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Prepared for delivery at the 2000 meeting of the
Latin American Studies Association (LASA)
Hyatt Regency Miami, March 16-18, 2000

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ABSTRACT: This article considers the propositions of transition and transformation research with respect to the “deviant case” of still socialist Cuba. A central element of the explanation for Cuba’s “non-transition” is the specific relationship of political continuity and economic transformation - even as the latter is carried out paradoxically largely behind the back of the state and against its officially expressed will. A second decisive factor is the simultaneity of the “political” and the “national” questions, in which Cuba’s political system can present itself as the defender of national sovereignty. The aggressive policy of “exporting democracy” from the United States in the style of the Helms-Burton Law has thus exactly the opposite result: stabilization despite internal crisis and loss of legitimation.

INTRODUCTION

Great political changes are typically spectacular. In Cuba it is their absence which is spectacular. In the face of unrelenting deep crisis a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Fifth Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba strengthened without exceptions the leading role of the Party in state and society, the socialist economy excluding private Cuban entrepreneurs, as well as the personal continuity of the leadership of the state through Fidel Castro - and, in the case of his demise, through his brother Raúl Castro (cf. *Granma International*, 19 October 1997).

What therefore demands explanation in Cuba is not a fundamental political and economic break but rather much more the processes and factors which have prevented one. The “double identity” of Cuba as a Latin American *and* a socialist country places such an analysis at the intersection of *transition* research on the one hand, which developed by scholars coming to grips with democratization processes in Southern Europe and Latin America, and *transformation* research on the other hand, as applied to the upheavals in the socialist states of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

As a first step the present contribution will place the “Cuba case” in the context of this overarching discussion. Developed accounts are here tested as to their applicability to the analysis of Cuban development - although (or exactly: because) still socialist Cuba represents a “deviant case” in the comparative debate.

With respect to the transformation process in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the “dilemma of simultaneity” (Offe 1994: 57ff) comes into discussion. In contrast to Southern Europe and Latin America, where the transition constitutes a passage to democracy and indeed a change of political regime without calling the economic system fundamentally into question, in the former socialist states change of both the political and the economic system has to be accomplished *simultaneously*.

As will be shown in the second part of this essay, Cuba poses in a particular form the question of the relationship between economic and political change. For in view of the fundamentally changed international relations since 1989, the reproduction of political authority in Cuba is just not possible, as is often assumed or suggested, by simply “maintaining the status quo,” but rather only through a substantial measure of change which, within the framework of the existing system, can be put through or at least accepted.

* This article is forthcoming in: *Review of Radical Political Economics*, Vol. 33 No. 1, January 2001. Translation by Frank Thompson, University of Michigan. The author is grateful for valuable comments on the manuscript by Rebecca Hovey, Don Goldstein, and David Barkin. Do not cite or quote without permission by the author.

Thus the fragmentation and informalization of the economy which is so striking in the post-socialist countries of Eastern Europe has taken place as well in Cuba; but here it occurs within the framework of a still socialist state. On the one hand this indubitably undermines the “classical” socialist ordering of economy and society, but it shows itself on the other hand - so the argument goes - as the form of recourse to market mechanisms which is most functional for the reproduction of political power.

The “dilemma of simultaneity” in the formerly socialist states includes indeed still a third level which Offe (1994, p, 64) calls “the territorial question.” In a further sense this allows itself to be conceived as “the national question” - that is the whole complex of the sovereignty, integrity, and identity of the nation-state, its affirmation or questioning (and also connected with this the role of external political agents) as well as of ethnically and nationally marked movements and legitimation models. In the collapse of the communist regimes of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union these factors gained a central importance; in the democratization processes in Latin America in contrast they played for the most part only a secondary role.

As will be argued in the third part of this essay, Cuba differs from the transitions in Latin America in that the political and the national questions are posed simultaneously and are tightly connected to each other. But in comparison with Eastern Europe, Cuba presents an opposite pattern. In Cuba the affirmation of the nation against overwhelming hegemonic power is the trump card of the socialist government, not the opposition. While transition research emphasizes the decisive importance of internal factors for the democratization process, the “Cuba exception” appears as an example for how external agents can come to have a key role in the whether and how of political transition processes.

1 Cuba’s “Double Identity”: In the Intersection between Transition and Transformation Debates

The starting point of the analysis must be Cuba’s “double identity” as a Latin American *and* socialist state. The Cuba of Fidel Castro was simultaneously a part of the “Third World” of developing countries and the “Second World” of socialist states. This double identity still marks the political, economic, and social structure of the country. When the investigation of Cuban development is reduced to only one of these two perspectives, the analysis necessarily remains insufficient.

The Cuban Revolution of 1959 ran up against the emphatic enmity of the United States and found a powerful ally in the Soviet Union. The quickly following proclamation of the “socialist character of the Cuban Revolution” was joined with a growing acceptance of the political and economic model of the Soviet Union which was firmly anchored, particularly in the 1970s, by the so-called “process of institutionalization,” by the adoption of a new constitution (1976), as well as by full membership in the Council for Mutual Economic Cooperation (1972).

In Cuba’s Latin American identity the Revolution represents the embodiment of the national struggle for independence. In this view the conflict with the United States was not an “East-West” but rather a “North-South” conflict. Behind the formal socialistically-conceived institutions, the foundation of Cuban politics remained recognizable in the military structures which grew out of the guerrilla war and in the over-dimensional and unquestionable leader at the top in the tradition of Latin American caudillo authority. Even today Fidel Castro is first and foremost “Comandante en Jefe” of the Cuban Revolution - whether or not a constitution recognizes this title - , and then secondarily First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, President of the Council of Ministers and of the Council of State, etc.¹

¹ In his memorable essay on Cuba’s Communist Party, Hans Magnus Enzenberger described in 1969 the ambivalent relationship of Fidel Castro to the Communist Party. Despite the “leading role in state and society” which the Communist Party formally possesses, Enzenberger summarized: “Only one thing is it

From this Cuban “double identity” it follows that an analysis of recent development lies in the intersection of the Latin American transition discussion and the transformation discussion molded by the socialist states. The dominant current of transition research takes practically no account of Cuba. The four volume standard work of O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead (1986) on “Transitions from Authoritarian Rule” is in this regard typical; it lists socialist Cuba in passing among the undemocratic regimes, but explicitly excludes it from the investigation (Vol. 1: 10).

Since 1989 there has been in fact a wealth of social scientific publications devoted to Cuba which use the word 'transition' in their titles; but under the assumption of an immediately impending upheaval in Cuba, “transition” was for the most part not an analytical category for what was happening in Cuba but rather a cipher for what *should* happen in Cuba.² Amazingly this failure to engage with Cuba reached a peak when, after 1989, some of the most prominent representatives of transition research set out on “Travels to the East” and applied the theses developed for Latin America to the explanation of the upheavals in the socialist states.³

Of course Cuba is a special case, ultimately since until now no transition in the sense of a change of the political system to democracy of a Western character has taken place. But the question of why a process of this kind did *not* take place is only the other side of the question of why it took place elsewhere. And the “deviant cases” from the established norm can be especially interesting precisely for comparative observation.

On the other hand Cuba is also as a rule left out of the “transformation research” dedicated to the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe. The continued existence of the socialist system in Cuba is often seen as the non-occurrence of transformation and thus does not appear as an object of research. Nevertheless, as in the states of Eastern Europe, Cuba also based the socialist development model on a thorough decoupling from the capitalist world market. Where now the

under no circumstance: the political power.” And, further: “Fidel runs with great pertinacity away from the avant garde which he called up. They will never catch up with him.” (Enzenberger 1969: 215.)

Since Enzenberger wrote his essay nearly thirty years ago Cuba has undergone the so-called “process of institutionalization” which gave the Party formal committees, congresses, and elective offices. Nevertheless this institutionalization has remained in the final analysis superficial up to the present. “It is blatant that the Cuban Communist Party is not a Gramscian or even Leninist institution,” according to Rafael Rojas (1997: 25). “The power of Fidel Castro is not divided or delegated over institutions but rather over persons.” Also the party congresses of 1991 and 1997 established no political tone of their own and served rather only the ratification and mediation of the course of the government. On the contrary, a process of disinstitutionalization is demonstrable in the 1990’s. (Cf. Domínguez 1997:12.)

² Thus in 1990 the Cuban-American “Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy” expectantly published the proceedings of its first annual meeting under the title “Cuba in Transition,” where this explicitly meant “the transition of Cuba to a free-market democracy.” Although this still has not occurred, the Association has met annually for seven years under this title, “Cuba in Transition,” in the hope that developments in Cuba might someday measure up (cf. ASCE 1992-1997). The term “free-market democracy” explicitly expresses a conflation of the economic system of capitalism with democracy (understood, without discussion, as “Western-style” liberal multiparty system, etc.) that is, though mostly in more explicit forms, a strong undercurrent in most of the dominant literature on transition and transformation. However it should also be noted that there exists a varied and substantial alternative stream in discussing democratization processes. For the Cuban case, Bengelsdorf (1994) presents a substantial discussion of alternative conceptions of democracy. For the recent discussion among scholars on the island itself on questions of democracy, civil society, and participation within the general framework of socialism, the essays of Rafael Hernández (1994), Hugo Azcuy (1994, 1995), Juan Valdéz Paz and Mayra Espina (1994) and the volumes edited by Haraldo Dilla (1995,1996) are central. (For a review of this discussion see Hoffmann 1997a.)

³ Cf. Karl and Schmitter (1991),Schmitter (with Karl) (1994), and O’Donnell (1994), and characteristically also Linz and Stepan (1996), who place developments in Southern Europe, Latin America, and post-communist Europe under the same roof of transition and consolidation research. Here there is merely one mention of Cuba and this in relation to the pre-revolutionary Cuba of the Batista regime (357). Only quite recently have systematic attempts to place socialist Cuba in the context of international transition research appeared. Worth mentioning in particular is the seminar “Cuba a la luz de otras transiciones” (Cuba in the light of other transitions) conducted by the Instituto de Estudios Cubanos together with the periodical *Encuentro de la Cultura Cubana* in Summer 1997 in Madrid.

transformation processes in Eastern Europe are to be understood always as processes of integration into the world market, so Cuba too stands - even though no rupture of the system took place - unavoidably before precisely this task of a new incorporation into the now even more thoroughly capitalist world economy.

From this perspective problems and processes emerge which suggest and make fruitful linking the analysis of Cuban development with research on the so-called "transformation states" of Eastern Europe. Because the collapse of trade relations with the socialist states deprived Cuban socialism of its former conditions of existence, the reproduction of the political system was in no way possible as a pure "holding fast to what exists" but rather only through change. From this perspective the conceptions of "transition" and "transformation" run oppositely: Precisely because the Cuban system - whether intentionally or unintentionally, whether consciously or unconsciously - has worked through considerable transformation processes, it has until now prevented a "transition" in the sense of a change in the political system to pluralism and multiparty democracy.

2 Crisis and System Reproduction: On the Political Logic of Economic Transformation

In the 1980s socialist Cuba conducted more than 80 percent of its foreign trade with the CMEA states. Thus the extent of the crisis entailed by the rupture of these relations after 1989 is understandable. The Cuban government responded to this with a double strategy: First a strict emergency program was proclaimed whose official name, "período especial en tiempos de paz" (special period in time of peace) already indicated that it was the adaptation of a concept developed for wartime. The massive provisioning bottlenecks and the sharp fall in the general living standard were dealt with by a nearly complete rationing of all products which was intended to apportion the costs of the crisis broadly equally. "At the moment we have virtually a war economy," according to Fidel Castro himself.⁴

Even with this severe suppression of national consumption reintegration into the changed world economy remained unavoidable for a Cuban economy structurally dependent on foreign trade. Under the pressure to obtain foreign exchange a new world-market oriented sector based on the US dollar was created in the Cuban economy parallel to the internal war-economy austerity policy. Central elements were an opening-up for joint-venture enterprises with foreign capital and the forced expansion of international tourism. Around these dollar enclaves as well as in the import and export sector quasi-state Cuban enterprises were also established, the so-called "Sociedades Anónimas" (public corporations), which operate on a hard-currency basis and openly imitate capitalist forms. Furthermore, since the legalization of possession of US dollars in July 1993, the government has set up throughout the country a large number of state hard-currency shops which are accessible to all Cubans. As a result the *remittance economy* has become a central support of the Cuban economy. According to official estimates Cuba has received since 1994 more dollars through money transfers from exiled Cubans to their relatives on the island than through the main export product sugar.⁵

Only with the collapse of the socialist trade partner did the US trade embargo against Cuba - in place since the beginning of the 1960s - reach its full strength. With Havana closer to Miami than Leipzig is to Bonn (or Chicago is to Detroit), the United States would be Cuba's "natural" market for practically all goods and services. Thus Cuba is not only exposed to the forces of the

⁴ "Es virtualmente una economía de guerra la que tenemos en este momento" (Castro 1991: 57). For more on the economic crisis and the reform debate see CEPAL (1997), Dirmoser and Estay (1997) as well as the contributions in Hoffmann (1994/1996).

⁵ In the balance of payments for 1994 the National Bank of Cuba showed an entry of US\$ 574.8 million under the heading "current transfers" which, as is expressly explained, is "mainly due to the income from donations and remittances" (Banco Nacional de Cuba 1995: 20f). (This report is also known as *informe a los acreedores* (Report to the Creditors). For 1997 this item was estimated at around US\$ 800 million (IRELA 1997: 4).

world market, but even more to a world market truncated by Washington's embargo. Without question the U.S. embargo policy - multiply sharpened since 1989 - represents an extraordinary hindrance for any Cuban economic-political plans.

The consequence of the Cuban government's double strategy of "a war economy with dollar enclaves" was a split of the economy which is thoroughly bitter for the Cuban population. The ever-sparsely provision available on the ration card contrasts with the state dollar shops offering everything, from bread and meat to imported refrigerators and Sony color TVs - *nota bene*, everything is for sale to every Cuban with the corresponding money, in other words sufficient US dollars.

Thus world market competition and also international currency competition takes place in Cuba itself and is visible to all. And with the collapse of the socialist economy and the national currency they occur in very crass forms.

In spite of the drastic reduction of goods supplies the crisis management of the government has held state prices and salaries artificially constant. As a result the amount of money in circulation increased according to Cuban estimates by 47 percent between 1989 and 1991, while simultaneously consumer sales fell 30 percent.⁶ The consequence was a dramatic fall in the value of the Cuban currency.⁷ The average wage in the state economy of 180 pesos corresponds today to 8-10 US dollars - as monthly earnings. This kind of distortion of monetary relations tears open a deep social chasm. What a steelworker earns in a month, a waiter in a hard-currency hotel easily receives as tips while serving breakfasts.

The transformation in Eastern Europe is frequently understood as a development "from plan to market" (World Bank 1996). Against this it has been argued that in the former socialist countries a simple change "from plan to market" has not precisely taken place, but rather that many more hybrid mixed structures have appeared; that the economy and society do not develop linearly, rather that they have fractionated and divided according to money; and that the old planned economy has not at all been replaced by "the market", but rather much more by mixed structures marked by *informalization* in which still remaining elements of the socialist society as well as mutual-help relationships among the old party and plan elite are mixed with the new market structures (Altvater and Mahnkopf 1996: 463ff).

As in the former socialist states the crisis in the formal economy - the official Cuban figures record a 34.8% decline in GDP from 1989 to 1993 - corresponded to a no less massive growth of the black market and informal economy. By the nature of the subject the figures given for this are vague. In a 1992 essay receiving much notice, the most prominent Cuban reform economist, Julio Carranza, cited for the first time figures which until then had remained unpublished: "In 1990 an estimated 2 billion pesos circulated through the black market (according to the Institute of Internal Demand), and in the following two years this number has probably quintupled." (Carranza 1992: 153.) Since the money value of the official state retail trade at that time amounted to around seven billion pesos, it follows that more money was spent in the black market than in the formal economy.

It can be assumed that up until to the bottom of the crisis in 1993-94, this relation shifted strongly further to the disadvantage of the formal economy. It must be noted that these relations have a bearing on the money-measured value of commodities, not the volumes. Taking into account the highly subsidized prices in the state economy and the black market prices exposed to high and increasing inflation, the relationship in amounts of commodities is considerably less gross. All the same unofficial Cuban estimates proceed from the assumption that up to 50 percent of consumer goods used in the country were not exchanged in the formal economy, but rather in

⁶ Carranza 1992: 139; on Cuba's monetary dualization see also Carranza, Gutiérrez, and Monreal (1995), as well as Ritter (1995) and Marquetti (1995).

⁷ In summer 1994 this collapse reached its nadir with a black market rate of 130 pesos per US dollar while officially a 1:1 parity was maintained. From the beginning of 1996 to the present the exchange rate - by now also that of the officially established state exchange stands - moves with variation between 25 and 19 pesos per US dollar. (Cf. CEPAL 1997, Statistical Appendix, Table A14, and, with slight differences, Marquetti 1995: 20.)

black market businesses of every kind, family relationships, private unlegalized trade, barter businesses, etc.⁸

The causes of the boom in the informal economy in Cuba are similar if not identical to those in the post-socialist states. In each the informalization of the economy is not only a “survival of old structures” but rather feeds simultaneously from a new second source: monetary economic relationships which march in and economically exclude the broad portion of the population. Anyone with no opportunities in the formal money economy is nearly compelled to withdraw from it by evasion into the informal economy. If the “peripheralization of Eastern Europe” is mentioned with reference to the former socialist states, in this sense a “Latin Americanization” is taking place in Cuba.

In Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, as Arndt Hopfmann (1997: 24) writes, “the radical shaking and/or dissolution of the actually existing socialist structures of acquisition and system of social security [had] above all as its result a comprehensive social ‘unsecuring’.” “For many agents this existence-threatening insecurity can only be to some degree ‘mastered’ through a combination of ‘survival strategies’ - holding fast to remaining interpersonal networks..., through partial retreat into self-provision activities and/or taking up precarious work relationships (outside institutionalized regulations).”

Formally socialist state enterprise continues in Cuba, in contrast to the Eastern European states. Nevertheless there is no doubt that also in Cuba the “actually-existing socialist structures of acquisition” are radically shaken - less in the form of workplaces being shut down, layoffs, and open unemployment, than much more through the dramatic devaluation of peso salaries. If peso salaries now determine only to a small extent the actual possibility of acquisition of goods and services, all other kinds of possibilities for acquisition become disproportionately more important (whether legal, illegal, or in the broad gray zone in between). Something similar holds for the social security system in so far as it is mediated by money (which it is only in part). If the average monthly pension of 80 pesos is worth four US dollars according to the state's exchange rate, a mango tree in the garden doubtless brings in more money.

If Hopfmann writes, “informalization is above all an immediate consequence of the collapse of the system and the ‘proclaimed turn to market economics and competitive democracy’” (Hopfmann 1997: 24), then the case of Cuba may put this in a broader perspective. For in Cuba the sweeping informalization of economic relationships is occurring even though no political “turn” has preceded it. The “erosion of the state” and the “unsecuring of reproductive relations” (Hopfmann) lead also then to massive informalization processes, even if they take place under the cover of state socialism and the continuity of the single-party state.

It is obvious that far-reaching social and political consequences result from these economic developments for a system which is based on (relative) social equality and which is in great measure legitimated by its social economic attainments. Central “Achievements of the Revolution,” above all the free education and health system, have also suffered greatly under the economic crisis. Doctors lack medicine and hospitals lack X-ray film and sterile sutures; schools lack pencils, paper, and books. In both areas the devaluation of salaries has moreover led to a noticeable drain of qualified personnel - and to great material and motivational problems with those remaining.

The list of erosions of Cuba's socialist economic and social order can be continued. Here no turning point is in sight; the economic recovery tendencies which have appeared since 1993-94 are largely restricted to the export and dollar sectors. Nevertheless it is important to see that a fundamental continuance of social-state and economic achievements of the “old” socialist structures still holds essential importance for the social fabric. State provision of subsidized food on the ration card has certainly been drastically reduced in comparison with the 1980s and is effectively insufficient for anyone to satisfy daily needs. But it guarantees nevertheless a nearly costlessly obtainable ground floor of rice, beans, cooking oil, etc. And, precisely in view of the crisis and the monetary discrepancies, the rationed products have become more indispensable than ever

⁸ Discussions of the author with economists in Havana in August 1994.

for those who do not or scarcely take part in the new money-economic relationships. In the workplace canteens and state cafeterias the quality and quantity of meals is low, but the price is often nearly symbolic. If the grossly distorted money relationships, as they are mirrored in peso salaries and the exchange rate, were in fact the mechanism dominating everything determining access to goods, privileges, and social status, then the social situation doubtless would be extremely polarized and the reproduction of political power hardly imaginable.

The processes of informalization in the Cuban economy has broadened to a extent that represents without question a substantial loss of legitimation for the socialist system. However, simultaneously the informal structures are quite broadly tolerated - the extent they have now reached would have otherwise been simply impossible.⁹ De facto the state in Cuba allows the informal economy to play a central role in provisioning the population, which, for the maintenance of social peace in the country, is entirely unignorable. If the state economy can no longer sufficiently guarantee provisioning, a return to market mechanisms takes place in this way even though no or very few formal market reforms are carried out.

This policy of de facto toleration of a broad informal, in the end not legal, economy follows less from an economic than, much more, from a political logic: It proves to be the most functional form of market mechanism for the reproduction of political power - even if it makes everyday disregard of official norms and laws the normal state of affairs. For it is more important that, since the market activities are not formal and legal, no claims can be derived nor demands raised from them; that no organizing of the producers can take place; and that the state always has a free hand to intervene against undesired activities or those which approach too great a size. Precisely the legal insecurity of these market relations renders them always dependent on the good will of state authorities. On the one hand this takes away their political sting, and on the other they thereby offer at every level possibilities to recoin administrative positions and control functions into material benefits.¹⁰

In any case another question is whether the strategy of the government yields a development perspective for the country. The argument of reform economists in Cuba is that, to be sure, this kind of informal and restrained economic structure may function for quite a long time as crisis-management, but that it does not lead to the construction of a national economy in the long run - not to speak of one which can maintain and finance an ambitious health, education, and social system for eleven million Cubans. Instead reform-oriented economists - such as Carranza, Gutiérrez, and Monreal from the Center for Studies of the Americas (CEA) in Havana - plead for a step-by-step but comprehensive and coherent reform of the economic model, for "moving from the classical model of socialism to another model of socialism..., that accords the market an active

⁹ Ever since Carranza first wrote about "the necessity of recognizing the existence of an informal sector" (1992: 153) this tolerance has also extended to Cuban economics and social sciences so that here, in the course of the 1990's, the dynamic and problematic of the "informal markets" (using this term) can be studied (cf. García Lorenzo 1995). Marquetti (1995: 9) writes: "A not inconsiderable part of the sales of certain products takes place in the 'informal market' where, under the new conditions, a relative loosening of the border between the legal and the illegal has taken place." When the government set up official state exchange bureaus in the fall of 1995, even the CP organ *Granma* announced that they "offer the same rate which rules in the informal foreign exchange market" (*Granma International*, 1 November 1995.) - a remarkable admission of what had long previously been taken note of in the discourse of the government and the party newspaper only as speculation and criminality against the socialist economy. The rollback directed against reform efforts in Cuba's academic world since March 1996 (see below) provided, it is true, a temporary halt to this conceptual tolerance.

¹⁰ State control and participation are also the key words for the external opening and the newly arisen hard-currency sectors in the Cuban economy: In joint-venture enterprises the state is always a direct partner of the capitalist investor; also the state at the least co-determines the handing out of jobs through employment agencies which foreign enterprises are obligated to use. And although the now nearly 300 "Sociedades Anónimas" in the hard-currency sector are structured quasi-capitalistically in form, in content they are parastate enterprises reserved for official elites. The phrase "cadre capitalism" circulates in Cuba in reference to them.

although not exclusive or dominant role in the allocation of resources and the general functioning of the economy.” (1995: 10)¹¹

The Cuban reform discussion so understood turns not so much on the question of the “introduction” of market mechanisms but rather much more on the question of what kind of market mechanisms these should be: formally and jurisprudentially recognized, which could develop a continuing economic dynamic - or merely tolerated but in principle illegal market mechanisms which remain to be sure much weaker economically but appear to be much more controllable politically.

After 1993 careful steps had been taken in the direction of the first of these alternatives. Thus a range of self employment professions (*trabajo por cuenta propia*) was allowed, which are in practice subjected to numerous restrictions and, with fewer than 200,000 registered, have until the present gained only a very limited economic weight. The most far reaching internal economic market opening until now obviously came from political grounds, from the reaction of the state to the first outbreak of the social crisis in the summer of 1994. At that time in Havana occurred the first (and until now only) open riot against the Castro government followed by a large refugee movement in which more than 30,000 Cubans left the country on improvised rafts. Only a week after Fidel Castro had declared the borders of Cuba once again closed, his brother Raúl Castro - and head of Cuba’s army - allowed the opening of food markets to be announced; and Raúl Castro founded this step quite explicitly on the proposition that the provision of food is the highest “economic, political and military priority” of the country (*Granma Internacional*, 28 September 1995).

A more extensive reform policy did not however follow from the long-denied permission of farmers’ markets. If one hoped for a step by step extension of reforms, other steps aimed at their containment. Allowing private small restaurants in June 1995 marked the temporary high point of the development. Already by the end of the year it became principally a matter of increased controls and restrictions.¹² Then in March 1996 Raúl Castro read a “Report of the Politburo” which in martial tones condemned the whole of the reform discussion, attacking its academic protagonists as a “fifth column of the enemy.”¹³ Since then the “containment” position has won the upper hand. The rejection of market-oriented reforms became thus explicitly grounded in its connected political and ideological dangers and thus withdrawn from any economic discussion. Thus the director of the central party academy of the Cuban CP, Raúl Valdés Vivó (1997: 4), wrote in a programmatic lead article: “The creation of seeds of a local bourgeoisie would bring in a social force which sooner or later would serve the counterrevolution.”

It is to be emphasized that the de facto toleration of the informal economy was practically untouched by all these struggles. To be sure there are repeated raids, confiscations, and also arrests,¹⁴ but there has never been an across the board attempt to establish “law and order” in the Cuban economy. As long as the Damocles sword of being in principle illegal hangs above, no

¹¹ Carranza, Gutiérrez, and Monreal state clearly that in their proposed reform perspective “the concern is not with just any kind of economic viability but rather with one which also allows retaining social justice and national independence with the recovery of growth.” (1995: 3) And they insist on the socialist character of their proposal, specifying that “the hegemony of social property is the element sine qua non of a socialist project.” (1995: 5f) This in no way contradicts their demand for a controlled but active role for market mechanisms: “The construction of socialism requires not the elimination of markets but rather the suppression of the hegemony of capital – which is something else.” (1995: 14)

¹² See for example the interview in the Party organ *Granma* of the Vice-Minister for Work and Social Security Conrado Valladares under the title, “Trabajo por cuenta propia - Por ahora, sólo controlar” [Self Employment - For now, Only to be Controlled]. (*Granma Internacional*, 1 March 1996).

¹³ Raúl Castro (1996). The director of the Center for Studies of the Americas (CEA) was fired as a direct result of the speech; Carranza, Monreal, and other social scientists had to leave the center as a result. For a more extensive report about this debate see Hoffmann 1997a.

¹⁴ Cuba’s Attorney General Juan Escalona officially reported for 1995 a number of 541 raids against “black market kingpins” (*macetas*), among them confiscations of 208 automobiles, 121 motorcycles, 56 trucks, as well as 188 houses (*Latin American Weekly Report*, 25 January 1996).

“social force” which the CP leadership would see as a problem can arise out of the informal economy.

Cuba's “second economy” is thus far from stepping “from behind the scenes to center stage” as it was formulated in the title of the most comprehensive international study on the topic by Pérez-Lopez (1995). On the contrary, the political condition for its existence is precisely that it remains backstage. Nevertheless the fact that it is becoming broader and a part of everyday life represents a structural transformation within a system which at one time was based on an omnipresent state responsible for practically all the concerns of individuals and society.¹⁵

While research on Eastern Europe increasingly takes into view, in addition to the great upheaval, the continuities, for Cuba the reverse is the point: to recognize, beyond the great continuity at the political level, the breaks and changes behind the scenes. As in the transformation states of Eastern Europe it is also essential in Cuba not to conceive the transformation only as “from plan to market” and not to restrict ones attention to the *officially* conducted reforms. The point instead is to analytically take into view as well precisely the informalized mixed forms - and not to see this informalization as a “defect” but rather as a thoroughly functional construction which follows a political logic and which in the case of socialist Cuba has contributed in considerable measure to the reproduction of political power.

3 The Transition which Didn't Happen: On the Dilemma of the Simultaneity of the Political and the National Question

A further key, mentioned at the beginning, for the analysis of the “special case of Cuba” lies in what can be called “third level of simultaneity” which can be conceived as “the question of the nation”: the sovereignty and integrity of the national state, challenging it or placing it in question, and, unavoidably bound up with this, the question of the role of external political agents, above all of the relationship to dominating hegemonic powers and the internal political questions which follow from this.

For Cuba this has central importance. Already that Cuba was omitted from the classical studies of transition research related to Latin America was due to the external political bind of the socialist Caribbean state. For even if Cuba had never been a formal member of the Warsaw Pact, the missile crisis of 1961 has nevertheless unmistakably drawn the border of the Cold War here. It is true that the USSR withdrew its missiles from the island, but de facto the US recognized in response that Cuba belonged to the area of influence of the Soviet Union. This had the consequence as well of a kind of implicit recognition of the Breshnev Doctrine which also shaped social science research. As long as Cuba was an ally of the Soviet Union, so it was assumed, the question of an internal political democratization was not an issue and Cuba was no sensible subject of investigation for a transition research oriented toward the model of pluralistic multi-party democracy.

After 1989 the widespread expectation of a soon-to-occur political system change in Cuba as well was based not only on the disappearance of up until then prevailing trade relations and the foreseeable following economic crisis, but also on the fundamentally changed situation in external politics which for socialist Cuba meant the disappearance of its long standing hegemonial and protective power.

Precisely on the question of international politics the “Latin American identity” of Cuba is up to the present decisive. However massive Cuba's actual dependence since the 1960s on the Soviet Union was, the economic embargo and the continued confrontational politics of Washington

¹⁵ At the earlier mentioned seminar (ft. 3 above) on “Cuba in the Light of other Transitions,” Domínguez (1997: 13) put forward these structural changes as evidence for his thesis that Cuba was currently undergoing a change of regime, indeed a transition from a “totalitarian” to an “authoritarian” system. In his reply Mesa-Lago (1997) referred to Domínguez's conceptual unclarity and argued that it was a question not of a “change of regime” but rather merely of a “change within the regime.”

allowed the alliance with the Soviet Union nevertheless always to appear as a means for standing up against the insolences of the “real” hegemonic power - the US.

In contrast to the transition processes in Latin America, in Cuba the question of the political system is in actuality bound up with the question of the nation; but in comparison to Eastern Europe and the republics of the former Soviet Union it poses itself under opposite omens: The affirmation of the nation is in Cuba the trump card of the socialist government, not the opposition. When Cuba lost its overseas ideological ally, national legitimation did not need to be newly invented, but rather only to be more strongly emphasized. One didn't take Marx off the wall, but now José Martí, the hero of the Cuban independence struggles a century ago, is pushed to the center. Article 5 in the constitution was changed: The Communist Party is no longer defined as the “vanguard of the working class” but instead as the “vanguard of the Cuban nation” (Azcuay 1994: 48).

Early after the 1959 Revolution Cuba's front-line position against the US had become a central internal political argument of the Cuban government against the opposition in the country. The Revolution, Cuba's great social conflict, with its confiscations and radical transformation of the economy and society, found its decisive vent in the emigration of the old elites to the US. Today around a million Cubans, Cuban-Americans, live in the US, particularly in and around Miami. And both the conflict of the Cuban Revolution, exported into the US, and the hegemonial claims of the US today are combined in a dreadful way in Washington's policy with respect to Cuba. The result is that US policy effectively stands in the way of and has until now hindered any democratization in Cuba. In spite of the rhetoric this is by no means merely an unintended consequence. A recurring theme of U.S. policy confronted with revolutionary change is a “war of attrition” which, even if it doesn't defeat an enemy, at least makes him look bad. It not only escalates material and economic costs but also structurally targets internal political polarization and thereby precisely encourages authoritarian and military tendencies on the side of the attacking enemy. In so far as the U.S. forces endless confrontation on a “hard-line” enemy it thus also seeks to prevent the emergence of a “soft,” democratized, tolerant and non-militarized process of fundamental political change.

The Helms-Burton law, passed by the US Congress in 1996, shows the degree to which Cuba's political question today actually presents itself as the “national question.”¹⁶ This law now makes the old property claims of the Cuban exiles a fulcrum of Washington's Cuba policy. For most Cubans who emigrated to the US after 1959 thereafter took up US citizenship. Precisely here lies the political dynamite: The Helms-Burton Law raises the claims of former Cuban citizens once expropriated by the revolutionary Cuban government now according to *US law* and as “protection of the property of *US citizens*.”

From a legal perspective these constructions, rendering US citizenship taken up by Cuban exiles retroactively effective to the time of the confiscations, conflict conspicuously with international law as well as with the previous legal practice of the US itself.¹⁷ On the political level they reinterpret the entire internal Cuban conflict of the Revolution after the fact explicitly as an international conflict in which the revolutionary Cuban state stands not in opposition to Cuban citizens but rather against US citizens and thereby the US - and precisely in this internationalized construction it is now newly placed on the political agenda. US policy could scarcely be more helpful for the strategy of the Cuban government to recast every internal struggle into the dichotomous friend-enemy schema of “Cuba versus the US.” To the extent that this process works,

¹⁶ Named for its initiators, the Republican Senator Jesse Helms and the Democratic Representative Dan Burton. The official name is the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (LIBERTAD) Act of 1996 (full text available on the internet at <ftp://ftp.loc.gov/pub/thomas/c104/h927.enr.txt>). For more on the Helms-Burton Law see IRELA 1996 as well as Hoffmann 1997b.

¹⁷ Already more than thirty years ago the “U.S. Foreign Claims Settlement Commission” pronounced, “The principle of international law that eligibility for compensation requires American nationality *at the time of loss* is so widely understood and universally accepted that citation of authority is hardly necessary” (quotation from Muse 1996: 6; emphasis added). Supplementing Muse (1996), in particular the contributions of Altozano, Horn, and the Department for International Law of the OAS in IRELA 1996 offers an exhaustive discussion of these juridical aspects.

the Cuban leadership has until now quite successfully prevented deviant political opinions from becoming legitimate discourse in national politics.

In the Helms-Burton Law the US stipulated in addition a long and detailed catalog of conditions for a democratic transition in Cuba. These extend from dissolving the state security apparatus (Sec. 205a3) to announcing “free and fair” elections for a new government (Sec. 205a4), from permitting privately owned media and telecommunication companies to operate (Sec. 205b2A) to taking “appropriate steps” to return to US citizens and entities nationalized property or to provide “equitable” compensation (Sec. 205b2D). Washington's requirements extend into personnel policies: “For the purposes of this Act, a transition government in Cuba is a government that...does not include either Fidel Castro or Raúl Castro” (Sec. 205a7). From the point of view of Cuban functionaries, no matter how reform-oriented they might be, this catalog of conditions describes less a transitional government than an already carried out and nearly complete change of power. And all this *note bene* is defined by US law.¹⁸

Moreover the Helms-Burton Law also stipulates further conditions and requirements for what the US would recognize not only as a “transition government” but as a full-fledged “democratically elected government.” With this the law aims to dictate the cornerstones of political relationships in Cuba far beyond the end of the Castro era. It thus in fact enters into the heritage of the notorious Platt Amendment, anchored into the Cuban constitution in 1901, which ceded to the US the right of intervention and became the symbol for the half-colonial dependence of Cuba on the US.

This is unpalatable even for many Cubans who are resolute Castro opponents. “Under Helms-Burton, Cuba would pass from the dictatorship of Fidel Castro to the tutelage of the US Congress,” objected Alfredo Durán (1995: 3), formerly a participant in the Bay of Pigs invasion and currently one of the most prominent leaders of the moderate forces within the Cuban exile, in a US Senate hearing: “All the requirements in the law establish criteria for democracy in Cuba which only the Cuban people can have the right to determine.” But as long as a transition to democracy in Cuba threatens to come in accordance with a rigidly written US law and from the literally reactionary section of exile Cubans dependent “transition government”, it is for no one in Cuba's political leadership (or anyone even in a leading position anywhere in the state, economy, or society) an attractive or even remotely practicable appearing perspective.

Finally, US policy may be betting not so much on a “transition” as much more on a “breakdown”: not on a change but rather on a collapse of the system, preferably through a resignation of the Castro government forced by the population. Where it came to this kind of mobilization “from below” in the upheavals in Eastern Europe, nevertheless by any rule dissatisfaction with the status quo must be combined with the prospect of a better future. Above all, three (differently connected with each other) factors were central for this hope: (1) the promise of an improvement in the standard of living by turning toward a market economy; (2) connecting to a society associated with material improvement (the European Union for many Eastern European countries, or, as the most prominent example, the unification of the German Democratic Republic with the Federal Republic of Germany postulated in the slogan, “We Are One People”); and (3) “the radiant past” (Burawoy and Lucás 1992) constructed in transfigured form into a national “better self” to which one could supposedly “return.”

In Cuba now all three of these factors are nearly inevitably connected with the exile Cubans (and thereby also the US). As the old upper stratum, the majority of which left the country after 1959, the exiles embody the nostalgically exaggerated “golden 1950s” of Cuba before the

¹⁸ If US Cuba policy professedly rests on analogies from Eastern Europe, it overlooks that with this there is no simple “repetition.” The Cuban leadership as well has seen that Honecker, Krenz & Co. [former East German leaders] were subjected to legal proceedings and will have drawn their conclusions from this. In particular, the implacability of the hardliners of the Cuban exile, their political practice marked by intolerance as well as the violent acts of exile Cuban extremists, suggest the assumption that that which already in united Germany often veered to the edge of constitutionality (cf. Wesel 1994: 37f, 145-161) could presumably be carried out in distinctly less civil forms in a “Cuba afterwards.”

Revolution.¹⁹ On the other hand the economic success story of the US-emigrated Cubans offers a manifest proof of the promise of a liberal capitalist economy (as well as of its opportunities for social climbing).²⁰ And finally the Cuban exiles are the living plea for the advantages of a maximal attachment, that is, integration with the US.

To the extent, however, to which these promises of a better future are associated with the exiled Cubans and the US, they present a conflict loaded with enormous (and founded) anxiety not only for the elite on the island but also for the broad population. As a result the whole social conflict of the Cuban Revolution, which was "solved" after 1959 as emigration, threatens to return. This includes first anxiety about the property and dominion claims of the Cuban exiles - just the question of residential property in Havana involves massive social dynamite. But another matter as well is anxiety about a situation of political upheaval itself in a constellation of sharply polarized conflict. To the degree that the alternatives are reduced to "Down with Fidel" versus "Patria o Muerte," it is difficult to conceive change as a peaceful civil process and not a frontal confrontation potentially involving a high level of violence. As a result, promises of a better future, to the extent to which they are connected with the U.S. and exile Cubans, are thereby politically blocked. These promises appear realizable only in their individual form - as emigration to the US - but not as a collective social process in Cuba itself.

A strong emphasis on *internal* factors has characterized transition research on Latin America. The, in this regard formative, work of O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead (1986) founded this explicitly on the "uncertainty" of "rapidly changing situations" and the "underdetermination" of transition processes whereby internal actors gain overwhelming importance.²¹

In the last ten years in Cuba the opposite has been the case: the constellations have not been rapidly changing, but rather practically not changing at all; conditions do not appear uncertain, but rather fixed in concrete, not under- but rather over-determined. And the Cuban case is an example of how *external* factors can come to have overwhelming importance for the question of transition. "Virtually every one of the East European transitions amounted to national liberation," Bunce (1995: 91) writes. In Cuba, where the Revolution led by Fidel Castro embodies the "national liberation," the reverse holds: here it is the political "non-transition" which can present itself as protection of national independence; and any process of democratization will be carried out peacefully and untraumatically only to the degree to which it does not pose the political question simultaneously with the national question. The high-wire-act for a progressive position on Cuba will be to continually reject arrogant external measures such as the Helms-Burton Law while at the same time denying that these external impositions provide an excuse to brand substantial discussion of democratization of the political system as "anti-national." In any case the proclaimed goal of the US government and the exile Cubans to "export democracy" to Cuba from outside by means of political confrontation have precisely the opposite consequence: The hardening and stabilization of the system under attack despite internal crisis and loss of legitimation.

¹⁹ Official Cuban historiography, according to which pre-revolutionary Cuba was feudal and backward and Havana was merely the "casino and bordello of the Yankees," stands diametrically opposed to this idealized image. Against this black and white perspective Pérez-Stable (1993: 14-33) offers a differentiated account of Cuba's dependent capitalist development before 1959.

²⁰ Even if the initial and background conditions for the Cuban immigrants were much more favorable than for other immigrant groups, the economic and social success of Cuban exiles (Cuban-Americans) remains remarkable. An outstanding insight is provided by the social history of the development of Miami of Portes and Stepick (1993).

²¹ Cf. O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986: 3ff. Transition processes are thereby taken as exceptional situations.: "We believe that this 'normal science methodology' is inappropriate in rapidly changing situations, where those very parameters of political action are in flux" (4). From this interpretation of transitions as "underdetermined processes" the emphasis is strongly placed on political actors and their activities and structural and economic factors are assigned a secondary role (ibid., especially: 7).

4 Summary

The dominant tradition of transition research on Latin America has largely ignored Cuba. Indeed, its focus on internal political actors does not provide a convincing framework to explain the “deviant case” of this still socialist island. Approaches which however center on the relationship between the political system and the economic transition in the course of integration into the capitalist world as well as on the relationship between the political system and the “national question”—that is to say, claiming or, as the case may be, questioning nation-state identity and sovereignty—prove productive as a social scientific way to approach the “Cuban case.”

In the often-invoked era of globalization it has nearly become a cliché to postulate the loss of importance of national sovereignty, identity, and borders, as a consequence of which world politics come into a “postnational constellation” (Habermas 1998). Nevertheless the case of Cuba provides evidence for the persistence and currency of the “national constellation” in international politics. Just as nationalist constructions and conflicts in Eastern Europe (from the collapse of the Soviet Union to the war in Kosovo) are by no means only “anachronistic” relics of the past but are rather at the same time products and consequences of the political economic restructuring processes currently taking place, so as well is the “national question” in Cuba by no means only an heir of the Platt Amendment or the euphoric times of the Revolution. Rather it continually nourishes itself anew from the continuing confrontation between Cuba and the US, including the Cuban exile community. The Helms-Burton Law shows exemplarily how the demand for a “democratic transition” in Cuba becomes connected to a sweeping challenge to Cuba’s national sovereignty – and how this “simultaneity of national and political questions” decisively marks political relations on the Island and massively hinders every process of democratization “from within.”

In Cuba resistance to a change of political system has accompanied an economic transformation which secured strong control and participation of the state in opening the economy outwardly while inwardly only very limited market reforms have been combined with a broader acceptance of merely informal market mechanisms. This proves to be the kind of economic reform most functional for the reproduction of political power; it has however made possible only precarious crisis management at a low level and an unstable recovery, which raises big questions for the future development of the country. Simultaneously economic and social processes of informalization, fragmentation, and inequality are thereby set underway which partially resemble those observable in Eastern Europe only after the collapse of socialism.

The maintenance of political power thus goes along with processes which entail a permanent erosion of the fundamental pillars of the established socialist system. This has given rise on the one hand to an internationally unique discussion about principles of political and economic reform for a renewed socialism sustainable under the new international and national circumstances; but it has also on the other hand led to recourse to authoritarian models of behavior which see no opportunity in a broadening of internal economic or political reforms but instead above all a threat to the system.

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