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# Neoliberalism, the Special Period and Solidarity in Cuba<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

While the Cuban state's resistance to neoliberalism and to US dominance in particular, has been vigorous, it is nonetheless subject to the constraints of neoliberal hegemony, and has entailed a degree of accommodation: the partial introduction of a market economy within a socialist political framework has given rise to some strong contradictions, most notably a sharp increase in inequality. This paper considers to what extent the contradictions arising from these reforms have effects within everyday practices of struggle which threaten to problematize dispositions to solidarity which are central to continued resistance, and an important social and political resource in confronting and shaping the future.

**Key words:** *neoliberalism, resistance, accommodation, inequality, solidarity, instrumentality.*

Revolutionary Cuba's resistance to capitalism, and its neoliberal hegemonic form since the collapse of the Soviet bloc, has been important symbolically and materially to the Latin American left and beyond – an importance reasserted during the recent electoral swing to the left in several Latin American countries.<sup>2</sup> The geopolitical circumstances in which the Revolution unfolded made resistance a dynamic feature of social and political developmental processes, and the socio-political solidarity which sustains them a central tenet of Cuban political culture.<sup>3</sup>

If the political classes of other countries in the region have introduced neoliberalism with varying degrees of enthusiasm, the Cuban state's resistance to neoliberalism as an ideological project<sup>4</sup>, and to US dominance in particular, has been emphatic. It is, nonetheless, significantly constrained in practice by the imperatives of neoliberal

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<sup>1</sup> The final version of this paper was published in *Critique of Anthropology* Vol. 28(2): 177-197. Sage Publications.

<sup>2</sup> Including Venezuela, Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile.

<sup>3</sup> Cabrera Rodriguez 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Frequently registered in the official newspaper, *Granma*, in speeches by leading members of government, and in communications from organizations such as the UJC (Union of Young Communists)

hegemony, and has entailed a degree of accommodation: the establishment of sectoral or 'enclave' capitalism and a dual economy within a socialist political framework, has given rise to some intractable contradictions, most notably a sharp increase in inequality (which recent economic 'recentralization' seeks to address).<sup>5</sup> What I want to consider in this paper, is to what extent these contradictions have effects within everyday, intimate practices of struggle which threaten to undermine or problematize – at least patchily – dispositions to solidarity central to continued resistance. This has implications beyond whether or not socialism will be sustained; solidarity will remain an important social and political resource in confronting and shaping the future, assuming that 'transition' is *unlikely* to proceed in a smooth and linear fashion towards a known horizon.

In Cuba as elsewhere in the Latin American region, and beyond, the effects of neoliberalism need to be studied as historically and contextually specific sites of accommodation and resistance, without losing sight of structural forces at work, and recognising that neoliberalism operates on a discursive level with teleological force. It is also important to recognise that resistance to neoliberal governance, while revealing much about neoliberalism's ideological normativities, is subject to considerable constraints and is in turn unevenly distributed and contested; the social costs of resistance may reinforce these normativities in unexpected ways, producing alienated counter-resistances in turn refracted through specific historical experience.

### **Regional tendencies and theoretical approaches.**

On a broad canvas, the neoliberal period in Latin America has been characterised by similarities in two principle and closely interrelated registers. Firstly, the usual sets of economic policy suspects, conforming to the Washington Consensus, have resulted in heightened inequalities, deepened marginalization, the depoliticization of labour, leading to increased insecurity and vulnerability in the workforce, the shrinking or disappearance of the social wage and the privatisation of public goods.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, the neoliberal period ushered in democratization 'transitions' which led to improved guarantees for electoral democracy, and – at least discursively - promoted institutionally strengthened civil society and citizenship which were to compensate for a minimized state, devolving much of the state's social responsibility to the individual: it also formed the context for a proliferation of grassroots political mobilization engaged at neighbourhood, community, regional, national and global levels with a wide range of issues.<sup>7</sup> These movements vary considerably in their

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<sup>5</sup> Mesa-Lago 2006

<sup>6</sup> Portes & Hoffman 2003, Harvey 2005, Robinson 2004, Petras et. al 1994, Karl 2003, Otero 2004

<sup>7</sup> Including environmental concerns, indigenous rights, agrarian issues, women's rights and social justice.

relationship to the 'new' institutions of the neoliberal state, accommodations coexisting with inventive reshaping, evasions, refusals and resistances,<sup>8</sup> and analysts vary equally in their relative optimism or pessimism regarding the emancipatory possibilities offered by these developments.<sup>9</sup>

Certainly, the chronic tensions generated by these processes strongly informed calls for 'new visions', the emergence of a 'post-Washington' consensus in which institutions such as the World Bank recognised past errors (reflected in a distancing from the label "neoliberal" and its association with hard-nosed austerity) and posited a 'new role' for the state: variants of "third way-ism" in which state responsibility is re-imported but now takes the form of promoting policies "emphasizing limited and targeted spending for the poorest, combined with support for market-based solutions for the rest of society" (Foweraker et.al. 2003: 74), solutions focused on enabling the excluded by equipping everyone with the necessary 'human capital' to confront and compete in the market economy with confidence.<sup>10</sup> This normative formula, however, can be read less as a departure from and more as a deepening of neoliberalization processes in ways which threaten to more thoroughly harness grassroots movements and disempower labour, even as they produce new sites of resistance.<sup>11</sup>

Yet within these broadly discernible patterns, it is clear from the behaviour of different states and the diversity of political responses and resistances that neoliberalism has spread unevenly, been adopted selectively and hybridized with existing political processes and political cultures; that neoliberalism in practice is characterised by an "unstable and volatile historical geography" (Harvey 2005: 70). For example, the early introduction of neoliberalism in Chile took place under the Pinochet regime, to be sustained by the subsequent Concertación governments under the rubric of national reconciliation, yet linked to deep processes of depoliticization and the 'marketization' of society which began in the period of military rule:<sup>12</sup> while the neoliberal *vuelta* in Mexico during the Salinas administration made cynical use of the same corporate unions it sought to disempower in order to guarantee conformity with policies which hurt their constituencies, provoking all manner of political contradictions, fragmentations, and realignments.

Emphasizing the need to study such 'actually existing neoliberalisms', Peck and Tickell insist that "neoliberalism should be understood as a process, not an end-state... Analysis of this process should therefore focus especially sharply on *change*... rather than on binary and/or static comparisons between a past state and its erstwhile successor. While processes of neoliberalization are clearly at work in...

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<sup>8</sup> Calderón Mólgora et. al. 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Gledhill 2002

<sup>10</sup> It is also worth noting that where resources are insufficient to "equip" everyone with the "human capital" to compete successfully in the market economy, then poverty alleviation programmes will remain a form of social welfare destined to reproduce dependency and marginalization (Powell 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Gledhill 2004

<sup>12</sup> Silva 2004, Paley 2001

diverse situations, we should not expect this to lead to a simple convergence of outcomes, a neoliberalized end of history and geography.” (Peck and Tickell 2001: 4, quoted in Gledhill 2004). Such a focus not only fractures the notion of neoliberalism as a monolithic force; its emphasis on process also complicates the notion of political ‘transitions’ by raising questions about the normativities underlying perceptions of previous periods as well as future ones<sup>13</sup> - (and Cuba is particularly burdened by the reification of ‘transition’).

The rejection of notions of the ‘imposition from above’ of an unvarying force – neoliberalism – in favour of historically and contextually specific studies revealing the complex interplay of accommodations and resistances, shares conceptual and methodological ground both with historical anthropology’s critique of monolithic views of colonialism, the spread of capitalism, and state formation<sup>14</sup>, and with calls for an ‘ethnography of the state’: these similarly critique state/society oppositional models<sup>15</sup>, focusing on the “degree to which the state has become implicated in the minute texture of everyday life’ (Gupta 1995: 2) and the specific nature of these intimate relations, - the ‘messiness of everyday life’<sup>16</sup> - where people deal with the intransigent, the corrupt or the hapless bureaucrat, petition the official representative, avoid the police, etc., and engage in discursive constructions of the state which both inform and make sense of their accommodations and resistances – and which reveals the state as an ‘ensemble of social relations’.<sup>17</sup>

### **Cuba: resistance, accommodation and social dynamics**

Cuba both shares in and departs from these broad regional tendencies, and presents a particularly complex historical conjuncture. While claims to Cuban ‘exceptionalism’ reach back at least as far as the colonial period, Centeno argues that such claims have been perhaps overstated, and that in any event exceptionalism is being eroded: “[Cuba] remained exceptional during the 1990s as it not only resisted neoliberalism, but also the accompanying democratising wave. In the first years of the twenty first century, however, I fear that Cuba will return to the regional fold in the worst possible way” (2004:404), by increasingly conforming to Latin American patterns of inequality, informality, marginality and migration – and there are many reasons to take this pessimism seriously.

Resistance to neoliberalism came at an immense social cost: the 1990s in Cuba mirrored the decimation of much of the rest of Latin America during the 1980s under structural adjustment – which rather begs the question of whether the social cost

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<sup>13</sup> Pansters 2002, Gledhill 2002, Roseberry 2002, Verdery 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Roseberry 1985, Joseph and Nugent 1994

<sup>15</sup> Gupta 1995, Nugent 1994. One-party states such as Cuba or Mexico (until 2000) are perhaps especially vulnerable to this kind of analysis; at the same time particular features of such systems should not be overlooked.

<sup>16</sup> Taylor and Wilson 2004

<sup>17</sup> Jessop 2006

would have been any less had Cuba ‘capitulated’ - and revealed the exclusionary and punitive logic of neoliberal hegemony.<sup>18</sup> However, as mentioned above, resistance entailed accommodation in the marketization of certain sectors, resulting in an economic and social bifurcation and hierarchization, mirroring the regional patterns noted by Centeno: these processes (discussed in more detail below) coexist in some tension with political ones.

Resistance to the ‘democratising wave’, while widely attributed to President Castro’s ‘obduracy’, was hardly surprising – so beleaguered, this might not have been seen as the best time to imitate democratisation processes which elsewhere in the region were presiding over increasing immiseration. It is routine within neoliberal normativity that political reforms which do not conform to market liberalism are overlooked or dismissed: the centrality of debate which has informed shifts throughout the revolutionary period<sup>19</sup>: an electoral system which, while non-competitive, is based on intensive popular consultation and pluralistic representation.<sup>20</sup> ‘Totalizing’ characterizations of the Cuban state which pepper some of the literature and much journalism are particularly unhelpful, as they not only obscure the significance of such political processes, they also foreclose on questions of resistance and agency by implicitly or explicitly characterising the population as either ‘repressed’ silent opponents of the regime or ‘duped’ supporters.

The authoritarian nature of the Cuban state is not to be underestimated - executive prerogative and the influence of the Party’s Central Committee remains strong, and particularly in major policy shifts and reversals: yet the Cuban state also constitutes an ‘ensemble of social relations’, and is ‘implicated in the minute texture of everyday life’, in specific ways: official mass organisations<sup>21</sup> representing workers, farmers,

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<sup>18</sup> The US’s exclusion and ‘disciplining’ of Cuba are of course longstanding, and have been frowned upon by much of the rest of the world, but became far more consequential after the demise of the Soviet bloc and the rise of market triumphalism, while post 9/11, vilification of Cuba by the Bush administration took on a renewed vigour, matched only by its gratuitousness. The exclusionary and disciplinary stance of the US towards Cuba has, of course, also been historically uneven. President Bush’s location of the Castro regime within an ‘axis of evil’ (albeit a secondary one) serves neoconservative rhetorics of fear as an instrument of political control, and keeps the Miami-Cuban right happy. At the same time, while on the one hand introducing further restrictive measures which adversely affected the Cuban population on both sides of the Florida Straights, on the other, the Bush administration responded to lobbying by US agricultural and commercial interests by ‘modifying’ the embargo, allowing in 2000 the direct export to Cuba of foodstuffs, provided that they are paid for in cash (Mesa-Lago 2006:49). Despite this and other ‘flexibilizations’ of the embargo, both the US and the Cuban governments continue to use mutually totalizing discourses.

<sup>19</sup> Kapcia 2000

<sup>20</sup> Candidate selection involves consultation at municipal, provincial and national levels involving official mass organizations (see next note), but not the Communist Party, while up to 50% of both the Provincial and National Assemblies are made up of *de base* deputies (workers, farmers, students, etc) in close touch with their municipalities. The logic is that only closed lists of candidates can ensure such pluralistic representation (Roman 2006).

<sup>21</sup> Such as the CTC (Federation of Cuban Workers), CDR (Committees for Defense of the Revolution), FMC (Federation of Cuban Women), ANAP (National Association of Small Farmers), FUS (Federation

women, students, have active and highly politicized memberships at neighbourhood level and upwards. These organizations can be seen as attempts to 'monopolize social allocation' which Verdery (2002:382) argues has been characteristic of socialist systems (but should not necessarily be regarded as socially empty, as she suggests for eastern European socialist states): at the same time, while such 'monopolization' cannot be exhaustive, it does tend to 'disable' or view with suspicion other social groupings and dynamics, particularly when these 'escape' into informality.<sup>22</sup>

Many people are not captured by the mass organisations; some participate opportunistically, others disdain them altogether; and the socially divisive effects of accommodations work against these organizations' efforts to sustain a vigorous attachment to Cuban socialism. For some disaffected sectors of the population, the Cuban state's resistance to neoliberalism itself represents the continued hegemony of the socialist regime, which, beyond explicit dissidence, is in turn unevenly resisted / opposed in a variety of everyday ways, such as evasion, political apathy, valorisation of self-interest, dreams of escape; and here alienated discourses of a totalizing state re-emerge which construct a future resolved by the demise of socialism. President Castro's advancing years sustain speculation about Cuba's future, yet his political and physical robustness mean a seemingly endless deferral of the 'inevitable'. Cuba is often represented as suspended in a state of waiting, of stasis, of perpetual meanwhile – for example:

*Walter Benjamin defined the Messianic moment as that of Dialektik im Stillstand, dialectics at a standstill: in the expectation of a Messianic Event, life comes to a standstill. Do we not encounter in Cuba a strange realization of this, a kind of negative Messianic time: the social standstill in which 'the end of time is near' and everybody is waiting for the Miracle of what will happen when Castro dies, and socialism collapses? ... Paradoxically, the very return to anti-Messianic capitalist normality is experienced as the object of Messianic expectation – something for which the country simply waits, in a state of frozen animation (Žižek 2002:8).*

This representation certainly rings some bells, and the notion of an impending 'Messianic Event' introduces specific distortions in considering the future; these rest on a linear, progressivist view of history which Castro has 'interrupted' and which will be resumed on his death, when the past will be left behind, superseded. Thus, they also rest on the assumption that the historically accumulated experience of socialism will not much complicate the linearity of an inevitable transition to capitalism, foreclosing on questions of political futurity as well as questions about

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of University Students), FHS (Federation of High School Students) as well as the PCC (Cuban Communist Party and the UJC (Union of Young Communists).

<sup>22</sup> The informal sector notoriously defies definition: here it can taken as activity not licenced or sanctioned by the state, and therefore has a closer kinship with illegality than is necessarily the case in other countries – complicated by the fact that 'everybody', including members of official organizations and state officials, participates in informality to some degree.

what capitalist 'normality' might be like for a small and economically impoverished country in a context of global neoliberal hegemony (and here Centeno's pessimistic forebodings are well placed). These normative assumptions, however, also provide the disaffected with an ideological vocabulary for their 'counter-resistance' – one which sounds just like 'common sense' and in which the 'capitalistic' pursuit of individual interest is 'natural'.

The notion of social standstill also obscures the significance of day to day social dynamics, where there is a great deal happening. One feature widely commented upon has been the extraordinary resilience of the Cuban population in the face of extreme difficulty, and the creativity and inventiveness of their survival strategies – in response both to the exigencies of the special period and to the rigour with which the government polices its reforms; the ability to *inventar, resolver, luchar*<sup>23</sup>, as part of daily struggle, has become a recognised feature of contemporary Cuban society and culture.<sup>24</sup> This is not, however, just inventive *bricolage*, recycling obsolete resources in the 'endless meantime' until socialism collapses.

Such resilience depends upon a certain level of community solidarity – an ethos with significance to supporters and critics of the regime alike - which is, however, achieved at the cost of immense strain upon the very social relations which compose that solidarity. Amongst these are relations of trust, co-operation and social obligations of reciprocity which sustain those networks of relations between family, neighbourhood and community members, and which become particularly important resources in times of need.

However, as has been noted in other contexts<sup>25</sup>, the ability of such informal networks to underwrite survival strategies must be contextualised within the larger structures of resources and opportunities. On the one hand the chronic scarcities of the special period severely limited people's ability to engage in reciprocal sharing of resources, while on the other, the exacerbation of inequalities and heightened differentiation arising from economic reforms, have introduced contested elements into discourses on social obligations and on solidarity, as well as contested practices and dispositions. If normative assumptions about the future mean that it is only to be awaited, the 'impossible' present means anything is permissible to endure or overcome it.

These processes have implications for the construction of social and political identity and in turn for the composition of the social and political resources with which Cuban society confronts its challenges. This is one way in which the internalization of the 'Messianic Event' is deceptive, in its suggestion that the 'Event' will mark the end of these challenges, rather than a beginning.

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<sup>23</sup> To invent, to resolve, to struggle.

<sup>24</sup> Forrest (1999, 2002), Fernández (2000).

<sup>25</sup> Menjívar (2000).



## Special Period<sup>26</sup> reforms

The profound crisis of the Special Period generated an urgent call for solidarity, both immediately and in regard to the future: however, the reforms introduced to tackle the crisis responded to a context in which the meaning of solidarity shifted while the possibility for accomplishing it declined.

The reforms introduced during the Special Period constituted a response to the exclusionary logic of neoliberal triumphalism: undertaken between a rock and a hard place after the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the tightening of the US blockade through the Helms-Burton and Torricelli Acts, and more recent devices introduced by President Bush<sup>27</sup>, measures to address economic freefall<sup>28</sup> led to a partial and controlled opening of the Cuban economy to market forces, while maintaining a socialist organisational and political framework. They included the development of internationalised dollar-based sectors (most significantly tourism), the legalisation of dollar holding by ordinary Cubans, the de-centralization of state agriculture and re-opening of private agricultural markets, and the re-introduction of micro-enterprise self-employment in a range of occupations<sup>29</sup>, mainly in “low order services and tourism” (Colantonio 2004:30).

The reforms slowed the economy’s steep decline and enabled the beginnings of recovery by the mid 1990s, although recovery has ebbed and flowed somewhat since. However, a marked consequence of the reforms has been, inevitably, the hierarchization of the dollar and the peso economies, resulting in the growth of an increasingly difficult socio-economic gap between those who have access to dollars and those who do not - those who continue to work in the socialist peso-based economy and those who work in market based sectors or who receive remittances from relatives in the US<sup>30</sup>.

A sharp rise in inequality in a context of chronic scarcity provided strong motivation to pursue access to dollars to supplement peso incomes barely at subsistence level

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<sup>26</sup> The ‘Special Period in Peacetime’, announced by the government in 1991, was to be a period of internal adjustment in response to the consequences of the demise of the Soviet Bloc.

<sup>27</sup> These include limiting visits to the island by relatives in the US, restricting cash remittances, and denying visas to Cuban academics to participate in conferences in the US.

<sup>28</sup> For example, between 1989 and 1993 import capacity declined by over 70%, and estimated GDP fell by 35-45%. (Pastor and Zimbalist 1997: 3-4).

<sup>29</sup> These include small family restaurants or *paladares*, room renting, private taxi driving, small food outlets such as pizzerias, repair workshops and artisan production.

<sup>30</sup> Migrant remittances to families represent “the largest source of foreign currency in the Cuban economy (\$900 million)”: moreover, as Centeno points out, “the over-representation of light-skinned exiles creates something of a ‘dollar apartheid’: the flow of dollars is not evenly distributed, but concentrated on the white urban population” (Centeno 2004: 407).

and to be able to buy goods only available in dollar stores, or to quit the peso economy altogether. Alternatives here include much sought after jobs in tourism<sup>31</sup>, self employment, informality, or migration.

This has engendered a complex 'economy of practices', creative survival strategies which link formally paid work and access to resources with a range of informal activities: the ability to *inventar, resolver, luchar*, and to engage in *bisne*, as part of the daily work of social reproduction - as well as offering opportunities for individual advancement - has become a resource which is both essential and permeated with anxieties. The growth of the informal economy has provided a crucial safety net<sup>32</sup> (increasingly so as the state's ability to do so has declined), and at least intermittent participation in the economy of 'the street' is widespread: though crucial to survival, street activity must evade the gaze of state and anticipate swings between toleration and crackdown.

A further outcome of dollarization, rising inequality and informality has been status inversion<sup>33</sup>: workers in sectors of which the revolutionary state has been most proud - health and education professionals for example - remain in the peso economy and find that a bartender earning tips in dollars, or a street hustler who touts for business for restaurants, earns considerably more: moreover, as Forrest has pointed out, this overlaps to a large degree with the inversion of a racialized employment and status hierarchy which has always advantaged white Cubans<sup>34</sup>.

At the same time, the government's enthusiasm for the reform sectors has not been uniform. Unlike their counterparts elsewhere in Latin America, small producers in Cuba have fared relatively well from reforms in the agrarian sector, characterized by decentralization, extended cooperativization and re-peasantization. These have been accompanied by a renewed valorisation of agrarianism as a political imperative, a reassertion of its revolutionary roots, and have seen peasant organisations such as ANAP<sup>35</sup> strengthened and gaining in autonomy<sup>36</sup>.

Reforms which re-created the small business / self employed sector, by contrast, were carried through with "openly acknowledged... misgivings and reluctance" (Gayoso 1999: 60).<sup>37</sup> Henken argues that, rather than a state-led response to crisis, the legalization of self employment "can better be understood as an administrative response to a multitude of home-grown economic survival strategies (most of which were formally illegal) developed by the Cuban people" (2004: 220). Fernández makes a similar point, seeing legalization as part of the government's efforts to 'discipline' and regulate the informal sector (2000: 118-119). Although an explosion in self

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<sup>31</sup> Much dependant on *sociolismo*, discussed below.

<sup>32</sup> Centeno (2004).

<sup>33</sup> Blackburn (2000), Forrest (1999, 2002)

<sup>34</sup> Forrest (1999).

<sup>35</sup> The National Small Farmer's Association.

<sup>36</sup> Deere (2000), Enriquez (2003), Kapcia (2000).

<sup>37</sup> More enthusiastic reformers within government technical cadres were curbed by the Party's Central Committee (Gayoso 1999).

employed activity after legalization contributed to halting economic decline, mopping up many of the new unemployed and underemployed, members of this sector have been the subject of official opprobrium, reflecting the low ideological value attached to private enterprise, and suspicion of profiteering: the government held fears that “a vigorous... private sector would diminish its political control over a large sector of the population” (Gayoso 1999:60). The regulations, inspections, fees and taxes which apply to these kinds of businesses are stringent and subject to arbitrary change and high if inconsistent levels of surveillance<sup>38</sup>.

The self-employed sector was created and then strongly constrained, revealing again the tension between ideology and pragmatism which Henken<sup>39</sup> argues has historically characterised the revolutionary government’s attitude towards private enterprise. As Pastor and Zimbalist point out:

“Unlike most reforming governments, Cuba cannot truly embrace the “winners” from its new policies because the state’s interests diverge from those of these constituencies.. the state has sought to contain the influence of the those benefiting from reform in order to maintain political power... By June 1996... over 200,000 individuals were in business for themselves under government license - and some Cuban economists estimate that for every self-employed worker under license there are another four or five unregistered workers, creating the most dynamic sector of the Cuban economy. Surely, this constitutes the basis for a new coalition.” (1997:2-9)

The opportunity to create such a coalition seems to have been overlooked or evaded: subsequent restrictions saw the shrinking of a dynamic sector while regulations stymied the development of individual businesses<sup>40</sup>: Yet, rather than an obstinate refusal to proceed further with market reforms, this retreat is perhaps better understood in terms of Verdery’s argument against viewing socialist states from a normative capitalist perspective, in which they are ‘irrational’: the logic of socialist states is to maximize *allocative power* and accumulate the means of production, while maximizing resources available for redistribution is secondary; however, resources clearly need to be distributed, and when crises of availability occur, (as here in the crisis occasioned by withdrawal of Soviet support), focus shifts to output concerns, when calls for market reform are heard and de facto alliances with the private sector emerge (2002: 368-73). This sheds some light on periodic swings between tolerance and persecution of the self-employed /small enterprise sector, and on the recent

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<sup>38</sup> Smith (1999), Trumbull (2000), Gayoso (1999)

<sup>39</sup> Henken (2004).

<sup>40</sup> The high cost of licences and taxes caused many small restaurants to close down, and people renting accommodation to tourists to stop operating from the mid 1990s to date: moreover, the ‘recentralization’ drive which began in 2003 has reduced the number of occupations for which small business licences are available, and has once again prohibited self employment for state functionaries. The 1993 legalization of the use of the dollar was overturned in late 2004, placing a 10% tax on dollar transactions and obliging businesses and the general population to use the convertible peso instead, of which more below (Mesa-Lago 2006).

recentralization policies, undertaken since external support formerly supplied by the Soviet Union is increasingly being extended by Venezuela.

Nonetheless, such swings work against winning the political allegiance of the self-employed: instead, the evasion of tax and surveillance and the need to lower costs obliged many to participate partly or fully in the informal sector, to resolve their problems on 'the street'<sup>41</sup>. The street – usually conceptualized in opposition to the home – *casa y calle* – increasingly took on the significance of a social space, sets of social practices, constructed in explicit opposition to 'the state'. This is not to suggest that the street constitutes a separate social geography. On the contrary, in important ways it is constituted *by* the intimate daily relations which inform a discursive opposition to a state constructed as ubiquitous, monolithic and endlessly tiresome. It is here that relations - of negotiation, evasion, complicity - with state officials, employees, and members of official organisations are played out: inspectors who monitor small business accounts, or health and safety standards, tax inspectors, the police who monitor traffic, public spaces, tourist areas, members of the CDR<sup>42</sup> - many of whom also participate in informal practices to supplement or stretch low incomes, and who may, until recently, also have been engaged in self-employment. Many of the resources which circulate on the street do so through precisely such relations. The 'street's' informal practices are thus inherently, and intimately, political.

### **Changing significance of solidarity?**

In this context, the concept of solidarity in state rhetoric has acquired a new meaning (and in some quarters invites scepticism). As Kapcia notes:

The shift towards *solidarismo* is revealing here, for it seems that it is to some extent replacing the long-standing ethos of egalitarianism, given the impossibility of maintaining the latter in the face of the crisis and the reforms... Thus an emphasis on solidarity is a way of rationalizing the need to ensure that imbalances are not excessive, rather than non-existent (2000: 244).

Implicitly here, therefore, a shift in meaning can be discerned from equality towards a notion of *fairness* – which, however reluctantly, represents an accommodation to

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<sup>41</sup> Corrales (2004), Henken (2004). Small businesses are restricted in size and not allowed to employ people outside the family; inputs have to be bought retail (from higher-priced dollar outlets), not wholesale (from state outlets), and all receipts subject to inspection; restaurants and rented accommodation cannot advertise, etc.

<sup>42</sup> Committee for the Defence of the Revolution, of which there are representatives at residential block level. Their function is political representation and mobilization at local level, and although some disparage them as government 'informers': it is not, however, unknown for people working in the informal sector to be local CDR representatives, as this provides some access to resources or diverts attention.

market realities – a guardianship and restraint against excessive inequalities which, as the redistributive powers of the state decline, is increasingly difficult to guarantee. While some notion of solidarity is implicit in conceptualisations of political community, it should not be taken as some ‘natural’ attribute of ‘community’: its meaning is embedded – or disembedded – through historical experience and practice. Solidarity has long been a referent in social and political discourse in Cuba: as Kapcia has pointed out, in the early years of the revolution solidarity took on the significance of a “double exclusion” - in regard to the US and to the exile community (2000:15). The obverse of this exclusion – the disposition to stand together to defend common cause – made of solidarity a dynamic value-concept, in that it embodied a mode of action as well as a disposition of social affinity, linked to the values of equality, community, and central to Guevarist moralism. The considerable achievements of the revolution in regard to levels of equality attained in health, education, welfare and the distribution of wealth, and in regard to the refusal to capitulate to US and exile pressure, represent a significant, historical accomplishment of meaning in solidarity: as a value-concept solidarity has been instrumental in both conceptualizing and realizing these achievements<sup>43</sup>.

The de-coupling of solidarity from equality and attaching it to a guardianship of fairness is a tricky shift, as it involves vigilating ‘excessive’ imbalances likely to be viewed very differently by those who have a little more and those who have a little less (especially when a little less is next to nothing). Nonetheless, the notion of fairness and its promise of ‘relative freedom’ does have resonance, even amongst those who declare their disaffection or disenchantment with the state and with socialism. In an imagined post-Castro Cuba where ‘capitalism will prevail’, it is strongly asserted that social justice and substantial safety nets should remain in place or be reinforced; universal health, welfare and education should be protected, there should be no extreme poverty, homelessness, etc, *while* allowing those with entrepreneurial talent to forge ahead (and ironically, the unspoken assumption here is that ‘the state’ will take care of this).

At the same time, the shift is itself the reflection of a context which makes the meaningful accomplishment of solidarity – in either sense – more problematic, and which introduces contested elements into discourses on solidarity among the population.

### **The state and the street:<sup>44</sup>**

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<sup>43</sup> Cabrera Rodriguez (2006)

<sup>44</sup> The opinions, attitudes, perspectives and evaluations of the current situation and of ways in which people confront it which are discussed here, were expressed during innumerable conversations and exchanges with friends and acquaintances in and around the city of Cienfuegos from the late 90s to date. These never had to be solicited: ‘the crisis’ - its causes, who is to blame, practices in dealing with the problems it has generated - is *the* topic of conversation. All names have been changed.

These discourses include commentaries on the extent to which the state is itself implicated in producing inequalities and, indeed, is seen to behave *unfairly*, in keeping ordinary Cubans 'out of the game' of the market economy, restricting the benefits of the market sector to the political elite, while increasingly less able to fulfil its role as provider. 'Everybody here can be a capitalist except ordinary Cubans', is a common complaint.

As state appointed managers control entry into the market based sectors of the economy – functioning, as Corrales puts it, as 'gatekeepers' to the more profitable capitalist enclave – clientelism or *sociolismo* ('buddy socialism') and opportunistic loyalty acquire more importance<sup>45</sup>. This does not only incur resentment but is potentially politically regressive; while on the one hand clientelism facilitates access to resources such as work opportunities for the well-networked, on the other its logic distributes resources very unevenly. For the majority, clientelism is experienced as exclusionary and, moreover, its privileging of personalistic relations works against the reproduction of broader social solidarity and is ultimately politically demobilizing.

Ironically, the desirability of work in the more lucrative capitalist sector also threatens to be socially 'regressive': Forrest (2002) has noted the value attached to 'any job' in tourism even if it means a move from professional to unskilled labour, while, as Colantonio (2004) remarks, the quality of many jobs in tourism does not bode well for long-term prospects for mobility. Yet the juxtaposition of low wages in the public sector and the loss of symbolic capital which accompanies the social inversions produced by the reforms have led to disillusion and either exit from key professions, or moonlighting in the informal sector.

Resentments about exclusion from work in the more profitable sectors, particularly tourism, are compounded by the restrictions of 'tourist apartheid' which exclude ordinary Cubans from tourist hotels, discotheques, etc, and restrict certain products (such as beef and certain shell-fish, for example) to the tourist industry; these products circulate on the black market but penalties attached to dealing in them are notoriously high:<sup>46</sup> allusions are frequently made to the stiff prison sentences for the illegal slaughter of cattle (which are property of the state) – 'you can get longer for killing a cow than for killing a person; cows are more highly valued than people here'.

Access to the tourist industry is therefore constrained; the self-employed who target the tourist market, for example renting accommodation, running small restaurants or private taxis, are inhibited by state regulations and may respond by complying only partially with regulations or by running a non-registered business, and acquiring

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<sup>45</sup> Corrales (2004), Forrest (2002).

<sup>46</sup> This can lead to farcical situations: the Miami Herald reported an incident where two tourists, eating in a small, private *paladar* in Havana, were surprised when the waiter snatched the lobsters they were eating from their plates and stuffed them in his pockets: he had seen an inspector coming down the street. Such tales may well be apocryphal, but instructive nonetheless.

inputs 'informally'. Other informal activity around tourism includes hustling, touting for business, selling 'informally' acquired goods such as rum and cigars to tourists, and prostitution – a range of practices commonly referred to as *jineterismo*<sup>47</sup>: this kind of activity is sporadic, restless and risky.

However, it is too simplistic to identify self employment or informality with disaffection with the state, and public sector work with political loyalty<sup>48</sup>. Both disaffection and support are manifested in the state, self employed and informal sectors, and indeed it does not seem to be unusual for families and individuals to be engaged in each of them as they deploy a multiple range of survival strategies - or, for that matter, to hold views which are a contradictory mix of disaffection and loyalty. For some, *luchando* (struggling) in informal ways is just what you have to do to get by: others see it as a home-grown form of resistance to Cuba's external enemies.

Nonetheless, the somewhat prosecutorial attitude of the government towards the self employed sector has arguably neglected an opportunity to build political loyalty to the state – which, it has been suggested, might have been achieved by organising this sector along the same lines as the small producer sector, establishing regional cooperatives and a national organisation along the lines of ANAP<sup>49</sup>. If, as Fernández suggests, the government's aim in regulating the self-employed was to exercise greater control over the informal sector, this might have been better achieved by strengthening political inclusion rather than by depoliticization and the disapproval voiced by high government officials, which masks both the functionality of the informal sector to the state, as its redistributive capacities are compromised, and the intensely political nature of day to day struggles for survival.

Instead, the self employed and a steady stream of state inspectors maintain a relationship characterised by anxiety and distrust which reinforces the former's involvement with informality, the economy of the street, where, in turn, discourses about the solidarity of a long-suffering people *against* the state are generated: fuelled by tales of arbitrary coercion, disproportionate penalties, the anxiety generated by surveillance, the restrictions of 'tourist apartheid' and the frustrations of scarcity, the inventiveness of the 'street' - where people 'look out for each other' - is valorised as what makes survival possible *in spite of* the state. *Radio Bemba* (the grapevine) allows people to know what is *really* going on, as opposed to government rhetoric, while an extensive street vocabulary of *double entendres* allows people to say what they really mean, without actually being heard to criticize.

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<sup>47</sup> From *jinete*, horseman; a *jinetero* is a hustler, the feminine *jinetera* more specifically a prostitute who works with tourists: in both cases the implication is of 'riding' the tourist.

<sup>48</sup> Blackburn (2000)

<sup>49</sup> Pastor and Zimbalist (1997).

These discourses of course compete with more loyal ones, amongst those more disposed to locate the 'blame' for the crisis externally, on loss of Soviet support and the continuing US blockade: Mariela, a woman in her late 50s, recalled that "all this started around the time of Gorbachev: there were always shortages before, but it was never everything, and not all the time, like now." Luis, a private taxi driver, owner of one of the renowned 1950s Chevrolets, cited the blockade but was adamant that "it's not the U.S. that's the problem: it's the Cubans in Miami."

The more unequivocal versions of 'the people against the state' are characterised by a certain overstatement (as in the comments about the cows); it is important to emphasize that in these discourses the state *is* homogenised and presented as a totalizing force, and qualifying counter-arguments dismissed, along with the importance of the broader political context. The responsibility for Cuba's current ills is laid squarely at the door of the state, or of President Castro - thus presenting a mirror image of the unqualified admiration of his ardent supporters - while complaints about scarcity and the declining value of state rations reflect an outraged sense of entitlement, indicating the high expectations people have been able to have of the 'allocative power' of the state in the past.

They are also, however, somewhat 'overstated' as well as contradictory in regard to street solidarity, in that the same persons can one day extol its virtues, and the next, with equal conviction, present street relations as a minefield of mistrust, *envidia*, and self-interest. This uneasy and heightened co-existence of 'positive' and 'negative' sentiments<sup>50</sup> serves as a reminder that while the ability to 'invent' and to 'resolve' during the crisis in Cuba has certainly been remarkable, and indeed necessary, the celebration of inventiveness and of resilience needs to be accompanied by some caution.

Typical of one form of celebration are cover notes<sup>51</sup> advertising Tony Mendoza's book *Cuba - Going Back*, which describe a 'portrait of a resilient people awaiting the passing of the socialist system which has failed them': here 'resilience' awaits the normativity of a restored capitalism. Another form is the commodification of Havana informality as a 'cool' product: a particular blend of laid-back, creative and hot - from a fashion photo shoot in the U.K.'s *Guardian Weekend*<sup>52</sup> featuring 'real Cubans' (student, waiters, fruit sellers) modelling that season's shirts by Burro, Miu Miu etc, (each of which cost around five to six months' average Cuban salary) to more recent Heineken adverts representing an apolitical pastiche of resilience through subversive consumption.

But caution is also needed to avoid the kind of misplaced celebration of 'the poor generating their own resources' which characterizes some of the 'social networks'

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<sup>50</sup> See also Fernández op.cit.

<sup>51</sup> On the back of Fernández' book.

<sup>52</sup> *The Guardian Weekend* June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2000



approaches to analysing the survival strategies of poor communities<sup>53</sup>, and which is also redolent of recent enthusiasm for Putnamesque interpretations of 'social capital'<sup>54</sup> as both an attribute and outcome of community relations and practices, and promoted as central to community development. This places much of the weight of responsibility for this on poor communities themselves, and is particularly likely to do so when presented and valorised as a 'cultural characteristic', part of 'Cuban exceptionalism' - as indeed many ordinary Cubans themselves do .

Implicit in these approaches are the risks of overlooking or de-emphasizing a number of things: firstly, that efforts to 'invent' solutions and resolve problems through informal networks ultimately remain firmly constrained by the structure, distribution and quality of resources available<sup>55</sup>, and that a focus on the poor 'solving problems on their own' may deflect attention from what people actually *need* and that they do not have<sup>56</sup>. It overlooks the fact that although informality may present day to day solutions and appear to compensate for the disappearance of a state-resourced safety net, it is a *problem*, both politically and economically:

As Pastor and Zimbalist note, the difficulties small businesses have in buying inputs from expensive retail outlets leads to informal 'leakage' of these from state enterprises, a strategy that not only carries risks but which also "further weakens the state sector even as it encourages an unproductive notion of capital accumulation" (op. cit: 12) - a notion which, perhaps, has parallels in some sectors in a non-productive attitude to work and to the conduct of social relations (see below).

More generally, as Centeno points out, however functional in the provision of a 'safety net', informality guarantees the reproduction of inequalities and a poor and unprotected workforce who, despite their 'successes' in evading state control, remain politically disempowered.

Moreover, of particular significance to the value and practice of solidarity, celebrations of the capacity to *inventar*, *resolver*, *luchar*, overlook the immense strain on the very relations which underpin this economy of practices. Tales of this strain co-exist uneasily alongside tales of the state and of street solidarity.

### **Strains on solidarity: calculation and the politics of instrumentality**

The street economy needs solidarity to function; it depends on relations of trust, complicity, co-operation and social obligations of reciprocity for the exchange of information, favours, swapping and lending of materials, equipment and money, support in the 'diversion' of state resources and in the evasion of state surveillance; it

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<sup>53</sup> See also Menjívar's (2000) critique of these approaches in regard to Salvadoran immigrants in San Francisco.

<sup>54</sup> Interpretations heavily criticized by Fine (1999, 2000).

<sup>55</sup> Menjívar op.cit.

<sup>56</sup> Bryceson (2000).

generates sentiments of solidarity 'against the odds' of the mundane, exhausting difficulties of day to day social reproduction.

At the same time, chronic scarcity has severely limited people's ability to engage in reciprocal sharing of resources: as Menjívar (2000) points out, the expectations underlying reciprocity between people in networks based on community, neighbourhood and family relations are severely problematized in a context where the quantity and quality of resources available are extremely limited and people simply have 'nothing to share'. This leads to the evasion or qualification of obligations of reciprocity which are central to the practice – and disposition – of solidarity; and precisely because reciprocity is highly valued, such evasions are problematic and require justification – which often entails calculation of the relative value of what is given, and what is received in return.

In Bourdieu's discussion of economies of symbolic exchange, social obligations of reciprocity are central to practice and characterised by the *taboo of making things explicit*; you do not make explicit the obligation to reciprocate a favour, for instance, even though the social "constraint to do so is very great and the freedom *not* to return" it is very small: the taboo of making things explicit extends to any *calculation* of the relative value of what is given and what is received in return. Calculation is always a *temptation*, but usually repressed; being explicit about relative value and calculation, "is what ruins every economy of symbolic exchanges" (Bourdieu 1998:94-97). Yet, while even in 'economic' economies, one could argue that traces of both taboo and temptation in the calculation of reciprocal obligations remain, in a context of severe and chronic scarcity such as contemporary Cuba, this taboo is completely blown apart – indeed calculation and the attribution of self-interest becomes the source of much teasing and rough humour: the 'shared silence about the truth of exchanges' is broken and indeed the 'truth' of exchanges itself contested: explicit calculation enters the logic of the street economy.

These problems are further complicated since relations of reciprocity pertain between people working in the peso and dollar economies - including within families - which designate goods of different symbolic orders and make the calculation of relative value in exchanges across this cleavage more tricky. Someone earning dollars in the informal economy who has lent money to a friend does not see a gift of sweet potatoes in return as equivalent – and in terms of relative value it is not – but interprets it as an affront rather than as an effort to continue to reproduce the relationship; likewise those who send or bring home remittances complain that family members do not take enough care of the goods bought with this money, or that they begin to take it for granted and fail to show enough gratitude.

Fernández has noted a more particularistic "retreat to the private" (2000: 120) domain of family and close friends as one response to scarcity, yet here too, tensions intervene. Julio asserted that "the special period has destroyed the family", and went on to elaborate that chronic shortages and drop in the value of wages meant a

reappraisal of who, within the larger family, you feel an obligation to help out: you now exclude aunts and uncles, cousins, and restrict yourself to your immediate family. At the same time, the wider family's expectations might actually increase: Julio has a job in a state run café catering to tourists: he therefore does reasonably well earning tips in dollars. His dilemma therefore is a choice between helping out the larger family, or devoting more to *improving* the standard of living of his own young family, for example buying his children the expensive, better quality clothes sold in the dollar stores.<sup>57</sup> Gender relations have also suffered: commonly rehearsed complaints by women are that men evade their familial responsibilities as providers (reflected in high divorce and desertion rates); by men, that women are *interesadas*, only interested in men's relative capacity to provide, and get pregnant in order to 'entrap' men into such responsibilities (while at the same time maintaining the conviction that it is women's responsibility to provide contraception). Particular targets here are Black women, who, it is routinely asserted, have large numbers of children by multiple partners in order to avail of state benefits – echoing some of the most banal prejudices of Thatcherite discourse.

The negotiation of relations which underpin the practices of solidarity, including within families, are further problematized by the ways in which 'the crisis' and how to confront it become central to identity. *How* one deals with the daily struggle, the valorisation of the ability to 'invent' and to 'resolve', produces an over-invested economy of practices, an over-determined investment in being 'street smart' which derides the 'moral culture' of the socialist economy as it falls apart and creates a place where cynicism and self-interest appear to 'make sense'. Felipe fell foul of this over-investment in street-smarts: he is not accomplished in this area and received much disdain from his in-laws for *only* bringing home to his wife and child the state salary he earns as an engineer in a sugar mill. As a full-time qualified professional he is an *inadequate* provider and the butt of indignant jokes since coming to his in-laws' house for dinner and eating a second fried egg: an extra portion which had no correspondence – he brings home no extra anything but still benefited from an extra egg which was on the table precisely because members of that family *are* street-wise and accomplished 'resolvers'. Felipe has the further effrontery to be 'fat' and is unlikely to live down the fable of the second egg. Calculation intrudes here into commensality – as it does in obverse cases of eating something at home *before* going to eat at the homes of family members, so as not to appear to be eating too much, and inviting resentful comment. As Narotzky (1997) points out, the relations of consumption worked out within the 'bundles of relations' which compose

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<sup>57</sup> These are officially called TRDs or 'shops for the recuperation of foreign exchange', but were in effect dollar shops until the recent banishing of the dollar. For example, in 2005 some of these shops in Havana were selling children's shorts for \$15 – rather more than the average monthly wage in the state sector.

households, the consensus on exchange and expectations of help within households, should not be taken for granted.

The politics of calculation become clear as the value of goods in the socialist sector declines in both material and symbolic value: when Mariela brought home bags of flour which she received at work (a state run factory) as a productivity bonus, these were ridiculed by her adult children who work in the informal sector: a few bags of poor quality flour - what kind of difference could *that* make? And she was ridiculed too, for her “naivety” in thinking that the bonus meant something and was worth the bother; her contribution, her labour itself, was dismissed.

Raul, with a reputation for ‘street smarts, works abroad through marriage to a foreigner, but returns often to Cuba: he enjoys the enhanced status this affords, but complains that this attracts endless requests for favours. He was indignant when Mario asked to borrow money, even though Mario was an old friend who had recently lent him metal cutting equipment, which is difficult to get hold of: this was not ‘the same’, as ‘that did not *cost* him anything’. (Raul used a different logic in refusing to lend equipment of his own to another friend: on a previous occasion it had been returned damaged.) His problem with Mario was that he would not get the *money* back, as his earnings in the state sector were so low – a sector which, it was strongly implied, Raul himself had been ‘smart’ enough to exit. Here, again, was a calculation and a refusal of equivalence in exchange based on a prioritization of monetary transactions: but it was also elaborated as a *justification* for not reciprocating, anticipating reproach - it was not a denial of the value of reciprocity per se. Indeed, much of the justification lay in the attribution of calculation and self-interest to Mario, who “knew” he could not return the money and yet was exploiting friendship and social obligations to help out.

And within this logic, not only actual requests for help, but all manner of overtures of sociability may be suspected of being requests for favours in disguise: so enhanced social status - differentiation - is something sought after, striven for: but may bring with it the perception, at least, that some social situations might be better avoided in order to avoid being “overburdened” with obligation. This encourages a “disposition” that associates appeals to solidarity with personal cost. At the same time the *necessity* for justification – often gratuitous – speaks to a recognition of the salience – ideological and material – that solidarity still has.

The problems of confronting scarcity and need, together with the logic of processes which generate inequality, form a context in which consideration must be given to differentiation not just as a structural outcome, but also to the ways in which it intervenes vigorously as an *aspiration*. Within the street economy, to *luchar*, *resolver* in the way that Serena, a divorced single mother, does – calling in favours to get hold of medicine for a chronically sick child, or to procure a sack of rice, or get an elderly refrigerator fixed; moonlighting as a house cleaner and taking in washing for better-off families - is not in the same register as hustling to gain a reputation as someone

with money and dedicating oneself to the “production of distinction through consumption” (Narotzky: 108). Yet both sets of practices share the social geography of the street.

To some extent this reflects the different ways in which women and men engage with informality<sup>58</sup> – but it also reflects a tension between viewing relations of solidarity as a valuable social, political and material resource, and viewing them as instrumental in the pursuit of individualistic goals.

Between scarcity and differentiation, elements among the ‘disaffected’ – *‘los desvinculados’*<sup>59</sup> – articulate a devaluation of the relations which underpin solidarity in favour of an ‘anything goes’ form of individualism in which the building and conduct of social relations is strongly instrumental and overdetermined by the logic of calculation<sup>60</sup>. Such instrumentality is by no means restricted to, but perhaps most clearly articulated in cases where relations with tourists / foreigners are established – through friendship or marriage – as an explicit attempt to ‘resolve’ difficulties through gaining access to dollars or providing a means to exit the country<sup>61</sup>.

Information circulates about which national embassies are ‘the best’ in terms of the chances of acquiring a visa, together with tales of nostalgia for an imagined Miami where *‘te dan todo’*<sup>62</sup>, mirroring Miami’s nostalgia for an imagined Cuba.

Manuela, for example, bemoaned the impending arrival of her Canadian boyfriend who visits several times a year: “I can’t stand him but we need the money” - which he provides along with gifts of items in short supply, nights out etc. Rosa, with a comparable lack of enthusiasm, was married to Sam, a Canadian some 30 years her senior: she showed no interest in visiting Canada but received monthly maintenance between Sam’s regular visits and lived in a house he had bought. They divorced when Sam discovered (through an ‘envious’ neighbour) that her Cuban ‘husband’ habitually moved back in as soon as he left. Sam almost immediately married another, even younger Cuban woman.

Pati sat in her living room discussing with friends, including Ricardo, her Cuban boyfriend, the pros and cons of marrying her tourist boyfriend. Ricardo thought it was not a bad idea, and emphasized the potential advantages; the boyfriends and girlfriends of Cubans who marry foreigners may be ‘left behind’, but they may also stand to benefit from the relationship.

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<sup>58</sup> Fernández (2004), Forrest (2002).

<sup>59</sup> Fernández (2004:139)

<sup>60</sup> Thus mirroring the ‘unproductive notion of capital accumulation’ noted by Pastor and Zimbalist (above) in regard to the conduct of small businesses who ‘acquire’ social goods from state enterprises for use as private inputs.

<sup>61</sup> For example, the Spanish and Italian embassies in Havana recorded respectively 2,573 and 1,000 marriages between their own citizens and Cubans in the year 2000. *El Nuevo Herald*, June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2001.

<sup>62</sup> ‘They give you everything’ ...papers, accommodation, work, etc. It occurs to me that imagining Miami in this way also reflects a strong sense of entitlement.

Pedro saw marriage as a means to upward mobility; gaining residency rights in another country eventually enabled him to enter and leave Cuba as he pleased, and to earn abroad what in Cuba was good money. In common with the other cases mentioned, his community of origin remained the yardstick by which his achievements were measured: marriage to a foreigner was the means to 'get ahead' and enhance his status at home – a status which he confirmed with a succession of Cuban girlfriends – to whom, ironically, he now attributed motives of self-interest. Yolanda married a European, and lived there with him for some time before they divorced: back home, she now receives alimony and, interestingly, invites much criticism from neighbours for continuing to go out with tourists for monetary gain (they allege) even though she no longer 'needs to'.<sup>63</sup>

Such marriages introduce interesting elements into the notion of 'global hypergamy' and its 'gendered geographies of power' (Constable 2004), and also question common assumptions about (mainly) women from poor countries who marry men from the affluent north – especially assumptions about their "lack of agency and victimhood" (ibid). Strategic marriage to a foreigner (or, for that matter, prostitution with tourists) might be better understood as a concerted effort *not* to be a victim, while the calculative instrumentality of these relations reveals a vigorous assertion of agency which is as overbearing as it is constrained. Frankness about such instrumentality may well be read as an assertion of power within the relationship and an attempt to disclaim accusations of having been 'bought'.

This is not to suggest that the 'instrumentalist' practices and dispositions of those at the 'disaffected hustler' end of the street are generalized – on the contrary, they are the subject of fierce criticism, and for those trying to sustain less alienated social values, represent one more exasperation to contend with. But they have become a recognizable element in discourses about how to confront and deal with the crisis, and how to justify the way in which one does that. These are discourses precisely about agency, among actors highly self-conscious of their own agency, its contradictions, and the need for agency to be able to give a coherent account of itself. The constraints, frustrations and anxieties of the situation, for some, allow this account to assert that 'anything is permissible' in the effort to keep afloat or get ahead.

As in Bourdieu's economies of symbolic exchange, the political and social value attached to solidarity within a socialist ideology also, to a significant degree, "create[d] the objective conditions for social agents to have an interest in 'disinterestedness'.." (1998:93): And, as in "societies of honor which are already in crisis... values of honor crumble as monetary exchanges and through them the spirit of calculation, are generalized" (1998:87). It is the crisis and the crumbling of values which, perhaps, allow an *excess* of calculation and of instrumentality introduced into

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<sup>63</sup> Comments about women who work occasionally as prostitutes with tourists in order to provide for their families are much more forgiving.

economies of practices. The loss of “objective conditions for social agents to have an interest in ‘disinterestedness’ “ in the face of scarcity and growing market dominance leaves people extremely vulnerable to the fallacy of economism, the application “to all universes the *nomos* characteristic of the economic field” (1998:84). This fallacy lies at the heart of neoliberal normativity, and represents a far greater threat to solidarity as a political resource to confront the future than does politically engaged dissidence. To paraphrase Bourdieu - persuaded by the inversion which privileges the logic of calculation and of profit over social obligations, now associated with a ‘discredited’ universe of values, the ‘disaffected’ enter a new universe of belief, and represent this as ‘the end of delusion’ (Bourdieu 2005: 6-7). The calculation of means and ends for individualistic self-advancement – the privatisation of struggle, perhaps – becomes unassailably self evident and ‘natural’. An important corollary of this is the alienated political cynicism of the ‘clued-in’ who know what is ‘really’ going on – as opposed to the claims of political rhetoric or the ‘delusions’ of socialist loyalists: the tautology of calculation is invoked as a reason for scorning political engagement.

## Conclusion

The ‘street’ constitutes a complex social geography in which not only is loyalty to the state patchily eroded, but also what makes the production of community solidarity possible. How widespread these ‘erosions’ might be is difficult to gauge: there is evidence that support for the socialist state remains substantial and much greater than critics of the regime like to think<sup>64</sup>: at the same time levels of ‘disaffectedness’, while not generalised, are also probably higher than supporters of the regime like to think too. Political cynicism will by no means necessarily prevail, but may well undermine or problematize the dynamics of political solidarity, at a time when it is increasingly important to maintain. Despite its aim to address inequality, the *Batalla de Ideas* which launched the recentralization drive and reasserted Revolutionary consciousness and morality, is likely to harden positions among the disaffected as much as boost solidarity among supporters, and may well see an expansion of the informal sector while increasing intolerance towards it.<sup>65</sup> Yet, while a ‘battle of ideas’ may sound like an anachronism of socialist discourse, some such a battle has to take place if the taken-for-grantedness of neoliberal capitalism is to be ruptured and interrogated.

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<sup>64</sup> Kaptcia (2000)

<sup>65</sup> The imposition of the 10% tax on dollar transactions (while not restricting the holding of dollars) and obliging use of the convertible peso (introduced in 1994, pegged against the dollar) will hurt people who receive remittances from the US, while causing steep inflation in the TRD (foreign exchange) shops: for those earning (ordinary) pesos, the convertible peso is just as expensive as the dollar. These measures were undertaken in 2004 in response to US confiscation of Cuban dollar holdings in a Swiss bank.

Centeno sees the decay of the social infrastructure, including health and education systems, poverty, rising inequality, informality and migration as signalling the end of Cuban exceptionalism with respect to the rest of Latin America, a conformity to the structural problems of the region, and he admits to being less than optimistic about the future<sup>66</sup> - with good cause. Responses to increased inequality under neoliberalism seen throughout Latin America – forced microentrepreneurship, informality, migration and crime<sup>67</sup> – are evident here. Indeed, parallels can be drawn beyond the region: processes of “economic polarization, political demobilization and market triumphalism” which have underwritten the ‘new poverty’ in the US<sup>68</sup> are apparent enough in contemporary Cuba, even if the triumph of the market has been disavowed and resisted, while inventively accommodated.

At the same time, as mentioned above, even the ‘disaffected’ still take it as read that in a post-Castro era, which they – along with much of the rest of the world - assume will be capitalist, and in which they assume they will be able to do well once the constraints of socialism are removed - even they take it as read that the achievements of the revolution and a significant measure of social justice should be preserved: health and education for all, no homelessness, no *extreme* poverty. However, this is not a scenario characteristic of other Latin American or Caribbean economies; if Cuban development after Castro follows the well-furrowed route of integrating more fully into the global economy with the help of foreign aid, then there is no reason to suppose that this would not come with conditions attached which threaten the very areas people most wish to preserve: much Latin American neoliberalization has been premised upon reduced state spending in precisely these areas. Indeed, in Cuba they are already moving from being symbols of achievement to signifiers of decay. Hospitals and clinics as well as schools are sorely under equipped and even basic medicines are scarce, while schoolteachers and health sector workers cannot live on what they earn.

If – as many people wish and several commentators have suggested - the scenario is reform, understood as the development of a Cuban capitalism which will sustain a commitment to social justice, then even this is going to need defending, and vigorously: this is where the thrall of the ‘Messianic Event’ is especially disingenuous - in the assumption that, post Castro, the development of Cuba capitalism on its own terms will be relatively unproblematic. Here perhaps both *fidelismo* and Cuban exceptionalism have been internalised: the experience of other countries in the region will not apply – Cuba is different. Yet resistance – to neoliberal imperatives of the privatization of common goods, to the political and economic claims from Miami – is likely to require considerable solidarity. Whether a socialist or a reformist state is at issue, reclaiming solidarity – a disposition to stand together in the face of

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<sup>66</sup> Centeno (2004)

<sup>67</sup> Portes and Hoffman (2003)

<sup>68</sup> Goode and Maskovsky (2002)



inevitable external pressures and a recommitment to equality - seems essential if any measure of self-determination is to be carved out in shaping the future, as well as protecting the struggles and achievements of generations past. Yet, it has to be recognised that such resistance will require most from precisely those who have already been struggling for so long, and that the effects of those struggles may not necessarily be uniformly consistent with progressive hopes.

Nonetheless, if, as Centeno persuasively argues, Cuban exceptionalism has in the past been much overstated, then this might be the time to insist upon or reinvent it. Loyalists to the socialist project are encouraged by the shift to the left registered by recent elections throughout Latin America (although the uneven and volatile nature of this must also be recognised), and Cuba's significance to the Latin American left remains important. Renowned analysts such as Mesa-Lago may well be facetious about Presidents Castro and Chavez's 'Bolivarian pretensions', but regional electoral patterns suggest that demand for an alternative to neoliberal hegemony is increasingly insistent, and intra-regional alliances seem essential if its disciplinary constraints are to be surmounted.

A more cheerful return of Cuba to the Latin American fold than that envisaged by Centeno depends on a radical refusal of the future offered by neoliberalism across the region, which in turn depends on a refusal of its relentless normativity. It may be easy to dismiss such a prospect as 'Utopian' (although there are strong arguments for revisiting 'Utopian' thinking<sup>69</sup>), but it is equally easy to forget that discrediting the notion that more equal futures might be shaped is, after all, an ideological device which serves to protect neoliberal normativity.

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<sup>69</sup> Bourdieu (1998a), Harvey (2000)

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