several countries. *Vis-à-vis* the creditors, the main Latin American debtors also threatened to enhance their bargaining position by joining in the “Cartagena Consensus” to denounce the political, and not simply economic, nature of the debt problem<sup>12</sup>. The newly elected president of Peru, Alan García, unilaterally declared that his country would limit debt repayment until after the domestic recession had been overcome<sup>13</sup>. The Catholic Church, an influential player on the Latin American field, questioned the morality of the policies of the Washington Consensus<sup>14</sup>. However, whereas there were minor changes in the modalities in which the US-sponsored model of economic adjustment was promoted and applied, its basic philosophy remained unchanged throughout the period<sup>15</sup>. Governments kept divesting public sectors and cutting social expenditures, even though this frequently meant selling off the most strategic industries (including the water supply in Bolivia’s case) to (often foreign) private companies and creating wide areas of poverty. According to World Bank data about the region, apart from variations, inequality peaked, malnutrition grew and by 1996, a third of Latin Americans were living on less than two dollars a day (from a mere 11% in 1969)<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Judith Teichman, “The World Bank and Policy Reform in Mexico and Argentina”, *Latin American Politics and Society* 1 (2004), 39-74.

<sup>13</sup> Eduardo Ferrero Costa, “Peruvian Foreign Policy: Current Trends, Constraints and Opportunities”, *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 2 (1987), 55-78.

<sup>14</sup> Pontifical Justice and Peace Commission, “An Ethical Approach to the International Debt Question”, *Origins* 34 (1987), 601-611.

<sup>15</sup> In the early 1980s, in particular, the US government refused to commit federal resources to debt-rescheduling plans, which not only forced Latin American countries into faster adjustment and a worse bargaining position but also made payments to creditor banks more difficult. Eventually, with the so-called “Brady Plan” of 1989 (from the name of then Secretary of the Treasury William Brady) the US agreed to guarantee private loans to indebted countries. What did not change throughout the years was the “tight conditionality” that was attached to the financial packages. On this, see: Secretary of the Treasury Regan to Reagan, “Results of the 1983 WB/IMF Annual Meetings”, 6 October 1983, Confidential, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, USA (RRL), Executive, Secretariat NSC, Subject File, box 42, IMF.

<sup>16</sup> Huddle, “Post-1982”, 886-887.

## 2. The International Politics of the Debt Crisis: Cuba and Latin America

Beneath the surface of Washington's growing economic and political influence in Latin America, the Latin American debt crisis offered Fidel Castro the first serious opportunity in years to pull Cuba out of regional isolation. In March 1985, in an interview with the Mexican newspaper *Excelsior*, the Cuban leader began what would soon appear to be a relentless campaign against the political implications of "orthodox" foreign debt management<sup>17</sup>. Castro invited Latin America to unite and repeal the external debt. Neither of the two objectives could be deemed alien to "socialist internationalism", but both the regional focus and the arguments used seemed to mark a perceivable shift in the form, if not the substance, of Castro's foreign policy. The March interview was not just a one-off: Castro made Latin American debt the main focus of his foreign policy speeches for months<sup>18</sup>. The Cuban leader outlined three sorts of reasons why it was "impossible" to pay the debt. Economically, the size of indebtedness was simply too large to be offset so that, by analogy with what is prescribed in most domestic legal codes, the burden of losses from bad investments should have been shared between debtor and creditor. Politically, it would have been impossible for most governments to squeeze the living conditions of their citizens further without provoking rebellions and revolts, which Castro did not appear to desire in that phase. Morally, Latin America had already paid enough to the wealthy North, first through colonial exploitation and more recently through "neo-colonialism"<sup>19</sup>. Castro presented his solution in rather conciliatory terms, explaining that it would "not harm the international financial system". In order to avoid global financial collapse from the sudden repeal of the debt, the líder máximo suggested that, rather than having the new Latin American democracies pay for the debts incurred by their authoritarian predecessors the federal US government should cut its defense budget and devote the amount saved to repay the creditor banks<sup>20</sup>.

Castro's reasoning was purposely provocative but far from improvised. The Cuban government prepared the campaign carefully by arriving quickly at an agreement with its Western European creditors on its own outstanding \$2.9 billion debt to show that it was not acting out of any immediate self-in-

<sup>17</sup> Castro's speeches and thoughts on the debt crisis are collected in: Fidel Castro, *La deuda externa* (La Habana: Editoria Política, 1989). On the Cuban anti-debt campaign: Philip O'Brien, "'The Debt cannot Be Paid': Castro and the Latin American Debt", *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 1 (1986), 41-63. More generally: Michael Kline, "Castro and 'New Thinking' in Latin America", *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 1 (1990), 83-118.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Treaster, "Castro's Modest Proposal", *New York Times*, 25 August 1985.

<sup>19</sup> Castro, *La deuda externa*, 46-58, 59-62 and 88-97.

<sup>20</sup> Jim Hoagland, "Conversation with Castro. Marathon Session: Castro Talks Economics, Not Revolution", *The Washington Post*, 3 February 1985.

terest<sup>21</sup>. It also complemented the rhetoric offensive by hosting a large continental meeting “against the debt” in Havana in August 1985. Although only a few governments sent official delegations, the success in terms of affecting public opinion was huge. More than one-thousand delegates from NGOs, workers unions, religious groups, political parties and even a few corporations arrived in the Cuban capital from all over the continent at the expense of the Cuban government<sup>22</sup>. Debt relief made its way into the discussions of the Latin American people, if not into those of their governments.

The lack of unity among Latin American governments was abundantly displayed by the poor coordination of the Cartagena group<sup>23</sup>. Some Latin American leaders even showed annoyance at Castro’s campaign. Yet, diplomats from the same countries that publicly criticized the Cuban effort confessed to reporters that most leaders were “privately delighted” by Castro’s stance, which improved their bargaining position with creditors (although governments were interested in having better conditions for rescheduling, rather than repealing the debt altogether)<sup>24</sup>. In the words of one reporter: “emotionally they all agreed with Castro”<sup>25</sup>.

As noted by the New York Times columnist Tad Szulc in an article significantly entitled “Cuba’s Emergence, America’s Myopia”, the widespread perception in the Latin American public opinion was that President Reagan “did not care about their awesome economic crisis, [while] Fidel Castro did”<sup>26</sup>. The Cuban anti-debt campaign did not go completely unheard in Washington. Indeed, some commentators have established a link between the Cuban diplomatic offensive and the need for the US administration to present the so-called “Baker Plan” in 1985, which recognized the global nature of the debt problem and committed substantial amounts of fresh money to the World Bank (an action the US government had previously refused to take)<sup>27</sup>. From Cuba’s standpoint, however, the only practical short-term consequence of the campaign was the hardening of Reagan’s resolve to crush the island economically<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> Roger Lowenstein, “Cuba Is in Good Standing With Bankers Despite Castro’s Talk of Canceling Debt”, *The Wall Street Journal*, 30 July 1985.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Treaster, “Cuban Meeting Stokes Emotions on Latin Debt”, *New York Times*, 1 August 1985.

<sup>23</sup> US officials were well informed about the inner weakness and divergences in the Cartagena consensus even before they emerged publicly: (NSC staffer) Mulford to Interagency Group on International Debt, “A Meeting of the IG”, 19 September 1984, confidential, RRL, Executive Secretariat NSC, Subject File, box 42, IMF.

<sup>24</sup> Treaster, “Cuban Meeting”.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Treaster, “Castro Builds relations with South America”, *New York Times*, 19 May 1985.

<sup>26</sup> Tad Szulc, “Cuba’s Emergence, America’s Myopia”, *New York Times*, 5 May 1985.

<sup>27</sup> Catherine Gwin, *US Relations with the World Bank 1945-92* (Washington DC: Brookings, 1994), 38-45.

<sup>28</sup> See: National Security Decision Directive no. 235, “Strengthening US Policy Toward Cuba”, 18 August 1986, secret, in Federation of America Scientists, National Security Decision Directives on-line, [www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/index.html](http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/index.html) (cited 25 March 2008).

It was in the longer run that the anti-debt offensive represented an unprecedented opportunity for Cuba, allowing it to slowly find new interlocutors—some of them, such as the Catholic Church, inconceivable in earlier times—and, most importantly, to regain a recognized position in the community of the Latin American states. Castro's struggle for debt relief and regional cooperation coincided with the return to civilian rule in most of the continent. In that context, Cuba gained diplomatic recognition and reopened trade contacts with most of its Latin American neighbors after more than two decades. Throughout 1985, León Febres-Cordero Rivadeneira of Ecuador was the first democratically elected president of a Latin American country to visit Cuba, while Raúl Alfonsín, the centrist president of Argentina, and Julio María Sanguinetti, the conservative elected president of Uruguay, reopened trade relations with Cuba. Brazil followed shortly thereafter in 1986<sup>29</sup>. By 1989, all but three Latin American countries (Chile, Paraguay and Colombia) maintained regular diplomatic relations and incipient trade flows with Cuba. It goes without saying that these mutual openings did not constitute a reversal of policies and alliances in the southern half of the hemisphere. Certainly most of the Latin American leaders who reopened relations with Cuba were staunch followers of the Washington Consensus in their countries and could hardly be depicted as supporters of the Cuban government. Nevertheless, Cuba's offensive on debt did capitalize on the need that most governments had, in a period of dramatic weakness, to show at least some independence from the United States. As instrumental as the rapprochement might have been, it was a major breakthrough for Cuba's diplomacy.

### 3. The International Politics of the *Período Especial*

Although relatively immune to the economic turmoil of its neighbors, Cuba was extremely vulnerable due to its dependency on the Eastern Bloc. By 1986, trade with CMEA countries had grown to cover an unprecedented 85% of total Cuban foreign trade: 98% of the fuel, 50% of the calories and 57% of the proteins consumed in the country came from CMEA sources<sup>30</sup>. Starting in 1985, however, the new general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, Mikhail Gorbachev, accelerated moves to reduce the "imperial" commitments undertaken by his predecessors, partly in response to the challenging economic situation. More-realistic prices were to be set for sugar imports from and oil exports to Cuba, in line with the tenets of perestroika. Political considerations accompanied economic ones. From Moscow's "new thinking", which stressed complementing

<sup>29</sup> Roger Lowenstein, "Cuba's Castro Finds Friends in Region By Urging West to Pay Off Latin Debts", *The Wall Street Journal*, 23 May 1985.

<sup>30</sup> Tablada, "Les nouveaux", 39.

rather than competing with the West, the Caribbean island's strategic significance diminished significantly for the Soviets<sup>31</sup>. Bilateral contracts were renegotiated and eventually the flow of commodities came to a virtual halt with the end of the Soviet state. As Boris Yeltsin hauled the red flag down from the Kremlin in December 1991, the new Russian leadership ended all relevant economic and political relations with socialist Cuba.

After his first meeting with Gorbachev in Moscow in March 1986, Fidel Castro had been extremely critical of perestroika and declared that he did not want to be involved in it<sup>32</sup>. However, given Cuba's dependency on the Soviet Union, non-involvement was hardly possible. Cuba's economy had to adjust. The first step was the "readdressing of mistakes" (*Política de rectificación de errores*), which diverted investments from inefficient sectors towards tourism, pharmaceuticals and construction, while still aiming to strengthen and rationalize the centrally-planned economy<sup>33</sup>. Much more radical changes would occur after Castro's second meeting with Gorbachev, which took place in Havana in April 1989, only seven months before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In January 1990, faced with the global retrenchment of the Soviet Union, Fidel Castro spoke of the need for Cuba to enter a "special period in peacetime"<sup>34</sup>. The months that followed formed the most dramatic period for the Cuban economy after the *Revolución*. Between 1990 and 1993, Cuban foreign trade plummeted by 70%. Since most of the imports from CMEA were in strategic raw materials and spare parts for industrial plants, the resulting scarcity ignited a chain of economic shortages. Annual sugar production was halved, while the end of Soviet subsidies coincided with dropping prices in international markets. Cuban GDP dropped by nearly 30% in three years<sup>35</sup>, energy consumption was cut by half<sup>36</sup> and by 1996 the Cuban calorie intake had fallen 27% below the level in 1990<sup>37</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> On *perestroika* and "new thinking" in Gorbachev's foreign policy: Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire. The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 265-302; Danuta Paszyn, *The Soviet Attitude To Political And Social Change in Central America, 1979-1990* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> Bill Keller, "Gorbachev-Castro Face-Off: A Clash of Style and Policies", *New York Times*, 2 April 1989.

<sup>33</sup> Tablada, "Les nouveaux", 36-38.

<sup>34</sup> Gott, *Storia*, 335-349.

<sup>35</sup> Jorge I. Domínguez, "Cuba's Economic Transition: Successes, Deficiencies, and Challenges", in *The Cuban Economy at the Start of the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Jorge I. Domínguez, Omar E. Pérez Villanueva and Lorena Barberia (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 17-48: 19 and 20.

<sup>36</sup> Omar E. Pérez Villanueva, "The Cuban Economy Today and Its Future Challenges", in *The Cuban*, eds. Domínguez, Pérez Villanueva and Barberia, 49-89: 65 and 76.

<sup>37</sup> Statistics of the Havana-based *Centro de Investigaciones de la Economía Mundial*, cited in Domínguez, "Cuba's Economic", 43.

Commentators wrote daily about the imminent collapse of Cuban socialism under the pressure of the dramatic economic crisis<sup>38</sup>. US intelligence advanced their hypothesis that “the deterioration of the Cuban economy [would have] further undermined Castro’s legitimacy” and that there was “a better than even chance that Fidel Castro’s government would fall within the next few years”<sup>39</sup>. Certain episodes were seen as confirmation of such forecasts (for example, in August 1994 when disputes erupted in Havana’s harbor, forcing Castro himself to engage in lengthy talks with an angry crowd of youth who saw few opportunities on the island)<sup>40</sup>.

In this situation, the US government and Congress actively sought to exploit the economic crisis in order to put an end to the Cuban anomaly. Under heavy lobbying from the Cuban-American National Foundation, the Congress passed the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992, also known as the Torricelli Act, and the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act of 1996, also known as the Helms-Burton Act, which limited family contacts, virtually terminated all trade between the two shores of the Florida Strait and established before US courts the extra-territorial suitability of foreign companies doing business in Cuba<sup>41</sup>. Furthermore, Washington-based international financial institutions denied loans to Cuba<sup>42</sup>.

Given these conditions, an economist of the Havana-based *Centro de Investigaciones de la Economía Mundial* observed some years later in a display of the Cuban sense of humor that, with virtually no access to foreign credit, the socialist island had undergone, during the *período especial*, the only true “classical” economic adjustment. International prices had increased, the external deficit had soared and domestic consumption had been curtailed to offset the loss in purchasing power<sup>43</sup>. However, the way in which this adjustment was carried out radically distinguished Cuba from the rest of the continent.

<sup>38</sup> The most-quoted incorrect prediction on the imminent collapse of Cuban socialism is Andrés Oppenheimer, *Castro’s Final Hour* (New York: Touchstone, 1993).

<sup>39</sup> Respectively: National Intelligence Council, “Soviet Assistance to Cuba: New Estimates for 1986-90 and Outlook”, 9 September 1991, secret; and CIA, National Intelligence Estimate, “Cuba: The Outlook for Castro and Beyond”, 1 August 1993, secret. Both documents are in the CIA-FOIA database. The only CID/Gallup poll carried out in Cuba during the *período especial* found that, in 1994, roughly 69% of Cubans considered themselves revolutionaries, socialists or communists and 58% thought that the revolution had comparatively more achievements than failures: Peter Roman, *People’s Power: Cuba’s Experience with Representative Government* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 144.

<sup>40</sup> Geraldine Lievesley, *The Cuban Revolution: Past, Present and Future Perspectives* (Gordonsville: Palgrave, 2004), 161-6.

<sup>41</sup> See: Stephen Lisio, “Helms-Burton and the Point of Diminishing Returns”, *International Affairs* 4, *The Americas: European Security* (1996), 691-711; and Julia Sweig, “Fidel’s Final Victory”, *Foreign Affairs* 1 (2007), 5-13.

<sup>42</sup> Jorge I. Domínguez, “U.S.-Cuban Relations: From the Cold War to the Colder War”, *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 3 (1997), 49-75.

<sup>43</sup> Osualdo Martínez Martínez, “Cuba dans le contexte de l’économie mondiale”, in *Cuba*, ed. Alonso Tejada, 167-179: 174.

The Cuban leadership sought to quickly work out a “socialist” way out of the deep economic crisis. Although tourism was immediately identified as the most promising source of hard currency, the long-held suspicion towards external partners and the objective lack of consolidated relations with non-socialist countries initially led to an attempt to maintain the external balance by reducing consumption alone and concentrating the small amount of hard currency available on strategic imports<sup>44</sup>.

Additional radical measures were undertaken after 1993. Carlos Lage, a former pediatrician who became Cuba’s economic czar, legalized the ownership and use of the US dollar while seeking foreign investments in joint public-private ventures (in tourism and other selected industries) where the Cuban state would hold at least 51% of the ownership. Domestically, Lage moved on to diversifying agriculture and partially deregulating self-employment for small-scale economic activities while allowing rural cooperatives to sell their surplus products in town markets. He also introduced taxation, with a heavy emphasis on private activities<sup>45</sup>.

The development of these measures was a series of (sometimes confusing) stops and gos that would last well into the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when many Cuban economists – not to mention their foreign counterparts – continued to debate the appropriate balance between private, cooperative and public control over economic activity<sup>46</sup>. Although it was not conceived as a first step towards capitalism, nor as a way to change the basic orientation of the Cuban welfare-state system (even with all its economic “inefficiencies”), this second wave of adjustment policies did imply a larger degree of opening up to the once-abhorred market tools and a greater shock to Cuba’s social organization. Though the economy did eventually rebound (GDP growth averaged 3.6% between 1994 and 2001)<sup>47</sup>, the

<sup>44</sup> Cuban economists reported a 31% fall in consumption from 1990 to 1993, with a 7% decline in social and government spending and a 39% drop in private spending. See: Viviana Togores and Anicia García, “Consumption, Markets, and Monetary Duality in Cuba”, in *The Cuban*, eds. Domínguez, Pérez Villanueva and Barbería, 245-295: 247.

<sup>45</sup> Domínguez, “Cuba’s Economic Transition”, 25-30.

<sup>46</sup> After the end of the Cold War, debating the prospects of the Cuban economy has been a widely practiced activity outside Cuba. Forecasting and prescribing, however, has largely prevailed over analyzing and describing. A compendium of this type of work can be found in Carlos Mesa-Lago and Jorge F. Pérez-López, *Cuba’s Aborted Reform: Socioeconomic Effects, International Comparisons and Transition Policies* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005). In contrast, while during the 1990s most Cuban economists shifted away from the ideological Marxism and statism of previous decades, their work did not abandon a basic orientation towards an economic system based on social solidarity. See Fernando Martínez Heredia, “Izquierda y marxismo en Cuba”, *Alternativas Sud*, 3 (1996); and Anthony Maingot, “Epistemic ‘Organic Intellectuals’ and Cuba’s Battle of Ideas”, Florida International University, Cuban Research Institute Report no. 4, 26 May 2007 (available on-line at <http://cubainfo.fiu.edu/CubaContext/Reports/Maingot4.swf>).

<sup>47</sup> A complete set of data on Cuba’s recent economic performance is in Omar E. Pérez Villanueva, “Economía y Nivel de Vida en Cuba: Avances y Retos”, paper presented at the conference *Governance and Social Justice in Cuba: Past, Present and Future*, Mexico City, 21-22 April,



firmly egalitarian society of the 1960s and 1970s was deeply shaken by the creation of tangible economic differences between those that could access foreign currencies (through tourism and foreign remittances) and those that could not<sup>48</sup>. At the same time, in a well-publicized report of the mid-1990s, the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL) emphasized that “given the size of the external shock, the policies of adjustment [in Cuba] has been relatively low [...] in comparison with other Latin American economies”, attributing such an outcome to the “orientation towards solidarity” of the Cuban social context<sup>49</sup>.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

The rapprochement with the Latin American countries did not end with the beginning of Cuba’s economic troubles. On the contrary, those years saw the consolidation of the Cuban government’s institutional links with most Latin American countries and ties with the progressive movements of the continent. In 1987, eight Latin American countries pushed for Cuba’s re-admission into the Organization of American States for the first time<sup>50</sup>. The attempt was unsuccessful, but in August 1989 the Latin American countries contributed to the election of Cuba as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council<sup>51</sup>. In 1991, notwithstanding US critiques made to the Mexican organizers, Fidel Castro was the uncontested star at the Ibero-American summit, which brought together the heads of state and government of all Latin American countries, plus Spain and Portugal<sup>52</sup>. Precisely when US pressures for Cuba’s domestic change were intensifying, the Latin American governments turned their traditional abstentions into votes against the US blockade in the UN General Assembly, causing total votes against the blockade to jump from 59 to 101 between 1992 and 1994. At the same time, the Cuban way out of the crisis, with virtually no budgetary cuts to health care, education and social security, confirmed – or even increased – the country’s attractive-

2005 (available on-line at Canadian Foundation for the Americas, [www.focal.ca/pdf/everleny.pdf](http://www.focal.ca/pdf/everleny.pdf)).

<sup>48</sup> See, Mayra E. Prieto, “Social Effects of Economic Adjustment”, in *The Cuban*, eds. Domínguez, Pérez Villanueva and Barberia, 209-43: 219 and 221. Nevertheless, in 2003, according to a World Bank study, Cuba remained the least unequal country in Latin America by far: World Bank, “Inequality in Latin America & Caribbean: Breaking with History?”, 2003 (available on-line at <http://wbln0018.worldbank.org/LAC/LAC.nsf/ECADocByUnid/4112F111>).

<sup>49</sup> CEPAL, *La economía cubana. Reformas estructurales y desempeño en los noventa* (Santiago: CEPAL, 1997), 15-6. Cuba constantly ranked among the “high human development” countries in the yearly publications of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP): UNDP, *Lo sviluppo umano. Rapporto 2007-08* (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 2007), 287-95.

<sup>50</sup> Larry Rohter, “8 Latin Chiefs Urge Cuba Role in Their Region”, *New York Times*, 29 November 1987.

<sup>51</sup> Paul Lewis, “Cuba Is Elected to the UN Security Council”, *New York Times*, 9 August 1989.

<sup>52</sup> Mark Uhlig, “All Eyes on Cuba at Ibero-American Summit”, *New York Times*, 18 July 1991.

ness, especially in the Latin American context, as a socio-economic model different than the prevailing one. Latin American leftist leaders renewed their interest for the revolutionary island and often paid official visits to Havana<sup>53</sup>. All of this was not enough for Cuba to avoid the hardships of the *período especial*. Yet, the record of the period stretching from the half of the 1980s to the half of the 1990s indicates that the Cuban government was able, for the first time since the *Revolución*, to enter a significant network of regional relations right at the height of the policies and ideology of the Washington Consensus.

<sup>53</sup> Luiz Ignacio "Lula" da Silva (elected Brazil's President in 2002 and confirmed for a second term in office in 2006) visited Havana in 1989 as a union organizer and presidential candidate. Hugo Chávez Frias (elected Venezuela's President in 1998 and confirmed for new terms in office in 2000 and 2006) was welcomed in the Cuban capital with military honors in 1994.

D. Gualerzi

## Chapter 20

# Cuba: Political Success and Economic Failure?

The present essay attempts to clarify the question of Cuba's future by examining the development and recent reform of its economy, which ultimately leads us to consider the profile of "21<sup>st</sup>-century socialism", to use the term coined by Venezuela's president Hugo Chavez. In the spirit of sparking further discussion, the purposefully provocative title stresses the particular angle from which the issue of Cuba's economic reform is considered here. It will be addressed with respect not only to the success of the island's political stance in the international arena, especially its criticism of neo-liberal policies in Latin America, but also to the reality of an economy that, despite overcoming the harsh *período especial* and showing many signs of vitality, remains locked in a difficult process of integration into the world market. These and other related issues are also addressed in other essays of the present volume<sup>1</sup>. Opposite this integration process, moreover, is the issue of Cuba's "dual economy" – formed by two markets that are regulated by different currencies – and the two-tier society such an economy has the potential to engender. This latter issue appears to be vastly perceived by Cubans and external observers alike as a very serious problem. Although it is a part of the "*cambio en la vida cotidiana*" that has evolved since the end of the *período especial*, it also raises a number of questions. Most of all, as the cohesive force of the revolutionary leadership and the generation that lived through the triumph of the revolution fade away, it threatens to break apart the consensus that the regime has managed to maintain thus far.

<sup>1</sup> See in particular the essays by Duccio Basosi, Maria Stella Rognoni and Candace Sobers in this volume.

### **I. The Problem of Development: Industrializing and Diversifying**

Cuba is a strategic island for the Caribbean, Latin America and the world for one simple reason: it is the site of an experiment with the potential for profound change. Its interest and originality depends largely on the way its economic development has been addressed since the revolution. The challenge facing all developing countries is industrialization and the development of an industrial structure that can integrate into or compete in foreign markets. In order to produce the manufactured goods necessary to promote development, a country must be able to sell in foreign marketplaces in the first place. A country has to sell in order to have access to the hard currency that allows it to buy foreign-produced goods. So a country has to sell in order to buy, and it has to buy in order to develop. One of the main issues, then, known in development literature as the "balance-of-payments constraint", concerns the relationship between exports and imports<sup>2</sup>. The faster a country develops, the faster its imports grow. If the country cannot then match that rise with a corresponding rise in exports, it runs a commercial deficit, which, given the structural and financial weaknesses of a developing nation, poses a serious threat to the development process.

The more a country attempts to industrialize and ensure at least an initial diversification of its growing industrial base, the stronger its need to buy. A strong inter-industry structure and diversified output are among the distinguishing characteristics of developed economies. Only reasonably diversified economies can claim the status of being developed. The challenge, then, is two-fold: to ensure rapid industrialization while also building an economic structure that is both efficient and, if possible, diversified. But herein lies the problem. A country with little industry and a relatively uniform economy does not produce many of the goods it needs and therefore has to buy them from foreign markets. However, according to the aforementioned process, it has to sell in order to buy. The "reasonable" response, then, would be to specialize in what is more likely to ensure a conspicuous stream of exports, in order to pay for imports. In other words, in order to develop and diversify, a country first has to do the opposite, that is, specialize. Are developing nations going to specialize in industrial or advanced-technology products, which are already successfully produced by industrial economies? Of course not. Developing economies will typically specialize in their traditional industries and the goods they produce best or, as economic theory would suggest, in what they can produce with a reasonably competitive advantage.

This is precisely what developing nations are told to do, specialize in what they can rapidly export, and of course the items first on the list are agricultural products and raw materials in general. This, then, is the trap, because when

<sup>2</sup> John McCombie and Mark Roberts "The Role of the Balance of Payments in Economic Growth", in *The Economics of Demand-Led Growth*, ed. Mark Setterfield (Cheltenham: Elgar, 2002).

a developing economy integrates into the world market as a supplier of raw materials: a) it depends on the demand of the developed world and the prices in foreign markets; b) it is exposed to the balance-of-payments constraint; and c) the establishment of a vibrant, well-diversified economy becomes a secondary concern, entrusted to a long-term development strategy. Indeed, the experience of Argentina suggests that a reasonably diversified economy can even revert to the status of a raw-materials exporter.

To summarize: the integration of a relatively small developing nation into the world economy by means of international trade and a flow of imports and exports does offer the possibility of industrialization; however, the price tag that comes with it, i.e. a subordinate position and stringent constraints, makes it very uncertain that a developing economy could eventually break out of such a position. Integration is therefore both a blessing and a curse.

## **2. The Cuban Answer: Socialism on a Caribbean Island**

For Cubans, their victorious revolution also meant having to cope with the problem of development, which gave rise to a Caribbean socialist experiment that was bound to face the same problems encountered by centrally-planned economies. This vast topic touches on the island's variations on the basic Soviet model and the considerable debate that took place among Cuban leaders, as witnessed for example in the economic writings of Ernesto "Che" Guevara. It is unnecessary to expand on the topic here. Suffice it to observe that socialism meant economic integration into the Soviet bloc and a system of exchanges with other socialist economies. For this reason, Cubans did not have to deal with the challenge of integrating into the international market as an indispensable premise for their country's development. They did not have to sell (export) to import, since the development process could be sustained via a transfer of technology and goods with administered prices among socialist economies. It was still an exchange of manufactured goods for agricultural products, i.e. sugar, but rather than productivity and prices, it reflected a broader set of goals involved in a privileged relationship between Cuba and the Soviet Union, cemented in the solidarity of the socialist camp. While the solution had its problems, it did get around the suffocating constraints imposed by the balance of trade and market prices.

Admittedly, the Cubans made good use of this privileged relationship. Overall, the economic integration into the market constituted by the socialist economies – at least partially insulated from international prices – ensured the economic basis for the Cuban government's remarkable social policy and the possibility of experimenting with industrial and development policy. Together with investments in health, education and social services were attempts at industrial development and diversification. Most important, however, was the overall positive effect on Cuban living standards. The public provision of goods and services lessened the pressure on salaries that,

although relatively low by market economy standards, were sufficient to ensure acceptable living conditions for the great majority of Cuban citizens.

In sum, integration into the socialist camp relieved the island's economy from the urgency of industrializing under the discipline of international-market integration, while at the same time allowing it to postpone the major issue of diversifying and internally articulating its industrial structure, at least until the post-1989 *período especial*. Indeed, Cuba mostly paid for imports with sugar exports, confirming the specialization inherited from the island's colonially-integrated pre-socialist economy.

### **3. The *Período Especial* and Economic Reform**

The collapse of the Soviet Union brought all of this to a rapid close. The *período especial* that followed was therefore the manifestation of problems that had been deferred by the previous "arrangement", based on subsidized prices for sugar and integration into a protected socialist market. The dramatic effects on the economy and the standard of living, with a decrease of national income and per capita consumption, were similar to those of the debt crisis in Latin America (Mexico, Brazil, Argentina) during the early 1980s. The causes and consequences were, however, entirely different. In the Latin American case, it was precisely the integration into foreign financial markets, and therefore a dependence on the monetary policy of the US Federal Reserve, that caused the problem, whereas in the Cuban case it was the end of a relative insulation from those markets. As for the results, in the case of Latin America, the crisis opened the way for a firmer establishment of neo-liberalism, a turn in economic policy that was to lead to the disaster best witnessed by the Argentinean crisis at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In Cuba, it was instead the beginning of a painful transition, one that brings the central issue discussed here into focus.

Cuba was now forced to face the problem of integrating its economy into the international market, since doing otherwise would lead to economic collapse and the consequent weakening of its socialist institutions. There was no time to waste and every possible resource was needed, from economic ones developed over thirty years of socialism to any international relations that had survived the island's isolation, all largely depending on the relentless hostility of the US and its ongoing embargo. In response to this unavoidable dilemma, Cuba ended up accepting, and fostering the rise of, a "dual economy". The policy was less a choice than a necessity, but at least it made room for more than one option. More resources would be allocated to those industries that could conceivably achieve an acceptable level of productivity and quality so as to become export sectors in a few years. Their modernization and capacity to sell in foreign markets, i.e. to be competitive, would go on to mark the path and set the pace at which part of the Cuban economy

would integrate into the international market<sup>3</sup>. These industries would earn the hard currency badly needed for imports, in addition to that already entering the Cuban economy via industries like tourism, which traditionally worked on the basis of hard currency and international prices, and remittances from relatives living abroad, which had formerly been the primary channel through which Cubans had accessed hard currency.

The 1993 decision to legalize the circulation of the US dollar, aside from the need to respond to the emergency created by the *período especial*, is part of this same course of action. What had previously only been tolerated became part of a determined effort to create a sector using the US dollar for its transactions and therefore operating under international market conditions. The “dollarization” of the Cuban economy<sup>4</sup>, although manifesting all the problems and risks implicit in a dual economy, was to be understood as an indispensable and transitory step within the more general strategy of integration into the world economy. Indeed, one can appreciate the difference between this dual-economy approach and the adoption of the dollar as the national currency – as done, for instance, in Ecuador – by the fact that a Cuban currency soon took the place of the dollar: the *peso convertible*, introduced around the same time that the US dollar became legal currency in the mid-1990s, was in wide use by 2004.

When the dollar was banned from all domestic commercial transactions on November 8 of that year, it became the regulating currency for international transactions alone, under the control of the government. The *peso convertible*, which exchanges for hard currency at a fixed rate and has maintained a fairly stable rate of exchange with the Cuban *peso* over the years, effectively became the domestic currency regulating the new modernizing sector. In this sector, prices and salaries are now in convertible *pesos*, which provide access to goods previously only bought using US dollars, thereby creating the conditions for domestic demand as part of the effort to build an internationally-integrated sector of the economy.

#### 4. Market vs. “Social” Economy

Avoiding dollarization means protecting the national economy and preventing the US Federal Reserve from effectively becoming the regulating monetary authority. Yet the result of the island’s economic and currency reform has nonetheless been the establishment of a dual economy regulated by two currencies existing within the same socio-economic system. Indeed,

<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of the evolution of Cuban exports, see Hiram Marquetti, “Cuba: importancia actual del incremento de las exportaciones”, in *La economía cubana en el 2001*, CEEC-Centro de Estudios de la Economía Cubana ed. (La Habana: Universidad de la Habana, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Antonio Covi, Alessandra Lorini and Davide Gualerzi, “The ‘dollarization’ of the Cuban economy: Problems and Prospects”, paper presented at the First Conference *Por el equilibrio del mundo*, La Habana, 27-29 January 2003.

alongside the modernizing sector – which includes agro-industry, certain manufacturing and hi-tech industries as well as those that have traditionally earned hard currency like tourism – is the rest of the economy. Overall, this latter part pays low, at times ridiculously low, salaries in Cuban pesos. The Cuban peso gives exclusive access to domestic products that have no relation to international standards of quality and productivity. The traditional Cuban currency therefore regulates what is still a large part of the economy. There is, furthermore, a third system of allocation: the *libreta*, a rationing system that guarantees the availability of staple foods and other basic items of consumption and is still important for the poorest Cubans.

The resulting dilemma is that some people are increasingly being discriminated against, or made unequal, by the access of others to the currency and salaries of the modernizing sector, and in turn to the consumer items that are coming to dominate these two separate standards of consumption and lifestyle<sup>5</sup>. While one side reflects the country's integration into the world economy, and thus market-imposed conditions like higher standards of efficiency and quality but also a rising social status and purchasing power, the other reflects the traditional profile of a "social" economy directed at satisfying primary needs and maintaining social equality through access to social services and education. But this very equality is called into question by a rising divide in terms of access to goods and services bought and sold on the market.

When judged according to standard economic indicators, the overall outcome of the economic reform appears to be positive. A series of encouraging data concerning the rate of economic growth, the improvement of living standards, and an end to the most stringent bottlenecks in industrial production and the availability of consumer goods shows that the Cuban economy has recovered from the *período especial*. A second such indicator is the diversification of the industrial structure and a diminishing reliance on sugar production as the main source of exports. Thirdly, there is proof in the relative political stability and social cohesion that have been retained in the face of the difficulties of adjusting structurally to the new economic conditions. Despite tensions and opposition, the government has been able to maintain a remarkable degree of consensus. Yet none of these indicators take into account the social divide being created by the dual economy and the potentially destabilizing effects this might have in the future. How long can a social-economy model support itself in the face of the social differentiation set in motion by market mechanisms? This issue is central to the economic failure of the socialist experiment and the development pattern that could potentially emerge from it.

<sup>5</sup> It has been observed that at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the life of the majority of the population had become more "complex" and social differentiation more acute. See: CEEC-Centro de Estudios de la Economía Cubana, *La economía cubana en el 2000* (La Habana: Universidad de la Habana, 2001), 4.



## 5. Political Success and Economic Failure? Perspectives for the Strategic Island

This very limited sketch is sufficient to drive home the main point. Though probably unavoidable, Cuba's economic reform has nevertheless laid the groundwork for a differentiation that is bound to have an impact on both the country's social fabric and the prospects of further transformation of its economy. Considering the economic results at the macro level, speaking of a failure might appear excessively harsh. Still, it is an intentionally provocative reminder of the fundamental issue. This failure belongs to a socialist experiment that, deprived of external support, seems unable to advance an alternative development strategy. From this point of view, the dual economy signals a turning point: it could either be followed by an acceleration down the path of growing inequality and wealth concentration or by a rethinking of economic and social policy in the pursuit of a new socialist model. However, it is striking how this problem contrasts with the tremendous improvement of Cuba's image and political status in the international arena. Both the end of its political isolation from Latin America and, to a lesser extent, the rest of the world, as documented by Basosi in this volume, as well as the growing prestige of the Cuban leadership must be seen in the context of the island's rising criticism of neo-liberal doctrine and policies. While only partially depending on the political stance of Cuba alone, and largely on the failure of these policies, this assessment has vindicated Cuban leaders' long-standing criticism of capitalism and its effects on the regional and world scales, giving a tremendous boost to the image and political status of the strategic island. Interestingly enough, this vindication and political success is occurring at a time when economic reform is leading the island to a new and crucial phase of its development, as the rise of the dual economy suggests.

One positive outcome of the reform would of course be a progressive integration into the international market while maintaining the desirable aspects of the social-economy model and, in particular, avoiding a massive rise in inequality. Economic and social inequality is the main problem facing progressive governments in Latin America, which have profoundly changed the political landscape of the continent in the last few years. Although the social polarization so evident in most of Latin America is hard to imagine in Cuba, the risk of a two-tier society is a distinct possibility contained within further development of the dual economy. The country's challenge lies in determining how to properly handle the growing social differentiation that arises from a progressive integration into the world economy.

Younger generations in particular, who have not lived through the revolutionary fervor and achievements of Cuban socialism of the 1960s and 1970s, have much less incentive to look positively at the social economy,

whereas the modernizing sector appears to offer them a host of chances. On the other hand, the more disadvantaged members of the population – blue-collar workers, blacks and peasants – might feel increasingly thrust into the social and psychological condition of losers. Disenchantment with their country could lead them to consider the socialist institutions irrelevant. It might not then be enough to recall, as external observers often do, the remarkable features of Cuban society, such as the provision of social services, access to education and culture, and the overall level of equality and even income distribution, at least compared to much richer Latin American countries and, in general, developing nations.

As the cohesive forces of the revolution disappear, including the generation actually responsible for it, and the social economy becomes primarily a support for the disadvantaged, Cuba's integration into the world market may increasingly dictate the evolution of its economy and society. It is therefore the task of the post-revolutionary leadership to guide the country's transition while at the same time retaining the inherited socialist achievements and aspirations to a fairer and more advanced society. Indeed, the "Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century" that has been advocated as a possible alternative to the neo-liberal development model has this as its goal.

## Chapter 21

# A Barrel of Oil for a Doctor: Resilient Cuba

Ever since the Cuban Revolution triumphed in 1959, its imminent demise has been predicted and eagerly awaited by various critics, especially Washington and the Cuban exile community. Consistent efforts have been made to hasten such demise in the more than four decades since. Yet, there are numerous indicators that Cuba is proving to be more durable than imagined. A peaceful post-Fidel Castro transition appears to be in progress. Cuba is reintegrating with Latin America amid a resurgence of popularity and support in Latin America that has led to innovative partnerships and trade agreements. There are growing divisions regarding US policy toward Cuba within the United States and throughout the world<sup>1</sup>.

Representations of Cuba usually attribute its staying power to Fidel Castro's authority, concentrating on economic and political deprivations. They fail to capture Cuba's domestic and international sources of legitimacy, which have instead fostered its remarkable resilience. Resilience, a term referring to the ability of a system to cope with adversity and to recover from or resist being affected by shocks or traumas is certainly applicable to Cuba. Diverse social science disciplines have attempted to identify the factors and forces that enable some individuals or systems challenged by adversity to make positive adaptations and in some case to emerge stronger, with capacities that they may have not developed otherwise<sup>2</sup>. Two articles in

<sup>1</sup> Julia Sweig, "Fidel's Final Victory", in *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture and Politics*, eds. Aviva Chomsky, Barry Carr and Pamela M. Smorkaloff (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 235-243; Warren Hoge, "Cuba: UN Vote Reaffirms Opposition to US Embargo", *New York Times*, 31 October 2007; John McKinley, "For US Exporters in Cuba, Business Trumps Politics", *New York Times*, 12 November 2007; Soraya Castro Mariño, "US-Cuban Relations During the Clinton Administration", *Latin American Perspectives* 4 (2002), 47-76.

<sup>2</sup> Margaret Waller, "Resilience in Ecosystemic Context: Evolution of the Concept", *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 3 (2001), 290-297.

this volume, Basosi's "In the Shadow of the Washington Consensus: Cuba's Rapprochement with Latin America in a World Going Unipolar, 1985-1996", and Sobers' "Investigating Cuban Internationalism: the First Angolan Intervention, 1975", although addressing differing aspects of aspects of Cuba's history and development offer insight into these factors. Both articles reveal characteristics that have enabled a small developing nation with limited resources not only to survive and adapt, but also develop in the face of unrelenting hostility and "shocks" to its system, to even claim an influential role in world affairs through its international actions. This theme is further explored through the following comments on the Basosi and Sobers articles.

### **I. Human Capital Development and Capacity Building**

The foundation of Cuba's resilience is the priority the government has placed on investing resources in its people. From the revolution's outset, the Cuban state emphasized serving the poor underclass rather than catering to the elite, making public education and health services accessible to the entire population. This produced tangible results as early as 1974, whereby polyclinics were located throughout Cuba including remote rural localities, the infant mortality rate that had dropped to 12 per 1000 live births and a measurable rise in life expectancy was achieved. Expansion to a total of 16 medical schools produced a Cuban doctor-patient ratio better than that of the United States and the United Kingdom. By 1974, Cuban literacy levels were determined by UNESCO to be among the highest in the world, and even more exceptionally, Cuba served as a model for the world in its implementation of health promotion approach early on when it was still being discussed as an objective at the World Health Organization<sup>3</sup>. By the year 1982 Cuba's success in the health sphere was recognized by the US as superior to those of other developing countries and rivaling that of many developed countries<sup>4</sup>.

The significance of these achievements should not be underestimated. For Cuba, every nuance and component of US policy toward it has had profound consequences. The gains were attained in spite of the near half-century of attacks, economic siege and isolation and a sustained and restrictive economic embargo blockade that endures today. Declassified documents have revealed numerous plots to assassinate Castro and CIA developed operations which argued for "acts of sabotage, as well as a "a denial of money and supplies to Cuba, cutting real incomes and finance with the aim of causing hunger, desperation, and the overthrow of the Government", a strategy

<sup>3</sup> Theodore MacDonald, *Third World Health Promotion and its Dependence on First World Wealth* (New York: Mallen, 2001), 228-229.

<sup>4</sup> Julie Feinsilver, *Healing the Masses: Cuban Health Politics at Home and Abroad* (San Francisco: University of California Press, 1993).

that has been pursued in various forms up to the present<sup>5</sup>.

The collective will to preserve national independence has been fortified by the fractious history of US-Cuban relations stemming back to the late 1800s. A majority of Cubans are wary of any plans that involve a US-directed political and economic system. Most Cubans also place high value not only on their national sovereignty, but also on their social rights. After nearly fifty years, most Cubans have become accustomed to their social benefits such as education and health care and are conscious that these social supports are being curtailed through neoliberal policies in other nations<sup>6</sup>.

## 2. Economic Development and the Preservation of Social Gains

Basosi's essay in this volume fully chronicles the events leading up to the Special Period and Cuba's subsequent economic recovery. It should be emphasized that the withdrawal of the Soviet Union and end of the special trading relationship with Eastern Europe triggered a shock to the Cuban economy on the magnitude of a great depression. The opportunity was seized to "bring the hammer down" on Fidel, as Clinton proposed in the 1992 presidential campaign<sup>7</sup>. Laws such as the 1992 Cuban Democracy Act (also known as the Torricelli Act) and the more punitive Helms-Burton Bill of 1996 created a "double-blockade" by further undermining trade and reducing sources of foreign exchange or investment in the island<sup>8</sup>.

As Basosi depicts, the Cuban economy, in spite of apocalyptic setbacks, not only defied predictions that it would collapse within months of the fall of the Soviet Union, but remarkably began to rebound. The unique manner in which this was achieved captured the attention of the world and reflects the core of Cuba's resilience. Confronted with the need to become self-reliant, The Cuban government struggled to maintain its egalitarian ideals while it drew upon its internal capacities. Emphasis was placed upon preserving the social gains of the revolution and the initiation of new economic strategies, most of which were made possible by Cuba's accumulation of human capital and scientific

<sup>5</sup> Edward Lansdale, "Operation Mongoose", in *The Cuba Reader*, eds. Chomsky, Carr and Smorkaloff, 540-544; Select Committee to Study Government Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, "The Assassination Plots", *ibid.*, 552-557; Juan Tamayo, "One More Assassination Plot", *ibid.*, 666-670; Tim Anderson, "Contesting 'Transition'. The US Plan for a 'Free Cuba'", *Latin American Perspectives* 6 (2005), 28-46.

<sup>6</sup> Ana Maria Goicoechea-Balbona and Enrique Conill-Mendoza, "International Inclusiveness: Publicizing Cuba's Development of the 'Good Life'", *International Social Work* 43 (2000), 435-451; Sweig, "Fidel's Final Victory", 235-243; Hans-Jurgen Burchardt, "Contours of the Future: The New Social Dynamics in Cuba", *Latin American Perspectives* 6 (2002), 57-74; Mao Xianglin, "Cuban Reform and Economic Opening: Retrospective and Assessment", *Latin American Perspectives* 6 (2007), 93-105; Luis Salazar, "Cuba's Foreign Policy and the Promise of ALBA", *NACLA Report on the Americas* 4 (2006), 27-32.

<sup>7</sup> Sweig, "Fidel's Final Victory", 235-243.

<sup>8</sup> Anderson, "Contesting 'Transition'"; Xianglin "Cuban Reform".

knowledge<sup>9</sup> and were bolstered by the strong political commitment of the majority of the population<sup>10</sup>. Facing critical scarcities of food, electricity and medical supplies and a debilitated transportation system, Cuba fashioned its own form of structural adjustment. It differed from the massive restructuring of social services and public sectors experienced by other Latin American nations that reduced the capacity of their state health and welfare systems<sup>11</sup>. In contrast, Cuba's austerity measures emphasized the equalization of hardship and priority on maintenance of the system of social guarantees, health standards, and state regulation of labor relations. Castro described this approach:

For us, the essential thing isn't just to survive but also to develop [...] apart from the privations to which we may be subjected for an indeterminate length of time [...] as a matter of principle [...] resources must be shared amongst us all. [If workers are unemployed] we will guarantee a large part of their wage. Nobody will be left without support. [Cuba has been] deprived of more resources than any Latin American country, but we haven't closed any schools, hospitals, polyclinics or medical services at all, and we haven't thrown anybody out of work with no pay<sup>12</sup>.

These austerity measures contributed to social stability and a safety net for the population<sup>13</sup>. Based on the dual policy objectives of equity and priority for vulnerable groups, children, women, and the elderly were targeted for protection from nutritional deficits through rationing, public health education, workplace- and school-based feeding programs, and the promotion of urban gardening. Some initial deterioration in the population's health status occurred but it was short-lived and health indicators quickly improved<sup>14</sup>. Throughout this extraordinarily difficult period, Cuba has maintained human development indicators that rank it among the most developed nations of the world in spite of economic hardships and far fewer resources. Life expectancy at birth in Cuba today is the same as for US citizens at 77 years

<sup>9</sup> Ken Cole, "Cuba: The Process of Socialist Development", *Latin American Perspectives* 3 (2002), 40-56; Agustin Davila, "Cuba and the Knowledge Economy: Cuban Biotechnology", *Monthly Review* 7 (2006), available at *Monthly Review* on-line, <http://monthlyreview.org/1206lagedavila.htm>.

<sup>10</sup> Miguel Centeno, "The Return of Cuba to Latin America", Keynote Speech given at the *Annual Conference of the Society for Latin American Studies*, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2-4 April 2004, available at [www.princeton.edu/~cenmiga/works/The%20Return%20of%20Cuba%20to%20Latin%20America.doc](http://www.princeton.edu/~cenmiga/works/The%20Return%20of%20Cuba%20to%20Latin%20America.doc) (cited 2 February 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Carlos Muntaner et al., "Venezuela's Barrio Adentro: An Alternative to Neoliberalism in Health Care", *International Journal of Health Services* 4 (2006), 803-11.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Tomás Borge, *Face to Face with Fidel Castro* (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1993), 115-116, emphasis added.

<sup>13</sup> Miguel Centeno, "The Return"; Burchardt, "Contours", 57-74; Pol DeVos, "'No One Left Abandoned': Cuba's National Health System Since the 1959 Revolution", *International Journal of Health Services* 1 (2005), 189-207.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Garfield and Sarah Santana, "The Impact of the Economic Crisis and the US Embargo on Health in Cuba", *American Journal of Public Health* 1 (1997), 15-20.

and Cuba's infant mortality rate was 6 per 1000 live births, a figure less than that of the United States, which was 7.0 per 1000 live births in 2007<sup>15</sup>. Cuba's patient-to-doctor ratio is still among the best in the world and significantly better than those of the United States and Canada<sup>16</sup>.

Cuba spends 32% of its GDP in social programs, the highest investment in Latin America which demonstrates the strong political will, the proactive role of the state in social welfare and the commitment to universal accessibility<sup>17</sup>. The commitment of public spending on education means that Cuban children attend relatively well-funded and adequately equipped elementary schools, where the student-teacher ratios are among the most favorable in the world. Cuba is smaller than the state of Virginia, yet it contains 57 centers of higher education. This has resulted in an exceedingly highly educated population where a 99.8%, the adult literacy rate, places Cuba on a par with the world's most developed nations and averages 15 percentage points higher than the literacy rates found in other Latin American countries<sup>18</sup>.

Still, the health and education systems did not remain unscathed throughout the austerity of the Special Period. School quality declined because of lack of funds for cleaning materials and school supplies as well as the exodus of teachers due to low salaries<sup>19</sup>. Cuba's model health program has been threatened by serious shortages of medical supplies and the inability to replace simple diagnostic equipment or purchase drugs due to lack of currency. The infant mortality rate was not affected, but there was an increase in underweight children and a decrease in their nutritional status. Illnesses such as tuberculosis, sexually transmitted and water-borne diseases have reappeared<sup>20</sup>.

The economic measures such as the expansion of tourism, expansion of the private sector and the dollarization of the economy solved some of the immediate problems but also generated new ones that have impacted Cuban society. The measures were embarked upon reluctantly for fear of unleashing market mechanisms and were viewed as the only alternative for saving the revolution<sup>21</sup>. The Cuban government attempted to increase the flow of dollars by legalizing their possession and by opening dollar stores for Cubans

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Development Program, "Human Development Report 2006/2007", accessed at United Nations Development Program on-line, [http://hdrstats.undp.org/country\\_fact\\_sheets/cty\\_fs\\_CUB](http://hdrstats.undp.org/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_CUB).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Lorena Barberia, "Poverty and Inequality in Cuba", *Hemisphere: A Magazine of the Americas* 17 (2007), 20-29.

<sup>18</sup> Lavinia Gasperini, "The Cuban Education System: Lessons and Dilemmas", *World Bank Country Studies, Education Reform and Management Publications Series 1* (2000), 1-28.

<sup>19</sup> Miren Uriarte, "Social Impact of the Economic Measures", in *Reinventing the Revolution: A Contemporary Reader*, eds. Philip Brenner et al. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 285-291; Gasperini, "The Cuban Education".

<sup>20</sup> Robin Williams, "In the Shadow of Plenty, Cuba Copes with a Crippled Health Care System", in *Reinventing the Revolution*, eds. Brenner et al., 281-284; Michele Barry, "Effect of the US Embargo and Economic Decline on Health in Cuba", *Annals of Internal Medicine* 132 (2000), 151-154.

<sup>21</sup> Uriarte, "Social Impact".

to purchase imported goods in 1993. Remittances from abroad became critical in enabling many Cubans to get through the Special Period and became a source of hard currency for the state. Access to dollars increased for those with family abroad and for those employed in new sectors of the economy such as the tourist industry, creating a dual economy. A two-class system of consumption has emerged, generating new bases of social inequalities and a new materialism that departs from the income equity that existed prior to the Special Period. Previously, the highest paid workers, mainly professionals such as doctors and engineers, were paid only 4.5 times as much as the lowest paid workers<sup>22</sup>. These social and economic changes had an undermining effect on socialist ideals of working for the good of society rather than individual gain<sup>23</sup>. The so-called “inverted pyramid”, enables a waiter in a tourist hotel to accrue a salary worth many more times than that of a top professional working for the state which has contributed to some devaluation of the status of education and professional preparation<sup>24</sup>. The superior working conditions and rewards for workers in the “new economy” compared to lower paying state jobs paid in pesos has contributed to a brain drain from the professional and intellectual sector to the tourist industry<sup>25</sup>.

The impact on values as a result of the economic changes has been most notable among youth who are generationally removed from the Revolution and never experienced the relatively prosperous times of the 1970s and 1980s. Exposure to international tourists has stirred material yearnings and has contributed to a disengagement from the labor market among some youth<sup>26</sup>. Decline in the role of education as a priority in young people’s aspirations has also been noted because other paths to higher earnings have become available, including sexual tourism<sup>27</sup>. This has spurred the implementation of a number of social programs to incorporate disengaged youth into various work and study alternatives, which have made some progress in reversing these trends<sup>28</sup>.

Nevertheless, the Cuban economy has continued to develop and has changed radically since the Special Period in 1990. It has shifted from its historical role as an exporter of sugar to a diversified economy. By the latter half of the 1990s, tourism brought in greater profits than the sugar industry. The earnings of emergent sectors such as tourism, biotechnology, and oil have surpassed those of traditional activities<sup>29</sup>. Cuba has been especially

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Susan Eckstein, “Dollarization and Its Discontents: Remittances and the Remaking of Cuba in the Post-Soviet Era”, *Comparative Politics* 36 (2004), 179-192.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.; Uriarte, “Social Impact”.

<sup>25</sup> Eckstein, “Dollarization”.

<sup>26</sup> Maria Isabel Domínguez, “Cuban Youth: Aspirations, Social Perceptions and Identity”, in *Reinventing the Revolution*, eds. Brenner et al., 292-299; Uriarte, “Social Impact”.

<sup>27</sup> Domínguez, “Cuban Youth”.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Pedro Monreal, “Cuban Development in the Bolivarian Matrix”, *NACLA Report on the America* 4 (2006), 22-27; Xianglin “Cuban Reform”.



successful in mobilizing its substantial scientific infrastructure for the development of a successful biotechnology industry that has effectively introduced drugs and vaccines of its own, along with a nascent pharmaceutical industry that has achieved considerable success in exports<sup>30</sup>. Using a model radically unlike the technology parks that have been created in various underdeveloped countries, Cuba has developed artisanal biotechnology centers on agricultural cooperatives, incorporating rural populations into agriculture and providing training through both their labor as well as their knowledge of traditional farming techniques and their active participation in the generation of new technologies. Since 2000 there has also been increased investment in the information technology industry<sup>31</sup>.

Cuba's healthcare services have risen to the top of its export activities. All this is made possible by the island's wealth of human capital that is being used extensively in the mutually beneficial agreements particularly between Cuba and Venezuela<sup>32</sup>. A thriving medical tourism industry was born as tourist establishments began housing medical patients from Venezuela and other Latin American and Caribbean countries<sup>33</sup>. Through "Operation Miracle" Cuba has offered its state of the art treatments for eye diseases, enabling some 20,000 persons to recover their sight<sup>34</sup>. By 2005 it was estimated that earnings from these services exports have surpassed gross traditional tourism earnings<sup>35</sup>. The revolution's investment in human capital has produced an overcapacity of professional and scientific talent and has 10,000 current university students in its science and technology programs. Looking ahead, Cuba's challenge is to continue to develop its economy to expand the job opportunities of its highly educated population. This will enable Cuba to position itself to take advantage of the global economy and to compete with the upper ranks of developing nations<sup>36</sup>.

### 3. Foreign Policy: International Solidarity and Medical Diplomacy

One of the most remarkable aspects at the root of the Cuban Revolution's longevity and resilience is its internationalist missions. The Cuban government has cultivated a multi-dimensional foreign policy that enables it "to recalibrate the overwhelming asymmetry of power between

<sup>30</sup> Davila, "Cuba and the Knowledge Economy".

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.; Lynn Mytelka, "Pathways and Policies to (Bio) Pharmaceutical Innovation Systems in Developing Countries", *Industry and Innovation* 13 (2006), 415-435.

<sup>32</sup> Monreal, "Cuban Development".

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Salazar, "Cuba's Foreign Policy".

<sup>35</sup> Sweig, "Fidel's Final Victory"; Julie Feinsilver, "Cuban Medical Diplomacy: When the Left Got It Right", in *Council on Hemispheric Relations* on-line, [www.coha.org/2006/2006/10/30/cuban-medical-diplomacy](http://www.coha.org/2006/2006/10/30/cuban-medical-diplomacy) (cited 30 October 2006).

<sup>36</sup> Salazar, "Cuba's Foreign Policy".

Cuba and the United States"<sup>37</sup>. To this end, Cuba has sent thousands of doctors, teachers, and other personnel on humanitarian assignments to various countries since the earliest years of the revolution<sup>38</sup>.

Sobers' article in this volume analyzes what is probably the most dramatic example of Cuba's international solidarity when it deployed more than 300,000 Cubans in Angola between 1975 and 1991, as well as serving in a variety of civilian positions such as doctors and educators. They succeeded in repelling South African invasions and contributed to the decisive defeat of the South African armed forces at Cuito Cuanavale in the largest battle in Africa since World War II<sup>39</sup>. Sobers augments the compelling evidence that the costly and politically risky actions were an organic component of Cuba's foreign policy, done in the service of the commitment to international solidarity, rather than strategic ones or as a proxy of the Soviet Union. Cuba's actions placed the country squarely in the center of the international discourse on racism and colonialism, inspiring admiration and gratitude in many part of the world, especially Africa. Nelson Mandela himself credited Cuba with changing the course of history in Southern Africa and contributing to the end of apartheid:

The Cuban people hold a special place in the hearts of the people of Africa. The Cuban internationalists have made a contribution to African independence, freedom, and justice unparalleled for its principled and selfless character. We in Africa are used to being victims of countries wanting to carve up our territory or subvert our sovereignty. It is unparalleled in African history to have another people rise to the defense of one of us. The defeat of the apartheid army was an inspiration to the struggling people in South Africa! The defeat of the racist army at Cuito Cuanavale has made it possible for me to be here today!<sup>40</sup>

The actions in Angola and other acts of international solidarity have been a crucial element that has fostered the Cuban revolution's resilience, perhaps serving as a more effective policy tool than traditional ones. Cuba is no longer able to afford to engage in missions such as Angola and has tapped into its reservoir of human capital to expand its medical diplomacy. By the close of 2005, Cuban medical personnel were collaborating in 68 countries around the globe, including continents outside the western hemisphere such as Africa and Asia<sup>41</sup>. Cuba's highly developed expertise in disaster relief has led to medical missions in post-tsunami Indonesia and

<sup>37</sup> Salazar, "Cuba's Foreign Policy"; Feinsilver, "Cuban Medical Diplomacy".

<sup>38</sup> H. Michael Erisman, "Cuban Development Aid: South-South Diversification and Counterdependency Politics", in *Cuban Foreign Policy Confronts a New International Order*, eds. H. Michael Erisman and John Kirk (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1991), 139-165; Feinsilver, "Healing the Masses".

<sup>39</sup> Isaac Saney, "African Stalingrad: The Cuban Revolution, Internationalism, and the End of Apartheid", *Latin American Perspectives* 5 (2006), 81-117.

<sup>40</sup> Nelson Mandela, *Nelson Mandela Speaks: Forging a Non-Racist South Africa* (New York: Pathfinder, 1993).

<sup>41</sup> Feinsilver, "Cuban Medical Diplomacy".

post-earthquake Pakistan, efforts that continue today<sup>42</sup>.

In addition to improving the health of millions through direct provision of medical care and medical education and training programs, Cuba has accumulated considerable “symbolic capital” in the form of goodwill, prestige, influence, credit and power as a result of its international actions<sup>43</sup>. Furthermore, Cuba’s leadership and outspoken stance on issues such as the debt crisis (described in detail in this volume by Basosi) also contributed to positive public opinion. “Symbolic capital” has been effectively converted into material capital in the form of bilateral and multilateral aid as well as trade, credit and investment. Equally important is the fact that Cuba’s medical diplomacy contributes to the positive views held by other governments, translating into voting results at the United Nations on issues of particular importance to Cuba<sup>44</sup>. Cuba’s diplomatic and economic relations have expanded regionally and globally due to the shift in the global and hemispheric political climate. As of 2007, 30 of 32 Latin American governments maintained normalized ties with Cuba and a number of governments, particularly Venezuela, Canada, Spain, and China, expanded trade agreements and commercial ventures with the island<sup>45</sup>.

The Latin American Medical School (ELAM) was created after Hurricane Mitch in 1998 in order to insure the sustainability of Cuba’s medical diplomacy and demonstrates other positive adaptations that strengthen external relationships and foster Cuba’s resilience. ELAM offers a free six-year medical education to over 10,000 students from rural and marginalized communities in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and even the United States who commit to return to their countries to practice medicine in poor communities for at least five years<sup>46</sup>. Cuba’s medical programs in Latin America and other parts of the developing world stand out as a viable and principled response to the neoliberal reforms of healthcare services that have increased inequality and reduced accessibility, especially for the poorest social sectors in outlying areas<sup>47</sup>.

By far the largest Cuban medical cooperation program ever attempted is the present one with Venezuela. A highly creative and lucrative oil-for-doctors trade agreement with Venezuela has established preferential pricing for Cuba’s exportation of professional services in exchange for oil, joint investments in strategically important sectors for both countries, and the provision of credit<sup>48</sup>. In exchange, Cuba provides medical services to unserved and un-

<sup>42</sup> Pol De Vos et al., “Cuba’s International Cooperation in Health Care”, *International Journal of Health Services* (2007), 761-776; Aasim Akhtar, “Cuban Doctors in Pakistan: Why Cuba Still Inspires”, *Monthly Review* 7 (2006), 49-55; Feinsilver, “Cuban Medical Diplomacy”.

<sup>43</sup> Feinsilver, “Cuban Medical Diplomacy”.

<sup>44</sup> Warren Hoge, “Cuba: UN Vote Reaffirms Opposition to US Embargo”, *New York Times*, 31 October 2007; Feinsilver, “Cuban Medical Diplomacy”.

<sup>45</sup> Salazar, “Cuba’s Foreign Policy”.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Huish and John Kirk, “Cuban Medical Internationalism and the Development of the Latin American School of Medicine”, *Latin American Perspectives* 6 (2007), 77-92.

<sup>47</sup> DeVos, “No One Left Abandoned”; Muntaner et al., “Venezuela’s Barrio Adentro”.

<sup>48</sup> Monreal, “Cuban Development”.

derserved communities through the Barrio Adentro healthcare programs, which have provided free medical attention to 17 million Venezuelans with 30,000 medical professionals and a network of 600 comprehensive health clinics, 600 rehabilitation and physical therapy centers, 35 high technology diagnostic centers and 100,000 ophthalmologic surgeries<sup>49</sup>. Cuba also provides similar medical services in Bolivia on a smaller scale at Venezuela's expense. Plans are in motion for the construction of another medical school where Cuba will train doctors and healthcare workers in Venezuela and the expansion of the Latin American and Caribbean region-wide ophthalmologic surgery program (Operation Miracle) to perform 600,000 eye operations over ten years. Based upon Cuba's successful track record developing health programs especially under difficult circumstances, profitable triangular cooperation agreements have been established with donor countries. Germany, France and Japan are providing financial support for Cuban medical assistance in third countries. Multilateral agencies, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) also finance medical services provided by Cuba for third countries<sup>50</sup>.

Cuba demonstrates the essential characteristics of resilience in its positive adaptations in the face of challenges and its development of new capacities. Castro reflected on this in his remarks about Cuba's climbing economic growth rate in 2006. He stated: "We should thank the blockade because it forced us to grow and rise to the occasion"<sup>51</sup>.

Cuba has developed numerous innovations that offer progressive alternatives to the dominant policies of neoliberalism. At a time when health care access and cost are being intensely debated in the United States, Cuba's model of public health, which produces better key health indicators for a fraction of the cost of that of the US, deserves closer examination. ELAM and Cuba's medical diplomacy programs serve as models not only in public health, community medicine and capacity building, but represent an alternative strategy for foreign policy that enhances human and national security, a central concern of nations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Agreements such as ALBA (Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas) and the more recent Peoples' Trade Agreement (TCP) between Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia offer a new vision of social welfare and mutual cooperation through socially oriented agreements involving food production, literacy, health care and trade as opposed to deregulated profit maximization schemes. These approaches show promise for improving the Cuban economy but also fortifying the region from the types of economic shocks that occurred in the past. And for all of these reasons, Cuba continues to inspire.

<sup>49</sup> Salazar, "Cuba's Foreign Policy"; Muntaner et al., "Venezuela's Barrio Adentro".

<sup>50</sup> Feinsilver, "Cuban Medical Diplomacy".

<sup>51</sup> Fidel Castro, speech on 1 May 2006, cited in Larry Birns and Adrienne Nothnagel, "Cuba Comes in from the Cold", *Council on Hemispheric Affairs* on-line, [www.coha.org/2006/07/31/](http://www.coha.org/2006/07/31/) (cited 31 July 2006).

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