

# PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY AND THE CRISIS OF CUBAN PUBLIC LIFE

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From a historical perspective, the crisis of Cuban public life is rooted in Cuba's colonial experience. It was then that the seed of an incompatible relationship between Cuba's economic and political institutions was planted. The genesis of this crisis is the nature of the social stratification created by Spanish colonialism. It engendered a form of social stratification which interrupted the development of democratic political culture and a social sense of national character. The peculiar social stratification system undermined the development of a national political culture capable of adjusting the country to the economic growth it experienced after its independence. The social stratification permeated public life with a limiting instrumentalist sense of action.

The thesis of the essay is that exacerbated by the incompatibility between economic and civic life, the U.S. Intervention (1898-1902) steered the fledgling Cuban republic into a course of political development which fomented and aggravated the crisis incipient in the society since its colonial period. The U.S. intervention vested the society with a shroud of modernity which merely served to cover up the country's beleaguered political culture. Relying on Max Weber's typology of political legitimation and social organizations, this essay presents the crisis of Cuban public life in terms of the evolution of Cuba's political and economic institutions. In the first part of this essay I rely on Weber's theory of legitimation

and outline the historical evolution of this crisis during Cuba's colonial period and then during its period of constitutional republicanism. On the second part of the essay I begin by identifying the main philosophical lines of interpretation which have been used to explain this crisis and conclude with the philosophical implications of the crisis.<sup>1</sup>

## **THE CRISIS OF CUBAN PUBLIC LIFE: A WEBERIAN INTERPRETATION**

### **Weber's theory of legitimation.**

Cuba presents a relationship between legitimacy and economics which is different from that of traditional societies such as Japan's and the other Pacific economies. Pacific market economies develop in societies which partake of a traditionalist type of legitimacy. However, unlike Japanese, South Korean, Taiwanese and Singapore economies, which are compatible with a traditionalistic type of political legitimacy, the Cuban economy is faced with a political culture which is the off-shoot of Spanish colonialism. Cuba's colonial experience eliminated most remnants of traditionalism in Cuban society, creating a legitimation vacuum which is at the root of Cuba's political culture. In comparison to the path followed by traditional societies, Cuba's economic forces and its socio-political structures were also set apart by the discrepancies which surfaced during the Republic between legal structures and bureaucratic management.

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1. Thanks to Professors Benigno E. Aguirre and Michael A. Weinstein for their commentaries and editorial suggestions.

Weber argues that public life is a consequence of the secularization of traditional society. He defines public life as a political association in which rules become a formal principle of social organization. According to Weber, there are three different ideal-type of organizational structures around which all organizational structures of decision-making associations are organized; these are the traditionalistic, the charismatic and the legal-rational. The traditionalistic and the charismatic structures rely on habitual orientation and revelation, respectively, as the justification of the rules. Modern society begins only when legalism becomes the principle of decision-making and rational and secular principles of organization become the bases of association. Weber calls legalist organizational structure “bureaucratic management.” Weber also argues that bureaucratic-management is the foundation of public life.<sup>2</sup> For Weber, public life is a form of bureaucratic management in which decision-making associations are organized on the principle of legal action.

Weber further maintains that historically bureaucratic management is not the rule but the exception, with its beginnings dating to the early Middle Ages.<sup>3</sup> He identifies two factors which he says are essential to the sustained development and stability of public life: one is a market economy, the other is the spirit of Protestantism. Weber writes that while there is no necessary relationship between economic organization and administrative structures, “without a money economy the bureaucratic structure can hardly avoid undergoing substantial internal changes, or indeed, turning into another type of structure,” something other than public life.<sup>4</sup> To support his argument Weber cites examples of Egyptian, Chinese and Roman antiquity, as well as Medieval Europe.<sup>5</sup>

The importance of a money—as a opposed to a subsistence—economy is that it promotes the protection of private economic structures such as property rights, debt payments, contracts, etc. Under such circumstances, public officials are embedded in offices which discharge functions that by their very nature imply a *position or space* distinct, independent or autonomous from that which may be described and prescribed as personal or private. Public officials are staff and function by providing continuous administration without which organized domination and state power does not exist. Based on this argument, Weber concludes that even though “the full development of a money economy is not an indispensable condition for bureaucratization, bureaucracy as a permanent structure is knit to the one presupposition of a constant income for maintaining it.”<sup>6</sup> A money economy conditions the organization of human life into two distinct spheres—public and private. Without a private sphere there is at best a political domain but there is properly speaking no public sphere.

Weber's theory of legitimation holds that wherever economically and socially comparable levels of rational organization do not coexist, an autocratic government will be established based on charismatic leadership. The advantage of charismatic leadership is that, due to its personal or vital basis of authority, it functions independently of rational organizational structures. In situations where the powers of tradition have dissipated and rational social order do not or cannot take its place, devotion to individual action becomes a source of regularity and stability. Of course, the disadvantage of charismatic leadership is that it has no other source of legitimacy than the proven personal strengths of the leader. Intrinsic to it is a disregard of all permanent or institutionalized

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2. *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, translated, edited and with an introduction by C. Wright Mills and H. H. Gerth (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 196.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, p. 205.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 204-209.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 208.

structures of legitimacy, undermining a social order which is the opposite of the economic order.<sup>7</sup>

Cuba's period of colonialism disassociated the country's market forces, or economic organizations, from most forms of socially structured bureaucratic organizations. Hispanic colonialism created a discrepancy between the bureaucratic-management apparatus, the *apparatus* of domination, and the rational legal structures of the Cuban nation. In this context, Cuba's colonial experience undermined most remnants of traditional and modern political institutions, while creating a legitimation vacuum for Cuba's political culture. This discrepancy continued during Cuba's period of republican governance. This is what I term the genesis of the crisis of Cuban public life, a crisis rooted in the dissociation of market growth and Cuba's bureaucratic managerial patterns during its republican form of government. To document this thesis I will now present an outline of the political and economic conditions engendered by Cuba's Spanish colonial legacy.

### **The colonial sources of the crisis of Cuban public life**

This crisis of Cuba's public life is the product of three particular factors engendered by Cuba's Spanish colonial history. These factors are a) the obfuscation of the national political culture as a socially binding sense of "national" character, b) a lack of general experience in the practice of democracy, and c) a reliance on the family structure as a basis of political-economic power. I will briefly discuss the importance of these three factors which have contributed to limiting the function of political legitimacy in Cuban society.

*1) Colonialism and the obfuscation of Cuban political culture and national identity.* This first factor refers to the difficulty of identifying the origins of Cuban culture. Commenting on the history of Latin American subnational groups living in the U.S., Earl Shorris writes that any "history of Latinos stumbles from the start, for there is no single line to trace back to its ultimate origins."<sup>8</sup> This is particularly true of Cuba. While Amerindian civilizations remained at the center of many Central and South American societies, the near extermination of Indians from most of the Caribbean and the introduction of African slaves in their place substantially decreased the possibility of finding an original ethnic source of Cuban culture. The problem was further complicated by the practices of African-slave trade which, in the words of Melville J. Herskovits, prevented the recreation of tribal customs in the New World.<sup>9</sup> Under these conditions the Spanish Crown's heavy-handed domination of the people—both slaves and the general population—was the principal source of social order.

The single most important effect of Spain's colonial racial policies in Cuba was to minimize the effectiveness of the single most common cultural vehicle for the development of modern political institutions, nationalism. Enrique José Varona maintains that the social forces of Spanish colonialism so stratified the society that they obstructed the emergence of a collective soul, a nation. Varona writes: "When the conquest sets two or more completely dissimilar races in one another's presence, and obliges them to occupy the same territory, the society is divided into layers, into strata which mix with difficulty, and which more or less take on the organization of closed castes."<sup>10</sup> Instead of a national consciousness, he writes, what emerged was a form of social conscious-

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7. Weber, pp. 248-250.

8. Earl Shorris, *Latinos: A Biography of the People* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1993), p. 15.

9. See Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), p. 39.

10. Enrique José Varona, *De la colonia a la república: Selección de trabajos políticos, ordenado por su autor*, Biblioteca de la Cultura Cubana, vol. 2, "El fracaso colonial de España: período revolucionario" (La Habana: Sociedad Editorial Cuba Contemporánea, 1919), p. 120. The Spanish text reads: "Cuando la conquista pone en presencia dos o más razas completamente disímiles, y las obliga a ocupar el mismo territorio, la sociedad se divide en capas, en estratos superpuestos que se mezclan difícilmente, y que toman más o menos la organización de castas cerradas."

ness founded upon an individual's ethnic or racial consciousness. Ethnicity and not nationality became the identifying element in society.<sup>11</sup> Those who fought and died together for national independence did so bound together by a shared desire to overthrow a master.

Varona argues that in modern history there is no sociological equivalent to the social stratification engendered by the colonization of Spanish-America. The Spaniards did not contemplate educational reforms nor efforts at culturally improving the higher social classes and developing the people's social energy. Likewise, Leví Marrero argues that the process of land appropriation and "latifundio" which took place during the initial years of colonization in Cuba has no equal in America.<sup>12</sup> The Spaniards sought nothing but domination.

Varona characterizes Spanish colonialism as abnormal and suggests that this abnormality marked the inception of Latin American colonial societies, specially when compared to the effect of England's colonialism. In English America, he writes, the spirit of local autonomy was born robust and remained vital. In Spanish America it was hardly born at all and grew feebly.<sup>13</sup> The political benefits derived by the people of the U.S. not only from the form of their colonial governments but also from the practices of Congregationalism and other forms of Protestantism<sup>14</sup>, included along with their experience of democratic governance and local self-rule, the possibilities of a variety of public associations.

Marrero corroborates but also qualifies Varona's argument about the role of race as a condition which hindered the development of Cuban nationalism. Marrero, along with Varona, credits Felix Varela y Morales with the pedagogical and philosophical revolution which made possible Cuba's first intellectual nationalist movement, and which included liberal intellectuals like José Antonio Saco, José de la Luz y Caballero, and Domingo del Monte.<sup>15</sup> In this initial phase, the concept of "Cuban nationality" emerged as a critical concept used by liberal intellectuals, particularly Saco, to argue against Cuba's annexation to the United States in the 1840s. However, as Marrero notes, Saco's defense of Cuban nationalism was very much a product of his times, identifying "cuban nationalism" with "cuban white race."<sup>16</sup> Marrero goes on to argue that nationalism in Cuba was hostage to the inability of its proponents to discern the importance of the role of the slaves in the culture. Consequently, while nationalism functioned as an effective source of insurrectional force against Spanish colonialism, Cuban nationalism, as Gordon K. Lewis argues, "divided into various and sometimes contradictory elements." One tendency was anti-Spanish but pro-American, another was "autonomist" but reformist, while yet another was autonomist and "insurrectionist."<sup>17</sup>

According to Marrero, the pattern of development of Cuban nationalism changed with the beginning of new navigational routes that reinforced a type of commercial regionalism which had already been developing within Cuba. This development gave impetus to the drive for the war of independence in the

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11. Idem., "El fracaso colonial de España: período revolucionario," p. 120.

12. Leví Marrero, *Cuba, Economía y Sociedad*, vol. 15 (Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico: Editorial San Juan, 1972), p. 1.

13. Enrique José Varona, *De la colonia a la república: Selección de trabajos políticos, ordenado por su autor*, Biblioteca de la Cultura Cubana, vol. 2, "El fracaso colonial de España: período colonial" (La Habana: Sociedad Editorial Cuba Contemporanea, 1919), p. 98.

14. While Protestantism promoted self-rule and democratic institutional experiences in the U.S., in Cuba Protestantism was sparsely present in the XVI and XVII century, but did not establish itself among Cubans until after the 1902; see José Antonio Ramose, *Panorama del protestantismo en Cuba*, prólogo del Dr. Justo L. González: San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Caribe, 1986, p. 20, 159.

15. Leví Marrero, *Cuba, Economía y Sociedad*, vol 15. p. 42.

16. Ibid., p. 166.

17. Gordon K. Lewis, *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought: The Historical Evolution of Caribbean Society in its Ideological Aspects, 1490-1900* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 286.

country's Western regions, where the social, economic and military importance of race had been recognized. In the Epilogue to his fifteen-volume work on Cuba, Marrero concludes that while Varona's pessimistic interpretation of Cuba's Independence war was profound it was also incomplete because Cuba's war for independence, the War of 1868, the Great War, as Marrero calls it, gave Cuba a new form of self-identification. The war forged the earlier sixteenth-century concept of Cuban nationalism, the "criollo," into that of the "mambí," which applied to any black or white person who fought in the Independence Army. In this sense, the War of Independence gave Cuba a new form of nationalist consciousness.

2) *Colonialism and democratic institutions in Cuba.*

While nationalism managed to function as an effective source of insurrectional force against colonialism, Cuba's Spanish colonial legacy had a more detrimental effect on Cuba's democratic experience. With varying degrees of success, the spirit of constitutional democracy helped mold European nationalisms into the framework of modern political institutions. However, in countries stripped of the more traditional social framework of liberal constitutional democracy, nationalist ideologies became an accomplice to democratic despotism and populism. Thus, in Luis Aguilar León's words, nationalism limited Cuba's political development. According to Aguilar, while Cuba's historical nationalism is in appearance similar to Europe's, it is in fact its opposite because it weakens and spoils the Cuban historical social fabric and does not make the past a unifying force. Consequently, while it is true that, as Marrero argue, the War of Independence provided Cubans with the seed of a multi-racial national identity, in Cuba patriotism lacked the democratic experience necessary to prevent it from turning into a source of discord, psychological complexes, and resentments.<sup>18</sup> Nowhere is this more evident than in the Law of the Fifty Per-

cent, which in the 1930s, in order to provide employment for Cuban nationals, stripped of employment non-Cuban nationals who were already employed; many immigrants, most of them Spaniards who were also parents of Cuban-born children, were left without income and forced to leave the country.<sup>19</sup>

Beginning with Varela, Saco, and Varona and continuing up to Marrero, Cuban scholars have emphasized how Spain did not bother to transfer its political institutions to the New World and how instead it imposed an "external" form of social organization, based on an outmoded form of estate and caste hierarchies, which functioned at a rudimentary level. Spain did transplant its demagogic scholasticism, empty theology, chaotic jurisprudence, and an empirically blind medical science to the New World.

A bifurcation was created in Cuba between internal or "satellite" and external or "metropolis" oriented structures of domination. Periods of civil liberties were short-lived. For instance, from 1811 to 1814, under the impetus of the ratification of the American constitution and the Bill of Rights, a certain degree of freedom of the press briefly reached Cuba and works like Jean Jacques Rousseau's, *The Social Contract* were published. But these instances were sporadic, quickly ending at the hands of censors who feared tolerance of dissent.<sup>20</sup> Varona comments on how this lack of democratic experience meant that after gaining their independence, young new states like Cuba would be almost in a state of atrophy, not having had the experience and opportunity of exercising the vital functions and organs of communal life. Having known only social isolation and submission, societies like Cuba went about building their institutions by "blind routine." They could neither imitate nor invent.<sup>21</sup>

3) *Colonialism and Cuba's subsistence economy.* Along with these cultural and democracy-related problems,

18. Luis Aguilar León, *Pasado y Ambiente en el proceso Cubano* (Habana: Ediciones Insula, 1957), pp. 25-27.

19. Rafael Esténger, *Sincera historia de Cuba: 1492-1973* (Medellín, Colombia: Editorial Bedout, S.A., 1974), pp. 281-282.

20. Marrero, *Cuba, Economía y Sociedad*, vol. 15, pp. 24-27.

21. Varona, "El fracaso colonial de España: período colonial," p.102.

issues related to Cuba's colonial subsistence economy are also relevant to my argument. Throughout its colonial history, Cuba lacked adequate political institutions to support the development of a market economy. By the middle of the nineteenth century, explains Marrero, Cuba's economy, already thwarted by Spain's earlier commercial policies favoring other colonies like Mexico and Peru (under the assumption that there existed vast amounts of gold and other precious metals reserves in these countries) was characterized by large sugar plantations and a preponderance of commercial coffee and tobacco agriculture. Habana was the exception, benefitting from its strategic geographic location as passage-port. This agricultural type of economy, as Weber suggests, is consistent with traditional family and aristocratic structures, which oftentimes develop into a patriarchal type of political system, as was the case in Cuba.<sup>22</sup> However, patriarchal political structures disassociate rational legal structures and bureaucratic management organizations, depriving the society of the two-dimensional organizational structure which supports market economies like the one introduced in Cuba at the end of nineteenth century by the U.S. intervention (1898-1902).

### **The crisis of Cuba's constitutional republic**

By stabilizing and nourishing Cuba's market forces, the U.S. intervention did change the course of Cuba's economic and political history, fomenting the public crisis incipient in Cuba's colonial past. The fledgling Cuban republic was launched on an economic course of development without a complementary form of public life. The old colonial institutional political framework, more in tune with the social dynamics of a subsistence than a market economy, failed to provide Cuba with political structures which would be compatible with a demand economy and financial capitalism.

The Constitution of 1902, with its guarantee of U.S. intervention, while giving stability to Cuba's economic and political system, did not promote the so-

cialization process necessary to make a constitutional democracy work in Cuba. It was foreign investment from abroad, mostly from the U.S., and military intervention by the U.S., often at the request of Cuban officials, what prevented anarchy and kept order in the country, while political corruption and social disregard for the law and the Constitution ran unabated. As evidenced in Varona, Aguilar, and Marrero's comments, as well as those of other writers, the intervention and presence by the U.S. stabilized and sustained the political life of the country, which would have otherwise probably continued to drift politically.

In the aftermath of the U.S. intervention, the realization of republicanism, a political system in which citizens exercise power through elected representatives, the ideal of Cuban political society, was suppressed. Throughout their history Cubans had hoped for the arrival of the day when their dream of political autonomy and self-determination would become a reality. Now this dream would be postponed. The 1902 constitution, negotiated between the U.S. and non-elected Cuban representatives, would delay this process. In the absence of the type of ratification-convention debate which provided the U.S. Constitution with a social foundation unlike that of any other country, Cuba's 1902 Constitution aborted the "public dialogue" that would have engaged the people in a process of historical knowledge and education which would have better prepared them for the type of organizational responsibilities they were about to assume as citizens of the new republican form of government. The necessity and importance of this dialogue was neglected in the commotion and justified concerns of most Cubans over the U.S.'s role in Cuba's future, specially as defined by the Platt Amendment. This state of affairs changed in 1933, when, in the words of Rafael Esténger, "the economic crisis, interlaced with the constitutional reform which had paralyzed the free play of democracy, placed the country's great majorities against the [government's] dictatorship."<sup>23</sup> By then, however, politi-

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22. Marrero, *Cuba, Economía y Sociedad*, vol. 15, pp. 259-264.

23. Rafael Esténger, *Sincera Historia de Cuba: 1492-1973*, p. 274.

cal instrumentalism, manifested in factionalism, fragmentation, and corruption in Cuban politics, had already taken a heavy toll on the society, making apathy and martyrdom staple values of Cuban political culture.

The Constitution of 1940, which was drafted through a constitutional assembly in which a majority of the country's principal factions participated, and which instituted many provisions which had been sources of conflict in earlier administrations—such as a one-term limit on the Presidency, the limitation of the Executive's power (with a semi-parliamentary structure), and the protection of individual liberties, to name a few—was immediately undermined by groups of armed thugs, corrupt administrators and, most importantly, the people's mob-level of political participation and their fanatical devotion to a few leaders.<sup>24</sup> The Constitutional gains of 1940 thus failed to achieve the level of legitimacy and public order required by Cuba's market economy.

Even more detrimental was the paradoxical effect of the U.S. 1902 intervention. It contributed to the development of a market-type economy in Cuba by supporting its infrastructure, including bridges and roads, water and sewage treatment systems and certain types of legal and educational improvements.<sup>25</sup> These developments instilled among the populace a premature sense of confidence in economic progress, public life and stability. These collective erroneous perceptions were reinforced by a set of demographic changes which began to evolve through the Presidential administrations of Tomas Estrada Palma (1902-1909), Mario García Menocal (1909-1913), José Miguel Gómez (1913-1920), and Alfredo Zayas Alonso (1920-1924).<sup>26</sup> During these years, the development of a market economy in Cuba gave impetus

to the perception that the society was on a sure path towards modernity. Thus, by the 1950s trends of socioeconomic characteristics common of developed industrialized nations, such as declining birthrate, rise in the number of women in the workforce, rise in the rate of divorces, a very high average standard of living, especially in comparison to other Latin American countries, and a large population density in urban areas lent a quasi-modern quality to Cuban social life and encouraged the belief that Cuba was a modern developed society<sup>27</sup>.

*Summary.* The poverty of Cuba's nationalism, its deprived legacy of democratic experience, and its subsistence economy, conspired to frame the colonial characteristics of the crisis of Cuban public life at the end of the nineteenth century. Under the new constitutional republic, Cuban continued to project its bias against rational administrative organizational life, as shown, for instance, by its weak governmental authority at its local level and its strong, centralized, executive authority. This trend is corroborated by Cuba's weak local and provincial governments, its concentration of political power at the level of the national Ministries, its Presidential (as opposed to a parliamentary) system of government, and the weak presence or lack of public, as opposed to private, associations. This pattern is still evident in Cuban society today. As Dr. Ricardo Puerta shows the Cuban government prohibits all form of associations which engage in social criticism or which monitor the security forces.<sup>28</sup>

#### ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS TO THE CRISIS OF CUBAN PUBLIC LIFE

A philosophical analysis of the forces that historically have permeated Cuba's politics and public life, would enlighten us about the “meaning of action,” in

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24. *Ibid.*, pp. 288-300.

25. 24. Juan Clark, *Cuba: mito y realidad, testimonios de un pueblo*, con la colaboración de Angel de Fana, Juan Figueras, y Roberto Lozano. Miami-Caracas: Saeta Ediciones, 1990, pp.12-13; see also Charles E. Chapman, *A History of the Cuban Republic: A Study of Hispanic American Politics*, New York: Octagon Books, 1969, Ch. 5.

26. Clark, *Idem.*, pp. 13-20.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 26-29.

28. Dr. Ricardo Puerta, “Sociedad civil si, pero... de que tipo?” Paper presented at the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy Fifth Annual Meeting, Miami, August 10-12, 1995.

Weber's terms, that constitute the cultural structures of Cuban political culture and public life.<sup>29</sup> While a general analysis of Cuban political culture, involving a study of the relationship between institutions, social practices and ideas, is outside the scope of this essay, generally speaking, some currents of Cuban thought which illustrate important interpretations and experiences of Cuban public life are relevant to this discussion.

Prior to the late twentieth-century, Thomistic training, like that received by Varela and Varona, enabled Cuban philosophers to appreciate the importance of reflection, rigorous logical thinking and mental discipline for politics. This, in turn, led them to emphasize the political value of education and pedagogy in Cuba. Varona for instance, wrote:

Propender a la educación política es propender a que se enriquezca la inteligencia del pueblo con los datos y nociones que le sirvan para dirigir su razón a la consecución de fines sociales. Es propender a que esté en aptitud a dirigirse a si mismo; de tal modo que al cabo las leyes que se de, para regular su actividad, no sean el resultado de impulsos inconcientes, sino la expresión clara y comprendida de los dictados de la razón colectiva.<sup>30</sup>

While the relationship between pedagogy and public life distinguishes much of nineteenth-century Cuban political theory, in the 1950s Cuba's historicist and instrumentalist intellectual tendencies intermingled, contending for domination. In the work of Aguilar we find a good representation of the "historicist" bent of Cuban philosophy.

*Historicism.* Aguilar's historicism is strongly influenced by José Ortega y Gasset's and consequently carries existentialist and phenomenological insights which are important for a philosophical inquiry into public life. This historicism has influenced philoso-

phy throughout most of Latin America, as evidenced in the works of Leopoldo Zea, Luis Recasens Siches, and Enrique Miró Quesada. All historicist philosophy emphasizes the temporal.

Historicism, in Aguilar's term, stresses the influence of the past ("tiempos remotos") on concepts, values, and technologies.<sup>31</sup> Calling attention to the immanence of the past in the present, historicist philosophers underscored the effect of Cuba's colonial legacy and its cultural values on the nation's public life.

The importance of this historicist approach becomes evident in Aguilar's argument that if all that is behind us, except the emancipation struggles, is shadows and repeated theft, if our generation (growth) is imposed upon us by inheritance, then the duty of the present generation has to be to break forever with such cynical bondage.<sup>32</sup> To this end, he argues:

Nos hace falta... una filosofía beligerante y escalpelo que se atreva a hendir sin misericordia, a profundizar seriamente, y a proclamar en voz alta las verdades que encuentre. Seriedad en el conocimiento y sinceridad en la expresión son los pivotes sobre los que debe girar hacia atrás nuestra generación para replantar, con ánimos de solución, nuestro proceso colonial y republicano.<sup>33</sup>

Among the contributions of historicist thought to the analyses of Cuban public life is the emphasis it gives to the role of history and tradition in Cuban political culture. In this context, it is possible to obtain an insight about the experience of time in contemporary Cuban political culture. Shorris, describing the Cuban-exile culture states that unlike other immigrants, Cubans do not seek to escape the past or the future; rather, they seek to rehabilitate the past, from whence there derives an aggressiveness, a sense of hard work, a take-charge sort of attitude within the community. The objective of this aggressiveness

29. Max Weber, "Basic Sociological Terms," in *Understanding and Social Inquiry*, Fred R. Dallmayr and Thomas McCarthy, eds. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977). p. 38.

30. Varona, "El fracaso colonial de España," p. 93.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 30-31.

appears to be to overcome the experience of nostalgia; aggressiveness increases the time devoted to action and allows one to transform the phenomenon of lived time (nostalgia) into the phenomenon of "control."<sup>34</sup>

*Instrumentalism.* This reduction of existential time to chronological or measured time and the use of action to transform time into a cause-and-effect phenomenon, is neither uniquely nor primordially historicist. Nor is it unique to the Cuban exiles; it is a type of instrumentalism common in Cuban political culture. By instrumentalism I do not mean here the type of "pragmatist" epistemology associated with Dewey's experimentalist theory of knowledge. Instrumentalism, as used here, refers to the effort of asserting human mastery over nature, which, as Michael Weinstein argues, has its origins in the evolutionary philosophies of history of Comte, Marx, and Spencer.<sup>35</sup>

In Cuba, as in Mexico, to some extent, instrumentalism is rooted in the desire to come to terms with the country's colonial legacy of a sense of social, political and historical orphanage. By reducing the experience of lived time to action, instrumentalism endeavors to lengthen the duration of the consciousness of the "present" moment. It is a way to endure the dreadfulness of the presence of a dubious past. The Cuban predisposition towards action, essential to the characterization of Cubans as hard-working, aggressive, self-confident, and impetuous people, reflects this meaning and is consistent with Weber's use of the term.

Social action, according to Weber, is the purposive orientation of the actions of an individual to the action of other individuals. In so far as social action is based on the expectation that others will act with a view towards rules which have been established ratio-

nally, the action is instrumental.<sup>36</sup> These expectations are used as "conditions" or "means" for the attainment of the actor's own rationally-pursued and calculated ends. When the purposive orientation of actions consists of maxims regarded by the actor as in some way obligatory or exemplary for him, the action is normative or value-rational.<sup>37</sup>

Cuban society displays an instrumentalist social orientation, not in the sense that it is a society void of all sense of fundamental values, but in the sense that it is a society bereft of traditional values. In this context, individuals' behavior is instrumentalist in that it is constituted through the effort to control the effect of change and of the discrepant structures of social action upon the self. This is done through the attempt to prevent history from having an effect on and overtaking the actor. Such attempts succeed when the actor's efforts at manipulating change effectively overtake experience. In this purely instrumentalist mode of existence both the object and the subject, history and the agent, are dissolved. Existence and experience become one and the same. Consequently, maxims of obligatory or exemplary action cease to be regarded by the actor as in some general way relevant to him; the norm loses its independent normative character. This instrumentalism significantly divests social action and social life of normative meaning. When action is simply a means to an end, not only life but all that is part of that life, including other human lives, lose intrinsic value. Instead of being regarded as ends-in-themselves, the contents of experience are regarded as means to an end.

This social process is evident in Cuban public life both in Miami and Cuba in the aftermath of the Cuban socialist revolution. Capitalist and socialist instrumentalism in Miami and Cuba function by helping Cubans to develop a substitute form of social-

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34. Shorris, *Latinos*, Ch.5.

35. Michael A. Weinstein, *The Polarity of Mexican Thought: Instrumentalism and Finalism* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976), p. 4.

36. Max Weber, "Types of Social Action and Groups," Appendix 1, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (N.Y.: Bedminster Press, 1968), p. 1376-1379.

37. *Ibid.*, "Basic Sociological Terms," Chapter 1, vol. 1, p. 25.

identity in terms of consumerism and collective identity, respectively. Consumerism and collective identity rely on action to transcend time, transforming the self into a function of change.

Time is a function of duration and is part of every experience. It distinguishes between the beginning and the end of an experience, and the end of one experience and the beginning of another, making people aware of the finitude or enclosure of experience, and its openness to infinity. This distinction discloses time as a form of interdependence which extends to the individual's relationship with the environment, other persons, and cultural objects. Everyday life reflects this interdependence as a collective product which "is unified by a transpersonal meaning linking human beings to a past that happened before they became aware and to a future that will occur after they die."<sup>38</sup>

The lack of an adequate sense of cultural time jeopardizes one's appreciation of experience's temporal quality and its function in human action. Existence is experienced as a transitory process, void of an existential sense of finitude and infinity, and totally open to human manipulation. A society's sense of cultural time can be undermined by different forces and events. Cuba's is undermined by its colonial legacy and the effects of the U.S.'s Intervention, giving rise to capitalist instrumentalist consumerism and comfort in Miami and socialist collective-identity in Cuba.

*Capitalist Instrumentalism.* Deprived of a strong sense of cultural traditionalism and Protestant individualism, and bereft from Cuba's socio-political environment where the family institution was the basis of social integration and economic mobility, the process of adaptation and acculturation of Cubans in Miami is framed by business and capitalistic endeavors which have culminated in what Alejandro Portes and

Alex Stepick identify as the "enclave," a distinctive economic formation, characterized by the special concentration of immigrant-controlled enterprises which serve their own ethnic population.<sup>39</sup> In this context, not even the family institution is spared from this process of economic adjustment, in which it is transformed into another instrument of the labor market, a process documented by Lisandro Pérez.<sup>40</sup>

Engaged in economic activity strictly as a secular or materialistic endeavor, Cuban instrumentalism in Miami transforms capitalism into a ceaseless drive for consumerism and comfort. Consumerism involves a very basic type of activity, namely the satisfaction of wants. Since consumption is a type of activity which is easy to mimic, it helps to make an individual feel socially greater than others by virtue of his/her ability to dispose or purchase resources.

Comfort is the bourgeoisie's trademark solution to the problem of finitude and unhappy consciousness. It is prevalent among those who seek in it a means to circumvent a past riveted with betrayed promises, syphoned hopes, and unfulfilled dreams. Comfort is a feeling of relief or consolation for those who succeed in their efforts to possess and keep material goods. Comfort is a sense of relative security from physical perils which is established by the control over material conditions.

Like consumerism, comfort relies on action to transcend time, transforming the self into a function of change. Both reduce action to a means to action and hereby avoid the experience of finitude. Both are instrumentalist alternatives which help one to cope with the problem of social identity and its effect on the individual's ability to overcome anxiety and dread.

However, while consumerism remedies this problem through a continuous consummation of experience, comfort does it by engaging people in action that

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38. Michael Weinstein, *Meaning and Appreciation: Time and Modern Political Life* (West Lafayette, IN: The Purdue University Press, 1978), pp. 11-12.

39. For a discussion of the importance of the entrepreneurial character of the Cuban exile community see, Alejandro Portes and Alex Stepick, *City on the Edge: The Transformation of Miami* (California: University of California Press, 1993).

40. Lisandro Pérez, "Immigrant Economic Adjustment and Family Organization," *International Migration Review* 20 (1986): 4-20.

preempts its own consummation. Comfort mitigates the effects of time on experience by repressing the inevitable end which comes from the consummation of an experience; consumerism does it by exacerbating it through a myriad of new experiences. Comfort satisfies this function of mitigating the effects of time on experience by engaging people in wealth accumulation for the sake of wealth accumulation; consumerism does it by engaging people in consumption for the sake of consumption. Comfort relies on insatiable acquisitiveness, acedia, and greed as its motivational incentives; consumerism relies on conspicuous consumption and the erotization of commodities. These differences notwithstanding, consumerism and comfort help Cubans in a market economy to cope with temporality through the power to dispose of resources to transform experience into a totalizing form of activity.

*Socialist Instrumentalism.* In Cuba, socialism represents an effort to transform instrumentalism into a form of collective identity. In contemporary socialist thought this effort to distance meaning from time, reflection from action, is expressed in the works of Armando Hart Dávalos, Cuban Minister of Culture and member of the Political Bureau of Cuba's Communist Party. The saliency of Marx's "ideological" interpretation of philosophy—to displace philosophy to a secondary, epiphenomenal level, to emphasize action over theory, economics over politics—concur with the fundamental principle of Cuban culture: the reduction of time to action as an effective outlet from the dreadfulness of historical rootlessness.

Hart consistently argues for this reduction by identifying politics with culture. Political culture, he argues, is a material instrument of cultural identity; democracy is the effort to place these instruments "in the hands" of the people.<sup>41</sup> According to this line of argument, whatever the people do to further their

cultural identity is democratically sound and politically correct. Once politics is reduced to culture, it is dissolved into "collective identity." Identifying politics as a collective identity dissolves politics into a kind of cultural conformism. National identity is reduced to cultural identity by transforming whatever is collectively done into a socially binding reality.

It follows from this that collective action is always right because it is sanctioned by culture. The people's cultural identity is always right; it is never illegitimate or wrong. When everything that is cultural is legitimate because everything that is legitimate is action-based, and where nothing is illegitimate because there is nothing which is not action-based, public life becomes unnecessary. Moreover, since a non-collective identity cannot exist, there are no dissidents in Cuba, only anti-social deviants. From this perspective, political dissidents are non-entities because only the people's identity is culturally binding and only what is culturally binding is democratic. (Rafael Saumell's essay, "El otro testimonio, literatura carcelaria en Cuba," confirms how repressive techniques and propaganda campaigns are used in Cuba to silence dissident behavior or reduce it to a non-individualist politics.)<sup>42</sup>

In Cuba there is only the "politics" of collective identity, which is no democracy at all, since all democracy engages individuals and groups in dialogue. Hart and the Cuban leadership support this view of public identity by claiming that there is no system of domination in Cuba. They claim that there is no difference in Cuba between societal legal norms, or what Hart calls "culture," and the apparatus of bureaucratic management, or what Hart calls politics.

From a Weberian perspective, Cuba's social system constitutes an example of the "iron cage," that is, of a society in which the state is the *principal* source of social "integration." Cuba's socialist leadership reduces

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41. Armando Hart Dávalos, "Segunda Conferencia Mundial Sobre Políticas Culturales de UNESCO," La Habana, 1982, in *Pensamiento y Política Cultural Cubanas: Antología*, vol. 3 (Habana: Editorial Pueblo y Educación, 1986: 146-159; see also his essay, "La educación estética:" 92-113.

42. Rafael Saumell, "El otro testimonio: literatura carcelaria en Cuba," paper presented at the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy Fifth Annual Meeting, Miami, FL, August 10-12, 1995.

politics to culture in order to deny culture and values their critical function, which if politically affirmed, would give rise to legal structures that would involve the state in a critical social integration function. This one-dimensional character of social integration is criticized by Herbert Marcuse, who argues that the reduction of culture and aesthetic qualities to political functions strips culture of the critical function of limiting state power.<sup>43</sup>

*Critique of Cuban Instrumentalism.* Unfortunately, neither public nor private moral roots grow deep when the standards of individual action are constituted instrumentally, by the ability to transform successfully one instance of action into another. This engenders a morality in which the ends justify the means and the essence of moral integrity is action. Instrumentalism may or may not successfully sustain the life of a given individual at a given time but it reduces public life to a mode of action. In this environment public life is reduced to a means of action to more action, and distinctions between public and private life eroded.

Cuban instrumentalism in Miami and Cuba effaces not only time and history but most objects of human action, including self, other human beings, and the environment. Capitalist and socialist Cuban instrumentalism are a reduction of politics to action and are contrary to the very conditions of public life. What delimits public and private morality for most Cubans is the fact that in private life an individual, the proprietor, sets limits to action. In the public realm everyone is allowed to dispense with existence as a means to action. Public morality in Cuban society is reduced to what seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Liberal political theory terms a "state of nature:" a place where every individual struggles for position to impose control over the rest of society. To this the end, public action is transformed into a struggle for domination, into an instrument or tech-

nique, in Ortega's sense, of personal control.<sup>44</sup> This is true of capitalist and socialist Cuban instrumentalism.

### CONCLUSION

*Philosophy and the Future of Cuba.* To overcome Cuba's legitimation crisis, Cubans must go beyond traditional historicism and socialist\capitalist instrumentalism, and engage in philosophical inquiry. Philosophy is important to public life because it is its first constitutive element. Public life has a social and individual dimension but it is distinguished from these in that, to use John Dewey's terms, it results when persons make an effort to regulate the consequences of actions in which they are not directly engaged but which indirectly affect them.<sup>45</sup> Not being primary actors, their participation is mitigated by impersonal and abstract meanings. These meanings constitute public reality. This impersonal and abstract foundation indicates that, properly speaking, public life is neither a social structure nor an individual condition but an abstract relationship.

This abstraction is the essence of the linkage between philosophy and public life. Historical analysis reveals that the first political institutions appeared at the end of the Greek Dark ages and the beginning of the Greek Modern Age. These institutions, along with philosophy, emerged at a time of a legitimation crisis, when traditional Hellenic institutions were changing and cultural values were being challenged. Like the contemporary Cuban era, it was a period of historical orphanage, institutional collapse, cultural transition and legitimation crisis.

It is in this period that philosophy is born. When Parmenides, Anaxagoras, and Socrates offered solutions to this crisis they were accused of "blaspheming" authority and corrupting the minds of youth. For this they were sentenced to exile and death. But Greek society managed to overcome this autocratic

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43. Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978); see also Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism* (New York: Vintage Press, 1961).

44. See José Ortega y Gasset, "Meditación de la técnica," (1933), rpt. in *Obras Completas*, 6ta ed., vol 5 (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1964).

45. John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press: 1985), p. 12.

“modern” historical phase, and its degeneration and fundamental change of cultural values and traditions,<sup>46</sup> by relying on philosophy and self-doubt to identify the meaning of public life and to reconstitute society. Great institutions of public life, the direct democracy of Athenian society, the representative democracy of British society, and the republican democracy of the U.S.—all bore the imprint of philosophical inquiry. That they do so is a tribute to the intelligence of the peoples, the convictions of their philosophers, and their shared belief that public life is not a self-sustained reality but the product of a collective effort to live and share life in common, not based upon blood ties, tradition, or customs but, in the words of José Ortega y Gasset, upon a will of mind to abandon these forms of common life and think out another form not previously existing.<sup>47</sup>

The importance of the “new origin” of public life underlies the fact that the foundation of politics is not action or culture as the instrumentalists and Hart, respectively, would have us believe, but the alternative offered by philosophers and individuals who face the collapse and crisis of their cultural values and traditional institutions with an intellectual dialogue. Ortega underscores this point stating:

So the *urbs* or the *polis* starts by being an empty space, the *forum*, the *agora*, and all the rest is a means of fixing that empty space, of limiting its outlines. The polis is not primarily a collection of habitable dwellings, but a meeting place for citizens, a space set apart for public functions. The city is not built as is the cottage or the *domus*, to shelter from the weather or to propagate the species—these are personal or family concerns—but in order to discuss public affairs.<sup>48</sup>

Not only is public life, then, different from private life but also from traditional social or cultural life. Freedom and equality, for instance, are cultural practices which are different from other social institu-

tions. Most social institutions are engendered by beliefs, things which we do not doubt. The customs of freedom and equality are not of this type. They are the type of habits which, like ideas, we develop to sustain us at every moment; this is why they may endure times of crisis. For this reason, political philosophers, from Plato to John Dewey, emphasize the relationship between public life and education. In public life, as defined by Aristotle, individuals associate as equals under the law, free from the social inequalities of economics and tradition. Public life is a “space,” which, like ideas, exists as the product of human effort and which like ideas, as Ortega never tired of reminding us, cease to exist when the effort which sustains them ceases. It is thus not due to simple coincidence but to their essential similarity that, since the Greeks, public life and philosophy have shared a coetaneous existence. Both are historical orphans.

Philosophic inquiry is important to public life because, as it has often been said, philosophy draws attention to the life of the mind and the human condition. In doing so, it draws our knowledge to the experience of time and of the effect of tradition on the human mind, experience, and cultural structures. Philosophical analysis is a precondition of public life because public reality is neither just a natural nor a social institutional condition; it is a human creation and like all human creation it is constituted through intelligence and consciousness. It is, thus, through the undoing of the reduction of experience to action in Cuban thought that the crisis of Cuban public life will overcome the autocratic, bureaucratic, charismatic system in which it is based. If we are to overcome the political conflicts of Cuban society and achieve a stable political system compatible with a market economy, it is imperative to identify the basic structures which institute the separation of its rational legal structures from its administrative bureaucracy and perpetuate the instrumentalist thinking pattern.

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46. For a lengthier treatment of the meaning of modernity see chapter three of José Ortega y Gasset's, *The Revolt of the Masses*, authorized translation from the Spanish, 25 Anniversary ed. (1932, N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Co., 1957).

47. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

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