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Working Paper

Cuba: Democracy for a Possible Nation

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Summary

The aim of this Working Paper is to provide some conclusions and practical recommendations regarding possible policies to be implemented by governments interested in favouring -as third parties- the success of a gradual democratic transformation of the Cuban regime on the basis of an agreed and non-violent process.

- 'You are a Kerensky..., I believe in your sincerity, but you are naive.'

- 'The truth is I do not want to be a Kerensky'.

- 'Neither did Kerensky'.¹

From a conversation between Henry Kissinger and Mario Soares (1974, transition in Portugal).

A well-known joke from Poland in the period after Wojciech Jaruzelski seized power in a military coup in 1981 describes our psychological structure well, and our bloated belief that we can predict the future, each time we try to know empirically that which lies ahead. The people of Poland say that in this period, military patrols had the right to shoot without warning at anyone who was out on the street after 10 pm. One time, a soldier on patrol with a colleague saw someone rushing to get home, with 10 minutes to go before the curfew, and immediately shot him. When the colleague asked the soldier why he had opened fire early, the soldier said: 'I knew the guy. He lives far from here and there was no way he was going to make it home in 10 minutes, so in order to simplify things I shot him now'.²

This is an exemplary case which illustrates how *anticipative knowledge* of an indemonstrable fact can fulfil its function, prematurely and effectively eliminating its object.

How could the soldier know if the man was going to spend the night just 100 meters from the spot where he was shot? Didn't the man have any options other than spending the night at his own, faraway home? Isn't it possible that the man, knowing he would not make it home in time, might ask the soldier to let him stay at the guard post? In the end, this soldier, eager to comply with his duty, would be incapable of making a life-saving human gesture that would fulfil another clear duty. When it comes down to it, there is always some way of stretching time to go a minute past 10 o'clock. 'Knowing' beforehand has its price in human, social and political lives.

This time-is-running-out quandary can be applied in a prospective analysis of the transition in Cuba. The Cuban regime, knowing it is going to be *shot*, in other words, knowing how the Polish joke ends, could either halt the movement toward the transition zone, or remain at an intermediate point, or simply shift to a direction not seen in earlier processes of reform. Or, knowing that there are people willing to *shoot* it, the government might be tempted to send off vague signals, what we might call 'transitional diversionary tactics,' with the goal of confusing observers and other forces and mask its policies so as not to provide sensitive information on a process that is jeopardy. Finally, an analytical incursion within or from the outside of a process that inevitably wears out its own political variables would be close to aborting a process which, exposed to all its consequences, can sew up the body right above the operating room and fall into what psychoanalysts call a state of

¹ Huntington (1994), p. 18.

² Žižek (1989), pp. 6-7.

denial. The final effect of all this would be the political shut-down of a process of change due to an excess of information. It would be something like the Internet collapsing because of a huge flow *bytes* on the broad band.

Are these developments possible? Paradoxically, no. If there is a transition that is inevitable, and not all of them have been, it is Cuba's. The Soviet transition was a failed one that imploded a multi-national state without creating modern, stable and referential societies, except for the Baltic republics. It is clear that all transitions which have taken place turn into paradigms. It is also clear that abandoning communism does not necessarily lead to democracy.

In Cuba, the transition is inevitable for reasons closely linked to the process of negative, combined, accumulation of cultural and structural errors as a result of the regime's unique psychology. It did not have to be this way. If this psychology had not mandated the whole process on the island down to the very last retail –this is a counterfactual exercise, of course– change in Cuba would always have been understood, assimilated and incorporated as phenomenon that goes hand in hand with a process that is logically and, at least on the surface, open to the future. Change would have been seen as an incremental process in a society with a growth crisis, and not as a painful restructuring that threatened the basic underpinnings of the nation.

Here it is a good idea to recall that Cuba wavered, and to some extent still does, within the overall scheme of a sector of the left, more as the Cuban Revolution –the permanent utopia apparently on the move– than as a modern republican state in the international system of nations. Cuba used this advantage to enhance its image as a model society undergoing change –without really doing so– but the advantage quickly became a burden when the country could not shed its very particular brand of 'sultanism' in the tropics. It is fascinating to view Cuba over the past 49 years as a house of cards: an edifice that took time, patience and balance to build, but which is now inexorably crumbling because of an architect's excessive adherence to *pascalian* thinking.

So what does the 10-minutes-before-10 syndrome mean for Cuba. Let us consider this. In the first place, it means that transitions *carried out* along the way, without much prior information, become analytical bodies that the government can use for the very purpose of blocking the path to democracy. Secondly, those who seek to define the transition in Cuba have in effect used these analytical bodies to establish rules for change –in Cuba it would have been a good idea to verify a kind of change that I call *intelligent transition* because of the amount of available information used to drive it–. Thirdly, this has saturated formulas within a comparative scheme which traces, from a position of knowledge, an external road map of transition that is easily decipherable and usable by internal enemies. In the fourth place, and this is basic, the syndrome distracts the potential players in the transition, who neglect the concept of specific difference. This is the most important one for imagining an appropriate formula that will allow the Cuban transition to be done from within. In politics, specific difference is the fundamental concept that allows for effective and comfortable fine-tuning of general strategies and, in the case of critical junctures like a transition, makes them possible. Spain could not have had a Portuguese-style transition, nor vice-versa. And both are paradigmatic.

Therefore, if the Cuban government has managed to avoid a transition, it is also because the actors of change have had a lot of *useless* general information and little specific information that would be useful in the case of Cuba. This raises another paradox: if prior knowledge makes it possible to save time for subsequent processes, speeding up their development, in Cuba *know-how* from other experiences has been an obstacle of the same magnitude as the lack of will for change, or certain foreign policies. The historical delay in overall times of change can be very expensive precisely because of what is known about its thorny problems and main consequences and because of the difficulties in useful processing of so many categories of information.

Ignorance as to what our specific difference is, failure to use information, or limited use of it, a lack of internal imagination, the relative strength of the regime and some external strategies have combined to slow down the transition process in Cuba. But they have not made it impossible. So the 10 minutes-to-10 syndrome only means that the failure to wed available knowledge and specific reality have shored up the regime and rattled the agents of change, blocking the transition for a longer than reasonable period of time: both for a theory of transition and the needs of Cuban society. And a third paradox emerges from this: the Cuban government has learned from other transitions in order to try to prevent one at home, but has not achieved this; on the other hand, the agents or observers of democratic change in Cuba have utilised knowledge from these same transitions and failed to trigger one of their own. This implies, and strengthens the inevitability of a transition which, however, is happening behind the backs of its friends and enemies. Not as much as before, of course. The final question on this point is how to use knowledge in politics, be it in times of crisis or normal times. The possibility of learning from others when it comes to transitions is always open (the people of Hungary learned from Spain in this regard) so long as one does not abandon the *principle of reality*.

This is a crucial issue. Regardless of the different typologies of transitions –the most widely known ones are those of Samuel Huntington and Juan Linz, although there is one that I find instructive, that of Fredo Arias King– we can distinguish between transitions that emerge on their own and those which are willed or desired. In the former, the logic of events and the dynamics of processes are dominant over the political engineering of rationalised forces. In this kind of transition, events and information about them flow at almost the same time, that is, in a best-case scenario, reducing the time available for taking appropriate decisions that control undesired events. The imagination, leadership and strength of the players are essential here for preventing events from overwhelming the social and political metabolisation of change, thus blocking its success. The transition in Portugal falls into this category. When Henry Kissinger accuses Mario Soares of being naive, his aim is that Soares not consciously take on the role of Kerensky, in other words, as a rationalised player. Soares' answer –'I do not want to be a Kerensky'– is in line with the partial lack of control over processes and events in Portugal on the part of someone who also has only partial control on the fate of his ultimate intentions. Fortunately, Portugal achieved democracy and launched the third wave but it might well have failed, in a country in which agents caused and accompanied events at nearly the same time.

In the second kind of transition, that which is willed or desired, what dominates is the political engineering of rationalised forces –those which design the general outline of the process consciously through their own particular prism– rather than events and processes. Prior information on events is in itself important for causing subsequent developments, and experience stemming from similar events is used even if just to show players where a political process should or should not lead. One can say that this kind of transition is bound to succeed if the key players are in a position to act decisively. When King Juan Carlos was able to ditch Arias Navarro and replace him with Adolfo Suárez, this is possibly a kind of willed or desired transition in which the players trigger the events. The Spanish transition thus falls into this category, regardless of whether everyone knew of the king's intentions. The Hungarian transition went better.

In both cases, the structural failures of the regime that is to be replaced connect with the sociological demands of society and its cultural and technological means in order to demand a different kind social and political structuring of life and the creation of well-being. Whether or not this method is new depends precisely on the kind of political and social agents that control the process at key levels.

For this reason one can distinguish a third kind of transition half-way between those of the events-that-happen nature and the events-that-are-caused-to-happen kind. In this other form of transition, events as well as players can generate and unleash a chain of events and processes that are

uncontrollable and uncontrolled, for a variety of reasons which we will not discuss here. The Romanian transition qualifies perfectly. But the classic one is the transition in what was the Soviet Union. A rationalised personality, Mikhail Gorbachev, unleashed a process without evaluating all the information and was overtaken by events. Paradoxically, Gorbachev emulated Kerensky, both for cultural reasons and reasons of experience, even though he could have averted this had he read the history of his own country. So the transition that he triggered produced a different, albeit not new, kind of social and political realignment of life. At the time, this change was exclusively Russian.

Thus, the paradigm of the clock being at 10 minutes to 10 is so important for Cuba. How can we Cubans marry knowledge of earlier transition periods with our specific realities? Where does a self-fuelling transition head if the players do not become aware of the course of events and the dynamics of sociological processes, which teleologically we call the sense of history, and act appropriately to get on the *bandwagon of history*? Of what use is it to repeat historical cycles that make no sense because they are not connected with the demands of society? What role can we alternative forces play from the point of view of politics, knowledge or culture so that the transition will succeed? Where are we really in 2008? These and others are the questions we Cubans must ask ourselves now that our 'solitary wave' has begun and is moving toward what we hope will be democracy.

Indeed, we can call the transition that is beginning in Cuba the 'solitary wave'. This means that Cuba, with new prospects, sees in itself the need for change: a change that must be democratic because this is the only way to complete the Cuban nation. Here, I would like to make an important distinction: in the case of central Europe, it was an issue of countries that were being reborn. In the case of Cuba, it is about the need to and possibility of *being* a nation. So in addition to its modernising effects, here democracy has a strategically cultural and national-security value that it may not have had in other countries. In many of them it took on a moral and historical value, such as in the former Czechoslovakia. I am not trying to say that establishing democracy in Cuba does not stem from a moral necessity, just like in any other place. I am only trying to say that, amid all the variables that are gathering momentum in favour of Cuba, the moral one is not the most relevant: the heartfelt need that is expressed in major movements to the effect that an unbearable situation must change.

Why is Cuba's Wave of Democratisation so Solitary?

First reason: around the world there are few countries left these days that still lack democracy in the terms defined by successive waves of global democratisation: representatives of different political persuasions who compete peacefully for political power. The terms are a symbolic vacuum in the political centre as a prior requirement for competing for power (Lefort), division of powers (Montesquieu), fundamental freedoms for individuals to take part in civil society (Habermas), and redistribution of well-being and wealth through criteria of social justice (Laclau and Mouffe). North Korea, China, Myanmar, Singapore and Vietnam are the countries of Asia that still lack democracy; Sudan in North Africa, plus most of the countries of the Middle East. Most are not basically central and connected nations that must open up to democracy, even in an embryonic stage. So the continuum that democracy traces in geographic terms –in fact, solitary democratisation is a true historical birth– is broken doubly in this case for Cuba: geographically and culturally.

Second reason: the ideological context of democratisation is being discussed: the global impact of the debate has been weakened. Democracy has been established in most countries on the basis of issues such as free elections, democratic values, basic liberties, open markets and others that cornered the enemies of democracy in important areas of the world, at the peak of global democratisation. The Latin American context, in which the Cuban case is evolving, is particularly complicated for a pure democratic offensive because the continent's social expectations are challenging or playing down the value of many of those concepts. Many gauges of Latin American

affinity for the general values of democracy begin their diagnosis by saying: *democracy is still held in esteem in...* But even if democracy in Latin America has not lost followers, social values are broadening their spectrum within the population quickly and significantly, with indigenous peoples coming to the fore and tending to favour community-centred policies. This benefits the social perception that exists in Latin America with respect to Cuba and reduces pressure for democracy in civil society and governments in the respective countries.

Third reason: Cuba's odd status as the only country in the western hemisphere that lacks democracy plays more against the prospect of freedom coming to the island than in favour of it. As it is the straggler, the lack of democracy appears more as a moral issue in the continent than as a fundamental element for resolving the lack of economic integration or the geopolitical needs of the Latin American bloc. If Cuba were in the Andean zone, one could argue that it would not survive the next wave of capital movement which would essentially give rise to a healthy and dynamic MERCOSUR. To some extent this explains why the drive for democratisation in Cuba is based in Europe and not Latin America. The issues of *overseas image* do not work for Cuba the way they did work for Spain, Greece and Portugal when it came time to institute democracy. The European Economic Community provided a lure these countries to go democratic, just as the strengthened European Union did for the countries of central and eastern Europe. The plurality of integrating blocs that exist within the same geo-political and geo-cultural areas like Latin America and the Caribbean do not have the same role or importance for Cuba.

Fourth reason: unlike processes of democratisation in central and Eastern Europe, which were mutual and continuous among neighbouring countries, Cuba has a formidable anti-democratic defence for countries that wish to deny credibility to any democratising force: an external enemy that is the main geopolitical force on the world scene. It is said that nationalism is the best alibi of authoritarian regimes to *fundamentalise* their model; in other words, remove all common foundations from the diversity of political alternatives within a given state sphere. And it is true. The only thing is, the foreign enemy, in a period of pacification of international relations among countries with clearly defined geographical limits, is too diffuse an element to use as a pretext to mobilise an anti-democratic movement.

It is true that democracies tend not to wage war with each other, but it is also true that two neighbouring states with clearly defined borders are not more prone to fight just because one is a dictatorship and the other is a democracy. In fact, Palestine and Israel, formally two democracies, are at war with each other. This was not the case between Finland and the former Soviet Union; that was considered a bilateral conflict. The theory of toying with nationalism can help do away with dictatorships (Argentina).

In and of itself, nationalism is not a sufficient explanation for the *nationalist uses* of the anti-democratic discourse of the Cuban government. The way I see it, the fact that the United States' political practices *urbi et orbi* combine with its prominent role in the drive for democracy in Cuba almost paralyzes and poisons diplomacy on and outside the continent when it comes to stimulating Cuba policies to this end. It is for this reason that the government uses all the moral tools of diplomacy to curb a player like the European Union, which has shown a basically moral interest in the democratisation of Cuba. So diplomatic formulas that were tried out elsewhere have very specific rules for more or less common processes toward Cuba that have been difficult to activate. This makes Cuba stand out because it makes it harder to come up with a new kind of diplomacy. I will elaborate on this point later.

Fifth and final reason: bringing democracy to Cuba requires a careful deactivation of a forced identity: nation and revolution. The links between one and the other also explain the delay in democracy's arrival in Cuba. None of the anti-democratic forces in the third wave transitions was able to exploit such an identity in positive terms, not just as a recourse against external enemies,

either alleged or real. The fact that the basic perception of the majority of the Cuban people *nationalises* their social gains and *socialises* their national identity something specific to, albeit not exclusive of, the Cuban reality. It is also at the core of two apparently contradictory factors: on one hand, what Raymond Aron labelled the *Spanish complex* to refer to the panic that Spain's political elite felt over the loss of the country's colonies in the 19th century: for that class of people, such a loss was tantamount to the loss of Spain itself, in their conception of an empire as a nation with its provinces. In the case of Cuba it could read like this: the possible loss of a social conquest would mean the loss of an entire nation. On the other hand, and linked with this tough vision of the Cuban nation, a strong emigré community, as measured by the migratory standards of the late 20th century, is 'lost' because it cannot return freely to the country. To a large extent this community disconnects from national values, be it through the easy post-modern idea that Cuba's system makes no sense in an era of globalisation, or through the more hard-line way of writing off its historical symbols.

The long time it is taking to establish a process of democratisation in Cuba is thus stirring a 'solitary wave' in a turbulent sea for reasons other than demands for free participation and different alternatives in state affairs: ecological concerns, terrorism, financial problems and adjustments to economic plans overshadow demands for democratisation in Cuba.

Between midnight of 25 April, 1974 –the Revolution of the Carnations in Portugal– and midnight of 9 November, 1989 –the fall of the Berlin Wall– 15 years transpired. From 1989 to the evening of 31 July, 2006 –the *abdication* of Fidel Castro in favour of his brother Raúl– 17 years passed. During those first 15 years, the world witnessed what Samuel Huntington called the third wave of democratisation, from a historical and global point of view. In the other 17-year period we did not see any substantial democratisation process in residual dictatorships or totalitarian regimes in which demands for democracy were solid. Rather, in this period, anti-democratic reform processes began in places where tensions to this effect were quite visible: in Myanmar, China, Sudan, and Nigeria, the anti-democratic reaction by the regime or sectors of the ruling elite prevailed. This can be considered the third counter-reform wave, although peripheral to the previous process.

The third wave of democratisation began by sweeping away authoritarian models and ended by liquidating totalitarian ones. In the case of the former, it began in the periphery of countries that were decisive in economic and political terms. In the case of the anti-totalitarian drive, which was the second segment, it began in the nerve centre, ie, the former Soviet Union, and ended up on its periphery. The democratic changes wiped out, culturally and ideologically speaking, all the pillars of regimes based on anti-democratic political values. This caused those who opposed change to go on the defensive and try to exalt the past. The best example of this camp is Lee Kwang Yew in Singapore.

Why did Cuba miss out on the third wave? Let us situate it. During the first segment of the wave, Cuba, which shares fundamental factors with authoritarian-type regimes, was protected by the 'democratic values' that emanated from the ideological circuit of *real socialism*, to which it belonged –which involved stabilising resources– by its status as a third world myth and its nationalist definition with respect to the US. This is four-layer protection that few countries in the world have or have had. During the second part of the wave, however, Cuba, which features the institutional structure of totalitarian regimes that have failed, protected itself with social values that authoritarian regimes do not create, and again with its nationalist dimension with respect to the same enemy: at this point the armour loses one layer but is still strong enough to resist the wave of democratisation. Joining a social agenda and a political agenda in the same process provides a powerful survival tool which in and of itself is capable of creating *ex novo* models. In a comparison that takes things to the limit but is still instructive, it is as if the Nasser regime were reborn at any time between 1986 and 1990, with its mythical status intact, although slightly on the decline. Of course, this survival highlights the authoritarian features that the Cuban regime shared from the

outset with the regimes that were swept away in the first part of Huntington's third wave. And this will have consequences for the kind of transition towards democracy that Cuba experiences, a shift which began officially in the evening of 31 July, 2006.

When and how does one verify the transfer of legitimacy in Cuba? In 1986 and, in what is a fourth paradox, with an anti-reform speech in terms of the *socialist aggiornamento* that Gorbachev sought in the former Soviet Union. This made Cuba the unperceived initiator of the third wave of opposition to democratic reforms in the 1980s.

What China did with the repression of the Tiananmen Square uprising in 1989 and generals did in Burma a year earlier, the Cuban government achieved pre-emptively with a speech entitled *Rectifying Errors and Negative Tendencies*. It was delivered by Fidel Castro in 1986 at the Karl Marx Theatre in Havana. This address, which aimed to defend *real socialism* as opposed to *renewable socialism*, launched a new regime with a clear authoritarian slant but based on social and national issues.

Thus began a new legitimacy for the Cuban government, which from then on shed any organic relationship with the communist vision. At that point, the ideology of real socialism took on a clear and strictly instrumental relationship with regard to power and this confused many people who observe events in Cuba. This phenomenon is seen clearly in the symbolic replacement –I do not mean abandonment– of Karl Marx with José Martí, a founding father of Cuban nationalism, and in the 'defence of socialism' with the semiotic structure of many kinds of nationalism. Whereas before we would hear the epic nationalist battle cry of 'fatherland or death', from then on we would hear a different one but with the same structure: 'socialism or death'. It is a contradiction in terms from the point of view of any emancipating ideology.

The masking, behind the palimpsest of the communist account, guaranteed a change in the legitimacy of power with a smooth political shift from totalitarianism to authoritarianism. Rather than weaken the regime, this boosted it with a new legitimacy rooted in something that was missing: the convening of institutions that provided ideological legitimacy –the party and the communist youth league– at a time of global redefinition of relations between society and State. This thwarted the possibilities of a democratic transition in Cuba by protecting not the old Marxist state but the new authoritarian one. It was a way of skirting democracy by obviating the need, for instance, for Yugoslav-style self management –in theory the most advanced of any in the socialist camp – and choosing the path of a Francisco Franco strengthened with institutional structures inherited from the previous regime, which continues to cohabitate in the Cuban revolution's perfect ideological and institutional scheme.

This is how Cuba dodged the third wave: with late-blooming authoritarianism. Indeed, it was more than late-blooming. It only resolved right then the tense dictator-institution relationship that had existed in Cuba since 1959, and the winner was the dictator.

The role bordering on leadership that the Cuban government played in the third wave of opposition to democratic reforms gained strength to the extent that its authoritarian model did. One reflection of this overseas is its tightening of relations with regimes of similar ilk. Defining new relations with Iran, Pakistan, Zimbabwe and Sudan may sound outrageous from the Marxist or democratic point of view. But it is not from the perspective of authoritarian regimes which need global *entente* as a self-defence mechanism.

Domestically, the new model of opposition to democratic reforms facilitated what might be seen as legitimate in terms of the orthodoxy of real socialism; in other words, conditions for liberalisation first and democratisation later: foreign investment, dollarisation of the economy, fledgling social capitalism, openness to Western tourism, flexibility of cultural models, a new structure of inequality

based on closeness to sources of money and not just models of epic sacrifice, meritocracy and privilege –with which Cuba begins its process of *Latin Americanisation*–.

It also opens the way to pluralism in religious beliefs, the progressive weakening of social organisations –Revolutionary Defence Committees (CDR), the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC)– and a strengthening of the display effects of the first world, which will bring an irreversible sociological consequence, even for sustaining the same authoritarian model that allows itself this forced opening: Cubans thinking of themselves as a middle-class society. This is seen in the cultural identity symbols that Cubans embrace when they can and often cannot: cellular phones, DVDs and all the latest technological gadgets. This is a belated and consumption-centred affirmation of the island’s Western nature, and a coup de grace to the ideological foundations of the Cuban communist party.

Indeed, this is not convened from above, and cannot discuss with those down below in the decisive decade: the 1990s, when everything changed, even for the Cuba that was closing. Its last congress, in 1991, was one of paralysis in the circulation of ideas and the last of the communist era. Debate on Marxism and Marxist-Leninist ideas begins to be like that of any Western society: a chamber debate, increasingly comprehensible for small groups of insiders.

Consider another paradox. If real socialism brought about extensive modernisation in social areas that are critical for a post-modern society, such as education and health care, the new authoritarianism with identical players that is introduced in 1986 opened up modernisation in the economic, cultural and religious realms –with their influx of fragmentation for Cuban society– in a way that few observers expected. New kinds of racism, an explosion of homosexuality, gaping differences between rural and urban life, urban redistribution of social inequality and inequality based on ethnic origins and the phenomenon of violence are the consequences of modernisation of authoritarianism. It is as if Cuba could only structure social justice and creation of well-being through a hard-line exercise of power. This is one of the cultural failings –it has a major role in social structure– that we Cubans have to resolve in the possible transition: the lack of agreement between domination structures that are couched in ideology but inherited from the colony and the emergence of a post-modern society rendered chaotic by the absence of supra-structural and social channels that provide an outlet for it.

In this way Cuba began its ‘solitary wave’ on 31 July, 2006. Seventeen years on, its connections are no longer with the models of real socialism, turning instead to authoritarian models. Thirty-two years after the start of the third wave, it is closer to Spain or Portugal than it is to Poland or Hungary.

In the 1990s it was difficult to perceive this transition from totalitarianism to authoritarianism. Among other things because perceiving the tendencies of a transition that is being lived requires a certain detachment and this carries with it the difficulties of the *history of the present* in the style of Timothy Garton Ash, and lots of debate on the experiences that have been accumulated. Another cause of this difficulty is the response that the government made to the explosion of dissidence against it: the deployment of political police and jailing people for any attempt at organising an alternative to the government line. In another direction, the perception of the transition is hampered because the constitution guarantees an ideological State, recognising the communist party explicitly and exclusively as the only political organisation with rights. To this one should add that, with the exception of very fledgling pro-market reforms, the State has maintained tight control over the economy. Finally, another problem is a too-literal attachment to the rhetoric of power.

However, the transition happened in an unexpected way. In each of these areas, that process is visible: an intensification of anti-Castro rhetoric reflects the fact that discourse based on the fundamentals of anti-communism missed a political reality that boasted all possible variables for

the guaranteeing the survival of its logic of power. How can one finger a regime that introduces the dollar in the economy and opens up to capitalism, contradicting its own socialist rhetoric?

Exactly the same thing is happening to dissidents. Before, the regime tried to project a social truth that was the ideological underpinning for punishing 'enemy propaganda'. But now the government is moving more and more toward using reasons of State to justify jailing its opponents and displaying its powers of coercion to dissolve any meeting of three or more people. In terms of the Stalinist penal code, it was not necessary to pass the Law on Protecting Cuba's National Independence and Economy –Law 88 of February 1999, also known as the Gag Law–, which tries to do away with the opposition by resorting to the idea of protecting national security.

As for the constitution and its recognition of the communist party as the sole political force to run Cuban society, one can pose the question of to what extent does the real nation of authoritarianism respect the legal nation of State institutions? The participation of ideological institutions in the sociological mutation of the 1990s is equivalent to the political density of the General States in the France of Louis XIV: almost none at all.

Granted, the Cuban communist party has always been strong in inland provinces, but this stems from the political weakness of the other institution that represents the State: the National Assembly. This prepares the communist party for its new political identity: being a party like Mexico's PRI which defends specific interests, although more steeped in ideology, and strong in the *hinterlands*. This guarantees control of circular mobility in a typical Cuban province, while the party is weaker in the capital Havana, where modern life is lived to the fullest, with all its many facets.

It is in its control over the economy where Cuba is closest to a totalitarian state. But here one must keep in mind that large state-run companies, both industrial and agricultural, behave more like places to exert political control over workers than sources of productivity and well-being for society, and workers in particular. A Soviet-era saying –'we pretend to work and they pretend to pay us'– is the reality in Cuba as the State moves more clearly toward authoritarian forms of rule. This economic irrelevance paves the way for the elimination of the proletarian nature of work in Cuba.

As seen in studies by Carmelo Mesa Lagos and other economists, Cuba is starting to depend more and more on tourism, tobacco, nickel mining and medical services than on its own traditional industries. In the former, the abstractness of work and the product, modern management and professional ability matter more than material labour (nickel mining is the exception), full employment and the Che Guevara work ethic. This helps us understand why the government, in its authoritarian phase, prefers to let major industries collapse –the decline of the sugar-production industry is the best example– rather than reform them to make them productive. The source of tension, thus, is how not to lose control of the nascent services industry, which is forcing the State to have a more rational view of the economy. Certainly this tension will be one of the last to be resolved in the Cuban transition.

Meanwhile, the growth of the informal economy reintroduces to some extent the market economy in a frontier kind of way. It is a market economy that is typically mercantilist, according to the logic learned from the State in its dealings with the market, investors and the financial world. It is based on monopoly control of prices and not on reducing production costs. The State and the new forces of the informal market economy need money over the short term, not the productivity and low costs that are the result of investment, technology and competitive markets. All this yields money over the long term and involves liberalisation of labour. The most important change that this informal market causes in society is to connect most Cubans with the middle-class mentality and placing the State and society on steadily divergent paths.

The government is trying to control this with rhetoric. The value of discourse – words spoken with a political meaning – take on capital importance in this new authoritarian phase. Cuba has always had this. The Cuban revolution can be conceived as a phenomenon of words controlling social will. But there is an important distinction to be made between revolutionary and authoritarian kinds of discourse. The former mobilises people through conviction in order to harness their will and move it toward a purpose that *does not exist* and has to be built. For this reason revolutionary speech is lyrical, and romanticises things to keep people enthusiastic all the time and getting up in the morning with the same eagerness to undertake *new tasks*. This discourse ends when you try to justify it. As Jürgen Habermas said, it is the moment of ‘exhaustion of utopian energies’³ of a society. It is here where authoritarian discourse enters. Its job is not to persuade but to justify and instil fear. It is threatening in tone and defensive, and seeks to explain why purpose *no longer exists*. We thus understand how authoritarian speech grabs hold: not because it convinces people but because it transfers blame and punishes sceptics.

What does this new authoritarian discourse do? It clings to traditional words of mental, social and political control, all of which have to do with socialist and nationalist signifiers. This creates the counter-language of authoritarianism, which involves doing the opposite of that which one says but which is essential to do in order to guarantee that power remains among the same elite class.

In Cuba, adjusting language to suit events is a bogus move and can be costly to the government. And this counter-language misleads people. It is a counter-language with no fixed terms, which is the only way to suspend collective psycho-social security in order to thwart the actions of citizens. In this way, transferred to another phase, the counter-language of authoritarianism survives as the counter-language of the transition and becomes the *revolutionary* appropriation of the *counter-revolutionary* discourse in order to maintain a nominal dichotomy that allows the regime to stay in power while it transforms society and tries to liquidate its adversaries. This political schizophrenia has its moral equivalent in the cynicism that Peter Sloterdijk tells us about. Leszek Koulakowski had expressed irony and described this very well with his Infinite Cornucopia law, under which ‘there is never a shortage of arguments to back up any doctrine in which one wants to believe for any old reason’.⁴

So for 20 years, from 1986 to 2006, Cuba was in what I call a context in transition. Starting in 2006, it entered the transition zone. Seen from reality, the context in transition is an overall process that takes in most social sectors and lets them express their interests, aspirations and needs, although not always explicitly. This, in today’s Cuba, the category ‘pueblo’ is just a way of indicating a cultural and historic belonging to a specific way of being. In the present, there is no other way of getting close to sociological reality other than through the specificity of social categories.

In the socioeconomic field these categories are present. They can represent certain forces of change, some conscious of this and others not:

- The neo-bourgeoisie made up of economic sectors linked mainly to foreign capital. Forged inside the political *nomenklatura*, this category is visible in sectors like tourism, the computer and communications industry and some marketing companies; it is less visible in smaller industries such as electronics and light manufacturing. It is more interested in pressing ahead with modernisation than reversing a highly favourable process.
- The ministerial bureaucracy of those sectors also linked to foreign investments. Here, the process of bureaucratic modernisation and the link with the outside world has created better conditions and allowed for rationalisation based on knowledge and ability. This is not only beneficial but also attractive for those involved.

³ Habermas (1997), p. 145.

⁴ Quotes by Garton Ash (2000), p. 190.

- The managerial sector –the term itself suggests a change in mentality– closely associated with the Western style of administration and with very specific interests in living standards and its own private world. For this sector, the transition is something that is practical and can be verified, not something theoretical.
- Small, fledgling businesses run by individuals, including so-called self-employment and private farmers. These can be classified as new socio-economic forces. In the case of private farmers it is because they have a significant role in agricultural production even though they use less 15% of Cuba's arable land. And with so-called self-employed workers it is because despite the many restrictions and high taxes imposed on them by the State, they have created a major network that offers services that are qualitatively better than those provided by the state network. These sectors are seeking a deepening of the transformations that let them participate in the economic process with greater efficiency, guarantees and prosperity.
- Other sectors linked to agriculture. The ones that stand out are mainly those involved in growing tobacco, coffee and cacao. Their current dynamism has a lot to do with the stimuli inherent in the market and with more autonomous techniques of organisation and management. Thus, they link their fate to interests and modernisation. The same thing happens with the Basic Units of Cooperative Production (UBPC in Spanish) and Agricultural Production Cooperatives (CPA). They are now driven to make changes that will lead to greater self-management and participation.
- The Armed Forces, which enter civil and economic life by undertaking management and production techniques that are less orthodox. This is important for the transition for two reasons: first, because it raises the possibility of preparing military people for civilian life and second because it rationalises and professionalises a hyped-up sector by adjusting it to the real capacities of the economy.
- Workers in the state-run sector. They are the ones most affected by an incomplete modernisation which divides their companies on the basis of whether or not they work with foreign investors. Although a swift process of modernisation could lead to massive unemployment, incomplete modernisation is creating severe inequality and technological disparity that keep many workers from enjoying well-being, whatever its magnitude may be, and the economy. These workers have a twin interest in seeing a deepening of economic reforms: it would lessen the gap between those who take part in modernisation and those who do not, and they would receive the fruit of their work directly and with it higher living standards for their families.
- Segments of the population associated with the informal economy. They express the primary economic needs of a true civil society.
- The intellectual and professional sector. Both participate in knowledge and the production of knowledge and ideas, and in both the need and demand for modernisation is present. The visible crisis in these two sectors is clear, and manifests itself in two ways: a crisis of growth that seeks access to plurality, multiplicity and diversity of knowledge, and a crisis of identity that entails the abandonment of professions that do not provide sufficient material or intellectual satisfaction. Those who have found a permanent link with the outside world struggle to make their lives intellectually diverse and useful, or do not manage this at all. This explains the brain-drain toward more promising areas. For these sectors the transition stems from their need for knowledge and outlets for expression.

- Young people. These are the ones who best express needs and demands for modernisation from a generational standpoint. Their generic crisis in values should also be viewed as a crisis involving inability to adapt to certain values that lack meaning or whose meaning has been gutted by older people. Regardless of their ideology or ideologies in general, young people want to join the outside world; above all this fuels a culture of escape and consumption and breaking with values. And this does not always benefit social life.

This context in transition, described schematically, now enters the zone of transition, to which one arrives when the regime adjusts its policies to suit the sociological dynamics of the country. When the transition is complete, there is full correspondence between the nature of political decisions and the ideological dynamics of society itself.

There was a political moment prior to the *abdication* of Fidel Castro that was important as a negative launching point for the island to reach this transition zone: a speech by Castro at the University of Havana in 2005 on corruption and the possibility that it might destroy what he still sees as a revolutionary process. It was a roundabout way of recognising that Cuban society essentially lives on the sidelines of institutions and the law, and that this existential life is not just a mere survival technique but also a cultural lifestyle. They are not the same thing.

To continue in this vein, Castro's comments acknowledged that the Cuban people have created a counter-society within the revolution and this threatens to destroy it, fulfilling Oakshott's maxim. This British political thinker said 'trying to do something that is intrinsically impossible is a corrupting undertaking'.⁵ And the response to this discourse changes the sign of the times for Cuba. What is proposed from the seat of overall ideological power in which that 'revolution' makes sense is a modernising transformation which 'preserves' it in the course of its own utopia. The fact that this proposal came from abroad through a guru of the radical left, the German Hans Dietrich, based in Mexico, is a mere detail that only reveals that the *intelligentsia* on the island is, in an expression attributed to Voltaire, *capable of risking everything, except life*. It is an expression of the sociology of fear that is intrinsic to living or inertial totalitarianisms.

For the entry of Cuba in the transition zone, I feel it is important to consider this indirect dialogue within the ideological realm of the regime, given the linguistic loans which Marxist ideology made to the structuring of the Cuban government. This allows for eliminating, and here I once again quote Oakshott, 'the conflict between moral ideals (within society) so that political discourse becomes demonstrative'.⁶ This premise is essential for normalising politics as a pluralist realm.

When Fidel Castro, on 31 July 2006, began to ease his public exercise of power, all he did was give way to a process of transition, the context in transition that we discussed earlier, which had been emerging in a contradictory and corrupt way in society itself. He himself hinted at the entry of Cuba in the transition zone, and his brother Raúl, who received the baton with the mission of transforming the revolutionary elite into the new Cuban conservative class –it is tempting to compare this phenomenon with the origin of many monarchies– formally strengthens the transition under way with his speech on 'structural changes' on 26 July, 2007: a fundamental political address in a highly symbolic moment.

Any transfer of power leaves a deep mark on the way a society in need of change is going to proceed in the future. Due to the way it happened here, we could begin to call Cuba's case an evolving transition in which the historical crisis is resolved through a political crisis of rupture. This style allows Cuba to begin to resolve, in a natural way, a cultural problem regarding the nature of the exercise of power, which now assures the political transition, although not in its early phases.

⁵ Oakshott (2000), p. 135.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

With Raúl Castro the regime begins to take on an ethnic mix and become *mestizo*-style, whereas with Fidel Castro, in 1959, the Cuban revolution recovered the basic style of colonial power. This is normal given the origin and training of the Cuban elite in the first 40 years of the 20th century. As late as 1919, 30% of the population of Havana was of Spanish origin,⁷ an interesting figure that strengthens this tendency in the rest of the island.

The fundamental structure of colonial power combines several elements: order seen as something vertical; social corporatism which connects all of society in a system of orders centring on the regime; illuminated mysticism, which de-rationalises political decisions; the idea of the government as being provident, which does not allow for discussion of the decisions emanating from it; strong rejection, almost scorn, for the economy and trade; and old-style class narcissism, with its concepts of struggle, military heroism and grandiosity of domain, with view with disdain that which is civic and intellectual, considering part of the feminisation of society. In that sense the Cuban revolution cut off the *nationalisation* of politics, in its cultural sense, which had been verified in the first years of our republican life and was essentially frustrated by corruption, structurally and historically, by the absence of a nationalist bourgeoisie. Thus emerges another paradox that is invisible in social and nationalist rhetoric: the Cuban revolution survives because it turns Spanish-style in the old sense of the word. This is something that is still quite visible in Cuba in the habits of another elite class, the Roman Catholic Church.

Having Raúl Castro in power opens up the possibility of resuming the *mestizo* path of Cuban politics and thus complete the circle with its Cubanisation; in other words, bringing other kinds of people and their culture, mainly blacks, and what they can contribute to a political word that would finally be truly Cuban: tolerance. This is an excellent subject for political anthropology and, along with a historical analysis of the concept of revolution in Cuba, a group of us Cuban intellectuals are studying it.

For the purposes of this analysis, this *transition in the policy at the top* is fundamental for the political transition in society and the reworking of the nation through the many-faceted roots of its cultural foundations. This is no small change for the evolution of democracy in Cuba. Everything else depends on it.

The initial steps in the transition zone seek to get more or less in line with the dynamics of the previous context in transition. In this sense, Raúl Castro is lagging pretty far behind society. But in his favour, seen from the mentality of the regime, he deserves credit for interpreting social trends and suspending the permanent dialogue of the ‘revolution’ with history and instead making timid stops towards dialogue with society.

For this reason, even though it may seem superficial in terms of serious strategy, the market-opening reforms that the government has undertaken can be read in three ways: to no longer prohibit that which people will find a way to do anyway undermines a structure of corruption, which was fuelled by a society based on privileges; second, the reforms start to sever an old relationship between State and society that ‘justified’ pre-modern prohibitions. It is as if the Cuban revolution had not read the comment by Schumpeter to the effect that the superiority of capitalist over medieval society rested on the fact that, whereas in the latter stockings were only made for queens, in the former they were also made for working women. Thirdly, the reforms assure a degree of social calm because they address Cuban people’s consumer mentality –in this they are no different from people in the first world– even if this means *de facto* recognition that Cuban society has little stomach for the revolutionary ethics of sacrifice, austerity and ability to put off self-gratification. To paraphrase a line from the analyst Gottfried Benn, in Cuba the idea to start off is to play dumb and have a couple of artefacts. That is happiness.⁸

⁷ Segre (2003), p. 77.

⁸ Sloterdijk (2003), p. 75.

Thus, the transition begins not with an ideological debate but with concrete measures that focus on everyday life. In strategic terms, this is the not ideal way to start a transition because it does not clarify or reveal the concepts under which society will be governed. But for a society that is saturated with ideology, it is a tactical measure. People in Cuba, even those who participate in the regime, are wary of the value of words. So these changes are a psychological breath of fresh air for everyday citizens. It is not important whether people now have things they did not have before, but rather that they feel they have the possibility of getting them. It is all about *politics*, not *policy*. The idea is liberation, rather than strategy.

The transition of power toward society, not to society, begins by being political. Timothy Garton Ash, in *History of the Present*, raises an interesting idea about what policy can achieve in societies in flux. The idea is best expressed with questions: ‘when is there openness to the future?’ The answer: ‘when the possibility of surprise is evident’.⁹ And where does the possibility of surprise lie in Cuba starting in 2006? In the unknowns that the regime raises with its handling of the economy.

This is not an area in which I am an expert. However, I would like to say that once Cuba begins slight reforms of its policy on land, surprise is possible and the political transition in Cuba will have begun. Here, the slightest economic liberalisation is a political step because it is not an issue of the regime’s economic policies but rather its political economy. And to be certain, the step is what is shaping up as a third, undeclared agrarian reform, 47 years after the second and last one. Far from helping farmers, it just made the State more powerful. Now, the economic restructuring that Cuba needs is so deep that my remarks only serve to indicate what the reforms mean for the political restructuring of the country, connected with possibilities of truly democratic transition.

Redistributing land has a profound impact on the liquidation of the *latifundista* arrangement in Cuba and the wearing-out of the agrarian mentality that that provides land to vertical powers. To link land to productivity –with its powerful effect on the sense of ownership– is to connect agriculture with technology, markets, the service economy, the pluralisation of farm communities, the softening of their co-habitation and soft power in the exercise of politics. This is all facilitated by the powerful technologies that would easily engulf an island, actually an archipelago, like Cuba. The guarantee of democratisation, its irreversibility as a trend, lies in this process that is beginning to be seen in Cuban society. The sociological basis of totalitarianism lies in the kind of individual it creates with regard to the State. But the basis of authoritarianism is not in the cities, but rather in the traditional structure of the countryside, once urban dwellers have turned their backs on the regime through hedonistic escape and the secret enjoyment of that which is banned.

If, as I believe, the true test of the transition lies in what will happen with agricultural reform, the question that begs to be answered is this: what is the sociological dimension of Cuban society and how is the regime responding to its challenges?

In 2006, the government awoke from its mythical journey through the revolution and found itself with a society that was changed and changing. The official Cuba of speeches is the real Cuba of actual society. The lack of equivalence is as symmetric as the gap between the country on paper and the country as it actually is.

The revolutionary individual is dying out through the *Mexicanisation* of his relations with the regime: for him there is no more ideological creed, just issues of how to stay employed and certain kinds of access to well-being that follow the path of the old granted privileges. The political citizen appears only when he is convened in the town square or turns out to vote. The economic individual splits between the paternalist illusion of the State and the black market offering just about everything. The cultural individual is fragmented among several models and references but they

⁹ Garton Ash (2000), p. 45.

have little to do with the references created by the cultural production coming out of the State. The array of religions, beliefs, philosophies and ways of thinking of the Cuban people is so varied that it causes many to think of Cuba as a cultural tower of Babel, with people who communicate only through a common language and deep identities stemming from a common liking of baseball, dominoes, humour and sociability.

The moral individual gets lost in the ‘second level of rules’¹⁰ (double standard) which encourages a cynical society-society and State-society relationship. Also, among those who have nothing to lose because they have nothing, it resurrects the old-style joking and satirical behaviour inherent in Cuban culture. This might suggest demoralisation, but in reality it reflects the vigour of a society that mocks rigidity steeped in ideology and conquers, or re-conquers, pragmatism. To be exact, it elevates it as a positive value.

Cuban society is thus a pragmatic one that has just received a big shock in the form of hopes for modernisation, which are pressing the State in the direction of openness.

How does the State respond to this new society? By entering and leaving the transition zone at the same time. The government of Raúl Castro – and we are now talking in a political dimension – opens up the field of modern offers and certain individual rights. It is a dynamic of recovery measures that destroy proletarian rights, homogenise the Cuban people and begin to make them like the rest of the world’s citizens. Redesigning the Cuban citizen as one focusing on consumption wipes away the idea of Cubans as revolutionaries and boosts their needs for social, labour and physical mobility. One must not forget that the *voice and exit* dilemma raised by Albert O. Hirschmann has always been resolved in Cuba in favour of the latter. Physical mobility is there deeply embedded in Cuban culture as a survival strategy. It is enhanced by rising expectations.

But the government of Raúl Castro leaves the transition zone when we talk about the strictly political field. If we compare his political strategy with that of Fidel Castro we detect important progress. There is a movement from *caudillismo* to institutionality which is beneficial for the rationality of political decisions. Raúl plays an inevitable role but is not interested in monarchy. He is betting on institutionality and is trying to restore it. But he is not doing it through representative and elective institutions of the State which would link it more closely to society. Rather, he is doing it through selective institutions of the regime which link it with a hegemonic aim that does not correspond with the social remake of society. In an era in which being expelled from the party no longer means getting expelled from town, how can one justify domination by a minority? Does it make any sense to put a communist party at the centre of decision-making for the first time when it lacks ideological tools to contain the overflowing of a society that is more and more plural, post-modern, pragmatic and unbelieving like Cuban society. Where is this late restoration of the single party headed?

Raúl Castro begins where the countries of central Europe left off, in the hope of guiding revolutionary power’s need for institutionalisation. With this it seems to be attempting a double process of reanimation that will not find an answer in society: reanimating the role of revolutionary utopia and reanimating the tools for disciplinary control of a political party that has lost ideology.

Such a purpose creates political tension which, at the end of the process, enters into contradiction with the need for reforms and will only be resolved with the ‘PRI-isation’ of the communist party: control of power and interests and more granting of benefits to those who are loyal. This encounter between open sociology and closed institutionality ‘PRI-ises’ the communist party in post-authoritarianism. In this regard, if Fidel Castro is more or less comparable to Franco, then Raúl Castro, who is neither Andropov nor Gorbachev, is comparable to Miguel de la Madrid. Who will

¹⁰ Sloterdijk (2003), p. 295.

be his Carlos Salinas de Gortari? The question cannot be answered. Authoritarianism allowed Cuba to return to its Western roots and makes unthinkable a socially hegemonic recovery of communist discourse.

Tension between institutionalisation through the party of the Constitution, the need for structural reforms and a post-communist society jeopardise prospects for completing the Cuban nation. However, it responds to the need for political control of the transition and not restructuring society on Marxist pillars.

Here the counter-language of the transition appears once again. In his day, W. Sombart counted more than 130 variations of socialism. To state, as is done constantly, from an area of transition in which Cuba finds itself, that socialism is the *telos* of a political process that is necessarily open to the future, would lead us to version number 250 of the possible forms of socialism.

There is no Cuban path to socialism. The Cuban path means acknowledgement that the elite class is making a mental return to our western identity. The return to our identity causes the reappearance of pluralism invigorated by authoritarianism based on individuals. And if pluralism reappears, one of two things happens: either party-based authoritarianism is reproduced or plurality is incorporated in the elective institutions of the State, due to the impossibility of finding representation in the selective institutions. So Raúl Castro would end up reproducing the authoritarian structures from which he in theory is trying to separate himself with a permanent call to institutionality. He would also be reproducing the repressive structures that segregate society.

This would paralyze reforms, weaken the new social structure and gut both the communist party and the new harmony that is precariously taking shape. Trying to carry out reforms amid the narrow channels of the revolutionary mindset and the structures of the communist party would reproduce the State-society divorce that appeared so clearly on 31 July, 2006. Is there another Raúl Castro in the line of succession? Does he have all the time he needs to right the many crises of Cuban society?

The need for deep reforms makes it impossible to conceive of compatibility between the kind of institutionalising aim and the presumed results of staggered reforms that would make Cuban society more complex.

My hypothesis in this regard is that of institutionalisation through the communist party but as a way of controlling the transition. Without reforms the institutional hegemony of the communist party cannot be sustained; even with reforms they cannot. This is a Catch-22 which can only be solved with openness to pluralism, in other words, openness to other expressions of the Cuban tradition which would allow for the completing of the nation: this means democratisation and completion of the transition in its ideological dimension.

However, without institutional control the reforms cannot succeed. With weakened charisma, the utopian discourse exhausted, aged historical leadership, with many structural shortcomings, a fragmented society, intellectuals who begin to move around and discuss their ideas, an economy in need of restructuring, contradictions that begin to emerge among the elite, endless corruption, a growing social divide, the pressure of accumulated expectations that take new shape with the recent liberalisation, without an overall strategy of a nation that looks to the past and projects itself with inclusive logic –which increases pressure on the government through the amount of demands it will have to contain– and in an era in which the global flow of communications dissolves many truths just 25 minutes after they are enunciated, one would have to be trapped in a state of deep political unawareness not to undertake transformations (Huntington) or reforms (Linz) as a mere tool of political self-preservation. But one would have to get too far away from Marx not to note that an uncontrolled process of reforms is tantamount to class suicide. The question is one of choosing

between the need for conservation and self-induced death. And the option is called controlled reforms.

For this the government has two alternatives: militarisation of society, or the merging of the State with the communist party (*partidización* in Spanish), not to ideology. The deepening of reforms weakens the counter-language. And it has chosen the latter because militarising society would be of a provisional nature only justifiable in cases of grave civil or external threats that jeopardise the stability of the regime. With no external threat, calling out the military would definitively erase the government's legitimacy, in a country in which the army has a more or less positive image, and in the face of an international community that could press harder for the political reforms that Cuba wants to delay or block.

The *partidización* of the State, after the path of *recaudillización* was shut down –I offer my apologies for the new word– guarantees a civil image, a sense that is more strategic and less provisional, an international normalisation of the government, which it is achieving, and also party discipline at a crucial time in which reforms cannot be avoided but must be controlled. And discipline is guaranteed, so that it cannot be achieved with political discourse by bringing together historic leaders and calling for respect of the organic life of a Leninist party and militarising its top ranks.

In any case, the *partidización* of the State sends a message of continuity that is facilitated by a peaceful transfer of power. For the first time in 50 years, this would allow the communist party to take on the role assigned to it by the revolution and stipulated in the Constitution. The idea of nothing changing so that at least some things can change is tempting for the regime and welcomed by a society with a middle class mentality. It wants deep transformations without upheaval.

So I do not think the State's conservative move, with the unthinkable aging of the government, is an anti-reform move. It means control of reforms, attaching a safe parachute to Cuban society. And this is the party which, after its congress announced for 2009, could be called the Institutional Communist Party.

The *partidización* of the State is also guaranteed by the particular correlation of forces within the political elite. The country that emerged on 31 July, 2006 has triggered a shock of common sense within the *nomenklatura*. For this reason, to speak of reformists and anti-reformists in the government does not make a lot of sense today in Cuba. There may be people in the government who are opposed to reforms, but this does not mean you can talk about an outright anti-reform sector in the administration. Among other reasons, this is because the reform process is backed by the number two man of the *revolution*, the man who controls the military. This is the sector that represents the only legitimate space for 'capitalism of followers' in Cuba –it is here that part of the government's secret strategy is apparently planned– capitalising *in a monarchical style* on part of Cuba's political figures. At the top of the decision-making process this man has co-opted those who control the army and the security forces, along with alleged reformists and anti-reformists.

In one sense this jeopardises the stability of the regime because it concentrates the country's institutionality in one person, weakening that same institutionality. But distributing power at a critical time can also threaten the process of institutionalisation with men and women who are nostalgic for the rule of Fidel Castro and have to make decisions. Institutionalisation takes place in Cuba itself, not in a laboratory.

Meanwhile, those who are second-in-command in the government lack power to fight for control of or significant influence over Cuban policy. They are neutralised among themselves and with regard to the powers that be. In circumstances like these, the natural tendency is to follow the rules of game theory; in other words, to calculate positions and control the emission of voice. In any case,

after Fidel Castro erased the leaderships of the most visible figures in the regime, it would require a deeper political transition in order to build a political image centring on a particular faction of the regime. To this end, a complete transition is necessary both for society and the political ambitions of part of the *nomenklatura* itself. In any case, this sector tends to see reforms as positive.

Be they transformations, reforms or administrative transition –in the sense that the policy of liberalisation does not follow a strategic discourse, but rather eliminates certain legal and habitual restrictions– there is a consensus in all of Cuban society in favour of change. There are no visible enemies of change. Although those in power do not tell us what the future will be like, they do tell us we are all in the same boat headed in the direction of reforms. This is positive because it places the whole country on the same path at a historic moment. This is a measure of the *criollización* of Cuban politics –I insist that political tensions in Cuba have a cultural origin which has generated dysfunctions that are concrete but also dramatically artificial– which guarantees the rule of practical policy over ideological gimmicks. Ideology will not stop working, so long as it passes the test of pragmatism.

So the questions are, what kind of transition? Where is it headed? What are its ideas and what is its pace? What forces make it possible, divert it, delay it or block it? These and other questions arise.

Earlier, I defined the context in transition. Now I propose the metaphor of an *image-society*, in self-propelled movement. This context enters the transition zone when the government understands that it must follow the same direction as this blurry sociological photograph. What is the overall context for this process under way for more than 30 years?

The Cuban government is in the midst of an unavoidable triad: traditional geopolitics, the geopolitics of values and the geopolitics of communications. The first is and has been stabilising. The other two are not.

The geopolitics of values has been hitting the coasts of Cuba for at least 30 years. This says that the legitimacy of States is based not just on international law, as it emerged after World War II, but also on how they treat their citizens. Human rights –with all the argument they have stirred as a tool in bilateral conflicts– are a reality that increasingly prevent the Cuban government from using the traditional geopolitical truth as a pretext for ignoring the geopolitics of values. And on this point the transition is guaranteed because the government, by signing the United Nations Agreements on Civil, Political and Economic Rights, has accepted the Helsinki accords, the ones in which the former Soviet Union and its satellite countries made a commitment to the West to respect human rights. In psychological terms, I think this means that, over the long term, and contrary to the Keynesian consequence, we can all live in a community that respects human rights.

One cannot pick the moment in which the State effectively incorporates these universal values. The immediate effect of all this is that Cuban society, in addition to its expectations on the consumption front, can add expectations of values that will further complicate social and political relations in their country. Whereas until the relationship between the State and Cuban society was determined exclusively by the concept of corporate mass –trade unions, intellectual groups, CDR, FMC, etc.– now it begins to be based on individual Rights; at least in theory this breaks the exclusive vertical nature and resulting impotence of the individual with respect to the State and social organisations. For this to become a reality depends on the specific policies of the State, but it depends even more on citizens. In any case, the ‘solitary wave’ of the Cuban transition in some senses resembles a legitimate international company.

The geopolitics of communications are more diffuse, and Cuba gets caught up in them more quickly. They are less controllable by the government, and give more power to citizens. In this sense, the natural geography which for four centuries made for our insular condition loses meaning

when it comes to defining our frontiers and political possibilities. Whereas for four centuries Cuban policy was limited by the possibilities of economic geography, now we face the prospect of policy that knows no limits in the communications era of the Internet. This renders obsolete any policy designed to impede mobility. Thanks to the globalisation of communications, Cuba is starting to be a *Mediterranean country*.

Of course, this new global context encourages our ‘solitary wave.’ And it does so in a way that shifts our analysis from being about whether the Cuban transition is possible to an analysis of the traditional geopolitical context, the ability of the various forces involved and their approach toward a transition process that involves all of us.

Therefore, the Cuban transition is inevitable because it combines four factors that overwhelm the regime’s control mechanisms and the channels through which the government tries to tame these factors, regardless of whether or not it seeks change: the inevitable spread of a post-ideological social dynamic, unfulfilled expectations of well-being, new value expectations and the swift process of changing communications which gives a more prominent role to the individual.

So the unavoidable question about the inevitability of the transition is this: what transition is possible? After assuming the risk of the soldier in the Polish joke, I would simplify the question to one of a procedural nature: how is this transition possible?

Transformation or Reform, Replacement, Transfer or Pact?

I begin by ruling out the traditional formula of alternative policies in or toward Cuba: replacement. This is a formula which could only be fuelled by the *revolutionary* tradition of Cuban culture, which envisions political change taking place through violence but which finds no basis in a careful reading of real political options in the face of totalitarian or post-totalitarian States. As Huntington shows clearly in his book, there is only one exceptional case of transition through replacement in the countries of the former Soviet bloc.¹¹ In Linz’s analysis of reforms we do not find clear cases of replacement either, nor in the studies carried out by Arias King. In fact, third-wave transitions have little to do with bloodshed. On one hand this is grounded in the change in political culture that was established by the peace movements of Gandhi and Martin Luther King; it is also grounded in aversion to bloodshed in the wake of World War II, Korea and Vietnam, and, finally, the emerge of a global middle class that wants to preserve life for the purpose of consumption. In any case, totalitarian states achieve a monopoly on control of violence, and this along with the barriers posed by coasts and mountains make it unthinkable to muster the military allies needed to replace the regime.

There is a kind of replacement that stems from massive protests by people who are unhappy with the state of affairs in their country. In fact, the theoretical path of popular rebellion in Cuba has served as a substitute for forcing a replacement through military means. But the former is also ruled out, not just because of the conservative nature of Cuban society –there is a powerful myth about Cuban uprisings which I have addressed in another article– but because any popular rebellion in a post-totalitarian State first requires a breakdown in the political elite. The cases of central and Eastern Europe once again provide us with proof of this.¹² But this path is ruled out in Cuba because it could easily be construed as an external conspiracy in the conflict with the US.

So is a transfer of power possible? No.

¹¹ Huntington (1994), p. 149.

¹² Huntington (1994), chapters 3-4, and Arias King (2005), Part I, the Reforms.

This brings me back to the issue of domestic opposition. I will develop this argument point by point and in such a way so as not to bring in my own political preferences. I want express myself clearly on a sensitive issue and avoid statements that might be misconstrued.

At least in inland Cuba, the opposition faces the following problems:

- *Difficulty in social insertion.* Until now it has represented values, rights and concepts, not sociological majorities or minorities. As it was not born representing sectors, its ability to represent people tends not to take root, and its back-feeding is weakened in the face of liberalisation measures. If the government undertakes two or three structural reforms with regard to the economy and the insertion of individuals in the workplace, and other reforms with a strong social impact, it can in effect dissolve the opposition. This would absorb popular discontent and the expectations of broad sectors of Cuban society, undercutting the opposition with concrete measures it cannot direct.
- *Weakness and excess of doctrinarian policy.* As the opposition is forced to reinvent its political traditions, it has not had or spent enough time in founding them. This weakens referential spaces and strips political debate of meaning, tonalities and substantial ideas. At the same time, as the opposition has to reaffirm its reinvented identities, due to needs of recognition and self-recognition, it has neglected the policy of identifying itself with people's everyday problems and concentrated on the policy of identifying people with abstract values. It has not realised that the Cuban people are first and foremost interested in resolving their problems with everyday life, and after that, democracy. This has prevented the opposition from taking a vital focus in politics: seeing reality as a problem and not as an obstacle.
- *Lack of connection with interests.* This dilemma is self-explanatory.
- *Little identification with the oldest political debate in Cuba: the debate on what kind of nation the Cuban people want.* This dilemma is shared by the regime and the opposition. Clearly, this is not a debate of the kind that depends on majorities, concerned about immediate needs and well-being. However, it is necessary because it gives a foundation and stability to the prospect of democracy and well-being. The debate involves intellectuals and thinkers but carries with it two obstacles: for the intellectual elite linked to the regime, the country's only problems stems from the United States; but for the rest of the intellectual community, the focus should be on individual rights. I must admit there are projects designed to fill this vacuum that do have to do with democracy, as I will discuss at the end of this essay. But for the opposition, this debate is not current, either.
- *Little relation with external political dynamics.* What is the reality of the world? The Cuban opposition does not tend to pose this question. There is no calibration, therefore, of the impact of information on the formulation of strategies of change or in the culture of governability that it is necessary to achieve in order to think and design State policies.
- *Absence or limited presence of a culture of changes in power.* Cuban society, most of which was born after 1959, is not used to changes in power, either peaceful or violent. In fact, their first taste of this was Raúl Castro taking over for Fidel Castro: it is perceived as a change only because of the impact it can and is having on people's living standards, not on the culture, structure and nature of the regime.
- *Loss of the political citizen.* Only recently has one seen social demands give way to political demands. But with the exception of the Proyecto Varela, these demands are not presented with the systematic nature and fluidity needed to re-found a citizenry interested in politics. This is the

reason why social complaints are the most visible form of political response and do not translate into socially and politically structured alternatives.

- *Inadequate language of change:* The language of the opposition is mainly symmetric to that of the Cuban revolution. It is paradoxical, although culturally understandable, that the opposition has tried to democratise Cuba with the same language that recreates and reproduces violent systems of political expression.
- *Permanent dislocation of the central political debate.* The conflict between the US political class and the Cuban government has made it difficult to situate the debate between the Cuban State and society. This fuels the image of opposition leaders as heroes and makes it harder to incorporate everyday people talking about their needs and worries.

The opposition has these problems that prevent it from pressing for a possible transfer of power because it does not represent political alternatives that are sociologically important, nor does it use a language of social insertion that hits home with the most dynamic sectors, i.e. the ones who set the reference points to follow. Sloterdijk would paraphrase this, with a somewhat elite slant, as 'self-denial of the language of high culture'.¹³

This presents the transition in Cuba as a transformation or reform. Regardless of what people want, the transition in Cuba begins as a reform and eventually ends up as a pact. Political change in modern societies reduces the range of possibilities to ousting those in power or cutting a deal with them. Cuba's difficulties for achieving a transition based on deal-cutting stem from an excessive moralisation of the political conflict, a limited history of dialogue and negotiation and a fragile capacity for tolerance. There is also inertia in the discourse of intransigence that makes it difficult for who have enjoyed power, representativity and resources to adjust their strategy to suit a society in movement. In other words, even if extreme sectors lose space, they have not lost hegemony as political reference points that determine the course of the process. This continues to fuel an illusion because forces that tend to occupy the centre have little experience there, which would help them have more influence over the democratisation of the transition. For starters, and given the porosity of Cuban society, the hegemony of *soft speech* would seduce many moderate sectors on the island with a fundamental impact on the pressure of new expectations from the Cuban government. If there is not going to be bloodshed, why not change?

But the hegemony of a *hard landing* persists in the game of back-feeding with the extremist discourse of the regime. This causes yet another paradox: the Cuban government uses the tough talk of its adversaries to justify its political immobility and conceal and guarantee, on the hand, social mobility and recycling. In this situation it behaves just as it does with the policy of the United States. Whereas before it used this policy as a pretext for not changing, now it uses it as a pretext for changing from the same place. Let us call this the cynical transition in which the rhetoric of the *enemy-who-is-coming* transforms into the counter-language to do the same thing the enemy had been demanding.

With similar guarantees, with that same capacity for using its adversaries and with the certainty that over the short term no significant social pressure will amass, the transition in its reform phase can cover enough distance to lay the foundation for and deepen the economic restructuring of society, transform its elite within a kind of social capitalism and modernise society, achieving normality as measured by a series of international standards: consumption, special mobility, differentiated access to well-being and social and political use of Cuba's comparative advantages. If yesterday it was sugar, today it is a service-based economy, with the health care system as its cutting-edge technology.

¹³ Sloterdijk (2003), p. 301.

For the sector leading the reforms, the possible transition stops there. For this sector, that is enough. Its political model seeks to circumscribe itself to the dimensions of the island, returning from the vision of extensive domain that Fidel Castro espoused in his most triumphant moment. This model, comparable to that of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI in Spanish) in Mexico, works well with an opposition that is on the sidelines and does not offer immediate danger, with an intellectual class capable of criticising and obeying, and with a cultural plurality that is content if its aesthetic exhibition is not disturbed but rather stimulated. For this it does not need to heat up the economy like China and Vietnam have done, accelerating their transformation and creating a middle class quickly and with industrial progress. This sector can succeed over the short and medium term with this transition, which only goes half-way because it still controls the inventory of dysfunction and because the lack of response from the elite and society in general allows it to control the pace of transformation. If the transition started off slowly, it can take some time for contradictions to emerge, both the accumulated ones and those inherent in the process of change.

But this slow pace of a controlled transition can and must be changed. The political model of this phase of the transition, with its emphasis on the merging of the State with the party, narrows the limits and concepts being addressed by a society that is discussing accumulated problems and problems with carrying out reforms.

The accumulated problems have to do with including those who remain outside the new State-party. These are all those citizens who do not want to, cannot or do not consider themselves communists in a society that is nonetheless opening itself up to modernisation and its own cultural diversity. We can call this the dysfunctionality and tension of the State-party with the nation. The problems with carrying out reforms have to do with tensions that necessarily take place between the economic restructuring that is necessary and social participation in well-being, in a society that is beginning to recognise rights as belonging to individuals rather than revolutionaries. We will call this the contradiction between the State-party and modernisation.

China and Vietnam have been able to control these tensions because they have no problems with their identities, which are more or less homogenous, and their modernisations fit in well with what they see as traditions of cultural grandeur. As they have never seen a contradiction in the triad of *nation-political model-cultural foundation*, these countries have no problems as baggage from the past, but rather looping ahead: democratisation of society within the nation.

The Cuban government cannot control these tensions for long because it created artificial tension among the nation, the political model and the cultural foundation. And it did so trying to identify them. For this reason, those in power have problems looping back and looping ahead, once they have liberalised the past through culture and the future through reforms. These are problems that can only be resolved by democratising the nation from within society. This requires openness to its plurality.

In order to achieve this it is also necessary to change the focus of the opposition and that of traditional geopolitics. There is no capacity to disturb the tranquillity of a process of reforms, but there is such a capacity for completing that tense and contradictory process in an agreed transition.

This depends on two factors. The first has to do with the possibility of the political alternatives having sufficient sociological visibility to press for changes. Deploying that visibility depends on an ability for insertion and communicating strategies to citizens in a systematic and consistent fashion in order to stabilise political references within broad sectors of the population. And this is related to supply and counter-language in a society that is in flux.

Societies that are simple, static and rigid can assimilate simple offers and tough language. As they find no outlet and lack intra-social communications, a call for rupture might receive enough support to trigger a situation of change. It is doubtful that the rupture will bring about democracy, but some kind of outlet is possible when there is a call for rupture in tranquil societies.

Cuban society has not been immobile. Interpretations which have bolstered this perception have confused political calm with social and cultural calm, and the regime's immobility with paralysis in society. But Cuban society has been changing for more than 20 years, despite the government: in terms of instruction, cultural references, circulation of ideas and individual self-management of economic well-being, Cubans are not idle. What has happened is that a society in flux has not found the appropriate channels of expression to make those changes transparent and give them coherent meaning. Mobility invites moderation, rationality in decision-making, conservation of life and calculation of benefits. By the way, Cuba has always been this way. If the process of liberalisation and reforms that is under way remains on a consistent path, then social mobility in all of these realms will be greater and have more dynamism. This will fundamentally favour self-centred and peaceful goals and proposals that offer rational dialogue. The challenge for the political proposals is to respond to society's coordinates and not follow the mirage of urban disputes stirred by people who are angry and uneducated. It could be that society beats the opposition to the punch with proposals that are more modernising and viable.

This requires a consistent strategy with respect to the regime. An agreed transition as a continuation or second phase of liberalising reforms translates in politics as a communicative pacification with the sector that hold power. The political premise of this pacification is national reconciliation. In fact, without reconciliation no change is possible and the opposition cannot rise to a position of greater social visibility. Nor is it possible to guide reforms socially toward national democratisation, or toward the 'town square'¹⁴, in the words of Natan Sharansky. Nothing is certain, but the first step toward granting a marginalised opposition political access is to reshape language, adapting it to compromise and negotiation, and to redefine strategy to move toward a pact. This would be a historic agreement with respect to the past and a political agreement with respect to the future. In other words, the possible reconciliation between the fear of George Santayana – 'those who forget the past are condemned to repeating it'¹⁵ and Jorge Semprún's demands for 'collective and voluntary amnesia'¹⁶ to demoralise the conflicts inherent in a political transition.

In this sense, the search for an agreed transition is not consistent with excessive demands for free elections as a launching point for democratic change. One way to thwart the possibility of reforms leading to a political transition is to demand that the State be open from the outset to competition among political alternatives. The 'solitary wave' of democratisation also means that we Cubans are obliged to seek broad agreements on the premises of political change before a change in leadership. Seeking the democratisation of key forces, converting the parties to the conflict from enemies into adversaries, reaching a consensus on key points and a pact on the nation are fundamental steps for stabilising the democratisation of institutions over the long term. To start off by opening up the democratic game to citizen participation in choosing between opposing political alternatives –not sufficiently structured– and state forces who control power and political communications through their institutions is tantamount to guaranteeing a 'democratic' recycling of political sectors hiding behind a façade, without guaranteeing at the same time the institutional, cultural and sociological conditions that are necessary for change. The public realm as a place for building democracy is an essential premise for democratic competition for public power.

¹⁴ Sharansky (2004), p. 20.

¹⁵ Garton Ash (2000), p. 52.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

In any case, early pressure without sociological capacity to guarantee it would block the possible options by activating the leadership's capacity for thwarting demands. It is the equivalent of attacking a fortress using only Christian prayers as weapons. This can only strengthen those inside and delay any possible change.

South Africa, making the moral abstraction necessary for all analytical exercises, is an example of a successful democratisation precisely because the conditions for democracy existed in the practices of the white, racist elite. If the circulation of power in Cuba were done through democratic procedures, it would make sense to exert political pressure with demands for elections because this would simply be a matter of opening up the game to participation by those who are excluded, not creating the game from scratch.

Palestine, on the other hand, shows the risks involved in a premature election process that does not feature key democratic forces.

Here, the other factor comes into play: traditional geopolitics.

How can this 'solitary wave' of democratisation be helped? Changing the premises of traditional geopolitics toward the island –which means destabilising the local game of delayed cold war between Cuba and the US– is the only way to keep US foreign policy from continuing to be a structural variable in Cuba's domestic policy. If Washington sneezes in Iraq, Cuba's virtual democratisation catches a cold. But if Washington sneezes in Florida, the probably virtual democratisation of Cuba freezes over. A change of focus would clear up the options for solving the always postponed conflict between the Cuban state and nation.

To confuse a conflict of interests with a conflict of values is not fair to a generation that did not take part in the former and weakens a generation that can take part in resolving the latter. This only leads to confrontation and to the involuntary withdrawal of demands from citizens who do not want to imitate any heroes. This contributes to stopping liberalisation at mere reforms and preventing them from leading to full-blown democratisation. In this way the US is helping to stabilise the new bourgeoisie, similar to the one it recovered in the 1960s, but not to establish freedom in Cuba. If the transition goes no further than liberalising reforms, Cuba might find itself beset with the Latin American dysfunction of rich families that control basic elements of the economy and national wealth and which, citing reasons of national security, can continue to block resolution of problems such as racism and getting a diverse population to participate in national affairs.

Changing geopolitics is not just a question of revising their rules of engagement but also about changing the concepts and agenda that lie beneath the confrontation. These concepts were built during the Cold War, with the idea that they could quickly oust an adversary and restore democracy with the forces at hand. And they failed. Now, it is a matter of building both democracy and the players. For this, the most commonly used political agenda is not good because it does not reconcile possibilities with internal developments.

Stimulating democracy in Cuba can only be achieved by reducing geopolitical pressure from a player who is only capable of activating values such as nationalism to impede and delay the very democratisation it calls for. And this change in agenda is crucial for making it consistent with the overall agenda of other international players that might participate, such as Europe; or who might be stirred to act, such as Latin America. This agenda deserves only one concept: dialogue and support for the design conceived by the Cuban people.

If the wave of democratisation in Cuba is inevitable, the question is when we the Cuban people will finally be able to live in democracy. The possibility of getting an answer sooner depends on the quickness with which guarantees are provided to the effect that the independence of Cuba is not

under discussion. However, paradoxically, the independence of Cuba can implode if there are prolonged delays in the process of democratisation, which is the only possible outcome for the Cuban nation in the 21st century.

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