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***The Cuban Image in the Mirror of the Latin  
American and Caribbean Press, 1979–1994***

**Supervisor**

Ch. Prof. Duccio BASOSI

**Co-Supervisor**

Ch. Prof. Luis Fernando BENEDUZI

**Graduand**

Loris PETRI 866017

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## **Abstract in lingua italiana**

Dall'inizio della sua rivoluzione nel 1959, Cuba attira su di sé l'ira implacabile di un potente paese vicino come gli Stati Uniti. Dal 1962 era stato il sostegno economico e strategico dell'Unione Sovietica a proteggere Cuba dal subire le piene conseguenze del boicottaggio economico, dei tentativi di invasione e di assassinio del suo leader e della sovversione sociale e politica perpetrata da parte degli Stati Uniti. Ma dopo il 1990, come ha potuto sopravvivere Cuba senza il sostegno dell'URSS?

Molte risposte plausibili possono essere date a questa domanda, e nessuna di esse è necessariamente sbagliata. La leadership carismatica, la giustizia sociale, l'orgoglio nazionale, il consenso, la dittatura del partito, la sorveglianza capillare sulla società e la repressione politica hanno tutti avuto un ruolo. Ma la mia ipotesi principale è che per la sopravvivenza di Cuba il suo essere un paese immerso nella storia dell'America Latina e dei Caraibi, la sua auto-percezione e l'essere percepito come un paese appartenente a quest'area e alla sua storia, è stato il capitale politica più importante che Cuba poteva spendere per garantire la sopravvivenza del suo esperimento sociale e politico. Nella mia tesi di laurea mi concentro sull'immagine cubana nello specchio della stampa latino-americana e caraibica, per vedere se quell'immagine fornisce sostegno alla mia ipotesi.

Nel capitolo 2 esamino la 'preistoria' e la storia della Rivoluzione cubana, per ricostruire il suo emergere dal più ampio contesto dell'esperienza coloniale iberica nelle Americhe e il suo scontro con gli interessi economici e politici degli Stati Uniti. Cerco di capire la concezione che i rivoluzionari cubani come Fidel Castro avevano del colonialismo, della 'dipendenza' e dell' 'imperialismo'. Cerco di dimostrare che questi concetti erano stati forgiati molto prima del 1959, nella lotta dei movimenti nazionali anticoloniali e 'antimperialisti' in America Latina e in altre parti del 'Terzo mondo'.

Nel capitolo 3 considero il ruolo di Cuba nel Movimento dei non allineati, in cui il paese a volte è stato accusato di agire come la quinta colonna dell'URSS, altre volte percepito come un attore indipendente da lealtà di blocco. Nella sua auto-rappresentazione, lo sforzo militare di Cuba in Africa non è stata una guerra per procura per conto dell'URSS, ma una continuazione della lotta anticoloniale e 'antimperialista' in armonia con la storia e le radici latine e africane dello stesso paese caraibico. Il discorso di Fidel Castro del 1979 davanti all'Assemblea generale delle Nazioni Unite, tenuto a nome del Movimento dei non allineati, ricevette attenzione in tutto il mondo. Negli anni successivi Castro ha presentato proposte per la soluzione del problema del debito latino-americano, proposte che ha intensamente propagato in particolare nel 1984-86.

Nel capitolo 4 analizzo l'eco delle iniziative cubane nella stampa latino-americana, i cui risultati spiegherò in seguito. Ho scelto l'anno 1979, quando Castro ha gettato le basi anche per la reintegrazione regionale del suo paese con il discorso davanti all'UN, e il

1994, il primo anno della ripresa economica di Cuba dalla sua ‘crisi di astinenza’ dagli aiuti sovietici ora mancanti, come inizio e fine rispettivamente del mio periodo d’indagine.

Per quanto riguarda le mie fonti, mi baso su studi di sintesi e specialistici sulla storia di Cuba e dell’America Latina, sulla geopolitica dell’area, sulle relazioni di Cuba con gli Stati Uniti e con l’America Latina nel contesto globale, e sul dibattito sul debito del Terzo Mondo, sul concetto di impero e di egemonia americana. Includo alcuni brevi cenni alla discussione teorica attorno ad alcuni concetti chiave come ‘dipendenza’, ‘imperialismo’ e ‘neocolonialismo’.

Per la mia analisi nel capitolo 4, mi baso principalmente su articoli di stampa tratti da un archivio chiamato *Spiegel der lateinamerikanischen Presse*, che si trova ad Amburgo. Da quell’archivio, ho selezionato sessanta articoli di stampa su Cuba degli anni 1979-94. Per capire la portata e i limiti di queste fonti, ho cercato di scoprire di più sulla situazione generale della stampa nella regione. Purtroppo, non sono riuscito a trovare studi complessivi, simili a quelli già esistenti per il settore televisivo. Per questo motivo, ho intervistato due giornalisti latino-americani del Brasile e dell’Argentina, al fine di coprire, almeno in una certa misura, le lacune di cui sopra con i loro ricordi ed esperienze. Inoltre, ho usato varie risorse online, di cui le più originali sono quelle della Commissione economica delle Nazioni Unite per l’America Latina e i Caraibi.

Nel capitolo 4 ho messo alla prova la mia ipotesi, secondo la quale per la ‘sopravvivenza’ di Cuba durante il 1990-94 la percezione da parte dei vicini del carattere latino-americano e caraibico del paese era decisiva. La mia ipotesi era che quando Cuba perse la protezione dell’Unione Sovietica, poté attirare sufficiente attenzione, solidarietà, rispetto, simpatia, cooperazione e interesse calcolato dai suoi vicini regionali. Come ho spiegato nell’introduzione al capitolo, le fonti della stampa non possono essere considerate esaurienti o rappresentative per l’opinione pubblica. Come hanno dichiarato entrambi i giornalisti latinoamericani che ho intervistato, tra ampie parti della popolazione dell’America Latina c’è stata una visione più positiva di Cuba rispetto a quella riflessa dai media, a causa delle conquiste di giustizia sociale in Cuba, ad esempio nel settore della salute e dell’istruzione. Probabilmente, le élite al potere dovevano prendere in considerazione tali umori popolari. Il titolo ‘Un’isola senza miseria né libertà’ da parte di un giornale cileno mi sembra significativo per la strategia delle élite politiche di contenere il sentimento filo-cubano con report realistici piuttosto che con una propaganda rozza.

Secondo i ricordi dei miei due intervistati, invece, la rappresentazione di Cuba nei media latino-americani è stata per la maggior parte marcatamente negativa. Non ho però potuto riscontrare una visione così fortemente negativa negli articoli consultati. Molto probabilmente, questo è avvenuto perché gli articoli di stampa nell’archivio di Amburgo sono stati raccolti perché contenevano informazioni affidabili; esempi di giornalismo di

scarso livello e i tabloid sono infatti del tutto assenti dal campione. Ciò significa d'altra parte che le mie fonti non sono nemmeno rappresentative per i media latinoamericani e dei Caraibi nel loro complesso. Nel periodo in esame, la TV privata è diventata la fonte d'informazione più popolare. Tuttavia, penso che gli articoli della stampa che ho potuto esaminare siano sufficientemente espressivi per vagliare la mia ipotesi.

Questi articoli non entrano spesso nella discussione dei pregi e dei difetti del 'modello cubano'. Più frequentemente discutono la questione dell'integrazione regionale e i problemi geopolitici dell'area legati anche a Cuba. Gli articoli ci permettono anche di riflettere sul carattere della 'solidarietà latino-americana' che ha spinto i governi vicini di Cuba a coinvolgere l'isola negli sforzi di integrazione regionale, anche contro l'ingerenza degli Stati Uniti, che era percepita come arrogante ed era molto impopolare tra vasti strati di popolazione. Per ragioni storiche, il patriottismo e il nazionalismo nell'area latino-americana tendevano a coincidere con l' 'antiimperialismo', e questa visione influenzò anche le narrazioni non preconcepite su Cuba della stampa da me consultata.

Tuttavia, mentre nei Caraibi durante le crisi delle Falkland e di Grenada sembravano prevalere sentimenti anti-cubani tra le élite politiche, nei paesi latino-americani che si erano lasciati la dittatura militare alle spalle, e soprattutto in Messico, la manifestazione della 'solidarietà latino-americana' nei confronti di Cuba prevalse. Ho anche rilevato alcune ambiguità che traspaiono tra le righe di questi rapporti di stampa prevalentemente positivi. Le proposte di Castro per la soluzione della crisi del debito latino-americano hanno attirato l'attenzione di tutto il mondo, ma nella stampa regionale sembra che non ci sia stata una discussione dettagliata su di esse. L'impressione è che le proposte di Castro siano state apprezzate dai leader latinoamericani come mezzo per fare pressione sui creditori, ma le posizioni anti-neoliberiste che contenevano erano meno compatibili con gli interessi delle élite economiche messicane e di altri paesi che già partecipavano ai processi di globalizzazione. Il Messico sembra essere stato il più importante interlocutore regionale di Cuba e un suo partner per decenni. Ha manifestato un forte interesse economico e strategico nell'area dei Caraibi e dell'America Centrale, e nel preservare la propria sovranità e quella dei vicini, Cuba compresa, contro le continue ingerenze degli Stati Uniti. Per questo motivo, non era interessato a importare le tensioni della Guerra Fredda nella regione, né era interessato dopo il 1990 ad assistere a un crollo cubano. Tuttavia, anche nel caso messicano emergono ambiguità sullo sfondo della crescente integrazione economica del Messico con il mercato americano e il sistema finanziario americano.

Per quanto ambigua, la solidarietà latino-americana e la disponibilità per la cooperazione con Cuba hanno prodotto un sufficiente impulso politico per aiutare Cuba a sopravvivere alla minacciosa crisi dei primi anni '90. Dai resoconti della stampa, che affrontano le difficoltà cubane causate dal collasso sovietico, non sono emersi sentimenti di soddisfazione o di derisione per i fallimenti del socialismo cubano, ma piuttosto una

preoccupazione per le possibili conseguenze negative di questi sviluppi per Cuba e per la regione. Dopo la fine delle dittature militari filo-USA, lo scetticismo e l'ostilità contro le politiche statunitensi erano diffusi e la lunga storia di resistenza di Cuba contro il gigante ostile ha dato credito al paese. I paesi latinoamericani hanno smussato le iniziative degli Stati Uniti sulla situazione dei diritti umani a Cuba in un modo tale da salvaguardare la sovranità e la libertà di Cuba nel decidere il suo ordine giuridico e sociale. Nella stampa leggiamo delle osservazioni critiche riguardanti quello che viene dipinto come l'apparato cleptocratico di Cuba, ma c'era anche la consapevolezza che nel bel mezzo di una debacle economica era meglio non aggiungere una debacle politica. Con l'aiuto dei paesi della regione, le iniziative anti-cubane statunitensi per isolare Cuba vennero quindi neutralizzate. I paesi dell'area erano aperti al reinserimento e al riaggiustamento economico di Cuba, ed erano anche interessati a investirvi. Dal 1994, Cuba poté riprendersi. Dalle fonti risulta che questo è stato anche il frutto degli sforzi che la stessa Cuba ha intrapreso fin dagli anni '80, per riavvicinarsi ai vicini e riavviare la cooperazione regionale. Gli articoli di stampa sono una fonte troppo parziale per dimostrare inequivocabilmente che la sopravvivenza di Cuba nei primi anni '90 sia dipesa dalla sua percezione da parte dei suoi vicini latino-americani come 'nazione fraterna', ma forniscono nondimeno forti indizi a favore della mia tesi che questa sia una parte importante della spiegazione.



# 1. Introduction

The Republic of Cuba is worldwide one of the last remaining states that describes its economic, social and political order as ‘socialist’. Since the beginning of its revolution in 1959, Cuba is drawing upon itself the almost relentless ire of a mighty neighboring country that distances only ninety miles from its own coast and occupies an enclave on its island. How could the Cuban Revolution resist for sixty years to a similar fury, which expressed itself in a continued economic blockade, sabotage, attempts of invasion and on the life of its leader? How could it survive to the failure of other ‘revolutionary experiments’ in the neighborhood, such as in Nicaragua, Grenada, El Salvador, and to the litany of US military interventions in the neighboring territories and heavy political meddling in the internal affairs of Latin American and Caribbean countries? Until 1990, the first-sight answer would have been that it was only due to the support delivered by the Soviet Union and its socialist East European allies, who maintained intense economic relations with Cuba that also allowed to partly compensate for the loss of the American market. Then came 1989-91, the socialist block in Eastern Europe crumbled and the Soviet Union was dissolved. But Cuba survived once again. How was it possible?

Of course, many plausible answers can be given to that question, and none of them is necessarily wrong. Charismatic leadership, social justice, national pride, consent, party dictatorship, surveillance and political repression all will be mentioned in these pages, for they all played a role. But my main hypothesis is that for Cuba’s survival its being a Latin American and Caribbean country, a country immersed in a shared regional history and cultural imagination; and its conceiving of itself and being perceived by others as a fellow Latin American and Caribbean country, was the most important political capital that Cuba could spend in the 1980s-90s in the international arena to guarantee the survival of its social and political experiment. My assumption is that when Cuba lost the protection of the far-away nuclear superpower, it still could attract sufficient attention, solidarity, respect, sympathy, cooperation and calculated interest from its regional neighbors to survive. In my thesis I will concentrate on the Cuban image in the mirror of the Latin American and Caribbean press, to see whether that image corresponds to, and sustains, my assumption.

The assumption implies that first of all I should examine, in Chapter 2, the pre-history and history of the Cuban Revolution, to reconstruct its emergence from a broader background of ‘Latin’ colonial experience in the Americas and its clash with US economic and political interests. Particularly important is to understand the view that Cuban revolutionaries like Fidel Castro had of colonialism, ‘dependency’ and ‘imperialism’. Were these concepts familiar only to Marxists, or had they been forged more in general, in the struggle of national anti-colonial and ‘anti-imperialist’ movements in Latin America and other parts of the ‘Third World’?

While the Soviet Union and its allies of the Eastern European bloc formed the ‘Second World’, on Cuba’s belonging to ‘another world’, that is, the ‘Third’ one, the leadership of the country had never a doubt. In Chapter 3, I will examine Cuba’s role in the Non-Aligned Movement, in which the country sometimes was denounced as the USSR’s fifth column, other times perceived as an actor independent from block loyalties. Cuba’s military endeavor in Africa concentrated mainly on African countries under former ‘Latin’ colonial rule; for its independent decisions, its Latin, anti-colonial and anti-racist solidarity, as well as for the encounter with its own African roots, Cuba felt to fight not a Soviet proxy war but to interpret a Caribbean and Latin-American view. Fidel Castro’s 1979 speech before the UN General Assembly on the behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement received worldwide attention. In the following years, his commitment to the Third World’s interests vis-à-vis the mounting debt problem was increasingly formulated in terms also of a Cuban advocacy in favor to Latin America. Fidel Castro’s proposals for the solution of the Latin American debt problems were intensely propagated in the years 1984-86.

In Chapter 4 I will examine the echo of the Cuban initiatives in the Latin American press. Was there a broad discussion of Castro’s anti-debt initiative? Also interesting is how much attention the press of the region paid to Cuba’s internal development, the so-called ‘Cuban model’, and how that ‘model’ was interpreted. Also, how Cuba’s role in the Latin American and Caribbean context was perceived during the Grenada, Nicaragua and Malvinas crises, and if it was seen as a valuable partner for regional integration. How was Cuba’s behavior in front of the Soviet collapse described by the press of the region? How did the press comment on the Cuban economic difficulties of the early 1990s, and on Cuba’s efforts to reintegrate in regional economy and politics? I elect the year 1979,

when Castro laid new groundwork for his country's regional reintegration with his UN speech, and 1994, the first year of Cuba's economic recovery from what can be described as a 'crisis of abstinence' from Soviet aid, for the beginning and end of my period of investigation.

As for my sources, to understand the Cuban history, Fidel Castro and Cuba's internal politics, I rely on historical studies and overviews by Chomsky, Lievesley, Martin, Schoultz, Skierka, Szulc, Staten, Thomas and others. On specific questions of Cuba's internal development, I have also consulted texts by scholars from Cuba (Rodríguez García, Triana Cordoví, Martínez Heredia et al.) as well as exile Cuban and other specialists (Bartusch, Domínguez, Erisman, León Delgado, Lorini, Mesa-Lago, Pérez Jr., Rabkin, Vidal-Alejandro et al.). On Cuba's permanent conflict with the USA, I refer to studies by Gleijeses, Livingstone, Nieto, Pérez, Petras, Veltmeyer and others, whereas on Cuba's external relations with Latin American and Caribbean countries, and on the Latin American context in general, I use texts by August, Basosi, Coatsworth, Duran, Meucci, Sader, Vautravers Tosca, Wright and others.

For a better understanding of some of the theoretical key concepts of the debate that developed in and around Latin America, I include brief hints at some 'classics', for example regarding 'dependency' (Frank, Prebisch et al.), 'imperialism' (Hobson, Lenin, Luxemburg, Arendt et al.) and 'neo-colonialism' (Nkrumah et al.). Regarding the contextualization of Cuba's relations with the United States and Latin America within a global context, I refer to explorations into international politics and studies on empire and American hegemony by Arrighi, Calleo, Garavini, Golub, Harvey, Ikenberry, Lee, Maier, Prashad, Westad, Willetts, Wood, Young and others.

How was the Cuban experience mirrored in the Latin American and Caribbean? Regarding my central question, it will be interesting to see whether the press sources can give some additional insight that goes beyond what is already known from the scholarly literature. After 1959, when "Fidel Castro came to power and challenged American hegemony on the island" (Gleijeses 2002:6) as well as "the plausibility of the Monroe Doctrine" (Pérez 2002: 233), Cuba "unexpectedly presented an alternative route" (Sader 2008: 12) to Latin America. This was the point when an irreversible breach with the United States occurred (Basosi 2017: 83). The US-Cuban conflict, which never was just about the US interests in the island but in the region as a whole, was destined to influence

durably Cuba's relationship with the neighboring countries. The USA identified Cuba as the Soviet Union's most effective ally in the Third World and was concerned that it might participate in the region's politics. It exerted pressure on Caribbean and Latin American countries to isolate the island state in the region (Aldrich 2015). Since 1961, the United States favored the intensification of the region's integration in "the world economic system", as an alternative to regional integration (ECLAC 2016: 432). One of the few countries that partially tried to counterbalance these initiatives upholding the principles of noninterference and independent regional development, and thus worked against the isolation of Cuba, was Mexico (Vautravers Tosca 2005: 611). At the same time, in the 1960s, Cuba's example encountered enthusiastic sympathies among students and left-wing movements in the continent (Raby 2006; Volpi 1998; Zapata Galindo 2006; Buchbinder 2010) and triggered a new spread of guerrilla movements. "The response to these struggles was an era of military coups" (Sader 2008: 6) that left Cuba isolated on the diplomatic and political level from the governments of the surrounding region, notwithstanding a widespread sympathy among the population.

Things began to change in the late 1970s, when the US banks elevated their interest rates and most of the heavily indebted Latin American countries "began to face serious economic problems" (Basosi 2011b: 210). In this context, the island state "managed to break out of isolation. Diplomatic relations were restored with nearly all Latin American countries" (Skierka 2001: 241-242). Cuba, by then a respected leading country of the Non-Aligned Movement, developed proposals for a radical solution of the Latin American debt crisis. Regarding the regional impact of these initiatives, which were promoted by Castro between 1979 and 1986, the scholarly literature is not unanimous. On the one hand, it was expected that "Cuba's 1985 proposal that the developed nations assume the debts and his effort to link this proposal to superpower arms reduction agreements and the debate on the New International Economic Order" would "most likely benefit Cuba's hemispheric relations [and help] normalizing its Latin American relations" (Erisman 1988:3). On the other, although some Latin American leaders "at least appeared to be listening to what Mr. Castro was saying" (Bartusch 1986: 11), scholarly analysis has made clear also that the bargaining position of the countries whose governments met at Cartagena in Colombia to discuss the conflict of interests between debtor and creditor countries had proposals on their agenda that strongly diverged from Castro's ones, as they

were favoring a “dialogue between debtor and creditor countries, multilateral institutions and banks” (Duran 1986: 84). The background was that their economies were already deeply integrating with the “the world economic system”, that is, basically, the very US economy, paving the way for a full “entrenchment of neoliberal hegemony across the continent” (Sader 2008: 9) in the 1990s. From the late 1980s onwards Cuba's credibility suffered also from the country's own growing economic difficulties (Skierka 2001: 243), which were partly triggered and certainly aggravated by the Soviet crisis.

On the whole, it appears that scholarly research has sketched elements both of popular sympathy with Cuba among the citizens of Latin America and the Caribbean, and criticism or skepticism among the region's elites even after the end of the period of military dictatorships. It also appears to have not delivered so far, a clear picture regarding the existence of a causal nexus between Cuba's proposals for the solution of the debt crisis and its increasing diplomatic and economic reintegration in the regional context. I hope that the press sources may give us some additional insight into the issue.

Therefore, in Chapter 4 I mainly rely on press articles drawn from a press archive named *Spiegel der lateinamerikanischen Presse*, which is located at the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (CIGA) in Hamburg. From that archive, I selected and analyzed sixty press reports on Cuba from the years 1979-94 (see the list in the dedicated section of the Bibliography). I operated a selection not only because of the limited time at my disposal, but also on the basis of more substantial criteria that I will explain at the beginning of Chapter 4. As I also will explain in that chapter, the interpretative reach of these sources is limited. At the same time, I was unable to find comprehensive studies on the Latin American press, similar to those already existing for the TV sector, that would give an overview of ownership structures, political orientations and concentration processes in the regional press market of the period. For that reason, I interviewed two Latin American journalists from Brazil and Argentina who as young professionals were already active in the period under investigation, in order to cover, at least to some degree, the above lacunae with their memories and experience (see Appendix 2); unfortunately, the contacts established with another journalist from Mexico failed to lead to the accomplishment of the third interview that I had envisaged.

Additionally, I used some online resources, such as a speech by Ernesto Guevara from the Che Guevara Internet Archive, and several speeches by Fidel Castro collected

by the Latin American Network Information Center. I retrieved information on economic aspects from the online resources of the International Monetary Fund, and of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; the latter conserves interesting typewritten documents on the Cuban economic situation from the beginning and the end of my period of investigation (see Appendix 1).

I wish to thank my supervisor for advice and the many helpful observations that allowed me to improve the draft; the staff of CIGA Hamburg who instructed me on how to use the press archive and helped me in acquiring the full text versions; and the journalists Pepe Escobar from *Asia Times* and Gustavo Veiga from *Pagina/12*, who were so friendly to answer my interview questions.

## 2. The Cuban Revolution

### 1. U.S. influence in Cuba before the Revolution, 1920–59

During the four centuries of Spanish rule over Cuba, which lasted from 1492 to 1898, various turning points and political events of Caribbean colonial history, as well as of Spanish and European history, and that of the American settler colonies and later the United States, affected the island. On the other hand, the internal developments of Cuba, not the least for its importance as a location of maritime trade and tobacco and sugar production, likewise resonated well beyond its borders. Thus, as a part of the Spanish colonial empire, the island also was part of an interdependent world. For Cuba, however, this interdependence mainly meant dependence, as until 1959 it was never in full control of its own destiny.

In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, the indigenous peoples of Cuba were literally wiped out through diseases and the conquerors' violence, or absorbed through intermarriage. Consequently, they would not play any important role in the future development of Cuba. Initially, the Spanish conquerors used the island mainly as a stopping point between Spain and the rich gold and silver colonies in Spanish America, particularly Mexico and Peru. Later, the emergence of wealthy settler colonies in North America, which then would become the United States and still later Canada, increased the demand for Cuban sugar intensifying the slavery-based plantation system and transforming the island's role in regional and international trade.

As the sugar boom expanded, it also exacerbated the economic inequality in the island. The USA became the first market for Cuban sugar by the middle of the nineteenth century (Staten 2005: 10-12). When Cuba reached its independence from Spain in 1898, it was actually under the sign of a new dependence, that from the USA (Chomsky 2011 18-21). The Cuban anti-colonial movement, led by José Martí, Máximo Gómez and Antonio Maceo, was fighting a desperate War of Independence since 1895, when in 1898 the United States stepped in occupying the island and expelling the Spanish colonial forces. After an occupation that lasted until 1902, Cuba became formally independent. However, the Platt Amendment, a self-assigned American 'right' of intervention in Cuba whenever

they saw the necessity to intervene, which had been voted by the US Congress in 1901, had to be approved as a constitutional norm also by 'independent' Cuba. But even after Franklin D. Roosevelt had withdrawn the occupation forces and lifted the amendment's rules in 1934 – assuring nonetheless the Guantánamo Bay to permanent US control – the American economic and political control over Cuba remained crushing (Staten 2005 12-31).

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, one of the effects of US influence and the related socio-economic setting was the still more widening social gap within the Cuban society. Social inequality was a political fertilizer for an anti-imperialist movement that merged the motives of opposition to the United States with nationalistic sentiment. During the 1920s, Cuba lived a period of opposition against the corrupt Cuban government and the Platt Amendment. Although at the time Cuba's president Gerardo Machado, a veteran of the 1895–98 War of Independence who governed from 1925 to 1933, supported anti-colonialism and made nationalistic claims, the influence of the US was undermining Cuba's socioeconomic independence. In her comments on a 1928 special issue that the Cuban magazine *La Epoca* dedicated to Machado, Alessandra Lorini underlines that

this document offers a good example of the main components of what can be called 'monumental nationalism'. It is the conservative reinterpretation of the goals of the nineteenth-century 'Cuba Libre' movement against Spanish colonialism, through a rhetorical tribute to its heroes – generals, doctors and businessmen; at the same time, Cuba's ambiguous dependence on the United States under the Platt Amendment was left in the background and basically kept unchanged (Lorini 2009: 109).

During his first, short-lived presidential office from September 1933 to January 1934, Ramón Grau San Martín, a professor of the University of Havana with a rich tobacco planter family background, who enjoyed the support of many students and left-leaning intellectuals, but also of the leaders of the Sergeants' Revolt who ousted Machado, dared taking some more concrete 'anti-imperialistic' and nationalist measures. First of all, he demanded from the United States to abrogate the Platt Amendment (which would be abrogated later, in May 1934, under Carlos Hevia who signed a new Treaty of Relations with the USA) (Staten 2005: 39-42). He also tried to introduce reforms such as the requirement of Cuban citizenship for all union leadership positions, and that at least half



of the workforce of a firm had to be covered by Cubans. The Grau government seized two American-owned sugar mills, which were riddled by labor conflicts, and took over the American owned Cuban Electric Company.

Especially the latter moves were too much for the United States to tolerate. The American firms and entrepreneurs engaged in the Cuba business were fuming. Hence, Sumner Welles, who had been appointed ambassador to Cuba and Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs by President Roosevelt, suggested that the United States should not recognize the new government but rather encourage opposition groups, both among the traditional Liberal and Conservative factions and the corps of Cuba's military commanders. The majority of the latter initially refused to accept the leadership of Fulgencio Batista, who following the Sergeants' Revolt – a military coup d'état against the then president Carlos Manuel de Céspedes – had been nominated the Army Chief of Staff. But Batista crushed opposition and adverse military revolts, and step by step succeeded in strengthening his own position as the supreme commander. Taking note of the weakness of the traditional parties and the result of the power struggles within the ranks of the military, Welles began to see Batista as the only authority realistically capable in preserving US interests (Staten 2005: 59-60). When in February 1943 Jefferson Caffery became Welles' successor as the US Ambassador to Cuba, he continued to work with Batista in order to establish a new government in favor of US economic interests. Literally no alternative to Batista seemed available for the US since the student leader Antonio Guiteras had requested social reforms and Grau tried to meet both the demands from the left and the right, with moves that did not coincide with the interest of the United States.

Who was Fulgencio Batista? The Spanish colonizers had linked the social order and its preservation to racial hierarchy (Lievesley 2004: 41), and in line with the mental heritage of the former colonial society's racist taxonomies, Batista was frequently smeared by his most conservative adversaries through references to his 'mixed racial' features. They referred to him as *el mulato malo* and the "black beast" (Chomsky 2011: 25-33). Son of a sugar worker, he himself had worked as a cane cutter before he joined the army in 1921, which also gave him the opportunity to study Law. As a result of his leadership in the Sergeants' Revolt, his well-calculated political moves and the American support, he became Cuba's de-facto strongman until 1959, at times in official roles, others acting behind the scenes.

Of the three main factors of Batista's rise to power, American support soon became the most critical and enduring one. Batista himself acknowledged that sugar exports to the US were vital for the economic survival and prosperity of the island. Between 1929 and 1933 the standard of living in Cuba had diminished drastically, as the sugar industry was experiencing a severe crisis due to shrinking external demand. Poverty, crime and violence were among the consequences, which caused havoc in the countryside. When Batista understood that the new government would not have been recognized by the US, he conspired with Welles to replace President Grau with Carlos Mendieta. Washington recognized the government of Mendieta, but even more appreciated the central role Batista had been able to play in its institution. This made it not only easier for him to negotiate a new Reciprocity Treaty with better conditions in 1934, the US also conceded the abrogation of its rights under the Platt terms of the Permanent Treaty (Staten 2005: 56-62).

Hence, reinforced by a new, and seemingly more tolerant, 'alliance' with the United States, Batista was able to replace the old political system of 1902 and to practically form a new republic, even if it was still dominated by the influence of the United States. The abrogation of the Platt Amendment meant that US intervention did not rely anymore on military intervention. It now rested mainly on economic domination. From an economic point of view, the conditions of the 1934 Reciprocity Treaty was even more disadvantageous for Cuba than the previous one had been. The Cuban government agreed to these terms in the hope to easier access the US market and fight economic depression through an increase of exports. Not only, the US even introduced a new sugar quota system that assured Cuba a privileged access. Yet, it was up to the US government to decide year by year the quotas it wished to allocate to each producer. Being the sugar export Cuba's main source of income, the new Reciprocity Treaty made economic long-term planning difficult and deepened Cuba's one-sided dependency from US commercial and foreign politics (Schoultz 2009: 60-63).

After having seized power, Batista installed a series of puppet presidents until he himself won the 1940 elections. Thanks to his background activities, the armed forces began to be associated closely with the government, becoming its 'shadow'. Batista tried to raise the popularity of the military through rural programs, which provided healthcare and housing under the direction of the armed forces. He also used sugar tax funds to open

civic-military schools (Staten 2005: 64). Furthermore, he had a major role in putting in motion the new Constitution of 1940, discussed and voted by a Convention dominated by Batista's coalition. The elected assembly was dominated by the political party of the *Autenticos*. The new constitution provided for extensive social welfare, paid vacations for workers and minimum-wage guarantees as well as the autonomy of the University of Havana. It represented a progressive new beginning for many Cubans. In 1940, Batista, with the support not only of the wealthiest families of the island, but also of a coalition of left-leaning parties called Democratic Socialist Coalition that included the communists, was elected president under the new Constitution. He ruled until 1944, when a hand-picked successor, Carlos Saladrigas Zayas, took over (Lievesley 2004: 43-48). The political party of the *Autenticos* identified themselves as heirs of the 1933 student rebellion, 'revolutionary' and nationalist. However, not only the USA was aware of Batista's strength. The Cuban opponents of Batista and the *Autenticos* also knew since the 1930s that any test of American hegemony, let alone any future revolutionary attempt in the Caribbean island, would mean to challenge both the United States and Batista himself (Staten 2005: 62). Over time, some student opposition to the Batista regime, which had an anti-American character, began to rise, and the violence and tension in the country increased. Various strikes against the poor educational system led to the declaration of the martial law and the strikes were brutally crushed by the military (Kapcia 2008: 17-19). The *Autenticos* proved to be corrupt and this also led to a growing popularity of the political party of the *Ortodoxos*. When in 1952 this latter party was about to win the election, Batista seized power by a staged coup. The coup and its outcome triggered a new atmosphere of rebellion especially among students who challenged the legitimacy of the president and called for self-determination (Kapcia 2008: 19-20). This was also the moment in which young Fidel Castro entered the scene, as Clifford L. Staten (2005: 71) recalls:

Revolutionary struggles are rare throughout history. Successful revolutionary struggles are even more rare, and they are the result of many factors that come together in a given place at a given time. Cuba was no different. The stage for the violent upheaval was set by the existence of striking political, economic and social inequalities with more than one-third of the population considered poor and lacking social mobility, coupled with the growth of a frustrated middle class whose rising expectations could no longer be met by a stagnant, sugar-based economy. A corrupt and repressive government supported by the United States

had alienated its own people and spurred the growth of a Cuban identity and nationalism divorced from the United States. Yet, with all of this it still took the appearance of a charismatic leader in the right place at the right time to light the fuse and bring all of these ingredients together to make a revolution in Cuba. That leader was Fidel Castro.

Without negating the specific weight of charisma for the dynamics of the political revolution and its success, we may however also underline that the ultimately decisive preconditions for the revolutionary struggles in Cuba were the economic ‘colonialism’ that America was imposing on the Caribbean island and the unacceptable social and economic inequalities that resulted from it. These inequalities were felt, first and foremost, on a moral level, as a matter of national and social dignity. Through the Batista regime the United States favored the spread of gambling, prostitution and corruption. “Corruption has never before been so rampant, so organized, and so profitable for those at the top” (Schoultz 2009: 36). The same moral component played also a role in the offense that Cubans felt vis-à-vis the racist and colonialist mentality exhibited by the Americans. In 1940, the US ambassador commented on the Cuban revolutionary movement by saying that many of them “possess the superficial charm of clever children, spoiled by nature and geography — but under the surface they combine the worst characteristics of the unfortunate admixture and interpenetration of Spanish and Negro cultures — laziness, cruelty, inconstancy, irresponsibility, and inbred dishonesty.” (quoted in Schoultz 2009: 7).

On a more principled note, we may wonder whether the Cuban opposition’s accusations against the American ‘colonialist behavior’ were an excuse for the Cubans’ own flaws and failures, if not laziness, inconstancy, irresponsibility, and dishonesty, as the ambassador had put it, or if they had to tackle with historical and structural constraints that made it difficult to escape the vicious circle of poverty and inequality. During the 1950s-70s, an explanation of similar constraints was offered by Latin American economists who developed what then would be labelled ‘dependency theory’. As Joseph L. Love (1990: 143) has pointed out, “dependency analysis developed out of two traditions of economic thought, Marxism and Latin American structuralism, associated with the UN Economic Commission for Latin America”, the latter headed by Argentinean economist Raul Prebisch. I cannot discuss here the differences between the various leading figures of dependency theory, nor the distinction between ‘center’ and ‘periphery’

in the long-term development of a capitalist world economy. However, it may be worth recalling what, according to these theorists, the dependency creating and inequality deepening influences of colonialism and neo-colonialism consisted of.

The problem was basically due to the unequal geographical distribution of the industrialization process and the bias in productivity it brought about. It implied structural differences between industrialized countries, like the USA, and agricultural or other raw materials producing former colonies like Cuba. In Cuba, for example, the colonial period left behind an economy heavily relying on plantation, the revenues of which came mainly from the exportation of sugar and tobacco. Over time, both Spanish colonial rule and American influence defended and reinforced the related economic pattern as well as the correspondent landed and industrial properties both politically and militarily.

As a consequence, Cuba's economic structure showed an "extreme dependency of the Cuban economy on foreign trade in the pre-revolutionary period" (LeoGrande 1979: 5). It depended on export markets, mainly the USA, incomparably more than the USA would ever depend on imports from the Caribbean island. Cuba, to run their agrarian-industrial business, had also to import capital goods from industrialized countries (agricultural machinery, fertilizers, fuel etc.) as well as manufactured consumer goods and services, given their poorly diversified domestic economy. The USA had instead many possibilities to diversify their import markets of sugar and tobacco. If necessary, at certain price levels they even could replace plantation sugar with domestic sugar beet growing and, depending on price variations, could also reduce the consumption of a luxury good like Cuban tobacco. Otherwise said, the Cuban need for importing fuel or agricultural machinery or certain basic consumer goods was incomparably stronger than the American need for Cuban sugar and tobacco. Still otherwise said, the Cuban demand for US goods (and goods from other industrialized countries) was relatively inelastic, that is, insensible to price variation (when you need that fuel to run your bulldozers whatever it costs), if compared to the much more elastic (price sensible) demand for Cuban goods abroad.

Such a setting would likely lead to progressively worsening price relations, leaving in fact Cuba's economy particularly "vulnerable to deterioration in its terms of trade" (LeoGrande 1979: 11). Terms of trade (i.e. the ratio between a country's export prices and its import prices) tend to change for the benefit of the country with an elastic demand and

to the detriment of the country with an inelastic demand. Prebisch (2016: 52) showed in his 1949 analysis how primary goods had lost one third of their value against finished goods since 1876 worldwide, and thus urged the industrialization of the ‘periphery’. Worsening terms of trade for mainly primary goods exporting countries also meant that, “whereas the primary producers can increase their acquisitions of final products less than they increase productivity, industrial producers benefit more than they should in relation to the increase in their productivity”. As a result, “while the centres kept the whole benefit of the technical development of their industries, the peripheral countries transferred to them a share of the fruits of their own technical progress” (Prebisch 2016: 53–4). It finally meant that wage inequalities, for example between an American industrial worker and the wage of a Cuban cane cutter had a likewise good chance to drift apart. On the whole, in the words of Andre Gunder Frank, this setting made what he called the periphery “increasingly dependent on and vulnerable to the interests and vagaries of the metropolitan economy” (Frank 1969: 126).

I have no competence to go deeper into the economic aspects of these theories, none of which deemed ‘dependency’ to be inescapable, however, but suggested reformist (Prebisch) or revolutionary (Frank) ways out. From the 1980s, dependency theories have been widely discredited among economists, especially by those who adhered to the new ‘neo-liberal’ mainstream. However, still today there are economists who also wonder what causes the “failure of most poor countries to improve their position in the global economy”, and there are those who point their finger at lacking *independent* potentials for technological change, innovation, research and knowledge creation as the decisive factors (Fagerberg 2010: 8). Similar conclusions seem to be not so far away from at least some of the points raised by the dependency theorists of the 1960s, who also underlined, if in the jargon of their era, the bias in technological capacity.

One has also to consider that the setting they referred to, was the outcome of a secular colonial expansion, slave work and plantation economy that after 1750 went hand in hand with the industrial revolution in Europe and North America. In the mid-twentieth century, at the time of the beginning Cuban Revolution, the long-term effects of the historical hiatus created by the industrialization and colonial domination of ‘the North’ were still far from being bridged. Once such a huge bias had been established, the spiral towards

ever increasing divergence and dependence was difficult to reverse – even for revolutionary Cuba, as Fidel Castro (1985b) would claim still in the 1980s.

## 2. Fidel Castro the young revolutionary

Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz said about his own origins:

I was born into a family of landowners in comfortable circumstances. We were considered rich and treated as such. I was brought up with all the privileges attendant to a son in such a family. Everyone lavished attention on me, flattered, and treated me differently from the other boys we played with when we were children. These other children went barefoot while we wore shoes; they were often hungry; at our house, there was always a squabble at table to get us to eat” (quoted from Franqui 1980: 1-2).

The future *Líder Máximo* was born on August 13, 1926 at Birán, as the fruit of an affair that his father Ángel Castro (who originally came from the Spanish region of Galicia) had with a young housekeeper, Lina Ruz. After Ángel’s current marriage was dissolved, he married Lina. The place where Fidel Castro grew up was situated between the Nipe foothills of the Cristal mountains between the town of Mayarí and Santiago de Cuba, one of the largest cities in Cuba. The surrounding area was known as a kind of ‘Wild West’ for being subjected to frequent gunfights between so-called ‘bandits’ and armed ‘sheriffs’ of the American United Fruit Company. It was one of the Cuban regions where the North American influence was most heavily felt.

When Fidel reached the age of six or seven, he was sent to a college run by the Franciscan order in Santiago de Cuba. Some years later, he was sent to the Jesuit school *Colegio Dolores*, where he obtained excellent grades. After being advised to do so, his parents decided to send him to another elite school, the Jesuit college of Belén in Havana, where the Cuban aristocracy used to enroll their offspring. As Volker Skierka (2004: 15) writes:

Fidel obviously made a lasting impression, and right from the start – as classmates later recalled – the Jesuits detected in him an exceptional gift for political leadership. In the eyes of his examiner, the head of the oratory academy and

college 'ideologue' Father José Rubinos, he soon developed into the most capable pupil and the best athlete among the boarders. The fathers were convinced supporters of the Spanish fascist dictator Francisco Franco – anti-Communist but also, for historical reasons, inclined to anti-Americanism. They dreamed of countering US economic imperialism and the influence of Anglo-Saxon culture in Latin America with a renewal of *hispanidad*, and of reviving the traditional ties with Europe in the shape of Franco's 'New Spain.' They brought to life for their pupils such historical figures as Julius Caesar, Simon Bolívar, Benito Mussolini and Francisco Franco, as well as Antonio Primo de Rivera, the founder and spiritual father of the Spanish Falange, whose writings Fidel had to study. But the personality he discovered for himself at Belén, and with whom he would identify for the rest of his life, was the freedom-fighter José Martí, in a sense the George Washington of Cuba.

Thus, the figure of José Martí became central to Fidel. In 1892, after denouncing the political and social evils that afflicted his country, the poet and political leader Martí succeeded with founding the Cuban Revolutionary Party and started a revolutionary struggle for independence. This would be an inspiration for, and actually a major parallel with, the later life of his young admirer at the Belén college. But unlike Fidel Castro, during his struggle Martí was killed and became as influential as a martyr of national independence. His symbolic value as an anti-colonial fighter for Cuban independence became central for Fidel's development as an 'anti-imperialist' revolutionary political leader (Caistor 2013: 15).

In October 1945, after finishing high school, Castro enrolled in the Law studies of Havana University. Castro himself later wondered what were the reasons behind his choice: "I partly associate it with those who said: 'He talks so much he should become a lawyer.' Since I was in the habit of debating and discussing, I was sure I had what it took for the legal profession" (quoted from Skierka 2004: 20). Hence, it was in the atmosphere of intense "debating and discussing" in academic circles that the young Fidel Castro started developing revolutionary views. He would later recall:

When I was 18, I was, politically speaking, illiterate. Since I didn't come from a family of politicians or grown up in a political atmosphere, it would have been impossible for me to carry out a revolutionary role..., in a relatively brief time, had I not had a special calling.... I had the feeling that a new field was opening up for me. I started thinking about my country's political problems... I spontaneously started to feel a certain concern, an interest in social and political questions (quoted from Skierka 2004: 22).



During his years as a Law student he became active on the political scene of the University, which was one of the ‘hotspots’ of Cuban political and intellectual life. Here, his speeches against the government’s policies gained large attention, but also met opposition. Thanks to his activities he soon became a controversial public figure. He made a significant step for a political carrier when in 1947 Eduardo Chibás, then a 40-year-old senator, left his original political party to form the *Partido Popular Cubano* (PPC). The PPC, which soon became known as the Orthodox Party, was the first to openly oppose the government. Its members embraced the values and thoughts of the nineteenth century freedom fighter Martí: ‘anti-imperialism’, social justice and economic independence. Fidel enrolled in the party until it broke up in the mid-1950s.

Castro engaged in his first revolutionary adventure in 1947, when he joined other 1,200 would-be guerrillas who indented to help overthrowing the US-backed dictator Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic. However, this first revolutionary expedition never made it to Hispaniola, as due to treachery their ship was seized by the Cuban navy still in Cuban waters (Schoultz 2009: 63-66). In the following years, Fidel Castro became more and more interested in the fate of Latin America, just as his idol José Martí had been. He engaged in the battle for Puerto Rican independence and showed solidarity with the student movements in Argentina, Venezuela, Colombia, and Panama. He shared their quest for the end of the neo-colonialist policies of economic dominance and exploitation practiced especially by the United States.

In April 1948 he helped organize a congress of Latin American student organizations in the Colombian capital Bogotá – to be held in parallel with the Ninth Inter-American Meeting of Foreign Ministers, which was supposed to prepare the founding of the Organization of American States. Castro travelled with his friend ... Alfredo Guevara, to a country which for two years had been wracked by a bloody civil war between supporters of the Conservative and the Liberal Party (Skierka 2004: 26-27).

During 1949–50, Fidel Castro had to go for several months into exile (another parallel with his idol José Martí), after in a university meeting he denounced the student gang members and leaders, as well as the politicians who had been profiting from a ‘pact’ with President Prío. On August 5, 1951, Eduardo Chibás, who had major prospects of becoming president during the following year’s elections, shot himself in the belly with a gun during his radio broadcast. Fidel Castro rushed immediately over to help taking him

to the hospital, but Chibás died by his injury. As it seems, Chibás's desperate act was triggered by his inability to prove the charges of corruption he had made against the sitting president Prío. From that moment on, Castro felt obliged to take the place of Chibás as a president in the making, although for the moment Fulgencio Batista was able to make sure that no one else beside himself would be the next president.

On March 10, 1952, Batista staged a military coup to interrupt the election campaign, in order to proclaim himself president. Once in office, he allowed American gangsters such as Meyer Lansky, Charles 'Lucky' Luciano, Albert 'Butcher' Anastasia, Frank Costello, Carlo Gambino, Willie Moretti, Mike Miranda, Vito Genovese, 'Fat Man' Joe Maglocco, Carlos Marcello, Al Capone 'Three Finger Brown' Lucchese, to extend their obscure businesses to Havana. What is more, the New York Jewish gangster Meyer Lansky soon became Batista's official adviser for a 'casino reform', an activity that yielded both of them personally millions of dollars (Skierka 2004: 20-30). Fidel Castro was one of the first to denounce the criminal takeover. After Batista's coup he quickly published his manifesto and proclaimed in several public speeches and radio broadcasts that "your [Batista's] votes are in rifles, never in [the popular] will. With all that, you can win a military takeover but never clean elections. Your assault on government lacks the principles that give legitimacy" (Martin 1978: 98).

Batista and his men maintained that their coup d'état was a revolution, as it substituted the previous system of laws and instituted a new legal system. According to them, for that reason a 'revolution' could not be deemed to be illegal. Fidel Castro was not against an armed seizure of power as a principle, on the contrary. He fully recognized the legitimacy of revolutions, provided they actually represented and stood for the 'will of the people'. According to his view, Batista's coup certainly did not fall in such a category (Caistor 2013: 30-31). It had no legitimacy.

His own feeling of being legitimized for revolutionary action was instead particularly confident and strong. "Condemn me. It does not matter. History will absolve me!" he once defiantly addressed his interlocutors who had to judge him (Castro 2008: 105). He pronounced that what was destined to become perhaps his most famous phrase, at the end of his speech for the defense held during his trial for the attack on the Moncada Barracks of July 26<sup>th</sup>, 1953.

From an ideological point of view, at that time Castro was all but a convinced communist, as Melba Hernández, who also participated in the attack, observed:

In our ranks in that period there was never talk about Communism, socialism or Marxism-Leninism as an ideology, but we did speak of the day when the revolution would come to power, that all the estates of the aristocracy must then be handed over to the people and must be used by the children for whom we are fighting (quoted from Szulc 2009: 227).

Fidel Castro, who was the leader of the attack, like most of the other men who joined him on the mission, was involved with the *Federación Estudiantil Universitaria* (FEU) and the Orthodox Party. The plan was to set off a rebellion through the conquering of the barracks that would then trigger a general revolution. However, the attack was a complete failure as 61 of the attackers were killed during or after the attack. Many of the others were captured on the spot or, like Fidel himself, rounded up shortly after escaping the scene. Even Cuba's Communist Party criticized the action as "adventurism guided by bourgeois misconceptions" and for suffering a "lack of theoretical cohesion and ideology" (quoted by Chomsky 2011: 36). Although the attack on the Barracks was a complete disaster in military terms, in retrospect we can say that it gained a massive historical momentum as a symbol of breach with Cuba's past. Without hesitation Fidel Castro admitted his responsibility calling the action legitimized by the corrupt and illicit character of Batista's regime. A document, which he drafted in prison during the same year, delineated his project. It was addressed to unemployed laborers, peasants and plantation workers, and to urban professionals who were tired of political corruption. As Chomsky (2011: 36-37) sums up, he

laid out the five 'revolutionary laws' that the Moncada attackers intended to implement: restoration and implementation of the 1940 Constitution, an agrarian reform putting land in the hands of those who tilled it, obligation of employers to share profits with workers, guaranteed markets for small sugar farmers, and confiscation of all enterprises obtained through fraud and corruption. All of these revolutionary laws, he emphasized, were based on the Constitution itself, which restricted large landholdings and provided labor rights.

Hence, Fidel Castro's first appearance as a revolutionary in Cuba was marked by the attack on the barracks and crowned by his 'five revolutionary laws', foreshadowing the sketch of a new revolutionary narrative that was made of theory and action. And the script

was destined to be continued. After one year and seven months of imprisonment, Castro was released on May 15, 1955, thanks to the mediation of Archbishop Pérez Serantes. Already in June he founded the 26<sup>th</sup> July Movement. However, Fidel, his brother Raúl and his comrade Antonio ‘Nico’ López, who also had participated in the Moncada attack, decided that it was wiser to leave for exile in Mexico after having received death threats from Batista who diffused the sinister warning that the “governing parties have brains, ears, and also hands” (Skierka 2003: 39).

After their arrival to Mexico City, in July 1955, López introduced Fidel Castro to an acquaintance of his, the Argentinian Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara. According to Volker Skierka (2003: 41) it “was to be a historic encounter: Fidel Castro, the daring figure with a natural talent for politics and the aura of a battle-tried revolutionary, always at the center of things, determined, energetic and confident of victory; and the quieter Che Guevara, more reserved and physically less robust, but equally self-assured and resolute. They immediately felt a great sympathy with each other – even if they were not yet on the same wavelength ideologically”. Before meeting Castro, Guevara had travelled extensively through Latin America. In 1952, he saw the outcome of the failed revolution in Bolivia and two years later witnessed a United States backed a coup d’état in Guatemala to end the popular left-wing social reform policies adopted by the local government. *El Che*, as he would be called later, combined a thorough knowledge of Marxist theory with a critical analysis of US foreign policies (Kapcia 2008: 17-20). Castro would later admit that at the time of their first meeting, Guevara’s revolutionary visions and theoretical preparation were far more developed than his own. Nevertheless, their encounter “was the beginning of a close friendship and a common political fate, in which Che, as chief ideologue, became the powerful number two in Cuba and decisively influenced the orientation of the revolution” (Skierka 2003: 41).

In Mexico, Fidel Castro and his group were not the only political refugees seeking a safe haven in Central America. Many Republican exiles from the Spanish Civil War had also escaped to Mexico, providing intellectual, cultural and political ferment. Unfortunately for them, during the 1950s Mexico’s internal policies under the increasingly authoritarian Party of the Institutionalized Revolution became more and more intolerant of dissent. Nevertheless, foreign policy was still progressive especially with regard to Latin America and the Caribbean Islands. Political refugees from the

Dominican Republic as well as from Cuba, Venezuela and Peru were left relatively free to gather and plot their activities (Caistor 2013: 38-39).

After a year of organizational work and fund raising, on August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1956, Fidel Castro signed a joint declaration with the leader of the student movement FEU, José Antonio Echeverría, vowing to stimulate insubordination and organize sabotage as well as other operations in Cuba that would create the revolutionary precondition for an invasion of a liberation army. Earlier in the same year, Castro had released a manifesto, called *Bohemia*, where he declared that his movement was a “revolutionary opposition of ordinary people, by ordinary people and for ordinary people”. For that very reason the revolutionaries were still without financial resources, which were urgently needed for the acquisition of a ship. Hence, Castro did not have much choice but to meet ex Cuban president Prío, who financed the cause with 100,000 dollars. This money was used to purchase the boat *Granma* (‘Grandmother’) that would be known as the boat that ‘shipped’ the revolution (Skierka 2003: 43–6). Eventually, the plan regarding the revolutionary expedition materialized.

On November 25, 1956, at 1.30 in the morning, the 21 by 5 meter Granma finally slipped, with navigation lights dimmed, out of the little port of Poza Rica near Tuxpán de Pantepéc. On board the former leisure boat, built way back in 1938 for a maximum of 25 persons, 82 guerrillas (50 having been left behind for lack of space) now pitched and tossed in a stormy, rainy night as the two six-cylinder 250-PS diesel engines carried them the 1,235 nautical miles to their uncertain goal: the Cuban Revolution. As they entered the Gulf of Mexico, the men struck up the Cuban national anthem in defiance of the lashing waves, before sinking, like sardines squashed together in a tin, into long days and nights of sea-sickness (Skierka 2003: 47).

After landing, on its way to the Sierra Maestra the group was engaged by several army patrols, experiencing a heavy punch by losing 61 men. The group was decimated, and the rumor spread that even Fidel Castro himself was dead. Notwithstanding the awkward beginning, the guerrilla tactic began to pay off and eventually turned out successful. The revolutionaries received help by the local people and farmers, for which reason Batista’s army started torturing and killing them (Skierka 2003: 50). The mountains of the eastern part of the island turned out to be a fruitful ground for a rebellion. Already in colonial times they had been ground for outlaws and rebels. The expansion of the United State dominated sugar plantation during the early twentieth century only

incremented the sense of dispossession and frustration among the people, and their desire for revenge (Chomsky 2011: 38). After having released his First Manifesto from the Sierra Meastra, Fidel Castro was able to conquer ever more consensus among the people and mobilize them against the Batista regime.

Unable to defeat the Revolution with arms, the regime started spreading the most cowardly lie that our expeditionary force and I had been exterminated. After almost three months of sacrifice and effort, we can tell the country that the 'exterminated' force smashed a siege of more than a thousand soldiers between Niquero and Pilon; ...that the 'exterminated' force, whose ranks were steadily reinforced by the peasants of the Sierra Maestra, bravely resisted the attacks of the air force and the mountain artillery; and it fought successfully almost every day against more than 3,000 men equipped with all kinds of modern weapons: bazookas, mortars, and several types of machine guns. Their desperate but powerless efforts have converted the Sierra Maestra into a hell, where falling bombs, the rattle of machine guns, and bursts of rifle fire are heard incessantly (quoted from Franqui 1980: 139-40).

The fact that the guerrillas eventually achieved the upper hand in the Sierra Maestra represented the critical turning point for the revolutionary outcome in Cuba as a whole. The movement now gained ever more consensus among the people, who became confident in the possibility of success, and the rebellion against the Batista army spread to other regions. Despite the fact that Batista's troops were more experienced and technically better equipped than the group led by Fidel Castro, they faced great difficulties and eventually defeat. The process culminated with the victorious entrance of the revolutionary army in Havana on New Year's Day, 1959. The revolutionaries succeeded militarily thanks to their guerrilla tactics, which however would have been fruitless without the growing popularity of the political project that was behind the insurrection. People were acerbated by the disastrous economic situation and the social injustice, and thus welcomed the revolutionary effort. With the triumphant entrance to Havana, however, Fidel Castro's revolution did not end. On the contrary, it was just at the beginning (Chomsky 2011: 42-43; Kapcia 2008: 7-25).

### 3. 'Anti-imperialism' in the revolutionary discourse and practice

In 1962, Fidel Castro gave a speech at a ceremony in Havana where he received the Lenin prize. Among many other aspects, he touched on the subject of colonialism and imperialism in order to characterize the adversaries of the Cuban Revolution:

The threats to peace and humanity come from those who defend colonialism; who defend imperialism; who are against the right of the colonies to be free, the right of men to develop their economy, the right of nations to their sovereignty; who oppose the rights of men to be free and to enjoy a better life. The threat of war, in the world today as always in the course of history, comes from those who want to maintain the right of plunder and exploitation over man. The world is now closer than ever to the opportunity, or to the moment, when war could be eradicated forever. The world is also closer than ever to the moment when exploitation and hunger could be eradicated forever from humanity (Castro 1961).

Given the Cuban revolutionaries' frequent references to 'imperialism', it may be worth to have a closer look at the origins and variants of the theoretical concept. In modern times, it emerged in the context of the late nineteenth century, when after the 'Scramble for Africa' that led to the colonial conquest of the 'black continent' by competing European powers, these powers and the former settler colonies of European origin virtually dominated over the whole world. The domination in particular of Great Britain and its major competitors was exercised or by means of a military occupation and direct colonial rule, like in Africa, India and South-East Asia, or by a tight economic, political and military conditioning or submission of previously powerful and still formally independent states and empires, such as the Ottoman and the Chinese ones. Also, in Latin America, most of the former colonies which had achieved independence were still ruled by elites of European origin, and exploited by European and North American companies. Basically, only Japan and Ethiopia could preserve their sovereignty. The main factor behind such a disproportioned might of the West was the Industrial Revolution, with the wealth it produced and the technological advancement it allowed in the military sector, and with its limitless hunger for raw materials, cheap labor and export markets for industrial goods (Reilly 2012: 248–74). The might of these economic factors projected 'imperialism' beyond the borders even of the mightiest empire. Even if it is impossible

to exhaust such a complex argument in these pages, it is possible to affirm with Maier that “British financial influence at the end of the nineteenth century, after all, extended far beyond the borders of the British Empire's territorial components” (Maier 2006: 80).

Together with an aggressive nationalist ideology, economic interest was the major driver behind expansionist or, as the people got used to call it, ‘imperialistic’ policies. At the turn of the twentieth century, the United States of America, later destined to become the chief incarnation of ‘imperialism’, often underlined their own colonial history they had freed themselves from, and expressed solidarity with anti-colonial stances in their aggressive anti-Spanish rhetoric. However, one should not forget that the US shared not only a colonial past with the oppressed, they also shared a colonialist past with their European counterparts. Besides the activities of the American Colonization Society in West Africa, which started in the early nineteenth century and led to the foundation of Liberia (Clegg 2004), it was mainly ‘internal colonization’ within the expanding national borders. In this way the US became one of the many large states that “originate in a program of imperial conquest of people and regions within their own national borders” (Maier 2006: 28; see also Arrighi 2010: 75–80).

In the early days of the twentieth century, several thinkers tried to give a reliable theoretical explanation of the phenomenon of ‘imperialism’. In 1902, the British economist John Atkinson Hobson published a groundbreaking study where he analyzed imperialism on the basis of the experience of the British Empire. The author stressed that imperialism, governed by “enterprise capitalism”, visibly had an unfavorable effect on the majority of the British population, while it came to the advantage only of the highest classes of the society. Why then, he wondered, could the British nation be “induced to embark upon such unsound business?” The only possible answer was that

the business interests of the nation as a whole are subordinated to those of certain sectional interests that usurp control of the national resources and use them for private gain. This is no strange or monstrous charge to bring; it is the commonest disease of all forms of government. The famous words of Sir Thomas More are as true as now as when he wrote them: ‘Everywhere do I perceive a certain conspiracy of rich men seeking their own advantage under the name and pretext of commonwealth’. (Hobson 1902: 51–2).

However, he did not limit himself to underline the rich men’s conspiracy against the many that we can observe throughout history. Hobson wanted to understand the specific



features of the “new imperialism” he was witnessing, and which required huge expenditures on military, waged costly wars around the globe, and reduced the space for social reform within Great Britain, all to the advantage of certain businesses and professions in the country. Hence, according to his analyses, industrial and financial capital always searches to lower the wages to accumulate more capital, which then needs ever more opportunities for new investments. This vicious cycle produces under-consumption by vast masses of population in the home country, and an over-accumulation of capital in the hands of a small percentage of the population. As opportunities for investment at home are lacking, the capitalists seek opportunities abroad.

The process we may be told is inevitable, and so it seems upon a superficial inspection. Everywhere appear excessive powers of production, excessive capital in search for investment. It is admitted by all business men that the growth of the powers of production in their country exceeds the growth of consumption, that more goods can be produced than can be sold at profit, and more capital exists than can find remunerative investment. It is this economic condition of affairs that forms taproot of Imperialism” (Hobson 1902: 86).

Hobson was a convinced social reformer, who thought that welfare provisions, higher wages and the increasing demand for mass consumption within the home country were able to divert the investments from military expenditure and aggressive foreign investment. Marxist theorists shared much of his economic analysis, but excluded that capitalism could be reformed and pacified. In 1913, Marxist theorist Rosa Luxemburg emphasized the danger that arose to world peace through the competitive struggle among capitalistic nations. The ongoing conquer of pre-capitalist areas and markets by the capitalist mode of production could only temporally delay the decline of capitalism. In the long run, capitalist conditions would prevail worldwide, which could either be ended by a worldwide socialist revolution or by an economic or political collapse that would end in the war of all against all under the sign of a new barbarism. Interestingly, she also marked out the importance not only of big industry, but also that of big finance. According to her, the expansion of European dominance to non-European regions reinforced the ‘backward’ countries’ demand for European capital, and lead to the emergence of a divide between international lender and debtor states. This divide was also a specific feature of modern imperialism (Luxemburg 1951: 454-66).

A few years later, the Russian revolutionary Vladimir Ilyich Lenin took Luxemburg's discourse further. Also, in his view technological progress and huge profits had led to a pyramidal concentration process in both the industry and banking sectors; as a consequence, the financial capital of the banking sector had merged with the capital of monopolistic industrial associations. But the real new quality of contemporary imperialism was according to Lenin the unprecedented level of reciprocal penetration and de-facto fusion of the great corporations with the political sphere, which had lost any substantial autonomy. The leading companies and trusts, thanks to their market power, had not only overrun all rules of free competition and marginalized smaller businesses, they could also condition political decision making and put the state under the rule of their own interests, for example when it came to the need for a military conquer of foreign markets. This 'state-monopolistic capitalism' was in his view the ultimate driver of imperialism, and the fifth and final stage of capitalism. Foreign expansion had become a vital and alternative-less need for the monopolies, to delay the decline of their profit rate and maintain their power (Lenin 1999: 33-108). In his concise definition of imperialism, Lenin marked out five main features:

(1) the concentration of production and capital has developed to such a high stage that it has created monopolies which play a decisive role in economic life; (2) the merging of bank capital with industrial capital, and the creation on the basis of this 'finance capital', of a financial oligarchy; (3) the export of capital as distinguished from the export of commodities acquires exceptional importance; (4) the formation of international monopolist capitalist associations which share the world among themselves; and (5) the territorial division of the whole world among the biggest capitalist powers is completed (Lenin 1999:10).

Both social reformers like Hobson and Marxist thinkers like Lenin and Luxemburg have been criticized for focusing too extensively on the economic dynamics of imperialist aspiration, instead of understanding ideology as another, or even the main, driving force behind it. For Hannah Arendt, imperialistic aspiration is an unavoidable consequence of totalitarian ideologies, such as fascism and communism, because of the apocalyptic moment that results from the claim to totality. Any political or geographical area and any social entity that does not conform to the same totalitarian worldview is considered a threat. Therefore, the movement can achieve its final purpose only when the whole world is subjugated; the realization of totalitarian goals is ultimately only possible under the

conditions of world domination (Arendt 1986: 652). In his study of ‘imperialistic sentiment’, also Italian sociologist Giovanni Amadori-Virgilj (1906: 63, 104-105) had criticized Hobson’s excessive focus on economic aspects, underlining the universalistic and missionary self-understanding of “imperialistic peoples” who see themselves as altruistic donors of civilization to the rest of the world. As others add, if eschatological and apocalyptic thinking – that is, the idea that human history has an ultimate goal that must be achieved by all humanity – is the ideological landmark of imperialism, then western universalism as a whole, in all its different (and not just ‘totalitarian’) ideological variants through which it has manifested itself, “does not lack justification for being deserving of the term” (Petri 2018: 152).

In the view of the Cuban revolutionary movement, among the leaders of which Marxism began to play a major role only in the late fifties, the economic analysis was certainly the theoretical core of anti-imperialist stances, as also Fidel Castro’s later insistence on the debt crisis of the exploited Third World countries seems to underline. This does not mean, however, that the importance of the ideological dimension of anti-imperialist struggle for the political and cultural self-determination of Latin America was in any way underestimated. In their argumentation against imperialism, there is a constant line of reference to Cuban history that underlines in particular the substantial continuity between the anti-colonial and the anti-imperialist struggles, constructing in this way a continuity of national and Latin American history of which the 1959 Revolution appears to be a logical prosecution and consequence, and the fulfillment of the national aspiration for self-determination. This line of interpretation was further substantiated by the apparent and often quoted analogies between the 1895–98 War of Independence against Spanish colonial rule, and the Cuban Revolution of 1959 (Chomsky 2011: 21).

At any rate, anti-imperialism as a political discourse had a long tradition in Cuba. Like in other colonies or former colonies dominated by Western powers and exploited by their capitalist corporations and cartels, in the island the critique of imperialistic policies gained traction since the earliest days of the twentieth century. “Free America, Free Cuba, Free Philippines” were the addresses of the 1901 Boston meeting of the 1899 founded Anti-Imperialist League (1901). “All of the speakers denounced the Platt Amendment” and “condemned the measure as a betrayal of the Cuban people”, and these motives were echoed by the journal *La Patria* in Havana, which had been founded by José Martí (Foner

1962: 591). One day before he was killed in battle by Spanish troops, the latter had written: “What I have done, and shall continue to do is to ... block with [Cuban] blood ... the annexation of the peoples of America to the turbulent and brutal North that despises them... I lived in the monster [the United States] and know its entrails – and my sling is that of David” (quoted from Gleijeses 2002:5).

The reference to ‘imperialism’ thus partially supplanted, and partly merged with, the concept of ‘colonialism’ in the very biography of Martí, marking, at least in Cuba, both the changes and continuities in the passage from Spanish exploitation and domination to US exploitation and domination, from one type of negation of Cuban self-rule to another, partly similar, one. Cuba became a de facto “American fiefdom” until Fidel Castro came to power and challenged American hegemony on the island (Gleijeses 2002:6) and anti-imperialist claims were constant in Cuban political life among those who resisted foreign domination. In 1925, for instance, Julio Antonio Mella and Carlos Balino (a friend of Martí’s) founded a *Liga Antimperialista*. Fidel Castro saw himself as an expression of the same anti-imperialist tradition. He claimed to be the heir of Martí, hence, the savior and protector of Cuban national independence (Skierka 2004:13). After his death a journalist of *The Guardian* would write that “Castro’s main inspiration was not Karl Marx, but José Martí, the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Cuban independence hero. While the latter fought to eject Spanish colonists, Castro ended US neo-imperialist rule by kicking out US corporations and gangsters. The former banana republic is now proudly sovereign” (Carrol 2016).

In a first period following the 1959 Revolution, the diplomatic attitude of the US towards Cuba maintained a friendly tone, as long as the condition of privileges of American companies was given. Dwight Eisenhower, the US President at the time, had searched for a way to get along with the *Líder Máximo*, provided that Cuba would remain in the North American sphere of influence (Gleijeses 2002: 6). When Fidel Castro introduced a ‘Machete Law’, in order to counter American cut-backs on sugar imports, he still did not proceed to confiscate all North American companies in Cuba, but placed them under Cuban custody and set a limit on their percentage of re-exported profits. After the US cut-back their sugar quota from Cuba, the Soviet Union and later the People’s Republic of China declared that they wanted to invest in the Cuban sugar industry and import Cuban sugar. Subsequently, the United States condemned these moves and pushed the Organization of American States (OAS) to publish the San José Declaration, which

condemned “the attempt of the Chinese-Soviet powers” to meddle with the political, economic, and social affairs of Latin America (Skierka 2004: 94). US President Eisenhower also removed from the State Department the more moderate Assistant Secretary of State, Roy Rubottom, and Director of State’s Office of Caribbean and Mexican Affairs, William Wieland, after Undersecretary Dillon had insisted that the State Department needed a tougher line (Schoultz 2009 133-134).

In 1960, as a response to the tougher American stances, Fidel Castro seized and nationalized all US-owned industrial and agricultural assets in Cuba. In September, before his departure to the UN assembly in New York, he extended the measure to the three major US banks and announced: “It is not possible for a considerable portion of national banking to remain in the hands of imperialistic interests that inspired the reduction of our sugar quota by an act of cowardly and criminal economic aggression.” (Castro in Schoultz 2009: 134). From that moment onwards, the USA tried to get rid of Fidel with every means necessary. US ambassador Philip Bonsal would admit that the “suspension of the sugar quota was a major element in the program for the overthrow of Castro” (Szulc 2009: 519). In 1961, CIA Director Allan Dulles launched a “covert contingency planning to accomplish the fall of the Castro government”. The program foresaw the spending of some \$ 4.4 million to launch a propaganda offensive, organize a Cuban exile opposition in Miami and other places, develop anti-Castro underground activity in the island and create a military force of Cuban emigrants that would land at the Bay of Pigs (Schoultz 2009: 116-17). Aviva Chomksy writes about the famous invasion that the word most closely associated with the Bay of Pigs is, in the United States, ‘fiasco’. In Cuba, the victory over the invaders at Playa Girón, as the place is named in Cuba, is celebrated as “the first defeat of imperialism in Latin America” (Chomksy 2011: 68). The embarrassing outcome of the enterprise gave President John F. Kennedy the opportunity to drive Dulles out of office later in the same year. One year later, after one of the tensest moments in world history, the same president agreed with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev that if the Soviet nuclear missiles, which Fidel Castro had in the meantime requested to install following the Bay of Pigs invasion, were retired, then the US would dismantle its own Jupiter missiles in Turkey and in the future renounce invading Cuba again. But JFK himself was murdered in 1963, and the efforts by the CIA to get rid of Castro continued relentlessly.

In 1975, a US Senate Committee investigation documented at least eight CIA-organized assassination attempts against Fidel Castro between 1960 and 1965. The Cubans themselves, however, detected numerous other attempts on the life of their leader. Additionally, the US also tried to turn Cuba's military and Cuba's population against the government. In April 1963, "Langley was cabling its stations and bases in Latin America urging an 'intensive effort to seek out disaffected key personnel in Cuban armed forces with aim of uniting and turning non-Communist elements against Castro'" (Aldrich 2015: 202). The plan did not work out, but parallel actions tried to create discontent among the people to undermine the regime's consent. The severe commercial blockade that the USA erected against Cuba affected all economic activity in the country, "from what is necessary for the operation of the economic branches themselves to the high prices that we must pay for a large number of imports" (Martínez Heredia 2015: 8). An additional strategy was subversive activity inside the country. Lyon Verne, a former leading CIA operator in Cuba during the sixties, recalls how he participated in the poisoning of school milk:

We bought sacks of powdered cement mix and a dissident, vetted and paid by TIO [a code name for CIA operation handlers in Cuba that 'to me represented my own Uncle Sam', p. 72], climbed on the top of the truck and dumped the powder into the tank. We never learned the effects of our sabotage in this case, but I could imagine lots of kids getting sick as a result. How low had we fallen? It made me sick too. We couldn't win hearts and minds by waging war on school children. Most adults went without milk so that the children who went to school could have it, and we were doing this! (Lyon and Zwerling 2018: 104).

#### 4. The impact of the Cuban Revolution in Latin American politics

After 1959, Cuban revolutionaries as well as scholars have often compared the Cuban Revolution to other revolutionary events in history. In history revolts by oppressed people, for example slaves or peasants, are countless. According to the Cuban understanding, however, a revolution is more than just a rebellion or uprising against injustice. It is, instead, an attempt to reorganize the society from the scratch according to a different principle or order. Historians often have distinguished political from social revolutions. While political revolutions target to change the system of government and widen the participation of the population in the political process, social revolutions point

at creating a new, more just, economic and social order. The Cuban Revolution, in the understanding of its protagonists, was both. It was made by people convinced that they could profoundly change their society and the world at large. Their foremost goals were to overthrow the old and unjust social order, and challenge the heritage of the colonial as well as neo-colonial rule that had caused the poverty and social injustice in their country. They believed that colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism were expressions not of a natural order, but of evil human action, and therefore had to be contrasted by other, revolutionary, human action (Chomsky 2011: 7-9).

Throughout the Cuban Revolution, the revolutionary struggle has been identified not just as a phenomenon delimited by national borders, but as a fight based on broader popular and national aspirations for independence that was deeply rooted in Latin American history. The Revolution of 1959, rather than just a national victory was perceived as a moment of the larger struggle that the oppressed Americas were conducting in Bolívar's, Martí's, Zapata's and other traditions. The participation in the Cuban revolution of other Latin American fighters like the Argentine Ernesto Guevara was seen as a natural consequence of this broader Latin American aspirations, solidarity and common fate. Therefore, the sentiment of a reciprocal responsibility for the struggles also of fellow Latin Americans against imperialism pervaded the feelings and politics of the Cuban Revolution (Raby 2006: 100-17). More than once Fidel Castro stressed the importance of a united Latin America, pointing to the common heritage deriving from the same history, language and culture. *Nuestra América*, a concept inspired by José Martí, continued to be promoted by Cuba. Moreover, the Creole ethnicity became a central concept for the revolutionary movement, as a matter of pride for the richness of the mixed indigenous, European and African inheritance among the inhabitants of the Latin American subcontinent.

The example of the Cuban Revolution had a tremendous impact on other Latin American countries. When the Chilean socialist leader Salvador Allende visited Cuba, he said that the "The Cuban Revolution does not belong only to you... we are dealing with the most significant movement ever to have occurred in the Americas" (quoted by Raby 2006: 118). The immediate impact that the Cuban revolution achieved in Latin America was most incisive within the student movements, among which in the early 1960s *una radicalización 'cubanista' imperante* (Yuszczuk 2010: 101) could be detected. This was

several years before '68. A partial exception from the rule is Mexico, where thanks to Herbert Marcuse's guest lectures and the catalyzing function of Fernando Benítez's journal *La Cultura en México* (Volpi 1998: 187-193; Zapata Galindo 2006: 126-127) the student rebellion – which was brutally crushed in the Tlatelolco massacre of October 2, 1968 (Pontiatowska 2005: 144-145) – assumed a pattern that was more similar to North America's and Europe's '68s. In the other main Latin American countries, the radicalization of the educated youth dated back to the years after the Cuban revolution. Here, the writings of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro were probably more important than the theories of the Frankfurt School. The success of the revolution provoked enthusiasm and changed the perspective even within traditionally moderate, reformist or confessional organizations, which now developed a more revolutionary view. This holds also for the most important Latin American country. As Pablo Buchbinder recalls,

the early years of the 1960s were also in Brazil times of active mobilization of university students. The students rejected the limitative policies and staged several strikes at the beginning of the decade, under the influence, among other factors, of the Cuban revolution. This process was interrupted with the military coup of 1964 (Buchbinder 2010: 19).

Needless to say, the Cuban revolution provoked not just hope, it also provoked concern and a strongly negative reaction among the political and social establishment of many, if not all, Latin American countries. The traditional elites were anguished and “fearful of multiple Cubas throughout *Las Americas*” (Henry 2004: 193). Whereas center-left, centrist and moderate conservative forces reacted with proposals for an increase of social inclusion and reform, some welfare provisions and better wages, most of the agricultural and financial oligarchs, right-leaning politicians, police and military commanders preferred instead brutal repression. The erection of new authoritarian regimes and military dictatorships, like that in Brazil, was also, at least in part, a reactionary result of the Cuban revolution.

This was, so to say, for ‘good reason’, from a reactionary point of view, because the ‘Cuban model’ was not a matter of intellectual debates in university circles alone. The model's teaching was that a student's movement and their intellectual leadership could get traction among the working class, the peasants and the poor when it took concrete revolutionary action. Batista's fate was a strong warning signal for other Latin American



power elites. And indeed, “the guerrilla practices expanded to Latin America in the years after the seizure of power in Cuba by the July 26 Movement” (Millán 2010: 179). The Cuban Revolution had not only demonstrated that imperialism could be beaten, it had also confuted the ‘waiting game’ of socialist, communist and trade union factions of the traditional Latin-American labor movement, who for decades had warned against the fruitless ‘petit-bourgeois adventurism’ of the armed resistance promoted by small intellectual groups from the extreme left. It was fruitless no more.

This at least was the lesson that in the early sixties various groups throughout Latin America drew from the Cuban example, engaging in forms of struggle that were inspired by the guerrilla tactics of the 26<sup>th</sup> July Movement. For instance: the FALN (Armed Forces of National Freedom) in Venezuela; the ELN (National Freedom Army) in Peru; the MR-13 (13<sup>th</sup> November Revolutionary Movement) and the FAR (Revolutionary Armed Forces) in Guatemala; the MIR (Revolutionary Left Movement) militant groups present in Bolivia, Chile, Peru and Venezuela; the 14<sup>th</sup> June Movement in the Dominican Republic and the ELN in Bolivia, led by Che Guevara himself. So, Cuba introduced a new element that inspired movements all over the subcontinent. In addition to the inspiration, some of these groups also enjoyed direct support, such as funding or training, from Cuba. Doing guerrilla became a tool of mass politics and a method to encourage especially the peasants or other poor people of the rural areas to stand up and fight for their rights (Meucci 2013: 3-14).

Of course, the United States did not stand by idle to passively watch the scene. They also had learned from, and did not desire any repetition of, the Cuban example. So they immediately took provisions to keep their ‘backyard’ clean:

Military aid and training programs rose dramatically in the 1960s; annual US military assistance in the first five years of the decade was double what it had been in the 1950s. Between 1964 and 1968 alone, 22,059 Latin American military officials were trained at the School of the Americas in the Panama Canal Zone and at other US military training schools. Thousands more were instructed in the field in Latin America by the US special forces. The special forces or ‘Green Berets’ were elite US army units trained in jungle warfare, psychological operations and covert action, and equipped with the latest lightweight field radios, helicopters and high-powered rifles. Some 1,100 special forces were stationed at Fort Gulick in the Panama Canal Zone, and between 1962 and 1968 four hundred special forces mobile training teams were sent on missions in Latin America” (Livingstone 2009: 40).

Just as the Central Intelligence Agency had done with Cuban exiles before the Bay of Pigs intervention, they intensified the training of right-wing militias, and advised and financed military regimes in Latin American in order to counter the ‘communist danger’. During the 1960s alone, the US favored, assisted or co-financed six military coups in Argentina (1962), Peru (1962), Ecuador (1963), Guatemala (1963), the Dominican Republic (1963) and Honduras (1963). This line of conduct continued under President Nixon throughout the 1970s, when President Salvador Allende in Chile was eliminated by a US supported military coup (Harmer 2011: 220–254). The following military dictatorship under Gen. Augusto Pinochet combined bloody political and social repression with neoliberal economic and financial ‘reforms’, deregulating the markets and transforming the country into an ‘investor’s paradise’: “Chile became a testing ground for the radical free market policies advocated by a new breed of US economists trained at the University of Chicago known as the ‘Chicago Boys’. State industries were privatized, labor laws abolished, unions outlawed, and private investment encouraged. US investors could not contain their enthusiasm for the new Chile” (Business International Corporation 1975: 63).

The politics of intervention gained additional ideological momentum under the Reagan administration. Like in Chile, the US continued assisting oppressive dictatorships like the Stroessner regime in Paraguay. In 1979 the FSLN (National Freedom Sandinist Front) came to power in Nicaragua defeating the US-backed dictator Anastasio Somoza. In Guatemala and El Salvador this success gave revolutionary hopes to large sectors of the society (Deonandan 2016: 43-50). In order to counter the leftist guerrilla movements in Central America, who all were still inspired by the Cuban example, the CIA did not hesitate to fund and train criminal militias, the most famous of which were the *Contras* formed in 1981 to overthrow the Sandinista government (International Court of Justice 1986: 17-20). In 1983, US troops intervened directly in Grenada and in 1989 in Panama to remove insubordinate governments. And US special forces operated in various Latin American countries under the pretext of fighting drug cultivation and smuggle.

Similar direct or indirect US interventions, usually accompanied by acts of injustice, oppression, terror, murder and torture only increased the already widespread anti-American resentment in Latin America. It was against this background that Cuba’s and

Fidel Castro's image remained bright and popular among many Latin Americans even beyond political critique. Many maintained that socialist Cuba should be criticized for a lack of political or economic freedoms, but only a few would deny their respect for the Cubans' courage to stand up against the imperialistic superpower in the North of the continent, which otherwise held the South in the grip of its iron fist.

That Cuba's political capital rested to a large extent on its anti-imperialistic struggle and its opposition to US dominance, was proven in the 1990s, when Castro's regime, contrary to widespread expectations, did not collapse under the weight of the implosion of the Soviet Union and its system of alliances in Europe. On the contrary, after the dismantling of many military regimes and dictatorships in Latin America, a wave of left-wing policies set in. Seeking independence from US dominance showed to be increasingly popular among the electorate and led to the rise of several center-left governments (Eriksen 2018: 36–7). Not in all these countries Cuba was seen as a model and not all had so tight relations with Cuba as the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela under Hugo Chavez. Nevertheless, Cuba's and its leader's historical role and symbolic force continued to be widely acknowledged. As Chomsky (2011: 14–15) reports:

'Fidel Castro is a symbol' one of my Cuban colleagues tried to explain in a talk at a college in Maine a few years ago. For many in Latin America and elsewhere, he is a symbol of speaking truth to power. When he stood up at the Group of 77 'South Summit' in 2000 and attacked neoliberal economic policies and corporate globalization – what he called 'the neoliberal race to catastrophe' – for the poverty and suffering that they have created in the Third World, he was cheered for precisely those words... To many in Latin America, these words ring patently true, and eloquently express their outrage at an unjust global order.

Therefore, we may conclude that Cuba's image in Latin America was always shaped by its opposition against the overwhelming might of the United States, who otherwise tends to strongly condition or directly dictate politics in Latin America. Cuba's opposition to the US inspired neoliberal economic policies is a particular aspect of this general disposition, which became increasingly important after 1979. This aspect will be treated in the third chapter.

## 5. After the Revolution: armed opposition to ‘imperialism’

As we have seen in the prior sections, US interventionism has often been present in Latin America during the twentieth century. Che Guevara ([1967] 1999) wrote:

Our America is integrated by a group of more or less homogeneous countries and in most parts of its territory US monopolist capitals maintain an absolute supremacy. Puppet governments or, in the best of cases, weak and fearful local rulers, are incapable of contradicting orders from their Yankee master. The United States has nearly reached the climax of its political and economic domination; it could hardly advance much more; any change in the situation could bring about a setback. Their policy is to maintain that which has already been conquered. The line of action, at the present time, is limited to the brutal use of force with the purpose of thwarting the liberation movements, no matter of what type they might happen to be. The slogan ‘we will not allow another Cuba’ hides the possibility of perpetrating aggressions without fear of reprisal, such as the one carried out against the Dominican Republic or before that the massacre in Panama — and the clear warning stating that Yankee troops are ready to intervene anywhere in America where the ruling regime may be altered, thus endangering their interests.

Cuba, however, aspired to embody the opposition against the United States and imperialism in more general, and not just Latin America, terms. Since the early 1960s, Cuba’s role as promoter of revolutionary movements in the Third World became evident (Westad 2005: 170–74). This also was in line with Martí’s exhortation according to which Cuba and Latin America should embrace the principle of solidarity among all ‘oppressed’, in order to successfully oppose the ‘oppressors’ (Chomsky 2011: 23). As a state, the Caribbean island did even more actively participate in the anti-colonial struggle of Africa, a continent to which Cuba was related by a common historical heritage. In its colonial past, Cuba had imported more than one million Africans to work in their plantations (slavery was abolished only in 1867). Up to almost two third of the Cuban population are estimated to have some African ancestry. In Africa, other ‘non-white’ populations were still struggling against colonial oppression. Here Cuba adopted a different foreign policy approach if compared to Latin America. It assisted the African ‘cause’ also by conceding direct military help, whereas regarding Latin America it used only political means, diplomacy and a pronounced activism in supranational bodies. Probably to not endanger the 1962 US promise of non-invasion, the Cuban state was too cautious to send official

military help to other areas of the United State's declared 'backyard' (Gleijeses 2009: 17-18).

It was in May 1963 that Cuba made its first appearance on the African continent by sending 55 medical workers to Algeria to provide free medical treatment to the Algerian people who one year earlier had succeeded in achieving victory in a long and cruel war of independence against France. In October of the same year, Cuba provided Algeria with military help by sending 686 men in order to support the Algerians against Morocco. When this mission ended, Cuba turned for assistance to Central Africa (Gleijeses 2009: 19). In 1964 it established diplomatic ties with the People's Republic of Congo, a secessionist revolutionary entity located in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo governed by a US and Belgium backed corrupt regime. Che Guevara arrived with 120 Cubans in the Central African country to defend the revolutionary project, but also the US President Lyndon B. Johnson sent 1,000 mercenaries in order to prevent the fall of the central government. In 1965, the People's Republic was defeated, and Guevara left Africa for Bolivia (Gleijeses 2009: 19-21, 82).

Among the latest European colonies in Africa were the Portuguese ones, where the guerrilla war for independence achieved great momentum contributing to the 1974 'Carnation Revolution' in Portugal. In those years of anti-colonial fight, Cuba's attention turned to Africa once again. Fidel Castro agreed to sent 16,000 Cuban soldiers in support of Ethiopia in 1978, after an invasion by Somalia. Earlier, in 1974, Guinea-Bissau reached its independence from Portugal also thanks to Cuban help. In November 1975 a civil war erupted in Angola shortly after its impendence from Portugal. The different independence movements now fought against each other. Through covert operations, South Africa and the United States supplied weapons to factions who battled the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) headed by Agostinho Neto, who was backed by the USSR and Cuba. Cuba sent military instructors and weapons to the MPLA, who ultimately won the fight. This experience lead to an intense transatlantic military and political relation between Angola and Cuba, thus Agostinho Neto requested further support by Havana also after the civil war (Hatzky 2015: 31-45).

In American analyses, the Cuban presence in Africa was read in Cold War terms, that is, Cuba was deemed to be just a proxy of the 'Soviet bloc', badly concealed behind a rhetoric of Third-World solidarity: "Castro has shrewdly and effectively aligned Cuba

with African insurgencies against colonial vestiges and against South Africa. By providing aid and personnel – military and civilian – Cuba has unquestionably won trading partners for the Soviet bloc as well as loyal friends if not full converts to Marxism” (Falk 1987: 1077). Perhaps for that reason, Cuba’s readiness to help the MPLA government in consolidating and reinforcing the Angolan Armed Forces (FAPLA) irritated even the Soviet Union, as they were engaged, in the late seventies, in the important second Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT II) with the United States and saw no need to add another controversy to the already existing ones. After Soviet pressure, the Cubans accepted to withdraw, leaving the assistance to FAPLA in the hands of Moscow (Gleijeses 2013: 69-72). Moscow however agreed to deliver weapons and to cooperate in the reorganization of FAPLA as a state army.

While many in the West seemed to interpret Cuba’s military assistance to African countries only in terms of pro-Soviet agency, several African leaders were more inclined to look at it as an act of Third World solidarity. In 1977 Luís Cabral, the first president of independent Guinea-Bissau said during a speech:

We were able to fight and triumph because other countries helped us ... with weapons, medicine, and supplies ... But there is one nation that in addition to material, political, and diplomatic support, even sent its children to fight by our side, to shed their blood in our land ... This great people, this heroic people, we all know that is the heroic people of Cuba; the Cuba of Fidel Castro (quoted from Gleijeses 2009: 22).

And the Soviet Lieutenant Colonel Vladimir Barganov reported an experience with FAPLA soldiers whom he was instructing:

Even though they were, on the whole scale, educated people, their knowledge about the USSR was virtually nonexistent... They were stunned by the size of our country when I showed them the USSR and Cuba on the map. They thought it was the other way around (quoted from Gleijeses 2013: 72).

Such was at that time the reputation of Cuba among many Africans, especially those who sustained the struggle for independence, against neo-colonialism and the South African apartheid regime.

### 3. Cuba's foreign policy in the 1980s

The 1980s witnessed epochal changes for the world that closely affected Cuba. Symbolically, the decade would turn to the end with a solemn promise, pronounced by Fidel Castro in a 1989 speech: "If tomorrow or any other day (...) we were to awaken to the news that the Soviet Union had disintegrated, even in these circumstances – which we hope will never happen – Cuba and the Cuban revolution would continue its struggle and its resistance" (quoted by Gleijeses 2009: 46).

The start of the decade also had caught the island in a moment of apparent weakness, which it tried to counter with a strong reaction. In 1980, facing economic hardships and allured by the effects of the US 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act – which "allowed any Cuban who reached U.S. shores to remain", whereas 'boat people' from any other Central American and Caribbean country were rejected (Schoultz 2009: 359) – ten thousand Cuban citizens took to the grounds of the Peruvian embassy in Havana to ask for asylum and the possibility to leave for to the US. As an answer to US President Carter's claim, according to which the protest showed "the hunger of many people on that island to escape political deprivation of freedom and also economic adversity" (Schoultz 2009: 355), the Cuban government lifted the ban on emigration and opened the port of Mariel to whoever desired to leave. In this way, social discontent within the Cuban society "became evident to the world in 1980 when more than 125,000 Cubans left from Mariel harbor for the United States" (Domínguez 1986: 119).

As impressive as these numbers were in exposing Cuban weaknesses, they also implied that the Revolution was still backed by a majority of Cubans. It also demonstrated that the Cuban leadership kept ready to pay back any blow with a counter-blow: indeed, more than 120,000 immigrants from Cuba created tensions and discontent both within the US society and neighboring countries, whose citizens were interdicted from migrating (Schoultz 2009: 355). It finally confirmed that Cuba's political decision making, whether in the field of internal or foreign politics, almost always produced some effects in the never-ending US-Cuban chess game. After the Reagan administration threatened in 1981 to 'go after Cuba' declaring it a 'terrorist state', in the following years the game sometimes came close to a military confrontation. This was the case in 1985, when the USA menaced to attack Nicaragua where Cuban military advisers were stationed. But the

most important moves were carried out at a distance, mainly in Africa, and particularly in Angola and Namibia, where the Cuban military assistance against US ally South Africa tipped the scale of the geopolitical chess game to the side of Namibian and Angolan independence, and ultimately contributed to the end of the apartheid regime in South Africa (Gleijeses 2009: 46). Notwithstanding the shipwreck of soviet communism looming in Europe and Asia, the 1980s turned out to be a decade of extraordinary Cuban influence in the international arena, both for its effective military and medical aid interventions in Africa and Central America, and its prominent role in the debate on international and Latin American debt that will be discussed in this chapter.

Meanwhile, on the 'home front', Cuba witnessed both economic growth and difficulties. In 1984, Castro began to criticize the "insufficient plan discipline" and the excessive "reliance on the market" caused by earlier reforms of the 1970s, but which to him appeared to be at the basis, also, of "serious balance-of-payments problems". The leader's criticism led to a major reshuffle of key positions in the party and government. In 1985, the interior minister, Ramiro Valdes, the president of the Central Planning Board, Humberto Pere, and the party secretary for ideology, Antonio Perez Herrero, lost their jobs (Domínguez 1986: 118–20). At the third congress of the Communist Party of Cuba, in February 1986, Fidel Castro "criticized (generally accurately) his government's performance" and "complained about everything except his own performance" (Domínguez 1986: 121–2). In those years the government took back earlier liberalizations or at least drastically regulated private contracting, such as for private services, real estate transactions and on the free peasant markets, which had noticeably improved the food and service supply in the urban areas. The return to a more tightly regulated economy was a direct consequence of Castro's criticism. Fidel "became incensed by the emergence of middlemen and the new wealth that these policies made possible" in the real estate sector, and accused "some" state enterprise employees who offered private services on evenings or weekends that they had "confused free-lancing with capitalism". (Domínguez 1986: 123–4). The back and forth in the economic policies left the population uncertain on which rules they might have to play in the long run, for example when making professional choices or investing their savings.

There existed also various political features of the Cuban reality that resulted less attractive not only for foreign observers. The fierce "rejection of multiparty competition"



(Rabkin 1992: 33) was not necessarily a point that everyone could be happy with, considered that the party monopoly risked decaying in drudging political repression: “if you criticize the Communist Party frontally, you go to jail”, according to Cuba sympathizer Pepe Escobar’s (2008) lapidary statement. Criticism that was articulated within the perimeters and parameters of the established system, was instead allowed and to a certain extent encouraged. And indeed, many Cubans criticized the mid-1980s U-turns back to centralization in economic governance, and the new restrictions imposed on the peasant, service and housing markets. As an American scholar witnessed:

I detected no fear. Many stressed their loyalty to the revolution and told me that they criticized it as a sign of their faith in its capacity to overcome error. They stressed, too, that there were party policies to tolerate and promote such criticism as means of rectifying errors. Nor would a Roman Catholic bishop have dared to intervene against the authorities had there not been a change in church-state relations. (Domínguez 1986: 126).

So, Cuban citizens had a number of reasons to criticize and expect more and better from their government. Yet, on the whole, the 1980s can hardly be deemed as years of economic disaster. While the role of planning and market mechanisms in the economy remained uncertain, this uncertainty did not prevent the Cuban economy from growing. It should be recalled that between 1959 and 1989 Cuba's GDP

had grown at an annual rate of 4.4%, accompanied by a development of basic infrastructure that ensured a positive evolution of production and services, besides a significant improvement in all social indicators, including: rise in the schooling level of the population to 6.4 years; public health levels comparable to those of the most developed countries; eradication of chronic unemployment; highly equitable income distribution; and general improvement in the living standards of citizens. (Rodríguez García 2011: 30)

It should also be pointed out that the uncertainty regarding the economic order at no point in time during the 1980s put the priority of social policies into question. At the end of the decade, in 1989, Cuba allotted 29.9 of its state budgets to social services, 39.8 percent of which for education, 26.3 percent for pensions, 21.8 percent for health services and the rest for housing and social assistance (Mesa-Lago and Vidal-Alejandro 2010: 700). These interventions produced a level of social security and education that made Cuba stand out from the surrounding Latin American and Caribbean social landscape, and was still remarkable also in a global context. As the Argentinian journalist Gustavo

Veiga of *Página 12* declares in an interview conceded for the purposes of the present thesis, among the Latin-American public the “approval of social, educational and health policies in Cuba was always an asset of the Revolution, which even its declared enemies could not deny. Nor does anyone doubt other achievements, such as security or that Cuba is a country where drug addiction is not a problem” (see Appendix 2, interview 2).

Theoretically, the welfare provisions should have produced a positive image abroad that worked in favor of Cuba’s foreign policy projects. In fact, this seems not to have been the case to its full potential extent. If the population of neighboring countries approved of Cuban social standards on the basis of hearsay or because they had been treated by a Cuban doctor, the positive image that resulted from such experience was not necessarily reflected by academic studies, political speeches, or in the media. According to the prevailing agenda or viewpoint, the social achievements of the revolution were not always acknowledged by foreign observers, provided they were mentioned at all. Harvard professor of Government Jorge Domínguez, in his rather skeptical analysis of ‘Cuba in the 1980s’, apart from criticizing the “social expenditures that have broken the budget”, paid little attention to these aspects. Nevertheless, he concluded his article with an appreciation: “damnable as many abuses the Cuban government has committed against its opponents and many innocent people in the name of revolution and socialism undoubtedly are, Cuba's foreign policy remains that government's fundamental achievement” (Domínguez 1986: 122, 135). To better understand why Cuba’s role could grow oversize in the international arena, if compared to the island’s modest demographic and economic weight, we must go back in time and place the developments of Cuban foreign policy in a worldwide geographical context.

## 1. Cuba’s role within the Non-Aligned Movement

After the Second World War, de-colonization became a major issue in international politics. Inspired by India, Indonesia, the Philippines (whom the USA granted independence after Japanese occupation) and other countries who succeeded in freeing themselves from colonial rule in the aftermath of the war, national liberation movements spread over Asia and Africa contributing to, and then being assisted by, the declining

strength of Great Britain and the other remaining European colonial powers, namely France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain and Portugal. The two major founding members of the United Nations, the USA and the USSR, officially supported anti-colonial stances. In particular, “from 1960 the pressure within the United Nations for more rapid progress towards decolonization became more intensive”. The member states of the United Nations discussed and, in several cases, accompanied “the transfer of power in areas under colonial rule to the inhabitants of those territories” (Luard 1989: 175). This also contributed to a climate in which the General Assembly and other UN bodies could become an arena to denounce racism and colonialism (Kennedy 2006: 177–87). Due to the progress in transport technologies, the re-opening of international markets and the increase of trade between industrialized nations, the direct administrative control over the colonies’ raw materials also became less necessary, and in some cases costlier than beneficial for the colonial powers. And both the United States and the Soviet Union, the two ‘superpowers’ that had emerged from the world war, saw in de-colonization a chance to enhance their influence in the former colonies (Garavini 2012: 10).

With the Cold War on the background, US and Soviet efforts to establish good relations with, and gain weight in the former colonies or among liberation movements became highly competitive. At first glance, this competition increased the former colonies’ chances to obtain their assistance on favorable terms (Reilly 2012: 358). With self-encouraging optimism, Kenya’s leader Jomo Kenyatta exclaimed in 1963, at the moment of independence: “We shall pursue the task of national building in friendship with the rest of the world. Nobody will ever be allowed to tell us, to tell me: you must be friendly to so-and-so. We shall remain free and whoever wants friendship with us must be a real friend” (Kenyatta 1968: 215). However, the ‘friendship’ of both superpowers often came with ideological, military or economic strings attached, as it was meant to contain the other superpower’s influence. Such pressures created an uncomfortable situation especially for the political leadership of the weaker among the newly independent nations. They felt that their freedom to develop international relations and cooperation in the best interest of their countries was heavily affected by the bloc confrontation. Zambia’s Kenneth Kaunda gave expression to that frustration when stating in 1966 that “we are left with no choice but to fall on either the East or West, or indeed, on both of them” (Kaunda 2017: 256).

Already in the previous decade, similar concerns had inspired a number of former Asian colonies, such as India, Burma (the later Myanmar), Pakistan, Ceylon (the later Sri Lanka) and Indonesia, who met in 1954 at Colombo (Ceylon) to manifest their dissent from nuclear arms race and colonialism, and exhort the USA and the USSR to engage in détente and peaceful coexistence, requesting urgent “control of atomic weapons” (Espy 1954). In 1955, this same group convened 29 former colonies from Asia and Africa, which now had turned independent or semi-independent states, to Bandung (Indonesia), to reaffirm not only their opposition against colonialism and various forms of neo-colonialism promoted by Western European countries, but also against the superpowers’ efforts to extent a network of new dependencies all over the world. “It is an intolerable thought to me – exclaimed India’s Prime Minister Shri Jawaharlal Nehru – that the great countries of Asia and Africa should come out of bondage into freedom only to degrade themselves or humiliate themselves in this way” (quoted by McTurnan Kahin 1956: 65). The leaders of the formerly colonized countries “signaled their refusal to take orders from their former colonial masters” (Prashad 2007: 41), as well as from the new superpowers, as one should add.

Bandung was the first major international conference that was self-organized by third-world leaders (Lee 2010: 1-45). Its dealing with disarmament involved also the increasing Chinese influence in Asia, which by other Asian countries was perceived as an enlargement of the ‘Soviet bloc’:

Notwithstanding the presence of Zhou Enlai and Ho Chi Minh (...), the conference stressed the political and ideological independence of the new nations. The tone of the meeting was even predominantly anti-Soviet (...) Although often addressed to the Chinese delegation, all anti-Soviet feeling was amicably ignored by Zhou Enlai, who successfully engaged on something of a charm offensive, and proved himself unexpectedly flexible on matters of principle such as human rights and peaceful co-existence. (...) For the Chinese, the conference was seen as a means of assuaging Asian anxieties about its perceived military threat, and of cementing alliances in the face of the US policy of containing communism in Asia. (Young 2005: 13–14).

According to Prashad (2007: 41), Bandung is best remembered “as one of the milestones of the peace movement. Whatever the orientation of the states, they agreed that world peace required disarmament”. It was again Nehru who pointed out that non-alignment was almost synonymous with preventing a military holocaust: “So far as I am

concerned, it does not matter what war takes place; we will not take part in it unless we have to defend ourselves. (...) If all the world were to be divided up between these two big blocs what would be the result? The inevitable result would be war” (quoted by McTurnan Kahin 1956: 66).

The conference voted a final document known as *The Ten Principles of Bandung*, which affirmed the respect for fundamental human rights; the respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries; the recognition of equality of all races and nations; the principles of non-intervention in other countries’ internal affairs; and the right of a nation to individually and collectively defend itself. They also required for any non-aligned nation to abstain from the adherence to agreements of collective defense that might serve the strategic interests of great powers, as well as from exerting any pressure on other nations, and from threatening acts of aggression against the territorial integrity or political independence of any other country. The *Principles* finally underlined that the international community should promote the mutual interest and cooperation among nations; that international disputes should be solved only by peaceful means, such as negotiation, conciliation, arbitration, jurisdiction or any other peaceful mean chosen by the parties in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations. This, of course, implied the recognition by all countries of international justice and obligations (Xinhua 2005).

On a general note, Westad (2007: 99) remarks that “at the heart of the efforts of the nativist leaders at Bandung lay an attempt to create some form of common ideology which, eventually, could supersede the Cold War system, at least as far as the Third World was concerned”. As we will see, the ideological cohesion, or ‘spirit’, of Bandung would end up with being partly dissipated, or at least transformed, over the following years. Nevertheless, remain would a common framework of discussion that was able to intervene in the world affairs with a common standpoint on certain issues, giving the Third World’s interest and idea a more recognizable contour. At the meeting, the leaders “demonstrated their ability to discuss international problems and offer combined notes on them. In this regard, Bandung did create the format for what would eventually become the Afro-Asian and then Afro-Asian-Latin American group in the United Nations” (Prashad 2007: 41). Thus, they laid the groundwork for the formation both of the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Group of 77 under the roof of the United Nations.

Six years after Bandung, in 1961, a group of 24 countries met at Belgrade to hold the Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries, to officially found the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), an organization that by 1976 would have increased to 80 member states. Differently to Bandung, where no Latin American or European nation had participated, in Belgrade Cuba, Argentina, Peru and Guyana were also present (Calvocoressi 1996: 170-98), as well as the hosting European country, Yugoslavia, destined to become one of the Movement's leaders. As the "key political content of the Belgrade meeting was to underline the solidarity of the member states, to warn the superpowers against spreading the Cold War into the Third World, and to appeal to all countries to forego war as means of settling international disputes" (Westad 2007: 107), we may say that it gave the Bandung principles a more comprehensive political and organizational platform.

The presence of Cuba among the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement turned out to be particularly significant in the year in which the CIA-led invasion was defeated at the Bay of Pigs. Castro's Cuba entered the world stage with the declared objective of strengthening the global South against the West. The country developed a remarkable activism in that direction. On a more political than diplomatic level, in 1966 Havana hosted the *Tricontinental Conference* where the Organization of Solidarity of African, Asian and Latin American Peoples (OSPAAAL) was founded. To the event, 483 delegates of left-leaning, anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist governments, parties and movements from 82 countries had been invited. The purpose was to roll back imperialism by strengthening the solidarity among Third World countries and movements. The OSPAAAL not only aimed at resurrecting the spirit of the 1955 Bandung conference, it also condemned the US war in Vietnam and emphasized the importance of Latin America in the Third World. The event placed the Cuban hosts in the position of a world leader of revolutionary action in Third World countries. (Gronbeck-Tedesco 2008: 659-60).

The Caribbean island tried to present itself as a source of inspiration for other liberation movements and used the *Tricontinental Conference* as a geopolitical leverage for achieving their foreign policy objectives. Their goal was to offer an alternative to the selfish forms of 'economic cooperation' offered by the 'Free World', that is, in particular, the US, Western Europe, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Fidel Castro and the other Cuban representatives saw the conference as a chance to

enhance the solidarity among Third World countries on the basis of their shared colonial history and the likewise shared risk of falling under a new economic and political dependency. In particular, they were interested in inserting the Cuban support for African struggles “into the broader context of the global 'anti-imperialist' revolution” (Díaz-Briquets 1989: 30). This also allowed to distinguish Cuba from the Soviet Union, whose diplomats feared that tricontinental initiatives might “ignite larger centers of conflict in Asia, Africa, and Latin America” (Skierka 2004: 186), which was a perspective the USSR had little geopolitical interest in. Together with Vietnam, Cuba “contributed to inspiring a New Left, which saw both the Soviet development model and Soviet foreign policy as too dogmatic, too self-satisfied, and too timid” (Westad 200 : 191).

In this context, Cuba also tried to qualify itself as the speaker of Latin America. Che Guevara stated that “America, a forgotten continent in the last liberation struggles, is now beginning to make itself heard through the Tricontinental and, in the voice of the vanguard of its people, the Cuban Revolution will today have a task of much greater relevance: creating a Second or a Third Vietnam” (Guevara and Gerassi 1968: 420). However, such a radical line of confrontation with Western imperialism was more than many of the participants were ready to subscribe. The Third World as a whole was ‘not yet ripe’ for revolution. As it turned out in the course of the conference, “while there was broad agreement on the problems in the world, there were grave disagreements on the strategy to confront the world's predicaments” (Prashad 2007: 107).

In the 1970s, during a period of significant changes in the world economic order, Cuba’s effort was redirected to the diplomatic stage of the Non-Aligned Movement. When at the 1976 NAM meeting Cuba offered itself as the host of the coming Sixth Summit Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement, several member states such as Yugoslavia, India, Sri Lanka, and Tanzania raised the “issue of whether Cuba is ‘truly non-aligned’ in view of its close links to the Soviet Union”; others expressed reservations regarding “Cuba's involvement in Africa” (Willetts 1978: xv, 84). Notwithstanding similar perplexities, it was decided that Cuba was to host the summit, which in September 1979 took place regularly in Havana (Arnold 2013: 50–1). Its final declaration reaffirmed NAM’s traditional objectives:

Preservation of the national independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of non-aligned countries; elimination of foreign interference and

intervention in the internal and external affairs of States and the use of the threat of force: strengthening of non-alignment as an independent bloc factor and the further spread of non-alignment in the world ... eliminating inequality between developed and developing countries and eradicating poverty, hunger, sickness and illiteracy in the developing countries ... struggle against imperialism; colonialism, neo-colonialism; apartheid; racism, including Zionism; and all forms of foreign occupation, domination, interference and hegemony (Non-Aligned Movement 1979: 12-18).

Many of these phrases sounded almost like those of the Bandung *Principles* issued a quarter of century earlier. Although the Havana meeting is generally considered as marking a move toward more 'radical' positions, the fact that the NAM still referred to a kind of Bandung (and Belgrade) catalogue of quests, in my opinion can be interpreted also as a sign of persisting weakness. Undeniably, those phrases confirmed the movement's steadfastness regarding the basic interests of non-aligned countries who suffered numerous attempts of interference and exploitation. But they also seemed to testify that their attempts tended to be running partially idle, if the very objectives of nuclear disarmament, more equal trade, peaceful settlement of disputes, and abstention from great power interference in sovereign countries' internal affairs still needed to be reaffirmed because they had not been achieved after a quarter of century. In my view, this can hardly be read as the sign of a thorough success.

The Non-Aligned Movement's history of successes – such as the support given to the decolonization process – was alternated indeed by defeats and disappointments, some of which already became visible in its earlier days. “In spite of the continued organizational growth of the Non-Aligned Movement, 1962 – the year when Algeria finally won its independence – also saw the beginning of the unraveling of the spirit of Bandung”. The 1960s were years of growing internal conflicts rather than harmonious solidarity between nonaligned countries. Arne Westad (2007: 107) reminds us that “Nasser died, with his hopes of Arab and Third World unity unfulfilled, in 1970”. Superpower and European interests could infiltrate the Third World also by making leverage on regional conflicts.

The 1970s saw the prosecution of this mixed succession of successes and failures, at least if we look at them through the lenses of the Bandung and Belgrade 'catalogues' of principles and quests. While Portuguese colonies such as Angola and Mozambique, British ones like Grenada and the Bahamas, as well as other colonies finally achieved



their independence, the superpowers' meddling in Africa, Latin America and Asia was far from relenting. Moreover, several economic power structures and platforms of political surveillance and military influence, directly or indirectly commanded by the former colonial powers, also survived the declarations of independence. In Africa, in particular, the new independent states still were confronted with western financial "consortia that are fast laying a grip on the continent's riches" (Nkrumah 1965: 61). According to Abdul JanMohammed (1985: 62), in many cases the "moment of 'independence'" only marked "the formal transition to hegemonic colonialism".

Perhaps the persistence of a similarly pronounced hierarchy between the First and the Third World could make the 1979 reaffirmation of the Bandung principles appear 'radical'. As far as the Second World was concerned, it is worth recalling that at the Bandung conference most of the participants had expressed their concerns over the Warsaw Pact, as they "had no desire to line up behind a new master and sign up with the Soviets" (Young 2005: 12). During the following decades, the enlargement of the NAM toward a greater number of non-Asian countries, the Soviet support for the colonies' struggle for independence, as well as the wave of Marxist intellectual influence and left-wing militancy in the 1960s and 1970s, albeit not always in tune with Moscow's political agenda, had nevertheless attenuated the anti-Soviet sentiment.

This was before December 1979, when Soviet Union would intervene militarily in Afghanistan. The intervention was thought as an extreme measure to prevent the pro-soviet Afghan government from crumbling. It marked a major turning point that not only provided the USA with "much welcome proof of Soviet aggressive intentions in the Third World" (Westad 2007: 328), it also alienated the USSR from a consistent part of the Muslim world:

Moscow's decision not only made many nationalist regimes turn against it – the Islamabad meeting of thirty-five Islamic nations in January 1980 condemned 'the Soviet military aggression against the Afghan people' – but it also delegitimized the Left and made it easier for Islamist agitation to find an audience in the Middle East, North Africa, and even in Muslim Southeast Asia. (Westad 2007: 329)

The NAM's 1979 Havana meeting, which consigned Castro the role of the movement's official speaker for the three years to come, took place only some months earlier, when the tension was already mounting. Countries interested in maintaining good

relations with the former colonial powers, as well as Islamist movements that opposed the 'godless government' in Afghanistan, and even China and Yugoslavia who were driven by their own anti-Soviet resentment, had already alleged that inside the movement Cuba might be an actor for the behalf of the Soviet bloc. At Havana, Castro responded to the accusation by stating that who sustained the United States against the Soviet Union betrayed the Third World. Then, however, he made an effort to bridge "the ideological differences by setting out the main problem for all those present: the combination of the underdevelopment of poor countries with their dependence on the financial policy of the world's major economies" (Skierka 2004: 212).

Later in the same year, after Castro on October 13<sup>th</sup> had delivered his historic speech at the UN General assembly along the same lines, "his moral authority and credibility as Third World spokesman would be severely damaged when Soviet troops marched into Afghanistan". The severe loss of international reputation that the Soviet Union suffered as a backlash of the invasion, made it not easier for Cuba to defend its own leadership credentials among the members of the NAM. Within the movement only a small number of nations refused to condemn the USSR, and Cuba was one of them. As a result, the Movement's speaker appeared to be isolated from the 'basis' and "lost the chance to take a seat on the UN Security Council on behalf of the non-aligned countries. His role as spokesman then unfolded in an unspectacular manner over the next few years" (Skierka 2004: 212–13).

Nevertheless, as we will see in the following pages, Cuba's credentials as an advocate of Third World interests, if damaged by the Afghanistan war, was far from being exhausted. The structural problems of underdevelopment brought to the fore criticalities of the world's existing economic order that would not be forgotten easily over Cold War related geopolitical conflicts. Many western countries and the international institutions under their influence also were aware of the gravity of the situation. They showcased their intention to mediate and seriously tackle the mounting economic problems of the Third World.

Between 1977 and 1983 the Independent Commission on International Development Issues (ICIDI), chaired by former West-German social democrat chancellor Willy Brandt, undertook an analytical effort to delineate the problems of "global interdependence". In 1980, the Commission – the 'independence' of which had been inspired by the president

of the World Bank, Robert McNamara, and was partially financed by social democrat governments, the German Marshall Fund, the Ford Foundation, Ebert Stiftung and other western organizations – developed in its *North-South* report (Brandt 1980) proposals for the end of the costly arms race, in order to channel the resources into development projects. It called “for a full-scale restructuring of the global economy, along with a new approach to the problems of development, including an emergency program to end poverty in developing nations” (Quilligran 2002: 1). Among a certain number of NAM members and of the Group of 77, which had been formed in 1964 by developing countries in the framework of the United Nations, similar proposals instilled some hope that in the First World a serious reformist approach was underway and eventually might clear the path for less confrontational solutions. “Some of the conservative or moderate countries (for example, Egypt, Morocco, Malaysia, sometimes Brazil and India) indicate their disagreement with particular proposals in private communication with US representatives, but refuse to break publicly with the Group of 77” because, as Rothstein (1980:4,13) lamented, “the commitment to Third World unity prevails over the need to achieve agreement by detailed bargaining with the developed countries.” If the proposals for a dialogue as delineated by the Brandt commission were meant to isolate more radical voices of ‘the South’ like that of Cuba, they also missed their target, because the developing countries remained reluctant to break the ranks of solidarity over that issue, all the more so as the debt crisis was heading to a virulent eruption.

## 2. Cuba in Africa

Cuba’s commitment to foreign policy, however, would not limit itself to intervene in the debates on development, debt, and economic justice. In the 1970s, in Latin America the military coup against Allende and other setbacks had convinced the Cubans «to focus on nonideological diplomatic and economic ties in the region while simultaneously shifting their revolutionary hopes to Africa» (Harmer 2011: 18). In the 1980s, Cuba’s military commitment in Africa resurged even stronger as that already recalled in the previous chapter. Castro sent 36,000 troops to Angola in a fight against a South African invasion encouraged by the US, as well as in help of the struggle of neighboring Namibia for

independence from South Africa. The Cuban contingent in Angola increased to 52,000 soldiers by 1988, when in the summer of that year a decisive victory was achieved in the battle of Cuito Cuanavale. Not only, Cuba cooperated militarily to defend Mozambican ports and oil industries from attacks by the Pretoria backed rebels from the late 1970s throughout the 1980s. Seen over three decades, the Cuban military effort abroad was impressive: after the early experience in Congo, among the ten countries where Cuban military forces were stationed, 636 troops took part in military activities in Algeria in 1963–64, while during 1975–91 in Angola fought 337,033 troops and almost simultaneously, in 1977–89, other 41,730 were sent to Ethiopia. Outside Africa, in 1973–75, on the local governments demand 746 Cuban troops were sent also to Syria. Over the whole period, 2,398 Cuban soldiers lost their lives doing service abroad (Moloeznik 2013: 155–156).

What was the reason for Cuba to engage from the 1960s to the 1980s in Africa? Why, for example, were they ready to take high risks in assisting Angola and Namibia, a move that could lead to a direct military confrontation with South Africa, worsen their relationship with Western Europe, defy the USA and even damage their vital friendship with Moscow? Disregarding similar risks appears not much in tune with a cold-minded calculus of *realpolitik*. Rather, a good dose of ideological and moral commitment appeared to play a role as well. As Henry Kissinger would remark, Fidel Castro was “probably the most genuine revolutionary leader then in power” (Kissinger 1999: 785). Castro understood the significance of a victory in Angola from a revolutionary point of view, and this implied something more than just power politics, and more even than just follow the ‘scientific *weltanschauung*’ of orthodox communism. Rather, it involved motives of the Third-World cultural and political movement, and a desire for revenge after centuries of slavery and ‘white’ domination, which was deeply entrenched in the collective memory of a Caribbean plantation island like Cuba. The fight against the South African apartheid regime symbolized the fight against all ‘white’ supremacy. When the Cuban army pushed the South African troops back behind the Namibian border, it achieved a historic retreat by the ‘White Giants’. As the main South African newspaper wrote, “Black Africa is tasting the heady wine of the possibility of realizing the dream of ‘total liberation’” (quoted from Gleijeses 2009: 31). Enthusiasm among the population

spread in Angola and elsewhere in Africa about this great victory over the white imperialists and colonists.

Through their military and medical help, Cuba reached a higher prestige among Africans and African countries than most First or Second World nations could count on. In this way, the Cuban Revolution, in addition to Cuba's slavery history and the indispensable contribution of Cubans of African origin to its success, earned another share in the centuries-old African struggle and experience. However, American government circles and analysts recognized, but also tried to minimize, the Cuban success. On *Foreign Affairs*, Pamela Falk (1987: 1078) reported that "privately, many of these same OAU supporters of Cuba regard Soviet policy in the Third World as colonialist and racist, and African perceptions of Cuba in many nations are often contrary to official policy." After such self-reassuring observations, the author adduced a far less controversial fact of economic power politics, recalling that

many African nations are integrally involved with international financial institutions such as the World Bank. After building state-directed socialist economies, they are now shaping indigenous, mixed economies. They want to open, or reopen, lines of communication with the West in order to improve trade and technology transfers. Angola in particular has sent numerous representatives to lobby in the United States for continued American investment (Falk 1987: 1078).

At that time, the divide between what Rosa Luxemburg had defined as lender and debtor economies had reached an unprecedented level of confirmation, as we will see in the next chapter. Cuba was aware of the centrality of many Third World countries' new 'debt slavery'. Castro had already moved the debt crisis, as well as the monetarist and neoliberal policies, at the center of Cuba's international and diplomatic initiatives. At the same time, the Soviet Union and other socialist countries were riddled by a severe economic, social, and moral crisis that would lead to the fall of communism. This and the inescapable force of economic power relations tipped the scales in the West's favor and limited the potential of Cuban initiatives, in Africa and elsewhere.

Nevertheless, none of these unfavorable factors discouraged Castro. When thanks to the neoliberal 'reforms' imposed on debtor countries, "for example in Latin America in the 1980s, whole economies were raided, and their assets recovered by US finance capital", Fidel Castro tried to reposition his country at the center of the new frontline.

“The tone of anti-imperialism began to shift towards antagonism to the main agents of financialization – the IMF and the World Bank being frequently singled out”, writes Harvey (2003: 66). Cuba became a main actor of this shift, especially in Latin America.

### 3. Fidel Castro’s speech at the United Nations 1979

To understand why Cuba was achieving visibility in the debate over the debt crisis, we have to go back to October 12<sup>th</sup>, 1979. On that day, Fidel Castro gave a speech at the General Assembly of the United Nations, in New York, as the spokesman for the Non-Aligned Movement. In his presentation the *Líder Máximo* reported the decisions that the recent NAM conference had laid down in its Havana Declaration (Skierka 2004: 211-12). He said that

We are 95 countries from all the continents representing the vast majority of humanity. We are united by determination to defend cooperation among our countries, free national and social development, sovereignty, security, equality and self-determination. We are associated in the endeavor to change the current system of international relations based on injustice, inequality and oppression. (Castro 1979)

In name of the Non-Aligned Movement, the Cuban leader also denounced the inequality in the wealth distribution between First and Third World countries. He marked out that “wealth continues to be concentrated in the hands of a few powers whose economies, based on waste, are maintained thanks to the exploitation of workers and to the transfer and plundering of natural and other resources of countries in Africa, Latin American and other regions of the world” (Castro 1979). Hence, he demanded the redistribution of wealth and a more equal remuneration of natural resources for Third World countries, which had been exploited so long by the colonialism of the First World. Fidel Castro also denounced neocolonialism and imperialism, interpreting the quintessence of the Havana Declaration as an appeal for the struggle against “imperialism, colonialism, neocolonialism, apartheid, racism, including Zionism”, and any form of foreign aggression, occupation, domination, interference or hegemony perpetrated by the two superpower-led blocs. While continuing with his talk, Castro also criticized South

African apartheid and the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and blamed the US for supporting both regimes.

The most significant and timely passages of Castro's speech were dedicated to the debt crises in the Third World. He tried to analyze the situation in order to indicate historical and recent responsibilities for the crisis, and delineate a right and just solution. After centuries of colonial exploitation, the capitalist West had erected a kind of economic monopole as well as the monopole of financial decision making. The international capital, based in the US and other capitalist countries, controlled the world market and both the prices of the commodities sold to the Third World countries, and of the agricultural goods and raw materials that these countries could deliver. He further denounced the role of international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, dominated by the United States and their allies, whom he attributed a huge share in the responsibility for the accumulation of debt by Third World countries, which at that time amounted already to \$300 billion (Skierka 2004: 211–12).

On the basis of what we have seen in the previous paragraphs, these claims must have sounded convincing in the ears of at least a consistent share of representatives of Third World countries present at the General Assembly. Probably the same holds for his practical proposals on how to overcome the debt crisis, even if to everyone in the plenary hall it must have been clear how improbable it was that the leading capitalist countries would give up their privileges voluntarily. Castro said:

The insufficient financial resources developing countries receive should be increased. Arms expenses are irrational. They should cease, and these funds should be used to finance development. The current international monetary system is bankrupt and should be replaced. The debts of countries which are relatively less developed and in disadvantageous situations are unbearable and cannot be resolved. They should be canceled. [applause] Indebtness economically overwhelms the rest of the developing countries and it should be alleviated. Instead of narrowing, the economic abyss between the developed countries and those that want to develop is widening and it should disappear. These are the demands of the underdeveloped countries. (Castro 1979)

The Havana Declaration was based on a large consensus and therefore contained many generic phrases that reaffirmed traditional claims of the non-aligned movement. Castro, furthermore, in the institutional role he had to perform at the General Assembly, had to be inclusive enough to represent the majority positions within the organization he

was speaking for. However, not for that did he shy away from using plain terms when he polemically attacked the “arrogance and imperialistic stance of certain countries” (Castro 1979). And he focused on the debt problem, a choice that was not only dictated by the gravity and urgency felt by most developing countries; it also allowed him to highlight some major systemic flaws of capitalism and imperialism. So, while his tones and contents were not particularly confrontational, they held nevertheless a certain potential for a radicalization of the international conflicts regarding the debt problem. Seemingly even the stenographer became aware of this potential when he had to register applause.

The potential for an increasing popularity of Cuba’s radical positions throws an interesting light on the role of the Brandt Commission, which was operating during the same period. When its *North-South* Report came out one year later, it also denounced the irrationality of the armament expenditures and even hypothesized in some cases the cancellation of the debt. What at first glance may look like a similarity with the NAM’s and Castro’s positions, should be understood in its nuances. The Brandt Report (1980: 22) stated that none of the problems “between industrialized and developing countries can effectively be solved by confrontation: sensible solutions can only result from dialogue and cooperation”. The Commission was proposing “major additions to aid for agriculture in the South, as well as stockpiling and financial measures for enhancing the stability of international food supplies and prices”. Its members suggested that the aid should increasingly rely on “grant-like flows to the poorest countries and regions”, and be “justified mainly on humanitarian grounds” as well as by making clear to the tax payer that the North had a proper interest “in providing such aid” (Brandt 1980: 22, 72–4).

We believe that the richer nations must continue to give special attention to the poorest countries to help them to help themselves. They should step up their aid, directing it with effective planning into the critical areas of the ecology. They should provide emergency assistance as an addition to the longer-term programmes, not (as at present) as a large share of their total regular aid. Greater assistance, together with support for commodity prices, can augment the purchasing power of these countries and, with the new machinery for cooperation and, coordination, a comprehensive programme could move the poverty belts towards self-sustained growth before the end of this century. (Brandt 1980: 88)

The solution that the Commission envisaged was much in tune with what later would be called ‘global governance’ of short resources and the engineering (‘with the new



machinery for cooperation’) of solutions for poverty and other social criticalities. Apparently, all this once again would be achieved under the direction of the western countries and the international organizations dominated by their delegates and experts, with the (most of times ‘corrupt’, often also ‘brutal’ and ‘authoritarian’) leaders of the poor countries relegated to the role of minor stakeholders or even spectators. The phrasing through which Quilligran (2002: 3) has summed up the ‘Brandt formula’ – “partial or unconditional debt forgiveness for developing nations, linking debt relief to effective domestic policy reform” – is also revealing. Debt here appears to be a guilt that can be generously forgiven, provided the morally superior creditor has a say on how the local societies be ‘reformed’.

As Robert Everett Wood (1986: 232-69) and others have argued, the aid regime implemented by the ‘North’ actually was a major source of the debt crisis. In 1968–83, the bulk of ‘aid’ flows consisted of loans, which contributed to the accumulation of debt. While in 1968 23 percent of the ‘aid’ given to Third World countries flew back as repayment and interests of previous loans, the same percentage had risen to 39 by 1980. After a Paris Club meeting of creditor and debtor countries negotiated (perhaps with the Brandt Report under their eyes) some debt reliefs, in 1983 the ‘aid’ that flew back to lender countries in the form of debt services only had decreased to 31 percent. Aware of the detrimental effects of loans, also the Brandt Commission had suggested a shift of ‘aid’ from loans to grants. However, most often these grants did not consist of financial transfers, purportedly to avoid nurturing ‘corrupt indigenous elites’, but of ‘technical assistance’, which was frequently linked to ‘development projects’ that involved firms from the ‘donor’ countries. As these firms earned their fair share, they sent part of the grant back to the place where it came from. Thus, in many cases, the ‘cooperation machinery’ run by the US and European countries tended only to perpetuate or still aggravate the dependency of Third World countries.

Even if Castro used a relatively moderate language while presenting the “demands of the underdeveloped countries”, his wording was clear enough to mark the differences with the Brandt Commission’s approach, let alone that of the World Bank and IMF. The use of the word ‘neocolonialism’, which recurred seven times in his speech, was much more consistent with what Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of independent Ghana, had written back in the sixties:

From 1951 to 1961, without taking oil into consideration, the general level of prices for primary products fell by 33.1 per cent, while prices of manufactured goods rose 3.5 per cent (within which, machinery and equipment prices rose 31.3 per cent). In that same decade this caused a loss to the Asian, African and Latin American countries, using 1951 prices as a basis, of some \$41,400 million. In the same period, while the volume of exports from these countries rose, their earnings in foreign exchange from such exports decreased (Nkrumah 1965: 241).

However, what led to the re-edition of quasi-colonial dependencies on economic grounds that Nkrumah called neocolonialism, was not only the structural aspect of worsening terms of trade between leading manufacturing countries on the one side, and poor producers of raw materials on the other. Also, the 'aid' regimes established by the former colonial powers and the west in general was, in his eyes, an integral part of the same system of exploitation:

While capital worth \$30,000 million was exported to some fifty-six developing countries between 1956 and 1962, 'it is estimated that interest and profit alone extracted on this sum from the debtor countries amounted to more than £15,000 million. This method of penetration by economic aid recently soared into prominence when a number of countries began rejecting it ... Such 'aid' is estimated on the annual average to have amounted to \$2,600 million between 1951 and 1955; \$4,007 million between 1956 and 1959, and \$6,000 million between 1960 and 1962. But the average sums taken out of the aided countries by such donors in a sample year, 1961, are estimated to amount to \$5,000 million in profits, \$1,000 million in interest, and \$5,800 million from non-equivalent exchange, or a total of \$11,800 million extracted against \$6,000 million put in. Thus, 'aid' turns out to be another means of exploitation, a modern method of capital export under a more cosmetic name (Nkrumah 1965: 242).

Fidel Castro's way of interpreting the recent developments, which in many parts of the world had dramatically aggravated the problems that Nkrumah had examined two decades earlier, was still sticking to the same tradition of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle. From his point of view, it was not worth accepting compromises that might bring at best a short-term relief, but no long-term solution.

#### 4. The debt crisis of the Third World and the IMF policies

The debt crisis made its first spectacular appearance in Latin America in 1982, when Mexico surprisingly announced that it defaulted on its debt of \$20 billion owed to more

than hundred foreign banks. But Mexico was not alone. By the end of the same year more than twenty countries were in arrears with their obligations. The World Bank reported that in 1982 as many Third World countries rescheduled loans as in the previous five years. Hence, the debt crisis was spreading among the world's developing countries like a disease, differently to what institutions like the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank had been admitting. For a long period, they denied the general character of the crises, downplaying it to individual countries' repayment issues (Wood 1986: 232-33).

In order to trace back the origins of the crises, we have to go back to August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1971, when US President Nixon suspended the convertibility of the dollar into gold ending formally the era of Bretton Woods. The latter arrangement had provided transatlantic economic stability since the end of the Second World War. Thus, the European countries denounced Nixon's annulment of the international gold convertibility of the US as a unilateral act of the United States (Basosi 2011a: 468-85). Thanks to the strength of the US economy, but also to the arrangements of the Bretton Woods agreements, the dollar had become the world's de facto reserve currency. In the financial sector and in world trade it was as good as gold. Ending convertibility looked like an act of destabilization of international finance.

Actually, countries like West Germany and Japan, who now vehemently protested, had also their share of responsibility. Immediately after the war, Japan and Western Europe had been in dire need of 'hard' currencies in order to back their own vacillating currencies with an adequate stock of reserves, reenter the international market and get access to raw materials. Until they had not fully reestablished their former status of industrial net exporters, they needed financial support. The Cold War logic urged the United States to stabilize Western Europe, and the efforts it promoted to reintegrate the European economies, along with the Marshall Plan and other transfers, ensured that the 'Dollar gap' could be closed and these countries could be held save in the American sphere of influence (Eichengreen 1993: 55; Killick 2000: 94-104; Kudō 2018: 461-3). Once Germany, Japan and other countries recovered from their post-war crisis and turned back on the world market as successful exporters, they 'siphoned' the American currency into their strong rooms by their own means. Germany, in particular, preferred to invest these savings inside the country and export manufactured goods or services, while

keeping their foreign direct investment rate low (Deppe 1975: 198–9; Baumann 1977: 43–46).

During the 1960s, more dollars were outside the United States' borders than gold in their Federal Reserve safes, which made the system vacillate and finally crumble. Both Japan and Germany were accused of mercantilism by the United States, but even if this accusation was not unjustified, there were also multiple other factors of American responsibility that created instability within the system. Not only had the Cold War had its costs in form of the Marshall Plan. There had been the Korean War in the first half of the 1950s and the wars in Indochina, especially the American war in Vietnam; these wars and the related high military expenditure contributed chiefly to the Dollar exports (Ikenberry 2001: 163-214). So, it was no wonder that from 1968 the dollar came under heavy attack, while inflation was spreading. In 1971, for the first time in the century, even the US trade surplus was declining (Calleo 2009: 95).

In 1973, also most of the other currencies ended their gold convertibility, but many tried to avoid the risks of free floating by fixing their currency to the value of another currency, preferably the dollar, a situation that recreated a new “de facto dollar standard under which the dollar has been anything but stable” (Norrlof 2010: 160). Similar adjustments did neither calm down the international economic instability nor did they enhance the credibility of the currency system. In 1974, the United States made bilateral agreements with Saudi Arabia and other oil producers according to which OPEC oil had to be traded only in dollars; in return, the US would back the petrodollar circle, according to which the dollars earned in the oil trade could flow back to the capital market of the United States (Harvey 2003: 62). This arrangement, which was accompanied by unprecedented oil price peaks and ‘oil shocks’, turned clearly to the detriment of Western Europe, Japan and all oil importing countries in the world, whose expenditure for the oil bill, which in many cases multiplied their foreign debt exposures, began to finance not only the oil producing countries, but also, on the basis of the reestablished dollar hegemony, the US public and military expenditure. (Hensman and Correggia 2005: 1091–95).

In 1972–77, the total private and public foreign debt of low-income African nations rose from \$3.8 to \$11.5 billion, that of low-income Asian nations from \$14.3 to \$25.1 billion, and that of middle-income oil-importing nations from \$48.9 billion to \$123.7

billion; considered separately, the Latin American and Caribbean countries' foreign debt exposure jumped in the same period from \$37.1 billion to \$100.1 billion (World Bank 1983: 6, 10, 14, 144). In the meantime, sharp increases in crude oil prices were triggered by economic and geopolitical events.

On October 16, 1973, following the outbreak of the war between Egypt, Syria, and Israel, the OPEC countries announced a new posted price for crude of US\$5.119 per barrel. The price increase was mainly prompted by the need to recover inflation and dollar depreciation. This adjustment was quickly followed by the political decision by Arab oil producers (OAPEC) to put pressure on Israel through planned cuts in production of 5 percent per month and an embargo targeted at specific countries, foremost among them the United States and the Netherlands. (Garavini 2012 167–8).

Ultimately, the price increase favored all oil producers and, through the petrodollar circle, benefitted the USA, given that three of four transactions in the world oil market were traded in dollar. However, it should also be added that there were additional reasons that kept the oil price up to its high levels. The main was that the demand for oil in the world market was still on the rise, while its supply remained limited (Basosi 2012: 29-54). This whole scenario created a new basis for world-wide US economic, military and political hegemony, as David Harvey (2003: 62–3) has written in his book on *The New Imperialism*:

US banks ... gained the monopoly privilege of recycling the petrodollars into the world economy, thus bringing the eurodollar market back home. New York became the financial centre of the global economy ... . Threatened in the realm of production, the US had countered by asserting its hegemony through finance. But for this system to work effectively, markets in general and capital markets in particular had to be forced open to international trade (a slow process that required fierce US pressure backed by the use of international levers such as the IMF and an equally fierce commitment to neo-liberalism as the new economic orthodoxy).

Of course, South and Central America could not remain untouched by these developments. As we have learned thanks to the above figures published by the World Bank, the area had become a hot spot of the debt problem at least since the 1970s, both in regard to the dynamics and the dimension of its exposure. Duccio Basosi (2011b: 209-10) has summed up how the process affected the Latin American countries:

The 1970s had been a decade of easy borrowing for most Latin American governments. At least until 1976, in the context of a shift toward right-wing authoritarian rule that spared only a few countries, Latin American rulers were deemed both trustworthy partners and reliable borrowers by influential players such as the Nixon and Ford administrations in the US and the main international financial institutions. As for the following years, when the Carter administration in the US submitted loans and aid to deeper scrutiny in the name of ‘human rights,’ the big – mainly US-based – commercial banks continued to lend money enthusiastically to the regimes in questions, making up for the diminished public funding. Most Latin American countries began to face serious economic problems in late 1979, when the US turned to high interest rates to counter domestic inflation. With international loans indexed in dollars (as a result of US currency’s controversial role as the international monetary pivot), repaying outstanding loans became a difficult exercise. To cope, new loans were activated. Total Latin American debts jumped from \$240 billion to \$331 billion between 1980 and 1982 (they were only \$30 billion in the 1970s).

To refinance their debt, the indebted countries needed to access new loans, which the creditor institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF linked to the condition that austerity measures and ‘reforms’ leading to market deregulation and privatization be applied to their domestic economies. As for example in the case of Jamaica, the usual “elements of IMF policy included such items as a tighter money supply, a devalued currency, high interest rates, reduced government expenditure, lower wages, and an assault on tariffs and subsidies” (Prashad 2007: 233). These measures often favored economic stagnation and social impoverishment in Latin American countries, hence lower incomes, lower consumption, lower tax revenues and ever-increasing debt services that required fresh loans to pay the services for the older ones, and which again were linked to even more incisive ‘reform’ conditions: a vicious circle. In the hope to escape that circle imposed by the rigid IMF regime, the indebted countries resorted also to commercial bank loans from oil producing countries. As Fehmy Saddy (1983: xi) observed, “some Arab oil producers with capital surplus have extended development aid and loans, or entered into joint ventures with banking institutions in Latin America”. These and other private loans allowed the countries to make some additional investments the revenues of which, however, often went or to the lenders or, when American and European direct investment was involved, to the US and other western countries.

The United States, thanks to the central role of their currency in the international financial system, were able to pass the consequences of a number of internal economic

problems on to the outside world. For example, as Raúl Prebisch explained in 1986 shortly before passing away, they first exported the inflation caused by the rises in the oil price, which “spread to the rest of the world thanks to the power of the dollar as the international currency” and then, in a row, “led to the attraction of the resources of the rest of the world thanks to an extraordinary increase in interest rates” (Prebisch 2005: 49). In April 1978 the IMF abolished the official gold price, and with it the last fixed exchange rate of the US dollar. It additionally ended the obligatory use of gold in IMF transactions with member states, while gold also ceased to determine the value of the IMF Special Drawing Rights (SDR), to which member states can resort in the case of liquidity and reserve shortages. This meant that also in the exchange of other currencies for SDR, the US as the holder of the pivotal ‘world currency’ achieved a favorable position (Wood 1986: 232- 326).

Given the dependency of other economies on their currency, the US benefited from a sort of seigniorage, which was given by the difference between the cost of the money creation at a certain point in time and its final purchasing power. In a situation in which the price system included the floating exchange rates among international currencies, the USA, thanks to their exclusive privilege to issue the ‘world currency’, and thus to slow down or accelerate the dollar press and adjust the interest rates according to their own advantage, managed to let others finance part of their own increasing public deficit. This was the *aggio* (fee) that the world had to tribute to the *seigneur*, the privileges of whom are ultimately backed by sheer power. He will therefore wisely reinvest part of the income that the fee guarantees for the maintenance of that power. In line with this logic, the United States potentiated their already impressive military-industrial complex, and expanded their system of military bases and alliances all over the world, including many Third World countries, not a few of which were governed by loyal dictators. When this was not enough, the US was ready to get their own hands dirty, as Golub (2010: 78) writes:

Jordan and Egypt after Nasser, received military and political support but very little in the way of development. In both regions the United States consistently sustained authoritarian regimes and local *rentier* and oligarchic elites. The same was the case in the Caribbean and South America where the United States supported dictatorial regimes and local elites who confiscated and concentrated wealth and covert interventions to check social transformations, secure strategic raw materials and sustain the ‘credibility’ of US power, or all three, caused significant disruptions post-colonial societies ... But even a cursory glance

shows that from the early 1950s until today, the United States has either been at war, supporting war-making or sustaining predatory states almost constantly in one or another part of the 'Far Empire': The Philippines, 1948-1954; Iran, 1953; Guatemala, 1954; Indonesia, 1955-1975; Congo/Zaire 1960-1965; Cuba, 1961, Brazil 1960s; Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, 1963-1975; Chile, 1973; Angola, 1975-1992; Nicaragua, 1980s; Grenada 1983; Panama, 1989-1990; Afghanistan, 1980-1988; Iran-Iraq war, 1990-1991.

## 5. Cuba and the debt policies in Latin America

During the central years of the 1980s, Cuba multiplied its efforts to stabilize and improve its relationship with its Latin American neighbors, with the exception of Stroessner's Paraguay and Pinochet's Chile (Erisman 1988: 3). The debt crises had become dramatic when Mexico defaulted in 1982. By the mid-1980s, its effects spread worldwide menacing to destabilize a number of Third World countries (Bird 1989: 49).

The seventh summit of NAM was held in 1983 in New Delhi. After the 1979 Havana summit Cuba's prestige and influence among Third World countries was still intact, but the Soviets' reputation among NAM countries had worsened due to their Afghanistan intervention. In the midst of the debt crises, during the New Delhi meeting, it came to a confrontation between two opposed strands of thought on how to improve the economic fate of the Third World and protect it against the massive consequences of the debt spiral. According to Prashad's account, Fidel Castro had to face the Singaporean Prime Minister Rajaratnam, who held a strongly anti-Soviet and pro-western position. He maintained that since the 1970s the world had entered a systemic crisis due to economic stagnation and bloc confrontation. In that situation it was detrimental for Third World countries to extent their ideological allegiance to either capitalism or Communism to the field of foreign economic relations. Trade policies should be motivated only by national interest, he maintained. As an example, he cited his own country, which was doing much trade both with the United States and the People's Republic of China, since its economic necessities required to do so. And this, he pointed out, was a pragmatic choice, not an ideological one, as Singapore did strenuously prevent pro-Chinese or other communists from gaining influence in their internal politics. (Prashad 2007: 211-12).

Actually, his plea for pragmatism in foreign economic relations was also an appeal in favor of free trade. Sinnathamby Rajaratnam, a former 'democratic socialist' whose



firm political convictions had been since the 1950s “a bulwark against communist intimidation” (Ng 2010: 392), was in fact not new to the proposal that Third World countries should adapt their economic policies to free trade and neoliberal deregulation. Already in 1979, in the year of Castro’s speech for the behalf of NAM, at the same General Assembly of the United Nation he had expressed his other view:

The policies that work best are those based on free market competition, with government's role limited to protecting the people against the heinousness and injustices unrestrained competition could inflict and redistributing the fruits of competition without deadening the competitive spirit. (quoted from Prashad 2007: 223).

At the Delhi summit of 1983, the Singaporean PM enhanced his role as the spokesman of the agricultural and financial elites and rising middle classes in a number of Third World countries who began seeing deregulation and free market as a panacea. Vis-à-vis unprecedented opportunities of revenue and social advancement these forces hoped to free themselves from bureaucratic impediments and the corruption of a political class that had prospered under the shield of socialist watchwords and inefficient state intervention, welfare patronage and cronyism – all based on public expenditure, which was, as they argued, the ultimate source of foreign debt. In line with the theoretical and political debate in the West, where Ronald Reagan was governing the United States and Margaret Thatcher the United Kingdom, the opinion in favor of monetarist and neoliberal ‘reform’ policies now was voiced also inside NAM. According to Prashad (2007: 223), a new generation of NAM leaders, many of whom had witnessed “neither colonialism nor anti-colonialism”, now “experienced the change from a Keynesian development model (...) to a monetarist accumulation one”.

To avoid a serious split of the Non-Aligned Movement, host and chairwoman Indira Gandhi mediated between Castro and Rajaratnam. Thanks to her mediation, the two ‘rival’ strands in the movement ended up with compromising on some points, such as saying that the stagflation in the western hemisphere, combined with the deteriorating economy of the Soviet Union, all were dangerous for the economy of non-aligned countries. Another point of convergence was the complaint that the international community did lack of will to solve the famine that was raging in Sudan and Ethiopia in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

On the whole, these were clear signs of ‘de-radicalization’. For countries with an ‘anti-imperialist’ agenda like Cuba, the New Delhi conference took place in a particularly adverse moment in international politics. The influence of the Soviet Union, which increasingly faced home-made economic problems, the consequences of the Afghanistan war, political instability, moral de-legitimization and an arms race that had been forced upon it by the USA, was visibly losing ground in the international arena (Westad 2007: 349–54). Emboldened by its new uneven power position achieved thanks to the dollar supremacy, the United States, together with the United Kingdom and other allies, strenuously pushed an agenda of worldwide neoliberal deregulation and privatization, as well as monetarist austerity policies, where ever possible, in international institutions and the global economy and political arenas. In the course of the same process, a global financial elite was emerging that also gained from the dollar supremacy and thus tended to reinforce it. In addition, economic issues such as those regarding the international trade were not treated only as a matter of economic theory, they also were linked to the political agendas of powerful actors (Prashad 2007: 207-12).

Even if the NAM could avoid breaking apart, it became clear at New Delhi that the movement’s more radical quests from the 1970s, which went under the name of New International Economic Order (NIEO), were losing traction not only in the global political arena, but also among some member states themselves. The economically stronger countries within the movement did everything in their power to de-potentiate and moderate the NIEO program, in order to not disappoint their First World trade partners and international financial interlocutors, as Prashad (2007: 214) notes:

The delegates deliberated on economic issues, but they did not do so in the framework of the 1973 NAM's NIEO. The NIEO, adopted by the United Nations in 1974, was about the need to create new international rules to promote economic sovereignty and cooperation. Cooperation without sovereignty would mean that the powers with the greater economic muscle would simply continue to dominate the world economy, and regardless of their best efforts, their historical advantages would endow them with unequal power ... In New Delhi, the more powerful (and therefore vocal) NAM delegates suggested that economic issues should be seen as technical problems, which could be sorted out by technocrats. The political framework that suffocated the choices for the technocrats left the discussion table. The reaction to the debt crisis is illustrative. When some states proposed that the darker nations should simply refuse to pay their external debt, the more influential in NAM squelched this option. They felt that this would only provoke the G-7 to reprisals and would not improve their

bargaining power. Rather than even an outright debt payment strike as a tactic to help restructure the debt, the 'moderate' members argued that the restructuring of debt should happen individually and in negotiation. In other words, individual contracts between the indebted state and its debtors should be the approach rather than the totality of the Third World against their creditors (the G-7 governments or commercial houses located within the G-7).

Alongside Singapore, one of the 'Four Asian Tigers' (Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea were the others), among which the 'East Asian Miracle' was soaring and from where its effects began spilling over to other Asian countries, other governments used the favorable season to get rid of what they deemed anachronistic 'socialist' orientations of the Third World movement and the more radical quests put forward for decades by the Non-Aligned Movement. What Pankaj Mishra (2006: 55) observes referring to India, became a widespread criticism in the Third World: "The state-controlled economy encouraged corruption as much as inefficiency, and the bureaucrats and politicians parceled out its large and varied booty of big public projects, defense contracts, bribes from businessmen, jobs, foreign trips, telephone connection, etc.". The re-orientation in their economic and international policy was based on the fact that free trade and deregulation actually paid-off for a number of newly industrializing countries who could offer cheap work force and favorable institutional and fiscal conditions for foreign direct investment, and so were able to attract de-localizing manufacture from industrialized countries. This led to a split of both growth-patterns and interests inside the Non-Aligned Movement. Radical positions that opposed neoliberal policies were fading. In many of the more successful countries, anti-colonialist sentiment was substituted by a radical cultural nationalism, sometimes parted with resurging forms of racism, others with a new religious 'awakening', in all cases with de-regulation and privatization policies in favor of old and new economic elites (Prashad 2007: 214-23; Westad 2007: 400).

Apart perhaps from the Chicago Boys' Chilean purported 'success-model' under General Pinochet, which split the Chilean society in winners and losers and had not many admirers abroad due to its blood toll, the US neoliberal agenda and the World Bank's and IMF's debt policies produced no 'tigers' and 'dragons' at all in this part of the world. The debt crisis and its consequences unsettled most of the Latin American societies and represented, at least in theory, a good argument to build up some kind of 'Latin American solidarity' between neighbors who faced the same problems.

During the 1980s, the economies of the area generally worsened, as the prices for their export commodities fell, while the oil prices were still on the rise and the international demand for Latin American products faced a contraction in the most important import markets. The flagging economy generated growing unemployment, poverty, social conflict and a criminal shadow economy, as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), a United Nations regional sub-committee, repeatedly complained. From \$879 in 1980, the Latin American per-capita income fell to a low of \$815 in 1985 (expressed in 1960 USD value; see Prados de la Escosura 2007: 21). It took until the mid-1990s that Latin America could recover. In 1995 its real per capita income was just 0.9 per cent above the 1980 level. During the same 15-years period the US per capita income realized a 29.2 percent growth, while that of all OECD countries taken together augmented by 32.5 per cent. As Leandro Prados de la Escosura (2007: 44–5) has underlined,

blaming Latin America's long-term backwardness on the post-colonial epoch seems far-fetched. Contrary to a widely held view, Latin America's retardation appears to be a late-twentieth century phenomenon that should be explored if we want to understand why Latin America remains a backward region in a global world.

By referring to the aftermath of colonial rule in terms of 'post-colonial epoch', Prados seems to suggest (quite contrary to the assumptions of post-colonial theory) that the legacy of colonialism did not represent an unremovable obstacle for successful economic growth. During the early and central decades of the twentieth century, several South American countries had been catching up indeed, and at least one of them, Argentina, had reached "very high per capita incomes" and seemed to be on the track to successful industrialization, as the former head of the Argentinean Central Bank and secretary general of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Raúl Prebisch (2005: 118), recalled in 1986. In comparison, as Prados points out, the last two or three decades of the twentieth century saw Latin America fall dramatically back. Of course, the reasons were manifold and many of them 'home-made', but the 'coincidence' with the rise of monetarist policies to international economic orthodoxy is undeniable. Since the restriction of budget deficits "to prevent the excessive growth of public debt" (Congdon 2007: 238) was a central receipt of monetarist theory, it was probably not by

chance that the publicly most discussed issue of the moment was the mounting foreign and public debt. By late 1984, Latin America included the highest number of indebted countries in the Third World. Its exposure of \$366.2 billion was almost the half of the \$748.6 billion that the entire Third World 'owed' to western banks and international financial institutions (Erisman 1988: 4).

In 1984, in order to strengthen their bargaining position for the coming debt renegotiations, foreign ministers and other high-ranking representatives of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela met at Cartagena in Colombia. They discussed the conflict of interests between debtor and creditor countries. The latter wanted to impose austerity on the shrinking economies of the debtors, in order to squeeze even more resources and smooth debt services. Understandably, the Latin American countries were instead looking for ways to set their economies back on a growth track. To achieve this goal, they sought a dialogue between debtor and creditor countries, multilateral institutions and banks (Duran 1986: 84). "We have not come here to evade our obligations but to better fulfill them", proclaimed Columbia's president Belisario Betancourt at the opening session. In order to achieve this goal, the countries needed "reasonable interest rates, adequate terms of trade, flexible amortization schemes and access to the markets of industrialized countries" (Betancourt 1984: 14).

In fact, the Cartagena group did produce no consensus regarding the concrete receipt to apply, and remained far from forming an effective debtors' cartel. Although the summit was in itself of remarkable symbolic value, as it "moved the Latin American debtor nations a little closer together" and signaled to the industrialized countries "that the debtors may not always be so pliant", the participating "nations themselves were divided in part on the basis of their relative strengths (...) but also by the willingness of individual nations to accede to IMF-mandated austerity programs as a condition of refinancing and rescheduling". The minimum consensus reached in the final declaration regarded some obvious claims such as the reduction of interest rates. Annual repayment should be circumscribed by an equitable proportion of the country's export surplus and the duration of the loans should be extended and debt services diluted (Liff 1984: 14–17). However, the question remained whether the Latin American countries would ever be able to fully

repay the creditor countries and institutions, a doubt that also a *Newsweek* article of the time expressed:

Technological advances in the North, overproduction in the South and declining demand worldwide have left most raw materials in chronic oversupply. What's more, the glut shows every sign of increasing. [Thus] the countries of the Third World are caught in a 'double whammy'. The pressing need to pay off debts and develop economically makes it difficult for countries to reduce their output. But the more you produce, the lower the price. The gravity of the situation cannot be overstated ... It has lately become every bit as perilous as the Third World debt bomb – and no less explosive (cited in Erisman 1988: 4).

This was the general context in which Cuba tried to gather the Latin American countries behind its claims. During the early 1980s, Cuba's foreign relations concentrated on Nicaragua, El Salvador and Grenada to an extent that not only affected the island's position in the Latin American context, but also its relations with the USA and the Soviet Union. But on March 1983, on the sidelines of the NAM meeting in New Delhi, the Cuban delegation had invited the other Latin American countries to a separate meeting in order to increase the pressure on western countries regarding a debt relief or at least a diluted repayment system based on more equitable terms. By 1984, the situation had evolved, as the Reagan administration invaded Grenada, and in El Salvador for a certain period both guerrilla and government were testing the possibility to negotiate a peaceful settlement; in Nicaragua, despite the US attempts to crush the Sandinista revolution, the latter had stabilized (Coatsworth 1994: 163–206; Nieto 2003: 312–98).

After the Cartagena meeting and the following Latin American criticism of the United States regarding the increase of interest rates, Cuba found better conditions at least to be heart, if not necessarily followed, by other Latin American countries. As Esperanza Durán remarked, the Cartagena group's initiative in the following months and years remained symbolically important, but achieved little practical success, while the effects of the IMF driven 'reform' policies continued to hurt the Latin American population.

The stabilization policies pursued by the Latin American countries in order to obtain access to further lending created heavy social and political burdens. There was a steady decline in nutritional standards; drastic cuts in public expenditure led to a further reduction of already poor educational, housing, and medical services; unemployment increased dramatically. There were food riots and demonstrations in Brazil, violent protests in the Dominican Republic and huge

strikes in Bolivia and Peru. Austerity in the eyes of the Latin Americans did not seem a reasonable solution to their problems. (Duran 1986: 84) .

Sensitized by the expectations circulating in the Latin America of the post-Cartagena period, the Cuban press devoted increasing attention to the debt crisis. The Cuban leadership hoped to enhance its international position by intensifying the media appearances that would allow Fidel Castro to launch new proposals for the solution of the debt crisis.

In 1983, Cuba voiced the relief of foreign debt on the occasion of the Non-Aligned Movement in New Delhi, and launched “a major and in many respects unprecedented campaign in mid-1984 to try to rally the Latin American nations behind its leadership on the debt issue” (Erismann 1988: 6). On August 12, 1984, the Granma Weekly Review published an important article regarding “The Latin American Crisis and U.S. Policy”. The same periodical frequently would return to the issue over the following years. In various technical and political meetings on the international level, Castro explained his proposals and increased the efforts to make them broadly known. In two widely echoed interviews, one given to the Spanish news agency EFE on February 21<sup>st</sup>, 1985, and the other to the Mexican newspaper *Excelsior* on March 21<sup>st</sup> of the same year, he laid out his suggestions in great detail. He depicted a situation that had become intolerable:

Some countries, like Argentina, are using 52 percent of their exports to pay the interest on their debt. Bolivia is using 57 percent of its exports; Mexico, 36.5 percent; Peru, 35.5 percent; Brazil, 36.5 percent; Chile, 45.5 percent. It has been estimated that using 20 percent of the total export revenues to pay the foreign debt is already a virtually unsustainable percentage. (Castro 1985b).

This situation made him conclude that the “peoples of South America cannot handle more restrictions; you cannot take a single extra penny from them” (Castro 1985a), and that “Latin America's political, economic, and social situation is such that it cannot bear any more restrictions and sacrifices” (Castro 1985b). Time had come for a decisive break: “We feel that the debt must be written off. It can be mathematically demonstrated that it is unpayable. The problem no longer concerns the amount of the debt, but rather the interest being paid on it”, Castro (1985b) stated. To solve the problem, “Latin America needs a minimum grace period of approximately 10 to 20 years to pay its foreign debt, including the interests” (Castro 1985a).

On July 30–August 3, 1985, the Cuban leadership organized a highly publicized conference in Havana, which was attended by foreign left-wing party officials, grassroots activists, social movement and Church representatives, and renowned personalities, to underline that the foreign debt question was first of all a social question. On the whole, between May and August 1985 Cuba hosted five major international conferences on the debt problem. In summer 1986, the country's leadership proclaimed that it was suspending their payment of debt services to Western banks until they would not concede more lenient long-term payback conditions. However, this turned out to be mainly an ostensive act of political propaganda, as the country continued to meet all its contractual commitments during the following years (Erisman 9–12). From a technical point of view, the Cuban leader's proposals were complex and circumstantiated, and also – but this was a characteristic of the man – often a bit wordy.

Even if they were more radical in substance than the Cartagena initiative, they nevertheless sounded surprisingly 'moderate', 'dialoguish' and 'reformistic', as if they were moved by the desire to serve the best interest also of the United States themselves. From the Americans own standpoint, he argued, it "would be truly wise to associate the beginning of a reduction in military expenditures with the beginning of a solution to international military problems. All economists have stated that the problems of underdevelopment and poverty in the world could be solved with part of the funds used for military expenditures" (Castro 1985b). He pointed this out with an indirect hint at the results of the Brandt Commission and other studies. The American average citizen would only benefit from a debt relief for Latin American countries, and so would American companies who could take advantage from the recovery of Latin American demand. And all this would come to a little cost:

The United States, using 10-year treasury notes and 30-year treasury bonds, could answer to its creditor banks for the debt of the Latin American countries and even those of the Third World. This would not affect the contribution that US citizens make to the budget. The banks would recover the capital invested, the US exporting companies would increase their exports, and the US investors abroad would increase their profits. (Castro 1985b)

In 1985, "Cuba's Prime Minister, Fidel Castro, in the presence of a host of Latin American personalities in Havana, called for the collective default of the Latin American



countries' foreign debt. But these spectacular public statements have not, so far, been followed by radical actions by the Latin American Countries" (Duran 1986: 84).

After looking into Castro's proposals, René Lynette Bartusch concluded that they were not so radical and utopian, after all.

Castro did not suggest that the banks go under, or that the taxpayers pay more taxes. He did, however, suggest that the creditor Western nations use a small percentage of their military expenditures (no more than 12 percent), to assume the debts to their own banks. This way, neither the banks nor the depositors would lose; to the contrary, the bank would have that money guaranteed" (Bartusch 1986: 10).

Michael E. Erisman suspected that "many casual observers" might think that what Castro enunciated was "a little more than a grossly simplistic attempt at gratuitous 'Yankee-Bashing'" in order to capitalize on Latin America's dire needs for a debt relief. Others would probably see in it only "a crass ploy to obscure Cuba's considerable self-interest in debt relief behind a guise of altruistic concern about helping its Latin neighbors". Similar conclusions, however, would be oversimplifying, the author maintained, because

what emerges, on closer examination, is an extremely intricate policy mosaic that seeks to achieve significant progress in simultaneously addressing three of the world's most complex problems – Latin America's debt, the superpower arms race, and the need for structural reform of the international economic system (Erisman 1988: 8).

As it appears through the words of Bartusch and Erisman, the conundrum for several 'Cubanologists' was whether Castro's initiatives were motivated by geopolitical or economic goals. As for the latter, many suspected that Cuba itself had a huge hidden debt problem. The real amount of Cuba's foreign debt remained undisclosed and somewhat mysterious, and gave rise to speculation. To counter such speculations, Fidel Castro suggested that his country had no significant debt problem at all:

Fortunately, today we are the only country in Latin America and the Caribbean immune to the crisis. Our debt in foreign currency is minimal, approximately \$300 per inhabitant. We have no problems whatever in our financial relations or in our trade with the socialist bloc with which, fortunately, we carry out as I have said before, 85 percent of our trade. (Castro 1985b).

In her analysis, Bartusch (1986: 31) concluded that Cuba was indeed “a unique case in comparison to the other debt-ridden Latin American countries”, because of the huge quantity of Soviet subsidies. She reported that the accumulated Soviet economic aid delivered to Cuba in 1960-1979 was worth \$16.7 billion, but also that only one third was in repayable loans and the rest in donations and subsidies. And even who in the 1980s had bedded that the Soviets would not afford any longer to support Cuba because of their own mounting financial problems and domestic social discontent, at least for the moment got it wrong: the “Soviet economic assistance program to Cuba in 1986 was maintained at about \$4 billion a year – equivalent to over one quarter of Cuba's gross national product – and which accounted for over half the USSR's global economic assistance program” (Bartusch 1986: 27–8).

Cuba, in short, was protected by Soviet grants and easy-term loans from the most detrimental effects of the debt repayment mechanisms that the other Latin America countries had to face. This did not exclude, however, that Castro’s proposals were driven also by national self-interest. Although the impact was attenuated by the Soviet umbrella, the Caribbean island was not completely exempt from the debt crisis, and as for the structural weaknesses of its economy,

Cuba had much in common with other Latin states; it lacked hard currency and suffered from the low world prices of its raw-material exports, chiefly sugar. By using the issue to re-establish formal and informal ties to the rest of Latin America, he [Castro] could strengthen Cuba's economic links in the America's and help prop up its ailing economy. (Bartusch 1986: 11).

After all, these weaknesses were not hidden, but on the contrary highlighted by Castro (1985b) himself, who reported that “a total of 200 tons of sugar was needed 24 years ago to buy a 180-horsepower bulldozer. To buy the same bulldozer today, one needs 800 tons at current world market prices”. Being a raw material exporting Latin American country that had to face the same problems with worsening terms of trade that all the others had to face, could make Cuba’s proposals more credible.

Regarding the second hypothesis, according to which the Cubans were seeking a political gain, two different aspects may be singled out here. The first is the hope that Cuba seemed to nurture in appealing to the US that a debt relief was needed to not interrupt the democratization process that was underway in their ‘backward’. In those

years, some South American countries were freeing themselves from years of military dictatorship. Castro argued that the IMF measures had “provoked serious political and social conflicts, given that the people are totally opposed to the enforcement of new sacrifices and a deterioration of their living conditions. A democratic opening has taken place in the South American countries, and this has been welcomed with great interest and sympathy in Latin America and the rest of the world. The democratic opening has taken place, almost simultaneously, in three important countries: Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil” (Castro 1985b). But he also warned that if “these democratic processes attempted to pay this debt, or not even the debt, just the interest, they would ruin themselves politically” (Castro 1985a).

That the appeal on the US and the international institutions to not endanger the democratization process had a more tactical character, in the sense that Castro probably did not believe that those bodies were sincerely interested in democratization but had a convenience in speaking in its favor, becomes clear from his following utterance: “I believe – Castro said – democratic processes are presently assuming strategic importance and are very important developments. The Reagan administration might be saying that democracy is advancing, but what is advancing is the crisis in the US system of domination over Latin America. The democratic process means that military dictatorships are retreating, that the methods of repression and force used to preserve the system have failed.” (Castro 1985a). And indeed, in several countries this was the beginning of a longer process that years later would lead to left and center-left electoral victories and not particularly US-friendly governments.

The second political objective that Cuba was suspected to be searching to achieve was supposed to be merely opportunistic. By presenting themselves as the advocates of Latin American interest, the Cubans hoped to overcome their political isolation in Southern and Central America and “win solidarity from fellow Latins”. While the immediate reaction in the neighboring countries did not look overwhelming, Bartusch however admitted that “some Latins at least appeared to be listening to what Mr. Castro was saying. Ecuadoran President Febres, who visited Castro in April 1985 said, ‘I don't agree with him, but his position will be attractive to governments that don't have any possibility of paying their debt’” (Bartusch 1986: 11). This was meant as a concession to Castro’s political intuition. Did it pay off? The next chapter, a part of which is dedicated

to the echo of Cuba's anti-debt and other initiatives in the Latin American press, may deliver some more hints on agreement and disagreement with Castro's position in Latin America.

## 4. Cuba's image in the Latin American and Caribbean press

What was the echo of Cuba's anti-debt initiatives in the Latin American press? How did the press of the region mirror Cuba's internal development, the so-called 'Cuban model'? What was Cuba's press image as an actor of Latin American and Caribbean geopolitics, during the Grenada, Nicaragua, Panama and Malvinas crises, and as a partner of regional economic cooperation? How was Cuba's behavior in front of the Soviet crisis and collapse described by the press of the region? How did the press comment on the Cuban crisis of the early 1990s, and the Cuban efforts to reintegrate in the regional political and economic context?

These are the main questions which I will try to answer on the basis of a sample of sixty press reports, drawn from a press archive located at Hamburg, where it is run by the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (CIGA). The collection of press reports on Latin America and the Caribbean is called *Spiegel der lateinamerikanischen Presse* and it is indexed online under the name IberoDigital. The archive was created by the CIGA predecessor Institut für Iberoamerika-Kunde (IIK) between 1974 and 1998. It comprises around 37,000 press reports. The title of the collection is partially misleading, as also both Caribbean and out-of-area newspapers and magazines in Spanish language have been included. In the Hamburg archive, for the years 1979-94 I found 304 press reports regarding Cuba, of which I selected 60, roughly one fifth, on the basis of their geographical origin and their apparent relevance for the above questions. I effectuated this selection according to the periodicals' profiles and the titles and summaries of the articles reported in the digital index. Of the 21 newspapers and magazines in this way considered, 8 are from Mexico, 3 from Chile, 2 from Argentina, and 1 each from Barbados, Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela; exceptionally, I included one out-of-area paper, the London based *Informe Latinoamericano*, and cited two times from the Cuban *Granma*; otherwise, I excluded out-of-area and Cuban papers.

More than the half of the newspapers taken into consideration are from Mexico, in particular *El Financiero*, *El Día* and *Proceso*, a bias that reflects a disproportion in the archived press reports on Cuba as a whole. Theoretically possible explanations can be both the (unknown) selection criteria of the Hamburg archive and varying interests of

newspapers and countries in reporting on Cuban affairs. As I will argue on the basis of the press reports themselves and other sources, we have reasons to believe that the Mexican interest in Cuba was particularly intense indeed.

As the Brazilian journalist Pepe Escobar and the Argentine journalist Gustavo Veiga recall in the interviews I conducted with them (Appendix 2, Interviews 1 and 2), until around the mid-1980s, when military dictatorships were still in place in Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Brazil and other countries of the region, in these same countries small quantity and low quality prevailed in the reporting on Cuba, an aspect that also helps explaining the overwhelming presence of Mexican reports in the Hamburg press archive. My interviewees also recall an often-prevailing negative, if not demonizing, way of reporting on Cuba in the Latin American press or media. The newspaper and magazine articles taken into consideration in these pages, however, rarely display open animosity or denigration. This may be due not so much to the (prevailing) liberal or center-left political orientation of the newspapers selected for the Hamburg archive, but rather to their journalistic quality. It appears that the collectors of the archive were interested in selecting press reports of a certain analytical level; I found a good number of well researched magazine articles of two and more pages, whereas tabloids and low-level journalism did not make it to the archive. This is understandable, as the institutional purpose of the collection was not to make a study of journalism, but to store reliable information on Latin America and the Caribbean.

Of course, all these considerations limit the representativity of my sample regarding the Cuban image in Latin American and Caribbean eyes. To that image – or perhaps better, to those images – it can offer only an unperfect approximation. In general, press articles can mirror the visions and intentions of governments and political elites only to the point of what these elites want the press to know and to communicate, and what the press is ready to investigate and comment independently. Regarding the Latin American and Caribbean public opinion, that is, the presumed majority views of the population – which under the condition of dictatorship are even more difficult to grasp – some interesting aspects nevertheless emerge from the articles that I could examine here. However, I will avoid making conclusions on that point unless they are not corroborated also by the scholarly literature and/or the memory of my interviewees.

My sample, as well as the Hamburg archive as a whole, is not representative for the regional press as a whole either. As of 2015, the Latin American Network Information Center (see Appendix 1) reports 366 newspapers and news agencies operating in the region, and this also is probably only a part of the existing periodicals. For example, non-commercial papers, bulletins, leaflets and magazines published by associations, political parties and so on, are not considered. Consequently, the newspapers in the Hamburg archive and those which I selected from that archive represent only a small part of the regional press. Additionally, we have to consider that the impact of print media was shrinking as time progressed. Radio, TV and in particular the commercial Latin American TV broadcasters – such as Televisa of the Azcárraga Group in Mexico, Globo of the Marinho family in Brazil, and the Canadian Canwest Latin American Group – increased their share in the audience, and probably supplanted the newspapers as the principal source of information.

Cuba's image in the press was negative, recalls Gustavo Veiga, "generally in almost all media in Latin America, which are conservative" (Appendix 2, Interview 2). One important issue that I cannot answer here is how political orientation relates to private ownership, state control and censorship. Contrary to the ownership structures and concentration processes in Latin America's TV broadcasting industry (Becerra and Mastrini 2017; Vega Montiel et al. 2011; Trejo Delabre, 2011), I could not find a comprehensive transnational overview of ownership structures and concentration processes in the Latin American and Caribbean printed news market, probably because it is still more fragmented. There exist single studies regarding the creation of regional transnational news agencies, which in the 1980s developed to oppose the dependence on out-of-area actors (Salinas 1984). That during the military dictatorships censorship was exercised on a regular basis we can take as a given; but according to Peter Watt, also in PRI-ruled Mexico, in the 1960s and 1970s an "invisible tyranny of the Mexican media" was established that produced "direct intervention by the government in papers and in magazines" to tone down or censor the reports, while the readership was left unaware of such censorship (Watt 2009). 'Free' press is sometimes less transparent than unfree press, as the powers that condition the latter are well known to the reader.

All this considered, it must remain an open question what the average citizen in the region thought of Cuba, provided it would make sense looking for an 'average opinion'.

Both interviewees have no doubt that widespread opinions and feelings existed on the behalf of Cuba also independently from government and media inputs. Journalist Gustavo Veiga states that “Cuba enjoys much more sympathy among broad popular sectors than among the governments, which are voted for by those same citizens”, whereas Pepe Escobar hints at the fact that during the period under scrutiny intellectuals and academic youth generally sympathized with Cuba as the most radical alternative to their own life under military dictatorship: “We had to find ways to smuggle books in Spanish from Argentina or Mexico because nothing on and about Cuba was published in Brazil” (Appendix 2, Interviews 1 and 2). Perhaps the absence of information helped the emergence of an idealized view of the Cuban experience.

Finally, another interesting point emerges from the interview of Pepe Escobar, who recalls that he, as a young journalist, “never reported directly on Cuba, politically – but I did write about Cuban cinema, music and literature” (Appendix 2, Interviews 1). ‘Soft power’ is not only an armament at the disposal of the US State Department's Division of Cultural Relations, which since 1940 “actively promoted American information and culture in Latin America” (Nye 2004: 102). Cuban literature, music and cinema have a prominent place in the Latin American mind and imaginary, inside and beyond politics. But not too much beyond politics, as a cartoon in *El Financiero* suggests. It shows late Fidel Castro in uniform hat and clothes on which names of Latin American writers are inscribed, such as Julio Cortázar, José Donoso, Mario Vargas Llosa, Severo Sarduy, Carlos Fuentes, and others (Flores 2018). The major newspapers from which I quote all had pages of literature, music, theatre and cinema. But the Hamburg archive only selected political and economic news. This is another, important, dimension of reporting on Cuba that is completely absent from my analysis.

The indication of all the limits and lacunae that the use of my sources implies is a necessary premise to understand and keep in mind their limited interpretative reach. I am nevertheless convinced that the press reports, which I am going to analyze in the following pages, can give some useful insights on how the Cuban image was mirrored in the Latin American and Caribbean press, and tell us something about how Cuba’s internal situation and its role in the geopolitics of the region were seen, as well as its role in the Latin American debt crisis and in regional cooperation, and how it was perceived as acting vis-à-vis the Soviet collapse and its aftermath.



## 1. Press reports on Cuba's domestic situation in the 1980s

Throughout the period 1979–94, the Latin American and Caribbean press did not turn their eyes on Cuba's internal development very often, at least according to the press reports that it was possible to consider here. On the whole, geopolitical aspects, the perspectives of regional economic cooperation, the debt crisis of the 1980s and Cuban-Soviet relations outweighed the analysis of the Cuban internal development, which seems to have been more closely looked at in the academic literature rather than newspapers or journalistic periodicals. According to Brazilian journalist Escobar, in the press of his home country “Cuba was duly demonized according to the Washington diktat” (Appendix 2, Interview 1) under the military government; and according to Argentinian journalist Veiga, the “peaks of maximum interest” lay both “prior to the aforementioned period”, for example at the time of the “intervention of Cuba in Angola from 1975”, and “after the year 94” (Appendix 2, Interview 2). The Latin American press collected in the Hamburg archive, also seemed like shying away from discussing the ‘Cuban model’. In our sample, only Mexican journalists dedicated some major attention to it, using generally a sympathetic and friendly tone. However, in the second half of the 1980s we also find Peruvian and Chilean reports that insist on underlining Cuba's growing economic difficulties.

In 1980, in the pages of the Mexican newspaper *Uno Más Uno*, Jose Manuel Fortuny commented on Cuba's reforms, in particular the establishment of a partially free market in the field of agricultural production and the farmers' exemption from income taxes. He argued that Fidel Castro had moved away from a purely theoretical and static approach of Marxism in the economic field, in order to adapt the methods of government to the current situation. In doing this, he also followed the experience of other socialist countries, which already had introduced similar reforms. According to the author, in this way the Cuban leader revised the mistaken approach of the first years of revolution, when idealism and utopianism had the upper hand over pragmatism and efficiency in the economic field. “When it appeared that we came closer to a communist way of production and distribution, in reality we distanced ourselves from methods to construct socialism

first”,<sup>1</sup> Castro was quoted as saying (*Uno más uno* 1980, May 29). Cuba was waking up from utopia to face reality, as the title of the article – “utopía y realidad” – suggested. According to the author, this had been long overdue, and most probably it had been the Cuban citizens who stormed the Peruvian embassy who had rung the alarm clock.

The conclusion of the article was conciliatory, if not optimistic. During the following years, when Cuba attracted new attention for its political and economic initiatives in Africa and Latin America, the internal situation – which was, as we have seen in the previous chapter, characterized by further economic reforms and government reshuffle – seemed less interesting to journalists in the region. The Latin American press turned their eye to Cuba’s internal problems in the period 1986–88 when new problems became manifest. The Mexican journal *El Día* took the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Granma’s landing to take stock of successes and failures under the headline “Más desarrollo, nuevos problemas”. Cuba now was facing problems quite different from those under Batista. Illiteracy had been almost eradicated; the medical and other social services have been greatly improved. But there were also enough problems left. The article recalled the revision of planning methods that had led to the government reshuffle. Significantly, *El Día* choose to comment on these problems recurring extensively on Fidel Castro’s own words, pronounced at the third congress of the Communist Party: “Our work has been far from being optimal, there are evidenced deficiencies and failures that we should call by their name and fight with all our energy”<sup>2</sup> (*El Día* 1986, December 8). According to the report, in his speech Castro insisted on the necessity to raise productivity in order to attain a better socialist society. He also appealed to the Cubans’ sense of honor and conscience, as the moral driver behind the solution of the problems at stake: “We have many new problems to solve and many obstacles to overcome, because this experience is very new, and the construction of socialism has to be achieved by rehearsing, testing, rectifying”<sup>3</sup> (*El Día* 1986, December 8). Just as the previous piece, this Mexican report can be deemed Cuba-friendly.

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<sup>1</sup> “Cuando podría parecer que nos estábamos acercando a formas comunistas de producción y distribución, en realidad nos estábamos alejando de los métodos correctos para construir previamente el socialismo” (*Uno más uno* 1980, May 29).

<sup>2</sup> “Nuestro trabajo ha estado muy lejos de ser optimo, subsisten evidente deficiencias y fallas que debemos señalarías por su nombre y combatirías con toda energía” (*El Día* 1986, Desembre 8).

<sup>3</sup> “Tenemos muchos problemas nuevos que resolver y muchos obstáculos que vencer, porque es muy nueva esta experiencia y la construcción del socialismo ha hecho, en cierta forma ensayando, probando, rectificando” (*El Día* 1986, Desembre 8).

Only a few days later, Chilean *Hoy* published a more critical appraisal of the Cuban situation under the headline “La isla sin miseria y sin libertad”. At that time, President and commander-in-chief of the Chilean Army, Augusto Pinochet, was still in office, although the political atmosphere (that would lead to the 56 percent majority against his continuing in office as President in the 1988 referendum) was already turning against the general. However, writing on Cuba in 1986 Chile was probably still a sensitive matter. Perhaps for that reason *Hoy* published a text by a correspondent of the Spanish magazine *Cambio 16*. The Basque journalist Ander Landaburu reports his first impression: “To leave Mexico, the monstrous Federal District with its contradictions, its provocative wealth and absolute misery, and reach an underdeveloped socialist country like Cuba, makes a huge impression”<sup>4</sup> (*Hoy* 1986, December 28). In comparison to other Latin American countries, the journalist observes, there is no apparent poverty in Havana, and the main achievements of the regime are the advanced school and medical systems which are freely available to all citizens. Yet, his observations turn skeptical when describing the discrimination in restaurants to the detriment of Cubans who cannot pay with dollars. They have no immediate access to a table but have to wait “for long minutes”, to see the tables assigned first to tourists from Europe and Canada whose numbers have increased significantly over the years. Tourism is necessary to collect hard currency, an official admits, and therefore Cuba has to take some risks like that of a certain shadow economy. The journalist concludes that while Fidel Castro is promoting his “aggressive” campaign on the external debt issue, he himself is actually trying badly to collect the dollars necessary to pay back European, Japanese and Canadian bankers.

No poverty, and no freedom: The report by the Basque journalist printed for readers in Pinochet’s Chile now turns his eye to the latter, decisive, problem, recalling the estimated 350 political prisoners incarcerated for ‘anti-social’ behavior and other supposed misdoings. After the 1980 mass migration to the USA, Cuba and the US drew an agreement about the expatriation of twenty thousand people per year. But the establishment of the anti-Castro Radio Martí by the Reagan administration led to a paranoid and totally disproportioned Cuban reaction in terms of crackdown on dissent, Landaburu refers. He adds that in Castro’s eyes with Radio Martí Reagan has broken the

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<sup>4</sup> “Salir de México, del monstruoso Distrito Federal con sus contradicciones, de provocativa riqueza y absoluta miseria, y llegar a un país socialista subdesarrollado como es Cuba, impacta” (*Hoy* 1986, Diciembre 28).

deal. However, at the end of the article he admits that notwithstanding the problems in Cuban society, the majority of the people remains behind the *Líder Máximo*. “Neither the peasants, nor the agricultural laborers, who have obtained a permanent job, nor the workers who see their children in school and who have accomplished important achievements, desire a return to the past”<sup>5</sup> (*Hoy* 1986, December 28th).

In the following year, with the Soviet crisis already looming in the background, Cuba’s economic difficulties became more apparent. Headlines such as “Cuba: 1987 se presenta difícil” (*El Día* 1987, January 7) and “Castro impone un plan de austeridad” (*Informe Latinoamericano* 1987, January 15) signal the change. Under the title “Crisis económica lleva a Cuba a rectificar errores”, also the Peruvian journalist Gaby Cervasco commented on the situation, specifying what the correction of errors would consist of: “Austerity, efficiency and control will be new premises”<sup>6</sup> (*Noticias Aliadas* 1987, March 12). After 28 years of revolution, the Cuban regime, vis-à-vis increasing economic threats, seemed to bow to well-known IMF-like receipts. Cuba’s main export commodity, sugar, had been hit by a dry season. As sugar from time to time produced similar problems, Cuba tried to diversify its export by boosting the nickel production, and develop its metallurgy, in order to diminish its dependence on agriculture. The economic difficulties forced the state to rise the tariffs of basic services such as transports and electricity. Fidel Castro addressed his people by saying that socialism could only be constructed with harder work. This situation, together with the weak currency, according to Cervasco would force Cuba to adjust its import plans (*Noticias Aliadas* 1987, March 12).

In previous times, Soviet loans and transfers would had helped bridging similar shortages. In the following years the probability became apparent that Cuba’s ‘life insurance’ was to end, as I will discuss more extensively in the third section of the present chapter. In 1991, the Soviet Union dissolved. However, also Latin American and Caribbean views on Cuba were to change after that date, as we will see in the fifth section.

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<sup>5</sup> “Ni los campesinos, ni los jornaleros agrícolas, que han conseguido un trabajo fijo, ni tampoco los obreros que ven a sus hijos escolarizados y que han conseguido importantes logros, desean un retorno al pasado” (*Hoy* 1986, Diciembre 28th).

<sup>6</sup> “Austeridad, eficiencia y control serán nuevas premisas” (*Noticias Aliadas* 1987, March 12th).

## 2. Press reports on Cuba's geopolitical role

Between 1979 and 1990, the geopolitical environment in Latin America and the Caribbean seemed to turn more favorable to Cuba's position than it had been during the earlier decade:

The years 1973 to 1979 saw the consolidation of military dictatorships across the Southern Cone. As in Brazil, juntas came to power in Bolivia in 1971, Chile and Uruguay in 1973 and Argentina in 1976. Velasco Alvarado was overthrown in Peru. The neoliberal model was rolled out in Pinochet's Chile. This was a period of unmitigated downturn. By contrast, the long decade of 1979 to 1990 brought Sandinista victory in Nicaragua, revolution in Grenada and a nationalist government in Surinam. Castro was elected president of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, and guerrilla forces expanded in El Salvador and Guatemala. (Sader 2008: 5).

As we have seen in the previous chapter, at the start of this apparently more promising era Cuba had achieved an important role within the Non-Alignment Movement and "the now 53-year-old Castro was at the height of his international reputation" (Skierka 2004: 211). Later, also the economic and debt crisis played a role in weakening and finally rolling back military dictatorships and in criticizing neo-liberal policies in the continent. It was easy to predict that the new constellation would trigger a double effect: a certain increase in Cuba's weight in Latin American and Caribbean affairs, and an intensification of US and pro-US American local elites' counter measures.

It might be interesting to see how the Latin American and Caribbean Press mirrored this situation. To anticipate my overall impression, I should say that the majority of the articles regarding Cuba's geopolitical role in the region that I could examine tended to be more positive than negative regarding the Caribbean island's role, while the US geopolitical involvement and meddling in Latin American affairs was seen critically.

As Skierka (2004: 211) refers, in "March 1979 Maurice Bishop took power through a putsch on the Caribbean island of Grenada, and in July the Cuban-supported Sandinista Liberation Front succeeded in overthrowing and driving into exile the Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza". Grenada was a first alarm bell for the US State Department. One month after Bishop's takeover, the Mexican journal *Excelsior* published an article under the peremptory headline "No Permitirá Carter Ningún Tipo de Cooperación Militar de

Cuba en América”. In what was a news rather than opinion piece, the text reports of the concerns by the Carter administration regarding a possible military cooperation between Granada and Cuba. In a meeting with the new prime minister, US envoy Frank Ortiz extended the concept to Grenadian-Cuban relations in general. “According to Bishop, Ambassador Ortiz told him that his government ‘would see with very little pleasure, any tendency on the part of Grenada to strengthen relations with Cuba’” (*Excelsior* 1979, April 17)<sup>7</sup>. The warning notwithstanding, in the following years Cuba “sent technicians, doctors, teachers, and military advisers” both to Nicaragua and Grenada, but also tried to avoid an open confrontation with the US (Skierka 2004: 2011), perhaps suspecting that the American view on Cuba long since had “ceased to be a matter of rational policy calculation and passed into the realm of pathology” (Pérez 2002: 250). The Grenadian revolutionary experience ended in October 1983, first with the toppling and murder of Bishop by a more radical faction of his own movement, then by a US led invasion with the participation of allied Caribbean forces. Cuban technical and military personnel stationed in Grenada opposed resistance; along with 19 US soldiers and 45 Grenadians, 25 Cubans lost their lives in the battles (Stewart 2008: 36).

In the Hamburg collection of Latin American and Caribbean press articles I have found no other piece related to Cuba’s role in Grenada. Instead, a press article of 1982 reports on Cuba’s increasing influence, as well as its increasing difficulties, in the Caribbean area. The author, Rickey Singh, explains in *Caribbean Contact*, which is a Bridgetown (Barbados) newspaper, that Cuba had been invited to participate in the Caribbean Community CARICOM’s 1982 summit in Jamaica. Almost needless to say, the US was critical about Cuba’s invitation as it might help spreading Castro’s influence in the region. The Malvinas or Falkland Islands War in the spring of the same year, during which Cuba had joined Latin American solidarity with Argentina, was the wedge that the US tried to drive between Cuba and the English-speaking Caribbean countries led by Jamaica, who had been standing by the side of Great Britain instead. Singh added a lengthy interview conducted with Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, the deputy head of the Cuban State Council. The Cuban spokesman underlined the desire of his country to establish good relationships with all Caribbean countries. “We are a Caribbean country”, he

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<sup>7</sup> “Según Bishop, el embajador Ortiz le comunicó que su gobierno ‘vería con muy poco agrado, cual quién tendencia por parte de Grenada de estrechar las relaciones con Cuba’” (*Excelsior*, 1979, April 17<sup>th</sup>).

underlined, and since Cuba was at the same time a Latin American country it could have a role as a mediator.

When we speak of Latin America and the Caribbean, we think of the people of one region, plundered for years by American imperialism. Now, in the post-Malvinas situation, some Latin American countries are openly expressing their resentment against the positions taken by countries of the English-speaking Caribbean that chose to identify themselves with the British and American initiatives during the war over Malvinas, Cuba remains firmly opposed to any initiative that may further aggravate relations or sow discord among Latin American and Caribbean governments and people (*Caribbean Contact* 1982, November 1<sup>st</sup>).

In that moment, Jamaican-Cuban relations were strained by a number of Cuban fellowships granted to Jamaican students in the fields of health, education, economics and engineering. The Jamaican government (and of course the US diplomacy) interpreted the Cuban generosity as an attempt to gain influence among Jamaican intelligentsia and subvert their own government and political system. “We are a Caribbean Country with no hegemonic designs and with no illusions about multiplying the Cuban revolution”, Rodriguez tried to reassure the English-speaking Caribbean audience, adding that “Nobody can justifiably accuse Cuba of intervention in the area. On the contrary, the US has a long history of interventions in this region” (*Caribbean Contact* 1982, November 1<sup>st</sup>).

It appears telling for the Cuban influence, which was on the rise in those days, that a Caribbean paper conceded exceptionally ample room for Cuban self-presentation. But it seems likewise symptomatic for the precariousness of Cuba’s apparent success that Rodriguez felt obliged to dedicate great part of the interview to down-play his country’s geopolitical ambitions. This was perhaps because Cuba had a clear perception of the US American might and saw a better chance for breaking its own political isolation in the region by diplomatic means rather than ‘exporting revolution’, as Guevara had tried to do twenty years earlier. On the other hand, there was political and revolutionary ferment in the Caribbean and Central American area and Cuba could neither be prevented from being seen as a model nor was it willing to deny solidarity. Fidel Castro, in 1985, “after referring to the numerous interventions of the United States in Latin American countries and especially in Central America and the Caribbean, advocated serious and frank discussions without however ‘renouncing his ideas, changing the flag, or renouncing the

spirit of solidarity”<sup>8</sup> (*El Día* 1985, February 11). Therefore, several governments of the Caribbean area tended to see Cuba’s subversive actions behind any real or dreaded revolutionary movement in their own country. In summer 1983, for instance, the Dominican social democrat government of Jorge Blanco “launched a raid against the left and an anti-Cuban campaign” (*Informe Latinoamericano* 1983, August 26). From the governing elites’ point of view, the left and Cuba were almost the same, that is, domestic left-wing citizens were depicted as agents of a foreign power.

As we have seen in the previous chapter as well as in Rodríguez’s interview, Cuba acted on the diplomatic level also to gain recognition and acceptance as a ‘normal’ Latin American and Caribbean regional power. The Cubans were not ready to abjure their principles, but also tried to get rid at least in part of their role as the ‘plague-ridden’ outsider shunned by most governments of the region; instead, they were “on the hunt for commercial openings” in the region (*Informe Latinoamericano* 1982, November 26). And in the 1980s this effort apparently began to yield a certain success. In a rare and laconic press statement from the late period of military dictatorship, the Argentine newspaper *Clarín* reported that “the Cuban government relocated its ambassador to Buenos Aires”,<sup>9</sup> while a symmetrical move was undertaken by Argentina whose ambassador also turned back to Havana. In 1975, Emilio Aragonés Navarro, the Cuban diplomat who in 1982 would represent Cuba again in the Argentine capital, had been the target of a murder attempt; one year later the diplomatic relations between the two countries – which following the Cuban Revolution had been normalized only in 1973 – had deteriorated even more drastically to the point of a redrawing of the ambassadors, “because of the situation in Central America”, according to the text (*Clarín*, 1982, April 10). Actually, in 1976 in Argentina began the worst period of *Guerra Sucia*, the bloody repression operated by the Argentinian military junta against left-leaning movements, a context that *Clarín* avoided recalling. The 1982 re-establishment of official relations at the highest diplomatic level occurred in the early days of the Malvinas conflict. Some days later, *Granma* of Havana reported an official “Declaración del Gobierno de Cuba”, which condemned Great Britain’s occupation of the Falkland Islands as a violation of the Charter of the

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<sup>8</sup> “Tras referirse a las numerosas intervenciones de Estados Unidos en países latinoamericanos y especialmente en Centroamérica y el Caribe, abogó por discusiones serias y francas sin que algún 'renuncia a sus ideas, cambie de bandera, renuncie al espíritu de solidaridad' (*El Día* 1985, February 11).

<sup>9</sup> “El gobierno cubano repuso su embajador en Buenos Aires” (*Clarín*, 1982, April 10).



United Nations. The Cuban Government underlined that it “has always recognized and proclaimed Argentine’s sovereign rights over the territory of the Malvinas” and therefore stood side by side with the “fraternal Latin American and non-aligned country” (*Granma* 1982, April 26).<sup>10</sup> Also other Latin American countries like Mexico offered moral support by recurring to similar terms (*Uno más uno* 1982, April 20).

In late 1982, again on the *Caribbean Contact* and again on November 1<sup>st</sup>, in a second article by Annette Walker on “Reagan’s radio war with Castro’s Cuba”, we can read a rather skeptical assessment of American plans to establish a Spanish-speaking US anti-Castroist propaganda broadcast named after Cuba’s national hero Jose Martí. An American academic is quoted as warning against illusions regarding the desire of young Cubans to purchase blue jeans or listen to American music, as these phenomena should not be mistaken for ‘pro-Yankee’ feelings. “They are highly nationalistic and, regardless of their degree of support for the Castro Government, dislike or at least distrust the US Government” (*Caribbean Contact* 1982, November 1). But what was probably even more important, Cuban ‘anti-Yankee’ feelings were apparently in tune with widespread Latin-American sentiments.

In March 1983, the Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs, Isidoro Malmierca Peoli, gave an interview to the Mexican newspaper *El Día* to take stock of the results of the Seventh Summit of NAM in New Delhi. Malmierca underlined that the summit was particularly important to create unity in the fight “against imperialism, neoliberalism, racism, apartheid and Zionism in order to end repression and exploitation” of the peoples of the Third World. The debt crisis also was a major issue and Malmierca underlined the importance of searching a unitary solution for this worldwide problem: “Without development there will be no stable peace,” he warned (*El Día* 1983, March 22). Apart from the lengthy interviews that in those days Fidel Castro was giving to the international press, also other Cuban senior officials like Malmierca took any opportunity to explain the Cuban position to the Latin American and Caribbean press.

According to the tone in the press, at least in the realm of geopolitics a part of the newspapers seemed to take a more Cuba-friendly position than my interviewee Gustavo

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<sup>10</sup> “... siempre ha reconocido y proclamado los derechos soberanos de la Argentina sobre los territorios de las islas Malvinas. (...) Por ello, condena la agresión y declara la solidaridad del pueblo e del Gobierno cubanos con la Argentina, al tiempo che que exige el ceso inmediato de todo acto de hostilidad militar, económico y de todo tipo contra ese hermano país latinoamericano y no alineado” (*Granma* 1982, April 26).

Veiga recalls, when he states that Cuba was generally depicted negatively “in almost all media in Latin America, which are conservative and follow the Washington agenda” (see Appendix 2, Interview 2). The discrepancy may have been caused by the (unknown) selection criteria of the Hamburg archive, which perhaps preferred analytical press reports to the superficial reporting of tabloids. Also, in the above quoted case and in other cases the newspapers’ position cannot be identified with the utterances of the Cuban officials whom they interviewed. But the very fact that Cuban representatives were on various occasions invited to express their view without critical editorial comments attached seems to me significant enough to conclude that in those days not always and on every aspect the newspapers that I could examine were in tune with Washington’s agenda. On the other hand, both journalists whom I asked about their memories and experience, also pointed out that positive reporting was most likely to happen in Mexican and Argentine newspapers (Escobar added also those of Uruguay, see Appendix 2, Interview 1). In the early 1980s, when Argentine and Uruguay were still in the grip of military juntas, this held almost exclusively for the Mexican press and, indeed, the majority of articles I have found in the archive come from Mexican newspapers and magazines. So, Veiga’s above statement suggests that their reporting was not necessarily representative for the Latin American press as a whole, let alone the other media like private radio and tv channels.

At any rate, the Mexican case, one of the rare cases not touched by military dictatorship during the period under examination, stood out. This held not only for the press but also for the Mexican governments, who for more than seventy years were formed by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and who in foreign relations also tended to be US-critical on the official level, notwithstanding the growing economic integration with their mighty northern neighbor, and notwithstanding a president strongly committed to Latin American independence and friendly relations with Cuba like Luis Echeverría, was alleged being on the payroll of the US intelligence services as an informant by CIA defector Philip Agee (Watt 2009).

After a Mexican constitutional reform of 1988, article 89 of the Constitution commanded the President to promote in Mexican foreign politics the “self-determination of the peoples; the non-intervention; the peaceful settlement of disputes; the proscription of the threat or use of force in international relations; the legal equality of States” (Vautravers Tosca 2005: 612). In the given geopolitical context of the region, where US

interference occurred on an almost daily basis, these generic indications, which basically echoed UN statutes, were de facto 'anti-Yankee' constitutional principles which on numerous occasions would put the country on the same side of the aisle with Cuba. At least, this was the Mexican PRI governments' official line of conduct until 2000, when President Vicente Fox Quesada from the National Action Party (PAN) was elected. Fox would openly strengthen Mexico's ties with the USA and distance himself from Cuba.

Especially in the early 1980s, in the press articles under examination the US role in Latin America and the Caribbean tended to be presented critically. This happened, once again, most often in Mexican newspapers and magazines. One such example is a piece published by *El Día* in 1983 on March 30, which reports on a UN Security Council debate, in which Nicaragua accused the US Government to be the puppet master behind the infiltration into the country of armed opponents of the Sandinista government, an accusation that the US representative rejected. In the piece we also read that twenty-two years after the Bay of Pigs' incident "provoked by the US in Cuba", in face of the badly disguised US proxy invasion of Nicaragua "the UN reissues an almost identical debate".<sup>11</sup> Actually, the wording is that of the Italian press agency ANSA, reproduced by *El Día* according to what was nevertheless an editorial choice that seemed to reconfirm Cuba's model-case status with regard to the US imperial interventions in what they considered their geopolitical backyard. Still three years later, Mexico, Peru, Argentina and Cuba were trying to bring the case on trial at The Hague, because, according to their view, the US help to the Contras was a "historical error" (*Excelsior* 1986, October 23).

But it was not only the Mexican press that agreed with Cuba in challenging the US command in the region. As *El Nacional*, a Venezuelan newspaper from Caracas, reported in 1984, Cuba and Venezuela had taken a common diplomatic initiative drafting a resolution in front of the UN Special Committee for Decolonization regarding the status of Puerto Rico. As the article reports, Venezuela involved Cuba because at the UN it had been an advocate of Puerto Rico's self-determination since 1964. The resolution drew on Puerto Rico's right for self-determination, independence and recognition of sovereignty. The initiative was presented by Venezuelan Ambassador Sucre-Figarella, who highlighted the existence in Puerto Rico of political and ideological aspirations for the

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<sup>11</sup> "A 22 años de la crisis provocada por EU en Cuba, en la ONU se reedita un debate casi idéntico" (*El Día* 1983, March 30).

independence of their country. He wanted to make clear that the resolution was a gesture of cooperation with “the brothers of Puerto Rico, so that they become the authors of their own destiny”<sup>12</sup> (*El Nacional*, 1984, August 24).

On the whole, it transpires that Cuba by the mid-1980s actually had achieved a closer relationship with several of its neighbors. That it had been admitted to the Latin American Parliament (*El Día* 1985, June 22) was also a sign of a successful Cuban effort for recognition. Three years later, *El Día* reported on the common effort made by Mexico and Cuba to deepen Latin American integration. Both countries gave expression to their will to pursue that goal during a state visit of Mexican President Miguel De la Madrid to Havana. During the official dinner, in the presence of Fidel Castro, De la Madrid was decorated with the José Martí Medal. In his laudation, Cuba’s deputy president Carlos Rafael Rodríguez pointed out that the principles of independence that were guiding Cuba’s foreign policy, likewise were leading the honored guest “in resisting pressures and repudiating conceptions incompatible with Mexican national sovereignty”.<sup>13</sup> Cuba and Mexico, living on the rims of the same Gulf, were historically united by friendship, solidarity and Latin American unity. “In the passages of a history full of heroism but also of bitter crossings, the Mexican as well as the Cuban always would find a home and love on the other side of the Gulf. Juárez and Martí are the paramount examples”<sup>14</sup> (*El Día* 1988, November 10).

Whether commenting on Cuba’s diplomatic initiatives or on multilateral relations among Latin American countries, in the pages of the newspapers I could examine, a sense of Latin American unity was transmitted. By the majority of articles Cuba was presented under a more positive than negative light. This result coincides with a statement by Gustavo Veiga, who recalls that Cuba’s “systematic non-alignment with Washington”, its “independence in foreign policy” and its being “an example of self-determination” (Appendix 2, Interview 2) was among those aspects that independently from other criticisms were appreciated and rather positively presented in the Latin American press.

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<sup>12</sup> “... los hermanos de Puerto Rico para que se hagan autores de su propio destino” (*El Nacional*, 1984, August 24).

<sup>13</sup> “Fueron los mismos principios que en otros aspectos de la vida política internacional de México lo llevaron a resistir presiones y repudiar concepciones incompatibles con la soberanía nacional mexicana, señaló” (*El Día* 1988, November 10).

<sup>14</sup> “En el paso de una historia poblada de heroísmos, y también de encrucijadas amargas, el mexicano y el cubano encontraron siempre uno y otro lado del Golfo casa y cariño. Juarez y Marti son los ejemplos cimeros.” (*El Día* 1988, November 10).

Not all Cuban diplomatic initiatives, however, were positively valued by everyone. In 1986, Mexico and Cuba advanced another draft resolution that was approved by the UN General Assembly with 94 favorable votes against 5 contrary and 52 abstentions. The content of the resolution expressed concern over the violation of human rights in Chile, which was still under the rule of Augusto Pinochet. Chile reluctantly agreed to allow the visit of UN representatives to investigate human rights violations. But the oldest Chilean newspaper, the conservative *El Mercurio* of Santiago, which was traditionally in tune with the regime, took the opportunity to publish a polemical response. It quoted Chancellor Jaime Del Valle as protesting that “The issue of human rights at the international community is now primarily focused on political instead moral perspectives.”<sup>15</sup> Cuba in particular was not a credible promotor of human rights:

Many of those who normally promote the resolutions on Chile, are precisely the same States which in the world represent examples for totalitarian systems ... a draft resolution concerning the situation of human rights in the Soviet Union has never been presented; nor have we been able to vote a resolution on Cuba or Poland. (*El Mercurio* 1986, December 10).<sup>16</sup>

In the following years, human rights questions were increasingly raised against Cuba also by others, and the same criticism intensified after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the meantime, many of the former US-friendly repressive and dictatorial regimes in Latin America and the Caribbean had been overcome by a return to representative democracy. So, the argument seemed particularly appealing for the USA in their attempts to polemicize against Cuba and isolate it again in the region. But at least until 1994, these attempts were not particularly successful.

In 1991, after the conclusion of the [First] Gulf War, Washington turned its attention to Cuba. The USA was seeking support from Latin American countries for a UN resolution that would require to take some form of action or sanction against it, as Zelmar Lissardy in the Uruguayan newspaper *Búsqueda* marked out. The author underlined that

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<sup>15</sup> “El tema de los derechos humanos se enfocado hoy en la comunidad internacional desde una óptica ante todo política y no moral.” (*El Mercurio* 1986, December 10).

<sup>16</sup> “Muchos de los que normalmente patrocinan las resoluciones sobre Chile, son aquellos Estados que - precisamente - constituyen ejemplos en el mundo de sistemas totalitarios...en lo más variados campos, nunca se ha presentado un proyecto de resolución relativo a la situación de los derechos humanos en la Unión Soviética; jamás se ha podido votar una resolución sobre Cuba o Polonia” (*El Mercurio* 1986, December 10).

Argentina seemed now in tune with US foreign policy objectives, and therefore was ready even to undertake steps against Cuba. After hearing George Bush on the phone, President Carlos Menem decided that “Argentina will change its traditional position to block diplomatic actions in the United Nations promoted by the United States, to censure the alleged violation of human rights in Cuba”<sup>17</sup> (*Búsqueda* 1991, March 14). As Lissardy refers, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay uttered their “concern” over Menem’s decision. At the end, Argentina and Panama were the only Latin American countries to support Washington’s position against Cuba.

On the same day when Lissardy’s four-column article appeared on Montevideo’s *Búsqueda*, *Clarín* of Buenos Aires published a short news item on the same matter. Already the laconic title was telling: “Bush agradece”. The piece consisted almost entirely of quotes from a short letter that was said Bush had sent to Menem and was now circulating among journalists at *Casa del Gobierno*. It ended with the phrase: “You, Carlos, once again demonstrated your courageous leadership in defending what is right and just, with my best wishes for continued successes, George Bush”<sup>18</sup> (*Clarín* 1991, March 14). It does not seem from the tone of the report that the warm recognition from the mightiest man in the world contributed to Menem’s popularity.

George H. W. Bush's sojourn at the White House came to an end on 20 January 1993, as he had lost the 1992 elections against Bill Clinton after only one term in office. A few months before the presidential elections, US Congress passed the Torricelli Act, named after congressman Robert Torricelli who had presented it. It banned foreign-based subsidiaries of American firms from trading with Cuba, prohibited travel to Cuba by US citizens and stopped family remittances to Cuba (*Cuban Democracy Act* 1992). It was signed by President Bush in autumn 1992. Therefore, shortly before the change in the highest US office, new tensions with Cuba were building up. The American “Cuba-hawks”, among them intelligence officers, politicians and the Cuban exiles in Miami and Washington DC, were wondering whether the new democratic president would continue or change the US politics towards the Caribbean island.

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<sup>17</sup> “... Argentina cambiara su tradicional postura de bloquear acciones diplomáticas en las Naciones Unidas promovidas por Estados Unidos, para censurar la presunta violación a los derechos humanos en Cuba.” (*Búsqueda* 1991, March 14).

<sup>18</sup> “Usted, Carlos, dado muestras nuevamente de su valiente liderazgo al defender lo que es correcto y justo. Con mis mejores deseos de continuos éxitos. George Bush” (*Clarín* 1991, March 14).

Three months after Clinton's inauguration in office, Carlos Fazio of Mexico's *El Financiero* wrote an article stating that "El exilio Cubano presiona a Clinton", in which he referred of the American anti-Castro lobby's efforts to maintain the pressure on Cuba high. Among the initiatives, there was the proposal to internationalize the US economic embargo against Cuba and convince the UN member states to proceed with sanctions that would lead to "cero financiamiento, cero crédito y cero comercio". The device for obtaining the results was planned to be an official accusation against high-ranking Cuban officials for narcotrafficking. Raúl Castro was depicted as the mastermind behind an alleged cooperation of the Cuban government with the infamous Cartel of Medellín. "Seemingly, the idea is to manufacture another Noriega that 'justifies' a unilateral action of the United States on the edge of international law, and the objective would not be just Raúl Castro but to put an end to the Cuban revolution"<sup>19</sup> (*El Financiero* 1993, April 27). (Manuel Noriega, the former president of Panama, after being accused of narcotrafficking, had been ousted and captured by an US invasion of Panama in 1989-90). If these were the claims of the anti-Castro hawks, journalist Fazio reported that there were signs according to which Clinton would probably be more inclined to lend his ear to the moderate forces among the Cuban exile, instead of basing his policies only on the support of exile hardliners and secrete services.

Apparently, the conviction among *El Financiero*'s journalists regarding the critical role of Cuban exiles in orientating the US foreign policy was so strong that they decided to publish a detailed overview of Cuban exile groups in the USA later in the same year. The article written by Adriana Barraza López and Federico Campbell Peña on the "Diversidad ideológica en los grupos anticastristas en Estados Unidos" discusses the personal, political and ideological backgrounds of nine anti-Castro exile groups: Cuba Independiente y Democrática, Free Cuba Now, Hermanos al Rescate, Cambio Cubano, Asociación de Expresos y Combatientes Políticos Cubanos, Junta Patriótica, Brigada 2506, Comité Cubano Para los Derechos Humanos and Of Human Rights. The article also focused on their ideological and political differences, as well as their leading figures, who were ranging from renegades of the Cuban Revolution like Moncada veteran Huber

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<sup>19</sup> "Evidentemente, la idea es fabricar otro Noriega que 'justifique' una acción unilateral de EU al margen de las leyes internacionales, y el objetivo no sería Raúl Castro sino acabar con la revolución cubana" (*El Financiero* 1993, April 27).

Matos and Ricardo Bofil, to former Batista partisans and veterans of the Pigs Bay invasion (*El Financiero* 1993, September 25).

Similar to *El Financiero*'s concerns regarding the tensions in the region and the hope that the new US President might alleviate them, the Argentine newspaper *Pagina/12* of Buenos Aires highlighted how problematic the relations between Cuba and the United States had become in the early ninetieth. The newspaper's Washington correspondent tried to describe the negative effects of Bush's incumbent legal heirloom that went under the name of Torricelli, and understand if there were chances that the Cuban-US relations could soften up with the new Clinton administration. *Pagina/12* quoted a New York Times article according to which "dissident diplomats and Cubans believe that the law has given Castro a good political boost, making the United States appear to be bullying a small country for geopolitical rather than juridical reasons."<sup>20</sup> The correspondent interviewed Juan Mendez, the director of Americas Watch, who stated: "As the Torricelli law is now the central element of American politics, it gives a good excuse to Castro to be very hard on dissidents."<sup>21</sup> Mendez also claimed that the politics against Cuba had been influenced by an electoral strategy to win the votes of the Cuban exiles in Florida. He suggested that one of the themes for Clinton should be the reunification of the families in both countries, following Carter's example; that would require a diplomatic rapprochement with Cuba (*Pagina/12* 1993, January 21).

The Mexican journalist Homero Campa, who wrote several Cuba-related articles for the Mexican *Proceso*, also intervened by marking out that the US Basis in Guantánamo had become militarily obsolete. By running the basis, the US constantly violated the Cuban air space with test flights. "When exercising, these airplanes make a turn that forces them to leave the limits of the Base. By doing so, they continually violate our airspace",<sup>22</sup> as Roberto Robaina, Cuba's newly appointed minister of Foreign Relations, complained. However, according to Campa, there was no real military need any more to run the base. "If militarily the United States can dispense the base, it is obvious that it has

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<sup>20</sup> "Mientras tanto, diplomáticos y cubanos disidentes opinan que la ley le ha dado a Castro un buen empujón político, hacienda aparecer a Estados Unidos como que matonea a un pequeño país, geopolíticamente e no per judicial." (*Pagina/12* 1993, January 21).

<sup>21</sup> "... al ser la ley Torricelli ahora elemento central de la política norteamericana, está la da una buena excusa a Castro para ser muy duro con los disidentes." (*Pagina/12* 1993, January 21).

<sup>22</sup> "Al realizar el ejercicio, estos aviones dan una vuelta que los obliga a salirse de los límites de la Base. Con ello violan continuamente nuestro espacio aéreo" (*Proceso* 1993, May 31).



a political function: to retain a charter to obtain concessions in an eventual negotiation with Cuba<sup>23</sup>. Otherwise, there could be no military use to run the base but one: to provoke a war against Cuba (*Proceso* 1993, May 31).

In the early nineties, the tone of Latin American press comments on Cuba's international relations had changed if compared to the reports and comments of the early eighties. Where Latin American solidarity and cooperation in the international arena had been a leitmotif, and a certain admiration for Cuba's fierce independence in foreign affairs transpired from between the lines of almost all journalistic writing, now that the Soviet Union had gone and Cuba seemed in great economic and political difficulties, there was much concern that the US might take the opportunity of Cuban weaknesses to undertake some inconsiderate action. There was no thorough defense of Cuba's political system in the newspapers as far as I can see, nor was there an idea that the human rights in the island were in an excellent shape; but there was concern for the dangers of the increasing political and military tensions in the region. Who was to blame for these tensions appeared to be out of question. It was not Cuba.

### 3. Cuba's image as opponent of western debt policies and economic partner in the region

In the previous chapter we have seen that Fidel Castro's speech at the United Nations on October 12th, 1979, in which he focused on the question of the debt of Third World countries, was an event of worldwide resonance. During the 1980s, and especially after Mexico declared default in 1982, the debt crisis in Latin America represented a major concern for business, banks, international financial institutions and organizations, and also the Cartagena group. It was a subject for the scholarly debate, and as we have seen also for historical research. We also noticed how much during 1979-86 Cuba was engaged in intervening into the debate on the debt question, which it considered a key obstacle to Latin American development. Cuba made concrete proposals for a solution and wanted that these proposals were heard. In summer 1985, it organized an international conference on the topic that would serve as an echo chamber for them. In the same period Fidel

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<sup>23</sup> "Si militarmente Estados Unidos puede prescindir de la Base, es obvio que esta tiene una función política: retener una carta para obtener concesiones de una eventual negociación con Cuba" (*Proceso* 1993, May 31).

Castro gave several interviews to the international press. Even some leaders of Cartagena countries leaders manifested their interest in evaluating his proposals. In short, Cuba invested a remarkable effort into the question and that made me wonder whether their effort was paying off.

During my research in the Hamburg Latin-American press archive, I was surprised to find little reporting on the Cuban proposals for a solution of the Latin American debt crisis. There was some reporting on Cuban efforts to expand its own trading relationships, of course by the Cuban press itself, which in 1983 highlighted its long-lasting cooperation with West German chemical giant Bayer AG (*Granma* 1983, November 7), but also in the Mexican Press. The latter reported on Cuba's efforts to expand its trading relationship, for example by a new bilateral commercial agreement with Great Britain (*El Día* 1982, November 23). In 1983, Ricardo Cabrisas, Cuba's Minister of Foreign Trade, travelled to London to participate in the conference of the International Organization of Sugar (OIA). On the sidelines of the conference he put his signature under the new bilateral agreement, and discussed with the press Cuba's own negotiations with the creditor countries, as the Caribbean state wanted to reach a postponement on the payback of 1.25 billion dollars of their total debt of 3 billion. This was reported by the London based *Informe Latinoamericano* (1983, November 26).

The only contextualized discussion of the Cuban proposals for an overall solution of the Latin American debt crisis I found in a 1985 Spanish 'franchise' edition of French *Le Monde diplomatique*. The author of the article was Ivan Menendez Macin, the Mexican director of the Spanish edition. Menendez was a member of the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party who in the 1970s had been an economic advisor to the Echeverría government. One year after the here mentioned article, on 6 November 1986, the journalist was found shot dead in the trunk of his car parked in front of the journal's office (Associated Press 1986). The director of the French edition, Claude Julien, while remembering his colleague and friend, recalled that "everyone also knew his options for the Third World and the policy of non-aligned, perfectly consistent with the analyzes proposed by *Le Monde diplomatique*. These general guidelines imply support for the 'Contadora group' in which, to the great displeasure of the United States, Mexico plays a leading role in promoting a negotiated peace solution in Central America, while the White House favors open or illegal military means against Nicaragua. In the eyes of Washington,

says a Mexican personality, the efforts of the group of Contadora constitute an annoying ‘threat against the war’” (Julien 1986: 15). The central role of Contadora as an alternative to “the weakening of sovereignty and economic chaos” (*El Día* 1985, February 28) was reaffirmed also by the Mexican Foreign Minister Bernardo Sepúlveda on his visit to Cuba in early 1985.

In his article, Menendez started with describing the process that had led to the creation of the Economic System of Latin America (SELA) in Panama 1975, a process in which he himself, as a governmental advisor, had had a part. SELA built upon earlier efforts, such as the promotion of an Asociación Latinoamericana de Libre Comercio, a Mercado Común Centroamericano and others, that eventually made “decide the then heads of state Luis Echeverría (Mexico), Carlos Andrés Pérez (Venezuela) and Omar Torrijos (Panama) to promote a regional circuit - including Cuba - that would resist the trend toward capital flight, complement the economy by virtue of the different levels of relative development and definitively promote regional integration on the basis of reciprocal advantages”<sup>24</sup> (*Le Monde diplomatique en Español* 1985, November 1). One might add here that after a suspension of fifteen years, in 1978 the Mexico based UN Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), a stronghold of dependency and development theorists like Prebisch, had decided “to incorporate again the examination of the Cuban economy in the annual study of Latin America, with the purpose of exposing the behavior - achievements and difficulties - of its particular development style” (CEPAL Subsede de México 1979: 1). Among ECLAC’s economists the expression ‘style of development’ was popular to characterize “the specific and dynamic modality” adopted by a system in the organization of “human and material resources” (Pinto 2016: 319, 321). The regional UN body’s renewed inclusion of the ‘Cuban style of development’ into the comparative analysis of the Latin American and Caribbean economic performances had also been a sign for a new openness towards Cuba’s reintegration.

If ECLAC mainly proposed studies, SELA’s aim consisted in establishing practically a regional system of economic integration that would break off the economic and

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<sup>24</sup> “... los entonces jefes de estado Luis Echeverría (México), Carlos Andrés Pérez (Venezuela) y Omar Torrijos (Panamá) se decidieron a impulsar un circuito regional - Cuba incluida - que resistiera la tendencia de la fuga de capitales, complementara las economías en virtud de los distintos niveles de desarrollo relativo e impulsara definitivamente la integración regional sobre la base de intercambios benéficos.” (*Le Monde diplomatique en Español* 1985, November 1).

commercial blockade that under the supervision of the USA had been established against Cuba since the 1962 crisis. Not only, it excluded the United States from the regional negotiations. According to the author, the reason behind this approach was to import from the outside world only the minimum indispensable of primary goods and produce the maximum possible of manufacturing and agricultural goods within Latin America. Menendez also recalled that the idea of political and economic unity in Latin America could be traced back to the era of Simon Bolivar and the anti-Spanish independence movement. However, in the last decades industrialization had expanded especially in Argentina, Brazil and Mexico. As a consequence, in those countries both the demand and supply of consumer goods, technological products and automobiles grew in connection with the North-American market, and attracted foreign investment by multinational companies, but all this led only to “modest advancements” in Latin America’s economy and society (*Le Monde diplomatique en Español* 1985, November 1).

According to the author, SELA’s results after ten years of existence were disappointing. The causes were imputed by the author to the disadvantageous international economic order that continued favoring the USA and other industrialized countries. Under the pressure of a similar constellation of economic power, and the dictate of international financial bodies, many Latin American countries promoted an economy based on foreign investment that made their increasing industrial production and employment also increasingly dependent on the decision of foreign actors. Because of this dependency circuit many countries increased also their loans drawn from North-American private banks and in this way exposed themselves ever more to the neoliberal ‘reforms’ required by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank as a condition for refinancing (*Le Monde diplomatique en Español* 1985, November 1).

The huge foreign debt was a paramount symbol of Latin American dependency and this was the point where Menendez’s contextualized consideration of Castro’s proposals set in. Four alternatives were in front of SELA to tackle with the debt dilemma: a) the Cuban solution proposed by Fidel Castro not to repay the foreign debt at all because it was both morally and economically unaffordable; b) the Peruvian solution to repay not more than 10 percent of the yearly export value; c) the SELA Permanent Secretariat’s proposal to renegotiate the Latin American debt with the aim to establish a maximum of repayment to an amount between 15 and 25 percent of the annual export of each country;

d) the refinancing of private banks with 20 billion dollars proposed to World Bank and IMF by US Secretary of State, James Baker, to make sure that those private banks could concede new loans and the repayment conditions renegotiated by the Club of Paris “case by case” and country by country, and not on a multilateral basis with “a block of countries or collectively”. (*Le Monde diplomatique en Español* 1985, November 1).

Menendez avoided making a clear pick in favor to one of the four proposals, however, his aversion to the last solution favored by the USA was unequivocal, as it followed a *divide et impera* principle that was frontally opposed to the efforts of Latin American integration that he so strongly supported. According to the Mexican journalist, the problem laid with the negative effects that foreign investment and neoliberalism were producing in Latin America. They weakened labor as well as middle class incomes, the nation state and regional integration. This was why the region had a dire need for integrated and protected regional markets. As for the debt, what was needed also in this case was a “common Latin American platform to improve the conditions of debt renegotiation, strengthen the financial cooperation and increase interregional trade”,<sup>25</sup> also because “the defense of democracy today, in Latin America, hinges on economic growth and regional integration through mechanisms such as SELA and the Cartagena Consensus, and peace options such as the Contadora Group”<sup>26</sup> (*Le Monde diplomatique en Español* 1985, November 1).

Against this background we can understand that, when the Mexican Government opposed the American counter-measures against revolutionary movements in Central America and the Caribbean, it had not only political motives. In 1982, Alfonso Cabanas stated on *El Día* that “Mexico will continue to cooperate economically with Cuba, Nicaragua and Grenada, without conditions of any kind”<sup>27</sup> (*El Día* 1982, March 19), openly defying the so-called ‘Plan Reagan’ that foresaw the withdrawal of any kind relations with these three countries. Mexico, instead, developed programs providing both financial help and food deliveries to countries such as Cuba, Nicaragua, Guatemala and

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<sup>25</sup> “...plataforma común latinoamericana para mejorar las condiciones de renegociación de la deuda, fortalecer la cooperación financiera e incrementar el comercio interregional” (*Le Monde diplomatique en Español* 1985, November 1).

<sup>26</sup> “... la defensa de la democracia hoy, in América Latina, pasa por el crecimiento y la integración económica regional vía mecanismos como el SELA, el Consenso de Cartagena y las opciones de paz como el Grupo Contadora” (*Le Monde diplomatique en Español* 1985, November 1).

<sup>27</sup> “México seguirá cooperando económicamente con Cuba, Nicaragua y Granada. Sin condiciones de ninguna clase” (*El Día* 1982, March 19).

El Salvador, according to Cabanas. Besides the immediate political implications, this was also a long-term investment into regional integration.

During my research in the press archives of IberoDigital, I was unable to find much more than the above quoted articles that in some way would treat Cuba in relation to the debt crises. And nowhere, not even in the Menendez article, I could find a detailed discussion of Castro's proposals. Of course, it is more than likely that the sample is not complete, and that there were other articles written on the same matter, but this holds for the archive sample in its entirety. Since it is unlikely that the Hamburg collection had reason to exclude specifically articles regarding Cuba's position on the debt crisis, we may assume that this topic actually played a minor role in the press of the region if compared to other Cuba-related subjects. The same lack of attention is also confirmed by the memory of my interviewees. According to Escobar, in Brazil there was a recognition of Cuba's position regarding the debt issue "only in some university pockets, and in some top newsmagazines, such as *Isto E*, founded in 1977 by a top Italian-Brazilian journalist", while Veiga concludes on a more general note that the "rejection of the fraudulent debts of the nations of Latin America is generally more recognized by the peoples than by their rulers" (Appendix 2, Interviews 1 and 2).

So, we may assume that if Cuba's effort was directed to obtain in the press of the region a widespread public debate on their proposals for the solution of the debt crisis, it did not pay off well. On the other hand, we may also deduce from the interview answers that there existed alternative channels, for example social and political movements who were the participants in the 1985 Havana conference, or academic circles, finally clandestine press under dictatorial regimes, through which Cuba's initiatives had been made known at least to a part of the public. American observers of the time even came to a more general conclusion regarding the Latin American public opinion. According to what Tad Szulc wrote in 1985 in an article for the New York Times, "the widespread perception in the Latin American public opinion was that President Reagan 'did not care about their awesome economic crisis, [while] Fidel Castro did'" (Basosi 2009: 284).

The reasons why the Latin American press conceded relatively little room to Castro's initiatives regarding the debt issue must remain a matter of speculation in the present thesis, absent sufficient material to come to a certain conclusion. However, from several American press reports it seems that some Cartagena group leaders appreciated to a

certain extent Castro's proposal, as it would help them to built-up pressure in favor to their own 'more reasonable' claims in front of the international bodies:

Some Latin American leaders even showed annoyance at Castro's campaign. Yet, diplomats from the same countries that publicly criticized the Cuban effort confessed to reporters that most leaders were 'privately delighted' by Castro's stance, which improved their bargaining position with creditors (although governments were interested in having better conditions for rescheduling, rather than repealing the debt altogether). In the words of one reporter: 'emotionally they all agreed with Castro'" (Basosi 2009: 284).

On the whole, however, Latin American elites seemed to have little interest in a broad public debate on Cuba's proposals since radical criticism of neo-liberal economic policies would not just target the USA and other institutions and countries, but put into question also their own economic policies. For that reason, they "were interested in having better conditions for rescheduling, rather than repealing the debt altogether" (Basosi 2009: 284). As Menendez reported, the recent economic development in the main Latin-American countries had deepened the internationalization of the economic process and brought about a closer cooperation with multinational enterprise, international finance, the IMF and other institutions (*Le Monde diplomatique en Español* 1985, November 1). It means that Latin American political and economic elites also nourished expectations regarding the positive effects of low wages, budget austerity, free trade, liberalization and privatization. Perhaps, among those who cherished neoliberal principles, there was also the publishing industry and the very owners of newspapers. By contrast, as we have seen, there was a more frequent and friendly reporting on Cuba's anti-US stances in the geopolitical arena. Since the reports on the geopolitical events touched economic aspects only marginally, the hypothesis seems plausible that it was the critique of neoliberal economics that made the discussion of Castro's proposals less attractive.

Nevertheless, Cuba's commitment to contribute to a solution of the Latin American debt crisis, if it was rarely echoed by the press of the region, may nevertheless have contributed to Cuba's readmission to the Latin American and Caribbean 'family'. In Menendez's taxonomy, Castro's solution was just the most radical among other two proposals, all three reasonable, all devoted to Latin American common interest, and all opposed to the strategies of the USA and the IMF. As the process overlapped with the ending of military dictatorship in the major Latin American countries, Cuba regained

“diplomatic recognition and reopened trade contacts with most of its Latin American neighbors after more than two decades” (Basosi 2009: 285). Various countries deepened their economic cooperation with Cuba defying the US guidelines of conduct. In the mid-1980s, at least as a political principle, Cuba’s isolation from the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean seemed to be over.

In 1985, the Quito journal *El Comercio* reported on President León Febres Cordero’s visit to Europe, where he was “searching for new credits” (*El Comercio* 1985, 5 April). On his way back, he stopped for a state visit to Cuba, which the newspaper interpreted as “an expression of independency and willingness to give some contribution to the problems that affect the region”.<sup>28</sup> According to the Quito paper, the president could convince himself that Cuba

does not intend to return to the subversive adventures that contributed to the isolation of the island. Fidel Castro himself, due to the positions assumed during the visit of the Ecuadorian government, appears as a mature and practical leader, differently to more explosive times.<sup>29</sup> (*El Comercio* 1985, April 18).

*El Comercio* however added also that economic cooperation with Cuba was not easy, given its integration into the Soviet economic system, but that with a certain pragmatism some more steps could be achieved. This not so optimistic outlook may have been due partly to the modest profile of the Ecuadorian economy itself. Nevertheless, at the time the relations with Ecuador had for Castro a strategic value, as confirmed by his counter visit to Ecuador three years later. As the Argentine *Clarín* stated: “The visit of Fidel Castro to Ecuador to attend the inauguration of the president of that country, Rodrigo Borja, has again put into evidence the need of the Cuban leader to reinsert his country in the framework of the Latin American community”<sup>30</sup> (*Clarín* 1988, August 15). The paper of Buenos Aires also refers that Chile reacted to the visit by expressing the “suspicion” that it served to break the blockage imposed by the USA against the Caribbean Island.

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<sup>28</sup> “... una expresión de independencia y un afán de dar algún aporte a los problemas que afectan a la región” (*El Comercio* 1985, April 18).

<sup>29</sup> “... esa nación no muestra intenciones de retornar a andanzas subversivas que contribuyeron al aislamiento de la isla. El propio Fidel Castro aparece, por las posiciones asumidas durante la visita del gobierno ecuatoriano, como un dirigente más maduro y práctico, con diferencias respecto a tiempos más explosivos.” (*El Comercio* 1985, April 18).

<sup>30</sup> “La visite de Fidel Castro a Ecuador para asistir a la asunción del mandatario de ese país, Rodrigo Borja, ha vuelto a poner en el tapete la necesidad del líder cubano de reinserte a su país en el marco de la comunidad latinoamericana” (*Clarín* 1988, August 15).



However, the economic reinsertion process of the Cuban economy into the Latin American markets was hampered by growing difficulties in the Cuban economy. Again in 1988, a report in the Mexican *El Financiero* suggested that the second half of the 1980s was more difficult both for Cuba's economy and its position in the framework of regional cooperation. The paper reported on the growing "cooling" of Mexico-Cuba relations and the diminished commercial exchange between the two nations. The author, Lucía Rangel, also suggested that an imminent visit of Miguel de la Madrid to Havana was thought to obtain support for the PRI, in order to "avoid that the Mexican Left, which is presently on the rise, may obtain the support of Fidel's regime".<sup>31</sup> The 'cooling' of Mexico-Cuba relations "manifests itself in the diminution of commercial exchange; while Mexican exports were of 81 million dollars in 1984, this year they will be worth only 55 million. The imports of the Caribbean island at the beginning of Miguel de la Madrid's office were 25 million and this year they will be 2.9 million"<sup>32</sup> (*El Financiero* 1988, October 26).

The sharp reduction of Cuban imports from Mexico was probably due to the growing difficulties of the Cuban economy after 1986. As we already know from other press sources discussed in the first section of this chapter, Cuba's economic difficulties had become apparent (*El Día* 1987, January 7). They led to an "Austerity Plan" (*Informe Latinoamericano* 1987, January 15; *Noticias Aliadas* 1987, March 12) that could well explain the drastic reduction of imports. As we also already know, Miguel De la Madrid's visit occurred in a particularly cordial atmosphere, in which the two countries once again promised each other to work for a "more integrated Latin America" (*El Día* 1988, November 10). Not for that reason must Lucía Rangel have been wrong when underlining the symbolic value and political gain that 'MM' tried to achieve with his Cuba visit on the political home front. Because, so it seems, even in the midst of growing Cuban difficulties and almost thirty years after the start of the Cuban revolution, going to Cuba, sitting down with Fidel Castro and being decorated with the Jose Martí Medal still meant to increase one's political capital at home: "Cuba represents for Mexico a relationship of principles of symbolic importance, since it allows it to handle an image of independence

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<sup>31</sup> "... evita que la izquierda mexicana – cada día más creciente – obtenga el apoyo del régimen fidelista" (*El Financiero* 1988, October 26).

<sup>32</sup> "... se manifiesta en la disminución de las relaciones comerciales; mientras que las exportaciones mexicanas fueron de 81 millones de dólares en 1984, este año solo serán 55 millones. Las importaciones de la isla caribeña al inicio de la administración de Miguel de la Madrid eran de 25 millones y este año serán de 2.9 millones" (*El Financiero* 1988, October 26).

from the United States before the outside world”<sup>33</sup> (*El Financiero* 1988, October 26). This comment was probably intended as an allusion to the hypocrisy with which the men of the ‘Institutionalized Revolution’ were ruling México. However, in the present context it is also telling for the extraordinary position that Cuba still held in the ‘sentimental household’ of Mexicans and many other Latin Americans.

#### 4. Cuba’s image as the ‘Soviet orphan’ during and after the Soviet crisis

The alliance with the Soviet Union had been critical for the military and political resistance of the Cuban Revolution in the early sixties, and its economic survival in the seventies and eighties. Besides the other forms of Soviet loan facilitation and aid, the Caribbean island heavily depended on sugar exports to the USSR. During the period from 1961 to 1978, the established price for sugar exports to the Soviet Union only in 1963, 1972 and 1974 was inferior to the world market price, whereas in all the other years it was higher, in single years quite substantially: 3.4 times in 1966, 2.7 times in 1976, 4.4 times in 1977 and 5.2 times in 1978 (CEPAL Subside de México 1979: 11). So, also socialist Cuba remained a dependent economy, as William LeoGrande wrote in 1979:

There is little question that Cuba's current export economy is an inheritance from the pre-revolutionary period, an inheritance that has thus far resisted all attempts to eliminate it. Cuba's transition to socialism resulted in a reduction in the level of dependency but not in its elimination. The country's current vulnerability has a dual character. Cuba has not, of course, totally withdrawn from the international capitalist system; it still sells sugar on the world market and is therefore still vulnerable to fluctuations in that market. In its relationship with the USSR, Cuban dependency consists of a vulnerability which stems both from the high concentration of Cuban trade with the Soviet Union and the high levels of Soviet economic assistance to Cuba (LeoGrande 1979: 27–28).

To survive, the Cuban Revolution depended on the Soviet Union, and this was no secret. On the one hand, that very survival of the David against the Goliath was a source of admiration in Latin America. On the other, the American Goliath and his local partners used Cuba’s alliance with the USSR to discredit Cuba as a puppet regime the strings of

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<sup>33</sup> “Cuba representa para México una relación de principios y una importancia simbólica, pues le permite manejar ante el exterior una imagen de independencia con respecto a Estados Unidos” (*El Financiero* 1988, October 26).

which were pulled by an alien master. All these contrasting aspects and ambiguous feelings came to the fore in the Latin American press before and after the year 1991, when the collapse of the Soviet Union was imminent first, a *fait accompli* after.

Already prior to 1991, the role of the USSR in Cuba had been problematized in the press. In 1986, the Basque journalist Ander Landaburu in his already mentioned report for the Chilean *Hoy* picked-up the topic, underlining that what seemed to him a somewhat paradoxical situation. Cuba had launched an ‘aggressive’ campaign regarding other countries’ foreign debt, while at the same time it was desperately trying find the billions to pay back its own debt to the European, Japanese and Canadian banks, and did not say a word regarding its debt to the Soviet Union, the dependency on which was not even apparent on the surface.

In contrast to a widespread image in the West, at first sight it does not seem that the Soviet aid (more than four billion dollars a year) has transformed the Caribbean island into a satellite of the USSR. When it comes to national independence, the Cubans and their Líder Máximo are too jealous to accept such a situation. (...) A Western observer affirmed in this sense that ‘for Cuba the Soviets are indispensable, but nothing else’.<sup>34</sup> (*Hoy* 1986, December 28).

However, if the Soviet support was ‘indispensable’, what then would the Polish upheaval and other crises in the European socialist world, as well as the unfortunate Soviet campaign in Afghanistan, Mikhail Gorbachev's rise to power in 1985 and the inauguration of his policy of *perestroika* in 1986, mean for Cuban perspectives? What if the Soviets would decide that they could not afford any longer the aid to a faraway country? In early April 1989, on the occasion of Gorbachev’s visit to Cuba, Federico Gaxiola took stock of the situation in the Mexican *El Financiero*, by looking at the Cuban-Soviet relations under the light of “presente y perspectiva histórica”. The journalist recounted once again the history of Soviet-Cuban relations from the early days of the Cuban Revolution to the present. According to him, it had never been an easy interaction for both sides. The Soviet Union had backed Cuba in the early 1960s obtaining the American promise to abstain from the invasion of the island. Through the alliance with Cuba the Soviets thought to improve their image in Latin America and the Caribbean.

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<sup>34</sup> “En contraposición a una imagen extendida en Occidente, no parece que la ayuda soviética (mas de cuatro mil millones de dólares anuales) haya transformado a primera vista la isla caribeña en un satélite de la URSS. Los cubanos y su líder máximo son demasiado recelosos en el capítulo de independencia nacional como para aceptar tal situación. (...) un observador occidental afirmaba en este sentido que ‘para Cuba los soviéticos son indispensables, pero nada mas’” (*Hoy* 1986, December 28).

However, this same alliance had also several disadvantages even beyond the considerable economic cost, such as the geostrategic difficulties to include the island in an efficient Soviet defense system, Castro's unorthodox behavior in the realm of ideology and his independent decision making in foreign policy, for example with his military deployments in Africa. In Gaxiola's view, a major concern of the Soviet Union always had been that an all-too tight integration of Cuba into the Soviet geopolitical system would provoke a US aggression against the island or at least increase the tensions between the two superpowers, which the Soviet Union was instead interested to ease. According to the journalist of the Mexican newspaper, also *el presente* of the late 1980s had to be seen under this same light, all the more so as Mikhail Gorbachev's URSS, while it was struggling with a huge number of internal and external difficulties, had even more interest in lowering the tensions in the western hemisphere. But the United States, according to the journalist, tried to capitalize on the others' weaknesses, as

the tonic of Washington has been to increase the costs that the USSR has to pay to possess an ally in the Western Hemisphere. Also, a confidential memorandum recently signed by Secretary of State James Baker affirms that the United States does not currently intend to improve its relations with Cuba, because that country has not changed enough to merit a new attitude from Washington. Baker's memorandum states that although the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola is positive, this nation continues its military adventurism in other countries<sup>35</sup> (*El Financiero* 1989, April 4).

According to Gaxiola, in the given circumstances the recommendations that Gorbachev could make to his counterpart could only go into the same direction indicated by Baker: "the proposals that the Soviet leader can make to Fidel Castro, in terms of concessions that are not very difficult for Cubans and that force the White House to a greater distension, will have to result in more fluid relations in the hemisphere"<sup>36</sup> (*El*

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<sup>35</sup> "... la tónica de Washington ha sido la de incrementar los costos cual la URSS tiene que pagar por poseer un aliado en el hemisferio occidental. Inclusive, un memorándum confidencial firmado recientemente por el secretario de Estado, James Baker, afirma que Estados Unidos no tiene actualmente intenciones de mejorar las relaciones con Cuba, debido a que ese país no ha cambiado lo suficiente como para ameritar una nueva actitud de Washington. El memorándum de Baker declara que, aunque el retiro de tropas cubanas de Angola es positivo, esta nación continua su aventurerismo militar en otros países" (*El Financiero* 1989, April 4).

<sup>36</sup> "Sin embargo, las propuestas que el líder soviético pueda hacerle a Fidel Castro, en términos de concesiones que no sean muy difíciles para los cubanos y que obliguen a la Casa Blanca a una mayor distensión, tendrán que redituar en una mayor fluidez de las relaciones hemisféricas países" (*El Financiero* 1989, April 4).

*Financiero* 1989, April 4). The article offered an interesting revision of earlier interpretations, which had depicted Fidel's 'human face' as a mask behind which the cruel Russian bear was hiding. Gaxiola, on the contrary, depicted the Soviet Union as exerting a moderating influence on Cuba since the early 1960s, and this seemed to be confirmed also by the fact that Castro asked the Cubans to return to 'more socialism' to tackle with the economic difficulties, moving in an opposite direction to *perestroika*.

Argentine journalist Gustavo Veiga recalls that at the time "Cuba was predicted a sad end, a collapse similar to that of the USSR and its satellite countries of Europe" (Appendix 2, Interview 2). The press outlook for Cuba during the Soviet crisis varied with the political orientation of newspapers and journalists, however, the figure of Cuba's 'tragic loneliness' caused by the imminent breakaway of the Soviet Union as a trustworthy partner, must have been widespread indeed. It was discussed by Luis Suarez Salazar, the Director of the Havana Center for American Studies, who's article was hosted by the Mexican-Chilean magazine *El Día Latinoamericano* in summer 1990. In fact, the author quoted Cuba's tragic loneliness in the title only to confute the underlying thesis. His discourse moved from the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano's article "Un niño perdido en la intemperie", where the famed author had given expression to the fear that the desperate Cuban defense of socialism would only lead to bureaucratic fossilization, ideological rigidity and militarization of the Cuban society. Suarez Salazar conceded that there was some plausibility in forecasting Cuba's isolation in a world that was assisting to the dismantling of socialist Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union's existential crisis. But notwithstanding the deep economic calamities that the very Cuba was going through, the author was not too pessimistic on the behalf of its fate. He did not believe, to begin with, that Cuba was really alone. It had still a number of friends in the world and high international prestige. According to Suarez Salazar this had been proven by Cuba's 1989 election as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. On that occasion, it obtained 146 votes out of 159. Behind these and other results there was a sense of respect and gratitude among the countries of the Third World, Latin America and the Caribbean:

No honest man from any part of the world ignores, on the other hand, the generous contribution of the people and government of Cuba to the defeat of the

last colonial stronghold in Sub-Saharan Africa and the weakening of the execrable Apartheid regime<sup>37</sup> (*El Día Latinoamericano* 1990, June 18).

According to Suarez Salazar, the anti-Cuban resentment in the US and its dissemination by the media and among intellectuals had not yet had negative effects on its relations with the European Economic Community. Regarding the USSR,

there is nothing (unless unpredictable events in the USSR) that would make me believe in an abrupt abandonment of the criteria that have guided the bilateral relations. As far as the People's Republic of China is concerned, the political, economic and even military relations with Cuba today are only comparable to those that existed in the first half of the sixties<sup>38</sup> (*El Día Latinoamericano* 1990, June 18).

In late 1990, the Mexican periodical *Proceso* published a five pages long report on Cuba, written by its correspondent Enrique Maza. The article starts with describing a common scene of Cuba's everyday life during the period: "The queue to buy coffee was long. Just for one simple cup of coffee." The article then goes on with brief descriptions and many short interviews, of people from the street as well as political officials, during a travel through the island. The times which the Cubans were going through were hard. They called it an emergency period for a time of peace. Fortunately, there were no bombs falling, not yet, but daily life looked quite similar to a war economy, and the economic reorganization was actually said to serve to prepare for an aggression. Senior journalist Lázaro Barredo tried to explain the situation:

What we call a special period has to do with the philosophy of the defense of the revolution that we have developed since the presidency of Ronald Reagan. The country must be able to develop its own defense conditions. Based on the Vietnamese experience, we developed a war doctrine for the whole people to prepare the entire population for defense. Let people know how to act, where, what points, how it will be, how to guarantee food, how the country is going to work, what measures each territory should adopt in the case of an aggression or

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<sup>37</sup> "Ningún hombre honesto de cualquier parte del orbe desconoce, de otra parte, la generosa contribución del pueblo y el gobierno cubano a la derrota del último bastión colonial en el África subsahariana y el debilitamiento execrable régimen del Apartheid" (*El Día Latinoamericano* 1990, June 18).

<sup>38</sup> "... nada hace pensar (salvo imprevisibles acontecimientos en la URSS) en un abrupto abandono de los criterios que han guiado las relaciones bilaterales. En lo que a la Republica Popular China corresponde las relaciones políticas, económicas y hasta militares de Cuba hoy solo son comparables con las que existieron en la primera mitad de los sesenta" (*El Día Latinoamericano* 1990, June 18).

a massive bombing, that Reagan talked about as much as a surgical operation. And we arm the population<sup>39</sup> (*Proceso* 1990, December 31).

After having taken a way of austerity and reorganization since 1987, to tackle with foreign debt and the external threat, Cuba was now severely hurt also by the Soviet crisis. Between two and four million tons of petroleum ceased to arrive each year, so that fuel and energy were lacking for the agricultural and industrial production. The decline of imports also brought about shortages of raw materials and semi-finished goods for the textile and metallurgical industry, as well as for building. “We understand the problems of the Soviet Union – Daniel Díaz Anrade, a politician from Cienfuegos was quoted as saying - but we have to look for ways to solve our own problems.”<sup>40</sup> While the interviewees expressed gratitude to the Soviet people and the hope that they would maintain some form of socialism, the Eastern European turn away from socialism was commented with “pain” and less generous understanding. Luis Estruch Roncaño, a senior political figure from Santiago de Cuba, responded:

Cuba did not emerge as the countries of Eastern Europe. (...) Cuba established itself as the first socialist country in America, 90 miles from the imperialist colossus, who has not allowed it to rest for a minute in almost 32 years. (...) The blockade could not be more aggressive. This has not happened to any country in Eastern Europe<sup>41</sup> (*Proceso* 1990, December 31).

Enrique Maza, the journalist who gathered these and other voices, at the end quotes a group of students of the University of Santiago de Cuba as saying: “We are building a society of the poor, by the poor, for the poor. All of us here are poor, children of the poor, of peasants, of laborers, of humble workers. This is the only hope we know for a decent

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<sup>39</sup> “Tiene que ver con la filosofía de la defensa de la revolución que hemos elaborado, a partir de la presidencia de Ronald Reagan, para esto que llamamos periodo especial. El país tiene que ser capaz de elaborar sus propias condiciones de defensa. Basados en la experiencia vietnamita, elaboramos una doctrina de guerra de todo el pueblo: preparar a toda la población para la defensa. Que la gente sepa cómo actuar, hacia donde, hacia que puntos, como va a ser, como garantizar la alimentación, como va a funcionar el país, que medidas debe adoptar cada territorio, en caso de una agresión o de un bombardeo masivo, del que tanto hablo Reagan como de una operación quirúrgica. Y armamos el pueblo” (*Proceso* 1990, December 31).

<sup>40</sup> “Comprendemos los problemas de las Unión Soviética, pero témenos que buscar fórmulas para solucionar los nuestros” (*Proceso* 1990, December 31).

<sup>41</sup> “Cuba no surgió como los países de Europa Oriental. (...) Cuba se establece como el primer país socialista de América, a 90 millas del coloso imperialista, que non le ha permitido descansar un minuto en casi 32 años. (...) El bloqueo non puede ser más agresivo. Esto no lo ha pasado ningún país de Europa oriental.” (*Proceso* 1990, December 31).

society for the poor. And we are not willing to fail”<sup>42</sup> (*Proceso* 1990, December 31). Cuba was “in search of a national rooted socialism”, as the monthly *Carpeta Latinoamericana* (1991, February) of Agencia Latinoamericana de Servicios Especiales de Información reassumed.

If pride and defiance were not lacking at least according the above press reports, the economic problems nevertheless hurt the Cuban population with unprecedented hardship. Armando Barragán, journalist of *El Financiero*, wrote in October 1991 that Cuba was on the edge of a veritable economic disaster. And the problems that threatened to drag further downwards not only production and consumption, but also the country’s political stability, had its principal origin in the implosion of the Soviet system. Until 1990 the commercial exchange with the URSS and Eastern Europe represented around 85% of the islands total foreign exchange (*Semana Latinoamericana* 1991, September 30).

The Soviet Union bought at a preferential price sugar, nickel and citrus products from the Caribbean island, and in exchange for these inputs sent capital goods and finished goods. From the early sixties onwards, the trade between both countries was carried out through five-year plans agreed one year before the end of each period. In 1990, when the five-year period 91-95 had to be negotiated, the internal problems of the USSR prevented an agreement of such a magnitude, so that it was only agreed upon as essential supplies for the year of 1991. (...) as of September 30, only the shipment of oil was almost completed to the entire quota that had been agreed<sup>43</sup> (*El Financiero* 1991, October 29).

Simultaneously, the price of sugar per ton dropped to 300 dollars on the world market, a fact that also aggravated Cuba’s situation. As a consequence of the lack of available goods, the black market rose in the main cities of the country. During the IV Congress of the Communist Party, Fidel Castro had signaled that changes must occur in order to counter the problem, such as a higher rationing of supplies and a stronger

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<sup>42</sup> “Estamos construyendo una sociedad de los pobres, para los pobres, por los pobres. Todos aqui somos pobres, hijos de pobres, de campesinos, de obreros, de trabajadores humildes. Esta es la unica esperanza que conocemos de una sociedad digna para los pobres. Y no estamos dispuestos a fracasar” (*Proceso* 1990, December 31).

<sup>43</sup> “La Unión Soviética compraba a un precio preferencial azúcar, níquel y productos cítricos provenientes de la isla caribeña, y enviaba a cambio insumos, bienes de capital y artículos terminados. Desde los primeros años de la década de los sesentas, el comercio entre ambos países se realizaba mediante planes quinquenales acordados un año antes del final de cada periodo. En 1990, fecha en que debía negociarse el quinquenio 91-95, los problemas internos de la URSS impidieron un acuerdo de tales magnitudes, por lo que únicamente se convino en suministros esenciales para el año de 1991. (...) hasta el 30 de septiembre solamente en el envío de petróleo se cumplió casi con la totalidad de la cuota negociada” (*El Financiero* 1991, October 29).



development of the tourism industry. Castro stated that he would reunite with the Mexican leader Carlos Salinas and representatives of other countries, such as Venezuela and Colombia, in order to ask for support from the Latin American camp. “Meanwhile, with restrictions on the consumption of rum (2 liters per adult per month) and tobacco (2 packs of cigarettes every fifteen days), here in Havana the people rest in a passive observation of the evolution of events”<sup>44</sup> (*El Financiero* 1991, October 29). It must remain unanswered whether pride and defiance this time were lacking from the picture because of the different perceptions by journalists with different political orientations, or because over the nine-months period between the first and the second report the situation had worsened even further.

That in the early 1990s the Cuban economy went through a dramatic deterioration is out of discussion. From 1985 to 1990, while Cuban exports remained stable, the imports had already diminished by 12 percent, reducing the trade deficit by 44 percent. So, by 1990, the ‘planned’ efforts to alleviate the burden of foreign debt already had been paid by the population with decreasing consumption, also because deteriorating terms of trade for sugar and other goods meant an increase in the volume of production only to keep the overall exports stable. In the same period, however, notwithstanding such efforts the foreign debt in hard currency almost doubled. With the Soviet implosion in 1991, imports dropped to 50.6 percent of the 1985 level, and in 1992 even to 42.5 percent, and this could only mean even more shortages for production and consumption (Rodríguez 1993: 41).

Regarding the possibilities of saving hard currency by austerity and earning fresh such money, the only substantially positive note regarded tourism. In 1988, a Peruvian paper had noticed that Cuba would heavily invest into the tourism industry: “President Fidel Castro plans to invest millions of dollars to turn the island into the main tourism power of the Caribbean”<sup>45</sup> (*Noticias Aliadas* 1988, July 28). The gross revenue from tourism multiplied indeed by 5.6 times from 1985 to 1992; it more than doubled between 1990 and 1992 alone, a sign that the political directives were put into practice. The income

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<sup>44</sup> “Mientras tanto, con restricciones hasta en el consumo de ron (2 litros por adulto al mes) y de tabaco (2 cajetillas de cigarros cada quince días), aquí en La Habana la gente se encuentra en una pasiva observación del devenir de los acontecimientos” (*El Financiero* 1991, October 29).

<sup>45</sup> “El presidente Fidel Castro planea invertir millones de dólares para convertir a la isla en la principal potencia turística de El Caribe” (*Noticias Aliadas* 1988, July 28).

from tourism in this latter year already covered about 8 per cent of the external debt (Rodríguez 1993: 41).

The above mentioned were the main structural constraints and problems that Cuba had to face without any easy emergency exit left when, on December 26, 1991, the “unpredictable event” occurred: after 69 years, the Soviet Union officially ceased to exist. “Cuba lost abruptly and intensely 85% of the market that had accompanied it during the previous three decades, as well as its main sources of credit, technical advice and technological exchange” (da Silva et al. 2013: 248). And as if that was not enough, less than a year later, in 1992, the USA clamped down on the island with the Torricelli Act, designed to make the embargo total and starve Cuba into obedience. To evaluate the results and problems connected to “Dos años de periodo especial”, with which Cuba reacted to the scaring situation, Pedro Juan Gutierrez of *El Día*, in 1992 met in Havana with two leading scholars of Centro de Investigaciones de la Economía Mundial (CIEM), Osvaldo Martinez and Jose Luis Rodriguez, to get better insight into the questions that Cuba faced after the dissolution of the European socialism system. Rodriguez stated that between 1960 and 1990, Cuba’s social situation improved steadily in the fields of education, health care, sports, social security and employment. Until 1985, Cuba’s GDP had grown at the same pace as other Latin American countries, but then problems arose because of the difficult debt renegotiations and the economic blockade under which Cuba had been submitted. In the following years, the external circumstances changed even more dramatically, as Rodriguez underlined:

In the mid-70s trade with the socialist area was 60 percent of the total, because we had more favorable circumstances. Then we were forced to increase it to 85 percent, where it was located in 1990, when the disruption of European socialism occurs. For this year, only 40 percent of the volume is available in the value we imported in 1989. Such an impact in any Latin American country would have led to the most acute crisis<sup>46</sup> (*El Día Latinoamericano* 1992, September 21st).

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<sup>46</sup> “A mediados de los años 70 el comercio con el área socialista era el 60 por ciento del total, pues teníamos circunstancias más favorables. Después nos vimos forzados a aumentarlo hasta el 85 por ciento, donde estaba situado en 1990, cuando se produce el desbarajuste del socialismo europeo. Para este año se dispondrá apenas del 40 por ciento del volumen en valor que importamos en 1989. Un impacto así en cualquier país latinoamericano hubiera llevado a la crisis agudísima” (*El Día Latinoamericano* 1992, September 21st).

The same author in another study, which I have already quoted above, would show to be optimistic at least regarding Cuba's 'survival', "for two reasons: individual consumption levels and equity are being maintained across all social levels, and there already was evidence in 1991 of the more efficient use of investment and financial resources. In addition, Cuba's well-trained work force offers the possibility that economic efficiency will increase in the key sectors that can lead to economic recovery" (Rodríguez 1993: 44).

In his conversation with *El Día Latinoamericano*'s correspondent Gutierrez, Martinez underlined how even during its most dramatic crisis, Cuba managed to maintain social equity by protecting its citizens, in contrast to the inequality characteristic for many Latin American countries. There, the average life expectancy was at 68 years, whereas in Cuba it was 75 years; there, the infantile mortality rate was around 55 or 60 percent, while in Cuba it was way lower; there, foreign capital often dictated the internal situation, while in Cuba this was not the case. However, Martinez also recalled that

in the period 1976-1985, mistakes were made here in economic policy, due above all to the mechanical transposition of the European socialist experience. A model that unfortunately in many aspects we cannot continue developing since we entered the special period in 1990. I think that this economic emergency program which we are developing will allow the Cuban economy to resist with a maximum possible level of social equality and get out of this situation thanks to the prioritized programs to produce food and to generate freely convertible currencies<sup>47</sup> (*El Día* 1992, September 21st).

Some months after the report by *El Día Latinoamericano*, Homero Campa of *Proceso* reported on another study effectuated by Centro de Estudios sobre América, a think tank close to the Cuban Communist Party. As it appears, both the economists of the Centro de Investigaciones de la Economía Mundial consulted by Gutierrez for *El Día*, and those of Centro de Estudios sobre América, were 'children' of the *Periodo de Rectificación de Errores y Tendencias Negativas* of 1986-90, that is, economists who

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<sup>47</sup> "Hay que recordar que en el periodo 1976-1985, aquí se cometieron errores en la política económica, debido ante todo a la trasposición mecánica de la experiencia socialista europea. Modelo que lamentablemente en muchos aspectos no podemos continuar desarrollando desde que en 1990 ingresamos en el periodo especial. Pienso que este programa de emergencia económica que estamos desarrollando va a permitir a la economía cubana resistir con un nivel máximo posible de igualdad social y salir de esta situación gracias a los programas priorizados para producir alimentos y para la generación de divisas libremente convertibles" (*El Día* 1992, September 21).

were not any more driven only by the ethical revolutionary principles of the 1960s and 1970s, but part of a new strand in Cuban economic thought, which, “without disregarding the importance of moral factors, called for the observance of those of a technical-economic nature, inevitable for the implementation of any strategy” (Triana Cordoví 2000: 103).

Also the experts consulted by Campa depicted a rather dramatic situation, imputed to three main factors that had built up since the mid-1980s: the deterioration of the economic relations with western countries, which had resulted in a sharp drop of income in hard currencies and the doubling of foreign debt; the end of the privileged treatment in the trade relations with the USSR and Eastern European countries; and the loss in domestic economic efficiency and labor productivity, almost entirely observable in agriculture and industry, less in the services sector. The global value of the material production, called Global Social Product (GDP), had dropped by 24 percent in 1991 and 15 percent in 1992, and for 1993 no signs were to be seen for an inversion of the negative trend. As a consequence, the “quality of social services (health, education, culture, and social security) deteriorated and the direct consumption of the population was damaged especially in the acquisition of food and in the use of services such as transportation and electricity”<sup>48</sup> (*Proceso* 1993, January 11).

According to the study it was urgent, therefore, to undertake a number of steps in order to adjust the economy to the new conditions, reintegrate Cuba into the world market, reorganize the internal economy and increase its efficiency. To achieve these goals, the study recommended a long list of provisions, such as the legal and organizational redefinition of the levels of autonomy and subordination of enterprise, the readmission of private small-scale firms, improvements in the functioning of the banking sector, a new regulation of private property, an overhaul of the planning mechanisms, a redetermination of norms, prices and salaries and, finally, a fiscal reform (*Proceso* 1993, January 11).

The articles in the Latin American, mostly Mexican, press regarding Cuba’s situation during the Soviet crisis and collapse, highlighted the island’s overall economic difficulties with remarkable clarity and detail of information. Not so numerous, these articles were lengthy, well informed and analytical, and perhaps this was a criterion for them to be

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<sup>48</sup> “... deterioró la calidad de los servicios sociales (salud, educación, cultura, y seguridad social) y daño el consumo directo de la población, sobre todo en la adquisición de alimentos y en el uso de servicios como el transporte y la electricidad” (*Proceso* 1993, January 11).

selected by the Hamburg collection of press articles. Written from different angles and with different degrees of empathy toward Cuba, they lacked any sign of malice or schadenfreude over Cuba's difficulties. Rather, they seemed to be driven by sincere concern, perhaps because the authors understood that the 'orphan's' fate would more than ever depend on its role within, and the overall evolution of, the Latin American environment and its relations with the United States of America.

## 5. Changes in Cuba's image in the early 1990s

If the examined press reports and scholarly articles can be trusted, even vis-à-vis the enormous difficulties that the island suffered in the early 1990s, many Latin America and the Caribbean countries seemed disposed to intensifying Cuba's re-integration into regional markets and networks without putting preconditions regarding Cuban internal policies. Of course, the expectation was that such a re-integration would most likely go hand and in hand with a transition from the socialist model to something else. "Product of the shipwreck of the project of socialist internationalism, the reintegration process will not take place in the middle of a debacle of the regime and the government. The evidence indicates that the international community, especially the inter-American one, will be willing to accept to let in the same interlocutor to ensure an orderly transition" (León Delgado 1994: 1). According to journalist Escobar's memory, at that time the Cuban image in the mainstream media "improved a little bit compared to the 1970s, but demonization still prevailed" (Appendix 2, Interview 1). In the newspapers and magazines collected by the Hamburg archive, the format and impact of which clearly differ from tabloid press or private tv stations, I found more analysis, skepticism, concern, comprehension and regional solidarity than open denigration. The frequency of reports on Cuba that date from the early 1990s is also striking, as one of four press reports in the *Spiegel der lateinamerikanischen Presse* sample of the years 1979–94 goes back to that period. At least, this is striking if we assume that this new attention was caused by an increase in the Latin American press reporting and not only by an intensified interest of the Hamburg collectors of such reports.

It is plausible, however, that Cuba's attempts to compensate for the economic setback caused by the breakdown of the socialist block with an intensified international and

regional integration would stimulate much attention in the Latin American press. Cuba's "already impressive contingent of diplomatic officials was reinforced by anyone who showed capacity or presumed to have the potential to penetrate external media and markets; the past and potential contacts abroad were inventoried and activated, and the sources of currency generation evaluated and prioritized. The regime even showed an unusual ideological flexibility in its economic diplomacy, including that used with the [Cuban exile] community abroad" (León Delgado 1994: 4). Some observers of the time also noted that the integration of Cuba would both symbolically and substantially contribute to a shift of inter-American relations away from a strict US surveillance. They shared "the conviction that ongoing inter-American integration must be a process that consolidates national sovereignties in a framework different from the Pan-Americanism of the century that ends" (León Delgado 1994: 28).

Among the fruits of these efforts, there was a trade agreement stipulated in Guadalajara (México) between Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela and Cuba at the *Primera Cumbre Iberoamericana* (First Ibero-American Summit) of July 1991. On that occasion, Cuba also reestablished diplomatic relations with Colombia after 29 years, as Fidel Castro and César Augusto Gaviria Trujillo, the then Colombian president, declared in a joint statement. The diplomatic ties with Chile were also reestablished (*El Financiero* 1991, July 18). There were other circumstances as well in which Cuba could act, together with other 'fraternal nations', as a recognized member of the Latin American community united in the fight against Yankee interference. When Guillermo Endara Galimany, the ruler of Panama sworn in during the US invasion of 1989, tried to break his own isolation in Latin America, which was aggravated by a quarrel over refugees who during the US invasion had found protection in the Panama embassies of Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru, Cuba could voice its traditional anti-Yankee sentiment by "denouncing the government of Endara as a 'puppet government'"<sup>49</sup> (*Infopress Centroamericana* 1991, March 21); at the same time, however, Cuba coordinated its diplomatic efforts with the other involved Latin American countries to resolve the related problems pragmatically.

In 1991, the Mexican paper *Semana Latinoamericana* wrote that the Cuban government wanted to open the country to foreign investment in order to counter the

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<sup>49</sup> "... el gobierno de Cuba declara al gobierno de Endara como un 'gobierno títere'" (*Infopress Centroamericana* 1991, March 21).

crises. The most lucrative fields for the creation of mixed companies were tourism, nickel, sugar and citrus fruits cultivation. In the field of petroleum, the participation of Latin American capital could also be developed, the article stated (*Semana Latinoamericana* 1991, September 23). As another newspaper reported, Cuba projected the creation of mixed enterprises with foreign capital. Already 24 foreign companies from Europe and Latin America manifested their interest, which was appreciated also by a delegation of the UN Conference of Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (*El Financiero* 1991, October 28). This was an entirely new chapter for socialist Cuba, which previously had not even foreseen the possibility of substantial foreign investment (Triana Cordoví 2000: 105).

The support of UNCTAD had also a broader significance, which went beyond trade and economic development. It was an indicator of the fact that the US government was unable to isolate Cuba at the United Nations, where the Latin American adversity against such an isolation became apparent. In 1991, the Rio Group at the UN, which was a Latin American and Caribbean successor group of Contadora, handed in to the Commission of Human Rights a draft resolution aimed at claiming for the guarantees of human rights in Cuba. In the summer of the same year, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, the Peruvian diplomat who served as the fifth Secretary-General of the United Nations, asked the Cuban government for cooperation so that a special UN envoy could analyze the situation of human rights in the island (*El Financiero* 1991, July 18). The claim for the respect of human rights in Cuba originally had been promoted by the United States in order to isolate Cuba and depict the country as a 'special case', if not a kind of pariah, in hindsight of its frequent and allegedly particularly grave violations of human rights. However, the article written by Kyra Nunez for the Chilean-Mexican newspaper *El Día Latinoamericano* underlined how delegates of Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia and Peru, while not denying the importance of the human rights question, nevertheless backed Fidel Castro's Cuba in demanding that any UN initiative must be in harmony with the country's laws and fully respect its sovereignty. This was a particularly important step as several formerly Cuba-friendly countries, namely Panama, Nicaragua, Bulgaria, Poland and Romania, in the post-Noriega, post-Sandinista and post-communist era switched to the American side by supporting the US efforts in isolating the socialist island (*El Día Latinoamericano* 1991, March 5).

Of course, the US would not easily give up. What they could not achieve in the realm of human rights, they would try to achieve on the commercial level. As a journalist of *El Financiero*, Claudia Villagas, estimated in 1993, some 90 per cent of Mexican companies suspended their investment plans for Cuba because of the US Torricelli act. Among them, there were companies as important as Lusacel, Mexinox, Cementos Mexicanos, el Grupo Escorpion, DHL México and Petroleos Mexicanos. Managers of Banco Nacional de Comercio Exterior (Bancomext) confirmed that the enthusiasm of Mexican investors for investments in Cuba was ‘frozen’, but they added that this was due also to Cuba’s own difficult moment, exacerbated by the recessive effects of the measures adopted by the Cuban government under the name ‘El Plan Cero’ to counter the crises. The tense situation also affected Cuba’s debt renegotiations with the Banco de Mexico and Bancomext (*El Financiero* 1993, February 9).

In short, during 1991-93 and particularly in the year 1993 the moment was difficult indeed. According to another report by *El Financiero*, “Cuba, afflicted by the economic recession and in need of hard currency, said today that it will only produce 4.2 million tons of sugar this year, one of the worst harvests of recent history. (...) Sugar is the main product of the Cuban economy, which resented by the dissolution of its past trade and aid relations with Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, which were the main economic suppliers of the island for 30 years”<sup>50</sup> (*El Financiero* 1993, May 26). Initially, the Cuban leadership had hoped that still after the communist collapse it might be possible to maintain good trade relations with the countries of the former Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), but this turned out to be an illusion; also, the access to the vast Chinese and Japanese markets allowed no more than just to uphold the traditional levels of exchange (León Delgado 1994: 12). That in May 1993 “Cuba and Russia signed a memorandum to increase their exchange” of sugar against oil, “in order to revitalize their depressed commercial relationships” (*El Financiero* 1993, May 24), was, in a year that would register an almost 15 percent drop in Cuba’s gross domestic product (Rodríguez García 2011: 32), little more than a bed, or a hope, for a somehow better future.

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<sup>50</sup> “Cuba, afectada por la recesión económica y necesitada de moneda dura, dijo hoy que solo producirá 4.2 millones de toneladas de azúcar este año, una de las menores zafas de su historia reciente. (...) El azúcar es el principal renglón de la economía cubana, resentida por la desaparición de las pasadas relaciones comerciales y de ayuda con Europa oriental y la ex Unión Soviética, principales abastecedores económicas de la isla durante 30 años” (*El Financiero* 1993, May 26).



The situation in 1993 was dramatic, but perhaps not yet desperate. Latin American, and in particular Mexican, industrial companies and banks continued to look forward to investing in Cuba, US pressures notwithstanding. Mexican banks were to install subsidiaries in the island and create a system of credit cards for tourists. Mexican firms wanted to invest also in the Cuban glass, sugar, cement, textiles and telephone sectors. Between Mexico and Cuba, a bilateral program was signed according to which Cuba could swap shares of its debt for Mexican investments (*El Financiero* 1993, April 5). And, more than all, “the increase of the importance of inter-American and especially Latin American and Caribbean trade, as much desired as surprising, is undoubtedly the outstanding fact of Cuban foreign trade in recent years” (León Delgado 1994: 12). From 1994 onwards, the relocation of Cuba’s external economic relations definitely sustained the country’s economic recovery.

To accomplish a similar result, Cuba had to adjust its economic and social structure to the new situation. At the same time, the pressure was growing, in particular that of the USA and its allies, that Cuba should change also its political system and follow the example of the ex-socialist countries in Eastern Europe. Asked by the Uruguayan journalist Alfonso Lessa, in an interview for *Búsqueda*, whether it was not time also for Cuba to put socialism into a museum, Castro responded that “capitalism has three thousand years and the pieces that have a thousand years, those are for the museum”.<sup>51</sup> And asked whether it was not high time for a free press and fair elections, he answered that “nobody obtains more dissemination than that obtained by the enemies of the revolution, because they have at their disposal all the means of communication of the United States. (...) we are not going to open the doors to those who want to destroy the revolution, nor will we facilitate the road to the United States. This I can tell you, frankly and clearly”<sup>52</sup> (*Búsqueda* 1991, July 25). Given the epochal changes that Eastern Europe underwent in the same years, the expectation of radical political changes in Cuba where

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<sup>51</sup> “El capitalismo tiene tres mil años y las piezas que tienen mil años, esas sí son de museo” (*Búsqueda* 1991, July 25).

<sup>52</sup> “Nadie recibe más divulgación que la que reciben los enemigos de la revolución, porque tienen a disposición todos los medios de comunicación de los Estados Unidos. (...) nosotros no le vamos a abrir las puertas a los que quieren destruir la revolución, ni le vamos a facilitar el camino a Estados Unidos. Así que de manera franca y clara te lo digo. Nadie recibe más divulgación que la que reciben los enemigos de la revolución, porque tienen a disposición todos los medios de comunicación de los Estados Unidos” (*Búsqueda* 1991, July 25).

understandably high. In the following years, Latin American journalism kept Cuba's political and social situation under close observation.

In March 1993, after the third reelection of Fidel Castro as president of the State Council and Parliament, Homero Campa of *Proceso* wondered "Quiénes son y donde están 'los hombres de Fidel'" able to tackle with the new situation. Half of the members of the Council had been changed, he stated, but Raúl Castro, Juan Almeida Bosque, Osmany Cienfuegos and Predro Miret had all been re-confirmed. Raúl Castro was on the side of his brother during every military and political action since the start of the Revolution. But there were also the Secretary of the Council of Minister, Carlos Lage Davile, the brain of the political economy direction of the country known as 'administrator of the crises'; Ousmany Cienfuegos Gorriaran, secretary of the Comité Ejecutivo del Consejo de Ministros and responsible for the touristic development of the island; and, finally, Juan Almeida Bosque, also member of the Politburo and deputy president of the Council of State, like Fidel and Raúl a veteran of the Moncada Barrack attacks. These were the people of Fidel, elder men of the Cuban Revolution who hoped that they still could lead the Caribbean islands toward a better future in uncertain times.

Homero Campa argued that the real power was in the hands of the *Buro Politico*, the organ of the Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC) that was composed of 25 members who together with Castro formed the inner ("intimate", as Campa put it) circle of Cuban leadership. De facto even a reform of the constitution, economic policies and new electoral laws could be decided by the top leadership of the PCC, a party that only had one out of ten Cubans among its members. In Campa's view, it would be better the parliament regained its legislative powers but, of course, "given the power of the party, Parliament's weakness is evident"<sup>53</sup> (*Proceso* 1993, March 22).

Later in the same year, *Proceso* published another, long and well documented report by Homero Campa, in which he described the new reality of "un socialismo con bancos, impuestas, casinos y publicidad" (*Proceso* 1993, November 22). As he noted:

Obliged by economic hardships, Fidel Castro's government forgets the socialist orthodoxy and, on the way, accelerates a liberation of its economy that changes the face of the Revolution: it authorizes a virtual free zone for the entry of various products, a casino on a cruise ship whose property it shares with an Italian firm,

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<sup>53</sup> "Ante el poder del partido, es evidente la debilidad del Parlamento" (*Proceso* 1993, March 22nd).

state companies with autonomous management and a bank with foreign capital<sup>54</sup> (*Proceso* 1993, November 22).

His report went into a huge number of examples regarding the overhaul of bureaucratic structures of state, industries and government, the excessive personnel of which seemed to be destined to reduction, as well as its social rights which the same Castro was quoted as describing as “too generous”. At the same time, a number of sectors were liberalized and opened to private initiative. Taxes were raised, subsidies cut. Foreign investments could flow in, together with foreign consumer goods. And the decision makers on various levels of government and management, as a subtitle recites, had to take “classes in neoliberalism” (*Proceso* 1993, November 22).

Whether the Cuban conversion to “neoliberalism” was a realistic description, should be evaluated against the subsequent developments, which are beyond the scope of my thesis. Undoubtedly, the adjustment decided in the early 1990s would bring about heavy initial economic costs: “After a decline of 14.9% in 1993, in 1994 the downward trend of GDP was reversed by a limited growth of 0.7%; but in 1995 the growth reached 2.5%, leading the economy to start the recovery phase that has been maintained since then, with a 4.7% increase in GDP by 2009” (Rodríguez García 2011: 32). The adjustment had also sensible social costs: “Universal and free social services peaked in 1989, when they were the best in Latin America, except for housing, but their quality deteriorated under the impact of the crisis of the 1990s” (Mesa-Lago and Vidal-Alejandro 2010: 712).

Nevertheless, in the long run social services in Cuba would continue to develop positively and stand out in the Caribbean and Latin American context (Mesa-Lago and Vidal-Alejandro 2010: 700–3), while some twenty years after the start of the ‘special period’ the political leadership of the island still expressed the will “to maintain the Cuban economy as a planned economy” (Rodríguez García 2011: 36). Homero Campa’s analysis was generally acute, but to state that Cuba’s adjustment was the turn to a ‘neoliberal’ model would have been a far-fetched exaggeration. At any rate, the remark that its

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<sup>54</sup> “Obligado por las penurias económicas, el gobierno de Fidel Castro se olvida de la ortodoxia socialista y, sobre la marcha, acelera una liberación de su economía que le cambia el rostro a la Revolución: autoriza una virtual zona franca para la entrada de diversos productos, un casino en un cruceiro cuya propiedad comparte con una firma italiana, empresas estatales con gestión autónoma y un banco con capital extranjero” (*Proceso* 1993, November 22nd).

decision makers had to take classes in neo-liberalism apparently reflected the expectations of many Latin American observers of the time.

The temporary economic setback for Cuba, increasing inequality and other problems notwithstanding, what Basque envoy Ander Landaburu wrote in 1986 for the Chilean *Hoy* held still more than twenty years later:

But, you know, anybody from living elsewhere in Latin America, when you go to Cuba, the first thing that you notice is that there's virtually no unemployment. The health and education indicators are absolutely staggering. It's unimaginable in any other Latin American country. There's no hunger, for that matter. People are able to feed themselves, even though facing enormous difficulties. People, they are so well educated. You see Cuban doctors in Venezuela, Cuban doctors in Bolivia as well. So, compared to most of Latin America, it's outstanding (Escobar 2008).

On a personal note, I would add to Pepe Escobar's observations that social rights, such as the absence of hunger, illiteracy, exploitation and unemployment also are human rights (according to the articles 22–27 of the International Bill of Human Rights of 1948), which the USA and the neoliberal thought in general hardly conceive of as actionable rights, while Cuba does. In that sense it represents a counter-model the successful resistance of which many observers struggle to understand, perhaps for a lack of comprehension for that other way of conceiving of rights, and perhaps for ignoring the history and the social problems of Latin America and the Caribbean more in general. As Jose Luis Soberanes Fernandez wrote on *El Financiero* back in 1994:

Even though our northern neighbors have naively believed that their economic blockade will have disastrous consequences for Castro, they have not considered that such measures usually have paradoxical effects, that is, they achieve cohesion in the face of external aggression. In such a way it has strengthened Fidel rather than make him bow, and those who have paid for the ostracism are the unfortunate inhabitants of that beautiful island, who, as we saw earlier, live in conditions of extreme misery; and, finally, by the social control that the Cuban regime evidently exercises over the population. For all these reasons, I sincerely believe that Fidel Castro will not fall, he will continue to govern his country until the day of his death, and that, barring an American invasion, a hypothesis that is practically impossible, Fidel will not be taken out by anyone"<sup>55</sup> (*El Financiero* 1994, January 18).

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<sup>55</sup> “.. pues aunque nuestros vecinos del norte han creído ingenuamente que debido a su bloqueo económico el mismo va a tener consecuencias desastrosa para Castro, no han considerado que ese tipo de medidas normalmente tiene efectos paradójicos, es decir, logran cohesión ante la agresión externa, de tal suerte ha

## 5. Conclusion

Fidel Castro was ‘taken out’ only by his natural death in 2016. Eight years earlier, he agreed to a gradual transition of leadership into the hands of his long-time second in command and brother, Raúl Castro, who took over the position of President in 2008, and of First Secretary of the CPC in 2011. In 2018, Raúl's position as the president was ceded to Miguel Díaz-Canel, Cuba’s first leader born after the 1959 Revolution. For many, these passages testify the institutional and social solidity of Cuba’s political system, for many others, especially political leaders in the USA, Cuba’s socialism continues to be an ‘anachronism’ that must be removed. The pressure against Cuba that was partially relented during the Obama administration, under Trump is mounting again. But I will not elaborate on the quarter of a century that has passed since the Cuban Revolution survived to the collapse of the Soviet Union, which caused its greatest crisis after 1962. The excursus on the present just wanted to signal that it is still in place, after sixty years. The question of my thesis was: why? Until 1990, Cuba depended on the economic and strategic support of the Soviet Union. How could it survive the Soviet collapse and its aftermath?

As we have seen in the Chapter 2, the charismatic leadership of Fidel Castro emerged since the mid-1950s, when the law student of Havana University became a leading figure of the struggle against the pro-American regime of Fulgencio Batista. Perseverance, political talent and military ability made his movement seize power. A revolutionary and heroic narrative, also linked to the name of Che Guevara, laid the groundwork for a ‘mythical’ legitimization of the victory of the Caribbean David over the North-American Goliath. But the name of Che Guevara also stood for a mixture of Marxism and Latin-American solidarity, for a continental struggle for independence that goes back to the nineteenth century, from Bolivar to the Haitian Revolution of 1804. Like all Cuban twentieth-century parties and leaders that devoted themselves to the ‘anti-imperialist’

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afianzado más a Fidel en vez de doblarlo, y quienes han pagado los platos rotos son los infelices habitantes de esa hermosa isla, quienes, como señalábamos antes, viven en condiciones de extrema miseria; y, finalmente, por el control social que evidentemente el régimen cubano ejerce sobre la población. Por todo ello, sinceramente creo que Fidel Castro no va a caer, seguirá gobernando a su país hasta el día de su muerte, y que salvo una invasión estadounidense, hipótesis prácticamente imposible, a Fidel no la quita nadie” (*El Financiero* 1994, January 18).

struggle before Castro, also the victorious Cuban Revolution would interpret itself, first and foremost, as the prosecution of the fight for national independence that José Martí had initiated in 1892. With its modest economic means, the revolutionary Cuba tried to pursue social justice, and guarantee work and income, health and education to all Cuban families.

Charismatic leadership, national pride over the resistance against a mighty foreign power and the appreciation of social welfare and social justice, that also comprised the refusal of racism and gender discrimination, that is, the elements touched upon in Chapter 2, laid the ground for the regime's political consent in the Cuban society. Without that consent, its survival cannot be explained. On the other hand, there was and is of course also dissent. Since the 1960s, a part of the Cuban exile reorganized and radicalized in the United States. The almost relentless attacks, sabotage, meddling, media influence and propaganda, and the attempts of invasion, subversion, regime change, together with the economic boycott in place for over half a century, do not excuse, but can explain, the grip of censorship, surveillance and political repression imposed on the island's society by the ruling Communist Party.

But the aim of my work was not to look deeper into these other factors of the Cuban Revolution's survival. Instead, I wanted to focus on the critical passage between the apparent apex of Cuba's might and recognition in the world – which expressed itself, only some months before Soviet troops moved into the territory of Afghanistan, through Fidel Castro's 1979 performance before the UN General Assembly as the speaker of the Non-Aligned Movement – and 1994, when after economic difficulties that started to manifest themselves from the mid-1980s, Cuba began to see some light at the end of a tunnel that after the Soviet collapse menaced to become the grave of the Revolution. As we have seen in Chapter 3, when the neoliberal policies emerged in the context of what then would be called globalization, Castro tried to position Cuba as a steadfast 'anti-imperialist' and anti-colonial leader of the Third World and the Non-Aligned Movement. While thanks to the military interventions in Africa the Cuban influence was acknowledged by friend and foe, both the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and the increasing appeal of neoliberal strategies also for Third World elites made Cuba's position more difficult. But Castro's advocacy for an equal and fair solution of the debt crisis, in particular in Latin America, as well as a widespread antipathy against North American and British military initiatives

in Central America, the Caribbean and the Malvinas, led in the 1980s to a diplomatic rapprochement between Cuba and many Latin American and Caribbean countries. This rapprochement undermined the decades-long US efforts in isolating Cuba from its regional neighbors. Cuba also tried to reactivate the economic ties with its partners, but in the second half of the 1980s the country had to tackle with its own economic difficulties that hampered commercial exchange. Nevertheless, in the mid-1980s Cuba intensified its self-representation as the best advocate for a fair solution of the debt crisis by which its Latin American neighbors were shocked in the marrow.

In Chapter 4 I tested my main hypothesis, according to which for Cuba's survival to the problems of the late 1980s and early 1990s was due to its being perceived and accepted as a Latin American and Caribbean fellow country. My assumption was that when Cuba lost the protection of the Soviet Union, it could attract sufficient attention, solidarity, respect, sympathy, cooperation and calculated interest from its regional neighbors to survive. I have tried to corroborate my assumption by looking into the Latin American and Caribbean press, to see whether the Cuban image that was mirrored by the press corresponds to it. As I have explained in the introduction to Chapter 4, my sources, taken from a press archive of a German documentation center, cannot be considered as being representative for the public opinion of Latin American and Caribbean countries. As both Latin American journalists whom I interviewed have declared, there was a more positive view among many Latin American citizens of the Cuban model than those which was reflected by the media. Such positive views were determined by Cuba's social justice achievements, for example in the health and education sector, and by its resistance to US assault. Under the condition of the pro-US military dictatorships, which in many countries lasted up into the 1980s, Cuba among popular and intellectual strata probably was also idealized and became an alternative model to the reality of their own countries, a view that did not necessarily ground on detailed information. If this is true, the ruling elites as well as the press had to take such popular moods into account. The headline "An island without misery or freedom" by a Chilean newspaper seems to me significant for a strategy of containing pro-Cuban feelings with a dose of realism rather than mere propaganda.

According to the experience and memories of my two interviewees, the representation of Cuba in the Latin American media was for the most part overwhelmingly negative and even demonizing. I could not verify such a strong,

propagandistic view in the press reports which I have examined. Most probably, this is because the press reports in the Hamburg archive were collected according to their capacity to deliver feasible information. This however means that my sources are not even representative for the Latin American and Caribbean media as a whole. In the period under investigation, private TV became the most popular source of entertainment and information; but also, the tabloids and other press are absent from the sample. Nevertheless, I think that the press articles examined in Chapter 4 are significant enough to sustain my thesis, even if they cannot deliver a thorough proof.

The articles drawn from the Hamburg archive did not often go into the discussion of the ‘Cuban model’. On those rare occasions, Mexican journalists used generally a sympathetic tone. In the second half of the 1980s we find reports that insist on underlining Cuba’s growing economic difficulties. More frequently discussed was the issue of regional integration. The press reports, together with the literature examined in Chapter 3, allow us also to reflect on the character of the ‘Latin-American solidarity’ that motivated Cuba’s neighbor governments to involve the island into efforts of regional integration. I think that there was, once again, a set of different reasons, some evident, others more concealed. One was the necessity to take the widespread sympathies for the Cuban resistance against the US superpower into account. The principles of sovereignty and independence enjoyed high esteem among the public, probably because they were part of the Latin American foundational myths and though continued to be threatened in the present. US interference in Latin America and the Caribbean was perceived as arrogant and highly unpopular. In short, for historical reasons in this geographical area patriotism and nationalism tended to coincide with ‘anti-imperialism’. Also those political elites who contested openly pro-Yankee military juntas, were or at least tried to appear patriotic, and favorable to the defense of the principles of sovereignty and independence. Otherwise said, the political elites who did not support the military dictatorships were seeking geopolitical counterweights to cumbersome Uncle Same. The latter’s actions and interests often disrupted their plans for a more effective regional cooperation, which was direly needed to improve the chances for a more independent development.

My impression, based on the press reports, is that of a certain ambiguity of the politicians’ ‘Latin American solidarity’ on which the journalists reported. From the few



reports from the Caribbean it appears that during the Malvinas and Grenada crises the friend/foe scheme was drawn with more clarity. Besides left-wing and revolutionary movements, anti-Cuban feelings seemed to prevail among political elites from the right to the center-left. Such feelings, if they existed, were much less evident in press reports from Mexico and from post-dictatorship Uruguay and Argentina. On the contrary, the tone was most of the times friendly or neutral. But a certain ambiguity becomes evident in the low-profile that, to my surprise, Cuba's proposals for a solution of the Latin American debt problems had in the press articles from the region. As we have seen in Chapter 3, Castro's proposals had received worldwide attention, and Cuba invested much propagandistic energy into making them known in Latin America. Some leaders of the region, on occasions such as state visits, expressed a certain appreciation. Nevertheless, in the press, written for the regional and domestic public, there was no detailed discussion of these proposals, not at least in the articles I have seen. My impression is that Castro's proposals were appreciated by Latin American leaders only insofar as they added to the pressure on the creditors to accept the Cartagena or other proposals for a multilateral solution; but on the domestic level Castro's anti-neoliberal stances were less compatible with the interests of emerging elites who in countries like Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Mexico already participated in the processes of economic globalization.

Mexico seems to have been Cuba's most important regional interlocutor and a partner for decades. In several geopolitical quarrels Mexico sided with Cuba, at least as long as the PRI rule lasted. Mexico also helped to shield Cuba from US revenge, sanctions, retaliation, or at least tried to attenuate their negative effects. The Mexican press, according to the articles I found in the Hamburg press archive, was generally better informed than others on Cuban affairs. The reports which I could examine, if they were negative at all (which was rarely the case), nevertheless avoided propagandistic or polemic tones. Mexico did not suffer a military dictatorship, formally the press was free. However, according to the scholarly literature the PRI rule became more and more authoritarian, and tightly controlled the press. So, we may conclude, once again, that Mexico's political elites had a strong economic and strategic interest in the Caribbean area and the Gulf of Mexico, and in preserving their, and their neighbors', sovereignty from US interference. For that reason, they were not interested in importing Cold War tensions into the region, neither were they interested after 1990 in a Cuban collapse. They

offered their help, and invoked a shared history and solidarity. In the first half of the 1970s, the *tercermundismo* professing Mexican president Luis Echeverría pursued important projects of regional integration that expressively included Cuba against all US efforts to isolate Castro's country in the region. This also sounds unambiguous, whereas I have spoken of ambiguity. The allegation that the most Cuba-friendly among the Mexican PRI leaders, Echeverría, was at the same time a paid informant of the Central Intelligence Agency, if true, would be little more than a symbol for the ambiguity I refer to. The deeper causes were of a structural nature. In Mexico, there was interest and a strong desire of an 'independent' development, but at the same time a dynamic industrialization process set in that would lead to Mexico's increasing integration with the US American market and financial system; in the early 1980s, this same process led to an unprecedented dependency on US loans and debt services. All this implied that the steadfast defense of a regional integration without the USA, of independence and sovereignty, was counterbalanced by an increasing entanglement with the US economy.

However ambiguous, the manifestations of friendship, Latin American solidarity and readiness for cooperation with Cuba produced enough political momentum to help Cuba's survival in the menacing crisis of the early 1990s. From the press reports, which tackle with the Cuban difficulties caused by the Soviet collapse, no *schadenfreude* transpired, but rather concern for the possible negative consequences that these developments might have not just for Cuba's population, but also for Latin America and the Caribbean as a whole, for example as a consequence of political turmoil or a military intervention. At the height of 1990-01, after the long wave of pro-American military dictatorships had finally been supplanted in almost all countries by reconquered democratic freedoms, the general mood was certainly not in favor of similar solutions. And skepticism and hostility against the US policies implied if not sympathy, at least less hostility, against Cuba. The 1991 episode referred by Uruguayan and Argentine press reports, from which we understand that Carlos Menem's support for Bush senior's anti-Cuban initiatives let him appear in Latin American eyes as a Yankee's lackey, is telling.

The Latin American counter-moves, which appeared to enjoy support also at the United Nations, avoided to rebuff the US stances on human rights, but gave them a shape that explicitly safeguarded Cuba's sovereignty and freedom to decide its own legal and social order. In the press we read some critical remarks regarding Cuba's allegedly

kleptocratic apparatus, that was depicted as being ready to sell out the country to neoliberal principles and rapacious banks in order to preserve its power. Nevertheless, there also was the awareness that in the middle of an economic debacle it was better not to add a political debacle, all the more so as the socialist government and its charismatic leader still transmitted strength and determination. For these reasons, the American hostile political maneuvers of 1991-93, which seemingly tried to spin Cuba's economic downward spiral to a political breaking point, were only lukewarmly followed, if at all, by Latin American countries. These countries were open to Cuba's reintegration and economic readjustment, some were also interested to invest in the island. It seems to me that these behaviors were fruits not only of the circumstances, but also of Cuba's medium-term efforts, made since the 1980s, to reengage in regional cooperation. The press reports cannot fully prove that Cuba's survival in the early 1990s hinged on its perception by the Latin American neighbors, but they deliver strong indications in favor of my thesis that this is an important part of the explanation.



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## Latin American and Caribbean Press Sources

### *Búsqueda* (Montevideo, Uruguay)

- 1991, March 14 – “Argentina coincide con objetivos de EE. UU. entre ellos el de avanzar respecto a Cuba. Buenos Aires: Concluida la guerra del Golfo Pérsico, cuando aún no se ha dispersado el humo de las bombas en Irak y Kuwait, Washington ya mostró indicios de que éste será el año en el que arremeterá definitivamente contra el presidente Fidel Castro.”
- 1991, July 25 – “Aunque rechazó la introducción de la libertad de prensa, Fidel Castro dijo que Cuba ‘es el país más demócrata de América Latina.’”

### *Caribbean Contact* (Bridgetown, Barbados)

- 1982, November 1 – “Cuba and the Caribbean”
- 1982, November 1 – “Reagan’s radio war with Castro’s Cuba”

### *Carpeta Latinoamericana, ALASEI* (México D.F., México)

- 1991, February 1 – “En busca de un socialismo de raíz nacional. Entrevista con Pedro Pablo Rodríguez - Subdirector del Instituto de Estudios Marianos – ‘No sé si el partido esté preparado para una dirección colectiva’.”

### *Clarín* (Buenos Aires, Argentina)

- 1982, April 10 – “El gobierno cubano repuso su embajador en Buenos Aires. Emilio Aragonés Navarro, embajador de Cuba en la Argentina, volvió sorpresivamente esta madrugada, encabezando una delegación de delegados de los países No Alineados. De esta manera, La Habana reestableció el más alto nivel diplomático en su representación en Buenos Aires.”
- 1988, August 15 – “Castro intenta reinsertar a Cuba en Latinoamérica. La visite de Fidel Castro a Ecuador para asistir a la asunción del mandatario de ese país, Rodrigo Borja, ha vuelto a poner en tapeté la necesidad del líder cubano de reinserte a su país en el marco de la comunidad latinoamericana. Su primer viaje a Sudamérica desde 1971, año en que visitó Chile, abrió nuevas suspicacias respecto de los esfuerzos cubanos por romper el bloqueo impuesto por los Estados Unidos.”
- 1991, March 14 - “Bush agradece. El primer mandatario de los Estados Unidos, George Bush, agradeció al presidente Carlos Menem el voto argentino sobre Cuba, al tratarse recientemente el caso de este país en la comisión de Derechos Humanos.”

### *El Comercio* (Quito, Ecuador)

- 1985, April 5 – “Ecuador busca nuevos créditos en Europa. Ecuador busca nuevos créditos de países europeos en un esfuerzo por fortalecer sectores básicos de la economía como la agricultura, minería y electricidad.”
- 1985, April 18 – “Contacto internacional. Terminó un viaje presidencial que provocó interés y diversos juicios sobre todo por el hecho de que tuvo dos etapas muy diferentes entre sí, determinadas justamente por las características de los países incluidos en la gira, Esta-dos

Unidos y Cuba, con sistemas y otras características diametralmente opuestas entre sí.”

*El Día* (México D.F., México)

- 1982, March 3 – “México seguirá cooperando económicamente con Cuba, Nicaragua y Granada, reiteró la SRE. Sin condiciones de ninguna clase.”
- 1982, November 23 – “Se constituyó el Comité de Comercio Cuba-Reino Unido”
- 1983, March 22 – “Cuba apoya las gestiones de paz de México en América Central. Isidoro Malmierca a El Día””
- 1983, March 30 - “La invasión a Nicaragua, tras los pasos de Bahía de Cochinos. A 22 años de la crisis provocada por EU en Cuba, en la ONU se reedita un debate casi idéntico”
- 1985, February 11 – “La Habana no renunciará a sus principios morales para mejorar sus relaciones con Washington: Castro. El presidente cubano, Fidel Castro, afirmó que la mejoría de las relaciones de su país con Estados Unidos nunca podrá lograrse sobre la base de que Cuba renuncie a sus principios morales.”
- 1985, February 28 – “Una comunicación política franca nutre la madurez de las relaciones de México y Cuba. El titular de Relaciones Exteriores reafirmó que Contadora es la única opción para solucionar la crisis de CA. Se persigue la paz de la conciliación y no de la imposición de intereses.”
- 1985, June 22 – “Cuba fue admitida en el Parlamento Latinoamericano.”
- 1986, Dezember 8 – “Cuba: más desarrollo, nuevos problemas. El 30 aniversario del desembarco del Granma, yate en que Fidel Castro y 82 de sus compañeros llegaron a Cuba desde México para Iniciar la guerra de guerrillas contra Batista, sorprende a Cuba enfrentada a problemas absolutamente distintos a los de aquella época.”
- 1987, January 7 – “Cuba: 1987 se presenta difícil.”
- 1988, November 10 – “México y Cuba aspiran a alcanzar una América Latina más integrada. Impuso Rdel Castro la Orden José Martí al presidente De la Madrid.”
- 1990, June 18 – “Cuba y su trágica soledad. La Habana. Leí recientemente un excelente artículo del afamado escritor uruguayo Eduardo Galeano’ intitulado Un niño perdido en la intemperie’ donde defiende con todas las fuerzas de sus elaboradas convicciones el ‘derecho a soñar que el socialismo no ha muerto, sino que esti naciendo y que hoy es el primer día de la larga vida que aún tiene que vivir’.”

*El Día Latinoamericano* (México D.F. , México / Santiago, Chile)

- 1991, March 5 – “El grupo de Río se lanza en apoyo de Cuba, en la ONU. Palacio de las Naciones, Ginebra, 4 de marzo. En una coherente acción con las gestiones llevadas a cabo por el secretario general de la ONU con el gobierno de Cuba en relación a la situación de los derechos humanos en ese país, el Grupo de Río ha Introducido en la Comisión de Derechos Humanos un proyecto de resolución que solicita el mantenimiento de esos contactos a fin de garantizar la promoción y el disfrute de tales derechos.”
- 1992, September 21 – “Dos años de periodo especial. El derrumbe del socialismo europeo, el bloqueo de Estados Unidos, la recesión económica que

se registra en los grandes centros capitalistas y la aguda crisis que atraviesa América Latina, se han conjugado desde 1989-1990 contra el proyecto socialista cubano, el cual ha tenido que adoptar medidas de urgencia conocidas como periodo especial, para poder sobrevivir.”

*El Financiero* (México D.F., México)

- 1988, October 26 – “Creciente ‘Enfriamiento’ de las Relaciones México-Cuba. Disminuyó el intercambio comercial entre los 2 países – ‘La visita de MM a la isla busca respaldo para el PRI’ - Preocupa al gobierno el auge del ‘militarismo’ cubano.”
- 1989, April 4 – “Presente y Perspectiva Histórica. Cuba-URSS.”
- 1991, July 18 – “Colombia y Chile Reanudarán Relaciones Diplomáticas con Cuba. ‘Enfatizar lazos y diversificar relaciones, los objetivos’: CSG Pedirá Pérez de Cuéllar a Castro aceptar un supervisor de la ONU.”
- 1991, October 10- “¿Que hara Cuba por si misma? Tanto Fidel Castro, como Ernesto Che Guevara, insistieron en que su meta no en el marxismo, sino los ideales de Martí y los de Bolívar, padre y abuelo de la Revolución Cubana y de la América Latina. ¡Si hay algún culpable de lo que hacemos, este culpable es Martí! ¡Como él, queremos para nuestros pueblos us que otros han alcanzado para los suyos! ¡No quiere Cu-ba ni h \merica Latina nada que no haya querido y alcanzado el pueblo de Estados Unidos para sí! ¡Si pretender esto hace de los pueblos y sus líderes, comunistas, entonces Estados Unidos y sus líderes serían los más grandes comunistas de la Tierra!”
- 1991, October 28 – “Patrocinará Cuba a Empresas Mixtas con Capital Extranjero. Las autoridades cubanas darán asesoría legal.”
- 1991, October 29 – “Cuba al Borde de la Debacle Económica. Cuba, la más grande de las islas del Caribe, todavía un enclave socialista en América Latina se encuentra en el inicio de un proceso de crisis originando por el resaque majamiento del bloque del Este.”
- 1993, February 9 – “Frenan Empresas Mexicanas sus Inversiones en Cuba. El 90 por ciento de los negocios que iniciaron en Cuba empresarios mexicanos se encuentran prácticamente ‘congelados’ como reflejo de la aplicación de la ley Torricelli que incrementa las presiones en contra del régimen de Fidel Castro.”
- 1993, April 5 – “Intensificará México Relaciones Comerciales con Cuba; Varios Proyectos de Inversión, en Puerta. Londres, 4 de abril.- Varios bancos y compañías de México estudian instalarse en Cuba en el futuro, reveló aquí el ministro presidente del Comité Estatal de Cooperación Económica de la isla caribeña, Ernesto Meléndez.
- 1993, April 27 – “El Exilio Cubano Presiona a Clinton. A unque aún no existe ninguna señal evidente, la administración Clinton podría modificar la A. política estadounidense hacia Cuba. Ante tal eventualidad, el poderoso lobby anticastrista de Miami hace desesperados esfuerzos para comprometer al presidente demócrata en la continuidad de la línea dura hacia la Isla.”
- 1993, May 24 – “Firmaron Cuba y Rusia un Memorándum Para Elevar su Intercambio. La Habana, 23 de mayo (Reuter). Con el propósito de revitalizar sus deprimidas relaciones comerciales. Cuba y Rusia

- firmaron un memorándum que esboza iniciativas de intercambio, producción e inversión conjuntas.”
- 1993, May 26 – “Disminuirá Cuba la Producción de Azúcar; Sólo 4.2 Millones de Tons. La Habana, 25 de mayo (Reuter).-Cuba, afectada por la recesión económica y necesitada de moneda dura, dijo hoy que sólo producirá 4.2 millones de toneladas de azúcar este año, una de las menores zafas de su historia reciente.”
- 1993, September 25 – “Diversidad Ideológica en los Grupos Anticastro en Estados Unidos. La siguiente es una lista de los principales grupos opositores cubanos que actúan desde el exilio. Cuba Independiente y Democrática. Su secretario general es el comandante Huber Matos, preso en Cuba hasta 1979, luego de que en 1959 rompió con la línea asumida por Fidel Castro tras el triunfo de la Revolución. Matos participó en el asalto al Cuartel Moneada junto con Gustavo Arcos, quien dirige en Cuba el Comité Cubano Pro Derechos Humanos. Su figura fue borrada de los billetes de peso cubano, donde aparecía con Fidel y Camilo Cienfuegos.”
- 1994, January 18 – “Cuba: Semper Fidelis. Indiscutiblemente que la isla caribeña de Cuba ha sido centro de preocupación internacional y de los afanes políticos internos de algunos países en los últimos 34 años, no sólo por estar políticamente inmersa dentro del concierto de las naciones socialistas.”

*El Mercurio* (Santiago, Chile)

- 1986, Dezember 10 – “Resolución de la ONU sobre Derechos Humanos en Chile. La Asamblea General ratificó acuerdo impulsado por México y Cuba por 94 votos contra 5, y 52 abstenciones - Embajador Pedro Daza dio enérgica respuesta y aclaró que el voto es de preocupación y no de ‘condena’ como lo califican las agencias informativas internacionales.”

*El Nacional* (Caracas, Venezuela)

- 1984, August 24 – “Venezuela y Cuba Presentaron en la ONU Proyecto de Resolución del ‘Status’ de Puerto Rico. El documento proyecto ‘reafirma el derecho inalienable de los pueblos a la libre determinación y a la independencia””

*Excélsior* (México D.F., México)

- 1979, April 17 - “No Permitirá Carter Ningún Tipo de Cooperación Militar de Cuba en América”
- 1986, October 23 - “Que se Cumpla el Fallo de La Haya: México, Perú, Argentina y Cuba. Error Histórico, la Ayuda a los Contras: Moyo Palencia”

*Granma* (La Habana, Cuba)

- 1982, April 26 - “Declaración del Gobierno de Cuba. En la tarde de ayer el Gobierno de la Argentina anunció que un submarino de ese país era objeto de un ataque aéreo británico en la isla Georgias del Sur.”
- 1983, November 7 - “Industriales de Alemania Occidental no temen visitar a Cuba y negociar con ella pese a la tensa situación en el Caribe.”

*Hoy* (Santiago, Chile)

1986, December 28 – “La isla sin miseria y sin libertad. Cuba vista por enviado especial de la revista española ‘Cambio 16’.”

*Inforpress Centroamericana* (Guatemala City, Guatemala)

1991, March 21 – “Ofensiva diplomática conciliadora. Panamá hace esfuerzos para normalizar sus relaciones diplomáticas con Cuba, México, Perú y otros países de América Latina con los que tiene dificultades por la presencia de refugiados en las embajadas de esas naciones tras la invasión estadounidense de 1989.”

*Informe Latinoamericano* (London, Great Britain)

1982, November 26 - “Cuba a la caza de aperturas comerciales”

1983, August 26 – “El gobierno dominicano lanzó una redada contra la izquierda y una campaña anti-cubana. La represión ha llegado a la universidad, a los sindicatos obreros y a los campesinos. El gobierno de Jorge Blanco dice haber descubierto la existencia de un plan para provocar el surgimiento de grupos guerrilleros inspirados por Cuba y Nicaragua. La izquierda lo niega y asegura que la represión ha sido ordenada desde Washington.”

1987, January 15 – “Castro impone un plan de austeridad. Acaparan alimento por temor a la escasez.”

*Le Monde Diplomatique en Español* (México D.F., México)

1985, November 1 – “Sistema Económico Latinoamericano: diez años de avances modestos.”

*Noticias Aliadas* (Lima, Peru)

1987, March 12 – “Crisis económica lleva a Cuba a rectificar errores. Austeridad, eficiencia y control serán nuevas premisas.”

1988, July 28 – “Cuba invertirá millones en industria de turismo. La Habana (NA)— El presidente Fidel Castro planea invertir millones de dólares para convertir a la isla en la principal potencia turística de El Caribe.”

*Página/12* (Buenos Aires, Argentina)

1993, January 21 – “El tono hacia Cuba podría suavizarse. Cuba representa junto con Haití los dos interrogantes más complejos de la política BiU Clinton hacia Latinoamérica. En los últimos días la incertidumbre acerca de Haití, la isla tomada por los generales, se ha ido despejando con un viraje de Clinton: la política del demócrata hacia los refugiados será tan indiferente como la de George Bush, pero en nombre de ‘razones humanitarias’, lo que la hace un poco más cínica.”

*Proceso* (México D.F., México)

1990, December 31 – “Empecinados en el socialismo, los cubanos aprenden a fuerzas a ser independientes. En Cuba, escasez de todo, agudizada por los cambios en Europa.”

1993, January 11 – “Iniciativa privada en pequeña escala, propuesta para Cuba. La Habana. Atareado en resolver las emergencias económicas que

- padece Cuba desde hace tres años, el gobierno de Fidel Castro no ha diseñado un "nuevo sistema de dirección de la economía" que articule de manera integral a todos sus sectores.”
- 1993, January 25 – “La Habana, ante Clinton: Nada con Washington mientras no trate a Cuba como estado soberano e independiente. Ante el nuevo gobierno norteamericano de Bill Clinton, Cuba está a la expectativa pero advierte ‘no se hace ilusiones’. Analistas, funcionarios de la Cancillería cubana y el propio Fidel Castro guardan sus reservas tras ocho gobiernos estadounidenses con los que la Revolución Cubana tuvo enfrentamientos”
- 1993, March 22 – “Quiénes son y donde están ‘los hombres de Fidel’. La Habana: Sobre el estrado de la Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular de Cuba, catorce jóvenes se encaramaron unos sobre otros para formar una pirámide humana. Del centro de ella emergió una chica, con una playera con la inscripción "95.06%", en referencia al porcentaje de ‘voto unido’ que logró la Revolución en las elecciones del mes pasado.”
- 1993, November 15 – “Cuba, un socialismo con bancos, impuestos, casinos y publicidad. En la confluencia de las calles 23 y L, en el barrio de El Vedado, un anuncio luminoso da la hora e inaugura la publicidad capitalista: Hollywood Cigars.”

*Semana Latinoamericana, ALASEI (México D.F., México)*

- 1991, September 23 – “Cuba se abre a la inversión extranjera. La Habana. En una verdadera carrera contra el tiempo, y en el marco de la peor crisis económica del país, las autoridades cubanas.”
- 1991, September 30 – “El comercio exterior de Cuba por zonas económicas.”

*Uno más uno (México D.F., México)*

- 1980, May 29 – “Utopía y realidad. El establecimiento de un mercado libre para los excedentes agropecuarios y el aumento a los precios de una serie de productos de la misma índole que compran los centros de acopio, pueden hacer pensar de inmediato que se ha implementado en Cuba una nueva política económica.”
- 1982, April 20 – “Apoya México a Argentina en la reclamación. JLP a Galtieri”

## Appendix 1: List of online data bases

All documents drawn from online data bases are listed in the Bibliography, besides Latin American press sources from IberoDigital, which are listed apart.

Che Guevara Internet Archive

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/works.htm>

April 16, 1967

- Message to the Tricontinental

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Digital Repository <https://repositorio.cepal.org/>

- CEPAL Subse de México (1979). *Cuba: notas para el estudio económico de América Latina, 1978* (typewritten document);
- León Delgado, Francisco (1994). *La reinserción internacional cubana: escenarios emergentes* (typewritten document).

IberoDigital, 1974 - 1998. Spiegel der lateinamerikanischen Presse

CIGA Informationszentrum <http://iberodigital.giga-hamburg.de/>

- only catalogue entries are available online
- for a detailed list, see under Bibliography, 'Latin American Press Sources'

International Monetary Fund (IMF)

<http://www.imf.org/external/index.htm>

- Reinventing the System (1972-1981), Recycling Petrodollars

Latin American Network Information Center (LANIC)

Castro Speech Data Base <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro.html>

May 1961

- Ceremony Honoring Him for Receiving the Lenin Prize: 05/20/1961  
October 1979

- Meets Officials at UN: Departs for Home: 10/12/1979

February 1985

- Castro Discusses Latin America in EFE Interview: 02/22/1985

March 1985

- Castro Discusses Latin American Debt, Sovereign: 03/30/1985





## Appendix 2: Interviews

### Interview 1

**Pepe Escobar** (Brazil): Interview conducted via e-mail on August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2018

Pepe ESCOBAR (\*1954) is a Brazilian journalist of *Asia Times Online* (Bangkok) specialized in Middle East politics who previously collaborated with newspapers and TV and radio channels such as *La Folha de S. Paulo*, *Al-Jazeera*, RT, *Sputnik News*, *Peter B. Collins Show*, and others. He is most known for his interview with Afghan leader Ahmad Shah Masoud shortly before Masoud's assassination, and for writing two weeks ahead of 9/11 that Osama bin Laden “is now a superstar playing the bad guy in some sort of planetary Hollywood fiction”. Among his books: *Red Zone Blues: A Snapshot of Baghdad During the Surge* (2007); *Empire of Chaos* (2014) and *2030 Jorge Luis Borges: Suivi de dialogues inactuels* (2016).

LP: *Did you start working as a journalist in Latin America?*

PE: Yes, I did, in Sao Paulo, Brazil in 1979 as a contributor film critic and then full time in 1982 as a reporter, culture critic and music editor for the country's top paper, *Folha de S. Paulo*.

LP: *As a young journalist, did you gather experience with reporting on Cuba and/or on Cuba's policies?*

PE: I never reported directly on Cuba, politically – but I did write about Cuban cinema, music and literature. Some of my favorite writers – like Cabrera Infante (exiled in London) and Virgilio Pinera, were Cubans.

LP: *According to your impression, during the period 1979-94 the Latin-American press was more/less interested in Cuba than in previous/later periods?*

PE: Brazil is a completely different story compared to Latin America – because of culture, history, language. Up to 1985 that was still a military dictatorship – so Cuba was duly demonized according to the Washington diktat. Virtually every progressive journalist was pro-Cuba – as we were as students in humanities/social sciences. We had to find ways to smuggle books in Spanish from Argentina or Mexico because nothing on and about Cuba was published in Brazil.

LP: *According to your memory and knowledge, in which countries and which type of media prevailed a particularly negative view on Cuba?*

PE: Definitely all across the board in Brazil – print and TV. And of course, in Chile – the Pinochet regime fabricated the myth of Allende and co. as Cuban-style communists.

LP: *According to your memory and knowledge, in which countries and which type of media prevailed a particularly positive view on Cuba?*

PE: I would not say positive, but in Argentina and Uruguay, as well as Mexico, at least there was debate on Cuba side by side with quality publishing/re-publishing.

LP: *Is it possible to describe for those years a balance between appreciation or disapproval for Cuba's social and educational policies, its active anti-imperialism, its economic, legal and political system?*

PE: In Brazil, there was no appreciation whatsoever on the media, but only in selected universities, especially in what was the best at the time, the University of Sao Paulo. Some of my professors in fact were exiled Chileans with an excellent, critical overview of Cuba's accomplishments.

LP: *Was Cuba's opposition against neoliberal policies and its proposals for the cancellation of the debt of poor countries criticized and rejected, or was it accepted and positively presented by the press as a kind of 'advocacy' for the interests of indebted Latin American countries?*

PE: Once again, only in some university pockets, and in some top newsmagazines, such as Isto E, founded in 1977 by a top Italian-Brazilian journalist. Then, much later, in the early 1990s, also in selected political/cultural magazines. I left Brazil in 1985 though, living in Europe (London, Paris, Milan), the US (California) and then moving to Asia in 1994, and I stopped following BR and Latin America media.

LP: *In the years after the collapse of the USSR, what were the main expectations in the Latin American press regarding the fate of the socialist 'Cuban orphan'?*

PE: I followed it from abroad, in Europe and Asia. In Brazil at least there was a measure of debate on print media (never on TV, controlled by the ultra-right-wing Globo network) and finally some excellent books were translated, such as Ramonet's interviews with Fidel Castro.

LP: *How would you quintessentially describe Cuba's image in the Latin American Press reports during the 1980s and early 1990s?*

PE: Once again, I roughly followed it from Europe, the US and then Asia. Certainly, improved a little bit compared to the 1970s, but demonization still prevailed on MSM.

## Interview 2

**Gustavo Veiga** (Argentina): Interview conducted via e-mail on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018

Gustavo VEIGA (\*1957) is an Argentinean political and sports journalist of *Página 12* (Buenos Aires) who previously collaborated with newspapers such as *La Prensa*, *Clarín*, *La Voz*, *Crónica*, *Perfil*, *Crítica*, and the magazines *Goals Match*, *El Periodista*, *Los Periodistas*, *Noticias*, *El Gráfico*. As a political journalist, he has covered eight Latin American countries, Italy, Germany, Spain and South Africa. Renowned also as a critical sports journalist, he authored four documentaries on historical and sporting themes, investigating, among other aspects, the dehumanized children's soccer market. Among his books are *Clean football, shady business* (2002), *Sport, Disappeared and Dictatorship* (2006) and *La vuelta al football* (2018). He also wrote the script of the miniseries *Deporte, desaparecidos y dictadura* based on his book.

LP: *¿Comenzó a trabajar como periodista en América Latina?*

GV: Si, por supuesto. Soy argentino y empecé a trabajar en América Latina.

LP: *Como joven periodista, ¿acumuló experiencia con informes sobre Cuba y / o sobre las políticas de Cuba?*

GV: Gracias por lo de joven, pero no soy tan joven. Escribo sobre Cuba hace quince o veinte años de manera sistemática. Sobre todo, en *Página 12*, el diario donde me desempeño actualmente. Cubrí las elecciones donde Miguel Díaz Canel fue elegido presidente en abril pasado.

LP: *De acuerdo con su impresión, durante el período 1979-94, la prensa latinoamericana estaba más o menos interesada en Cuba que en períodos anteriores / posteriores.*

GV: El interés por Cuba siempre estuvo vigente. Con picos de máximo interés anteriores al período mencionado (desde la propia revolución en 1959, la crisis de los misiles en los primeros años 60, o la intervención de Cuba en Angola de 1975 a períodos posteriores al año 94 como el regreso del niño Elián González en el 2000, el acercamiento con EEUU durante el gobierno de Obama en 2014 o el recurrente tema del embargo comercial que sufre el país.

LP: *Según su memoria y conocimiento, ¿en qué países y qué tipo de medios prevaleció una visión particularmente negativa sobre Cuba?*

GV: Generalmente en casi todos los medios de América Latina, que son conservadores y siguen la agenda de Washington. Con honrosas excepciones de diarios como el que yo trabajo, *Página/12* o *La Jornada* de México. Distinta quizás fue la época donde coincidieron en el tiempo gobiernos progresistas como los de Lula, Chávez, Correa o Evo Morales, en que determinados países cambiaron a favor su imagen sobre Cuba y la empezaron a ver como un aliado.

LP: *Según su memoria y conocimiento, ¿en qué países y qué tipo de medios prevaleció una visión particularmente positiva sobre Cuba?*

GV: En parte está respondida la pregunta en el punto 4.

LP: *¿Es posible describir en esos años un equilibrio entre la apreciación o desaprobación de las políticas sociales y educativas de Cuba, su activo antiimperialismo, su sistema económico, legal y político?*

GV: El período que vos mencionaste es muy extenso. Abarca quince años y termina durante el llamado Período especial, tras la caída del Muro de Berlín. La aprobación de las políticas sociales, educativas y de salud en Cuba siempre fue un activo de la Revolución, que hasta destacan sus propios enemigos declarados. Nadie pone en duda incluso otros valores, como la seguridad o que Cuba es un país donde la drogadicción no sea un problema. Distinta es la

impresión en América Latina de su activo antiimperialismo, su sistema político y económico, cuestionado generalmente por EEUU y sus socios del continente al sur del Río Bravo.

LP: *¿Fue criticada y rechazada la oposición de Cuba a las políticas neoliberales y sus propuestas para la cancelación de la deuda de los países pobres, o fue aceptada y presentada positivamente por la prensa como una especie de "defensa" de los intereses de los países endeudados de América Latina?*

GV: Depende de qué país o sector político lo expresara. El rechazo a las deudas fraudulentas de las naciones de América Latina generalmente es más reconocido por los pueblos que por sus gobernantes. Cuba goza de muchísima más simpatía entre amplios sectores populares, antes que entre los gobiernos que son votados por esos mismos ciudadanos.

LP: *En los años posteriores al colapso de la URSS, ¿cuáles eran las principales expectativas de la prensa latinoamericana con respecto al destino del "huérfano cubano" socialista?*

GV: No sabría decirte y menos globalmente. Sí recuerdo que a Cuba se le auguró un triste final, un colapso semejante al de la URSS y sus países satélites de Europa. Francis Fukuyama auguró el fin de la historia que no se produjo y en ese contexto, la prensa conservadora en general – que es la que impone la agenda en América Latina- siempre habló de Cuba como la dictadura de los Castro.

LP: *¿Cómo resumiría la imagen de Cuba en los informes de la prensa latinoamericana durante los años ochenta y principios de los noventa?*

GV: No lo recuerdo ahora puntualmente, pero está respondido en buena medida en la respuesta 6. Educación, salud y turismo siempre fueron activos reconocidos por la prensa. Otra cosa fue su sistema político de no alineamiento con Washington. Su independencia en política exterior, de la que Cuba es un ejemplo de autodeterminación.