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Recovering from crisis?: literature, publishing and nation building in contemporary Cuba

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Introduction

The changes in Cuba which began in 2007 – formalised from 2008 (with Raúl Castro's election) and 2011 (with the convening of the long-overdue Communist Party Congress) – had inevitable implications for culture. While quite draconian cuts were instituted (or at least threatened and discussed) for so many aspects of Cuban society, welfare, employment and the public sector, it seemed inevitable that culture generally would be expected to bear its share of the burden of economic austerity and streamlining. This was especially perceived from the outside, where it has long seemed that an inordinate amount of always scarce resources have been spent on what is usually, in most western societies, deemed a peripheral or even luxury, item of expenditure.

In many Cubans' eyes, the signal for this development had already been given in 2009, when, following the traumatic and damaging experience of three successive hurricanes in 2008 and the onset of the world financial crisis, it was announced that the annual Havana Book Fair would be reduced in scope. Since 2000, this event had grown spectacularly, the initial 10-day event in Havana being then rolled out in various forms across the island over three weeks, eventually reaching 40 towns and cities and attracting about 5 million Cubans, its sudden reduction was something of a shock to the cultural world. Then, in March 2012, the popular and seemingly influential Minister of Culture, Abel Prieto, retired from office, being replaced by one of his deputies, Rafael Bernal Alemany. Many in that cultural world had long feared the effects of a Ministry without Prieto, since, from the late 1990s, he had successfully argued for a high profile and expenditure for culture and had ensured that Cuba's artists and writers were protected and materially rewarded, giving them an importance which they had not enjoyed since the early days of the Revolution; moreover, many had hoped that another of the Deputy Ministers would succeed Prieto, and tended to see Bernal's appointment as something of a demotion of the Ministry, and thus of culture generally.

This was reinforced by traditional expectations among some of those artists and writers, who had previously tended to see in Raúl Castro someone a good deal less sympathetic towards culture's high profile and central importance than his brother had been; they cited Raúl Castro's position as Defence Minister in 1966 when the Armed Forces magazine, *Verde Olivo*, launched a campaign against the eventually punished poet, Heberto Padilla (Padilla 1989). They also pointed to the Armed Forces' presumed role in the 1965-8 creation of the notorious UMAP work (and re-education) camps, where several writers had been interned, mostly for their homosexuality. Finally, in 1996, Raúl Castro had taken the lead in the public criticism and purging of the rather maverick Centre for the Study of America, many of whose members remained influential in Cuban intellectual debates (Giuliano 1998). Hence, by 2012, it seemed that all that they had feared was coming to pass, and that the 'good times' for culture and for artists were over.

The historical background, 1960s to 1980s

To assess how far those expectations and that reading were correct, we should understand this latest development in a broader and more historical context, not least to try to explain precisely why culture generally - and, as it turned out, literature in particular - had always played such an unexpectedly prominent and central role in the Revolution. That role had been evident in the first months of 1959, in the remarkably early creation (March 1959) of the new cinema institute (ICAIC), immediately

followed by the influential Casa de las Américas cultural centre, but also in the ambitious mass publication of the novel *Don Quijote*, distributed and sold at low subsidised prices across the island, an exercise which seemed eloquent proof of a high-level commitment to culture.

Indeed, it soon transpired that the rebels' pre-1959 public commitment to the need to create a 'new' culture for revolutionary Cuba was not words alone, and that large amounts of money and energy would be expended on various projects to realise that: most obviously the 'piracy' campaign in the mid-1960s, which brought to all Cubans the best of world literature by purchasing textbooks and literary works abroad and then illegally reprinting and selling them cheaply inside Cuba (Rodríguez 2001).

That campaign was actually part of a wider debate going on inside the cultural and political worlds of the Revolution, from early in 1959, about the role and form of culture inside a revolution. Broadly, the three sides of the debate were as follows. On the one hand, many intellectuals – prominent in some areas and linked to projects such as the influential cultural supplement *Lunes de Revolución* – argued that the Revolution meant the obligation to give Cubans the best culture that the world could offer and to educate them all systematically in order to appreciate it (Luis 2003). The 'piracy' campaign was part of that argument, since it followed the Literacy Campaign of 1961 and the resulting realisation that an expanded readership needed an expanded literary production. Meanwhile, others – usually closely attached to, or members of, the pre-1959 communist party (the PSP) - argued that some of that world culture was inappropriate for a revolutionary society, being decadent, escapist, irresponsible and bourgeois; they attempted to influence the new culture towards a 'socialist realism' which echoed some of the Soviet Union's earlier ideas (Pogolotti 2006).

A third tendency, however, argued that 'cultural revolution' had to mean cultural democratisation if it were to mean anything, by which they meant facilitating the release of the innate cultural talents of all Cubans, to be realised through the ambitious campaigns of the cultural teachers' movement (the cultural equivalent of the 1961 literacy workers) and the resulting amateurs' movement, which flourished from the late 1960s and spawned the ubiquitous writing workshops (Kapcia 2005a: 135 *passim*).

That debate was never really settled, each of the three tendencies in turn sometimes controlling the cultural apparatus and influencing policy and at other times being marginalised, depending on the internal politics of the Revolution. However, it all produced a visible cultural renaissance in Cuba, which saw a massive expansion of publishing, writing, artistic production, film-making and cultural activity, alongside the aspect of the 'cultural revolution' which caught the world's attention most, namely the alienation, disaffection and eventual self-exile of some of Cuba's more prominent writers and artists, especially in the 'grey five years' of 1971-6.

In a sense, the coexistence of these two experiences – expansion and effervescence, on the one hand, and alienation on the other – was not coincidental, for many of those who left felt increasingly at odds with a system which seemed to them to determine what sort of art should be produced and sought to make artists and writers into 'functionaries' of a political system which wanted them to serve 'the collective' rather than their individual ambitions. What was actually happening, however, was not necessarily the 'Stalinism' which many then saw – although those who directed the 'grey years' were often closely associated with more dogmatic Soviet ideas of culture and the role of the intellectual – but rather a sustained process of change which had revolutionised Cuban society since 1959, but which also meant a parallel and intimately related process of nation-building.

For one way of reading 'the Revolution' is always to see it as a long delayed process of the nation-building which Cuba never experienced in the early 1800s (when the rest of the former Spanish colonies gained independence), nor after 1902 (when a highly conditional and constrained Cuban independence was granted by the United States), nor even after the revolution of 1933 created a 'new' republic and much hope. Hence, by 1959, what many Cubans, and certainly many rebels, wanted was not just a dramatic improvement of Cuba's social provision, but also real sovereignty and a sustained process of building a national identity around a national project.

Culture was always seen as fundamental, and not peripheral, to that, as the key to unlocking the talents, willing participation and collective and individual self-fulfilment which national unity and progress demanded. That was precisely why so much effort was put into film (able to communicate easily with hundreds at a time), into literacy and then literature, and into all manner of cultural awareness and activity. It was also why Cuban artists were redefined as state employees – not only because they had a key role in this process of cultural liberation and nation-building but also because, by receiving a steady income, they would be freed from the vagaries – and often poverty - of the market.

Hence, it was this imperative – of tying the new culture to the whole nation-building project – which drove most of the campaigns, ideas and experiments of the first three decades of revolution, leading to a massive expansion of production and consumption which was subsequently seen as something of a 'golden age' of high expenditure, multiple opportunities for would-be artists and writers, substantial availability of books and films – and clear-cut, but occasionally resented, notions of what art and artists should be like. In this renaissance, literature boasted a paramount role, seemingly privileged above all other genres.

The crisis of the 1990s

This relatively coherent drive to create and sustain a dual notion of literary culture that could create and sustain publishing opportunities for established writers whilst at the same time providing greater mass access to literature in terms of writing workshops, affordable books and literary events, was severely damaged by the economic collapse of the 1990s, now known as the 'Special Period (in Times of Peace)'. The economic consequences of the withdrawal of Eastern Bloc support from Cuba were catastrophic for Cuban society, and, although the accelerated growth of tourism provided a quick fix to the lack of hard currency circulating on the island, this too carried a series of unavoidable collateral effects. In summary, new social inequalities began to emerge between urban and rural sectors, and, within tourist hotspots, inequalities were often linked to the ability to appeal to tourists, an appeal which often carried racial dimensions. A further contributor to social fragmentation was the phenomenon of emigration, with an estimated 34,000 Cubans leaving the island illegally in the early 1990s, the *balseros* exodus which was largely owing to economic hardships rather than any political disagreement with the Cuban system (Pedraza 2007). Although some Cubans, again in rather uneven terms, benefited from the remittances sent by family members living abroad, this too created basic inequalities in income and living standards; and, in terms of national sentiment, reinforced the notion that Cuba was somehow doomed to be a dependent nation. As a response to the apparent failure of socialist ideas, the fragmentation of families and the emerging social inequalities, the general mood was one of disillusion, or at best uncertainty, with the revolutionary project, and, in the absence of the state's ability to provide for Cubans as it had until 1989, as well as with the paralysis of public

transport and other services previously within the State infrastructure, many individuals turned to the local neighbourhood and informal networks in search of solutions to the challenges of daily life.

The impact of the Special Period on literature was similarly wide-ranging and profound. Along with ordinary citizens, many writers emigrated and sought their fortunes outside the island, whilst many of those who remained in Cuba were obliged to curtail their literary careers and seek employment in sectors which could guarantee some hard currency income. For all Cuban citizens, of course including writers and artists who were, after all, state employees, daily life entailed the search for basic goods and services, a search often undertaken with no public transport available, and, in these conditions, the mental and material conditions required to write literature were rarely available (Davies 2002; Whitfield 2009). Some writers, nevertheless, drew on their writing as a form of psychological release in the midst of personal and national crisis. The publishing industry for literature was virtually paralysed as a result of shortages of necessary commodities such as oil and paper; any available publishing outlets prioritised the national press (*Granma*, the newspaper of the Cuban Communist Party) over other text types. And, in the absence of an effective state infrastructure for culture, many of the municipal, provincial and national events that made up the literary calendar were simply suspended. As for readers, here too the well-established patterns of access and participation that had sustained the everyday enjoyment of literature for thirty years were largely paralysed. Indeed, given the need for hard currency and the scarcity of commodities, many Cubans sold their books to secondhand *peso* bookshops, or, more lucratively, to the hard currency booksellers in the Plaza de Armas of La Habana Vieja, who attracted tourists in search of well-known literary and political texts.

For the first time since 1959, then, the literary environment was closely tied to economic concerns, and the effects on literary production and consumption were experienced in often dramatic terms by those writers whose work was ‘scouted’ by foreign publishers, and who were awarded often minimal sums of money in exchange for their manuscripts (including translation and reproduction rights). This last aspect should not be underestimated, as it created a new globalising tendency not only in the mechanisms for publishing literature, but also in the subject matter that these new texts covered, in effect constructing a canon of 1990s Cuban literature that ran alongside, and sometimes in opposition to, the canon for national readerships which had been developed for the previous three decades (Kumaraswami 2012). This new canon often highlighted the themes of national and personal crisis, dystopia (rather then the utopia of the Revolution), the marketisation of Cuban life (including hustling and prostitution) and nostalgia for a lost era (Casamayor Cisneros 2012; Whitfield 2008). Many texts dealt even more explicitly with the collective moral crisis of the failed revolutionary project, with sordid descriptions and scatological references, and an underlying narrative structure where the individual was isolated – and often mistrustful of – the collective context. This thematic strand – known more generally as ‘literatura del desencanto’ (Fornet 2003) ‘narrativa de la interioridad’ – stood in sharp contrast to the collective and constructive thrust of literary texts until 1989 and itself created an assumption amongst outside commentators that all post-1989 Cuban literature inevitably dealt with the exotic, the erotic, the decadent or the dissident. Indeed, a more general observation could be that the incursion of foreign publishers into the Cuban literary scene itself promoted a certain vision of life on the island and, with the national publishing industry unable to compete in terms of offering other visions, the trend of ‘realismo sucio’ became a powerful new adjective to describe post-1990 Cuban literature.

As always with Cuba, however, the picture is far more complex. Whilst it is undeniable that the Special Period presented a moment of rupture with the previous thirty years, and with the largely coherent thrust of the cultural policies of the revolutionary government, it is also important to

examine the continuities between the 'before' and 'after' of 1989 and its aftermath, both at the levels of State-led policy and of grassroots or community practice. For it was not long after the worst moments of the Special Period – from 1992-4 – that signs began to emerge of the gradual recovery of publishing. The mechanisms for this renaissance were complex: local communities and individual actors in the literary scene worked together to create the phenomenon of *plaquettes*, mini-books created from the offcuts of the large printing presses still functioning to publish Granma; editors of literary magazines accepted financial and material help from supporters in Latin America and beyond, negotiating terms whereby their publications could appear, albeit in diminished or less frequent forms, through being printed abroad; similarly, publishing houses in allied countries in Latin America were able to fund modest literary prizes, such as the Colección Pinos Nuevos, which provided some publishing opportunities for writers on the island. For a country whose literary production had been exclusively state-sponsored for three decades, the need to seek financial backing in order to see work in print must surely have come as a rude awakening to many writers and publishers. More crucially, the generous print runs of the 1970s and 1980s now gave way to minimal runs of 500 copies, creating a situation where the reading public's access to Cuba literature was severely compromised.

However, the most significant and surprising new phenomenon to emerge in the early 1990s came via a state-level decision whereby the Japanese government made a gift of hundreds of photocopiers to the Cuban government. The copy machines, known by their brand name RISO, were distributed by the Cuban government to every province in the country, thus creating a network of small-scale provincial publishers across the island. Although print runs were small and the quality of RISO books was more akin to a photocopied booklet, this new mechanism for publishing was significant in several ways: it provided opportunities for writers to publish and for readers to read and, crucially, was able to publish texts more quickly than the larger national publishing houses had been able to; in addition, and even more importantly, it decentralised the publishing industry which had hitherto been based principally in Havana (with some larger publishers in Santiago de Cuba). In other words, writers living in the provinces could now approach their local RISO publisher to submit a manuscript – indeed, several Havana-based writers also used the RISO mechanism during this period in order to see their work in print. Thus, whilst some of the checks and balances in place to assess the quality of manuscripts had disappeared, so too had Havana's monopoly over what was considered 'quality' literature.

What is clear, then, is that, at least in terms of the production of literature, the mid- to late-1990s saw a slow and partial recovery of the publishing industry, which, combined with opportunities from abroad, provided some outlets for writers on the island. Less successful, however, was the other strand that had characterised cultural policy until 1989: the notion of cultural participation as a route to individual and collective development, within the larger nation-building project of the Revolution. Whilst many of the actors in literary culture had attempted to resurrect the notion of literature as participation through reading initiatives and literary workshops in Havana, the economic hardships and daily struggles of the Special Period, the lure of mass culture such as television, and the appeal of the cultural products and services being offered to tourists all made participation in literature seem irrelevant, especially to Cuba's youth.

Recovering from Crisis: The Battle of Ideas

The Batalla de Ideas, announced in 2000, was, like 'Rectification' in 1986, a multi-layered and variably motivated campaign to address a great many problems; hence, it was inevitable that, by addressing 'ideas', its scope would include culture, and probably most specifically literature. Indeed, once it became clear that its main purpose was to revive ideological commitment, especially among the young, and to reinvigorate Cubans after the ravages, disillusion and demoralisation of the 'Special Period' and against the corrosive effects of the post-1993 economic reforms, it was obvious that culture would, as in the 1960s, lie at the heart of this impulse. For, just as culture had, from the outset, been seen as central to the Revolution's underlying project of nation-building, so too now, as Cuba emerged from the 'darkest days' of the post-1990 crisis – buoyed up by the Pope's visit in 1998 and the exciting youth mobilisations of the 2009-10 campaign for the return to Cuba of Elián González -, was culture to be central in a new process. This process essentially meant rebuilding not just a damaged 'revolution' but also a severely damaged nation. Therefore, it was inevitable that some of the same mechanisms that had worked in the early 1960s would be used now, to invigorate and possibly enlist a new generation of young Cubans.

There were three basic elements to the 'Battle': a focus on mobilisation once again (since the 1980s had seen a steady decline of what had been characteristic of the early days of a new Revolution and since the Special Period had allowed little time, energy or resources for anything other than the most essential or cursory mass mobilisation) (Kapcia 2009); an educational campaign, which focussed on both old Cubans (offering them the chance of life-long learning and greater involvement) and young Cubans, especially those perhaps dangerously left on the sidelines by the 1980s shift from mass higher education to a much more selective university entrance system (Kapcia 2005b); and a new campaign to emphasise reading and to expand book publishing.

The latter element, and especially its focus on publishing, actually grew out of another seminal experience of the 1990s, already seen in this chapter, namely the evolution of a new 'localism', as a response to the weakening and stagnation of the Cuban state during the worst days of austerity, and specifically of provincial publishing, which, as we have seen, began to flourish in its scope if not ever reaching the levels of production of the 1980s. It was, however, the focus on reading which was deemed to be vital, an emphasis which probably owed much to the collaboration between Fidel Castro and Prieto, and to the dynamism of the new generation of young activists then leading the Union of Communist Youth (UJC), steeled in the heady days of the Elián campaign.

That they should focus on reading was logical for two reasons. Firstly, the material deprivations of the Special Period, coupled with the temptations of a new opening to globalisation and, with it, the world of the internet and DVDs (not to mention the effects of decades of exposure to television), had created a visible decline in young people's interest in, and practice of, reading, lacking the books, the time and the disposition to do what their parents and grandparents had done with such energy in earlier decades. This was certainly lamented in the media, in the education ministries, and in political circles and, while it might seem uncannily familiar to many on North America and Europe, was seen as a serious problem for a nation whose system and processes of popular involvement had been partly built on the premise that an educated and reading populace was fundamental to a 'new' consciousness.

The second reason for the new focus on reading was the awareness that, just as the 1961 Literacy Campaign and the subsequent campaigns on 'piracy' and writing workshops had been basic blocks in the process of building the nation after 1959 – i.e. all focusing on the written word and imagination

through writing and reading -, so too now might it be possible to repeat the impetus of those campaigns to the same effect in a new rebuilding process. The essential dilemma, however, was that it was impossible to repeat the 1961 campaign, since all Cubans could now read; the problem lay in getting people to read extensively once again.

Part of that campaign therefore could be addressed by boosting the production of books, repeating the impetus of the 'piracy' campaign and building on the flourishing of provincial and local publishing. However, whereas in the 1990s this had focussed on the writers, protecting their opportunities, the new emphasis after 2000 was very clearly on the reader, meaning that, even if the number of books increased, compared to the low points of the post-1990 years, or at least their availability to most Cubans, there was no guarantee that people – and especially the young – would necessarily provide the demand to meet that supply.

Hence, the solution was to repeat the scale and the dynamism of 1961 in another way: by expanding the Havana Book Fair and taking it out across the island, and then following it up with a number of smaller follow-up campaigns (not unlike the post-1961 campaigns to follow-up new literacy with a drive to improve the levels of reading). The Fair had existed since the early 1980s, but had been a small, biennial, writer-focussed and publisher-focussed, event; its creation at that time, picking up on a few early attempts in the 1960s to mount a large-scale literary festival or book fair, owed much to the 1981 UNESCO designation of Havana as a World Heritage site, which then spawned the revival of the Office of the Historian of the City of Havana (under Eusebio Leal) and its own energetic campaign to refurbish and rebuild the decaying and battered capital. In other words, the book fair was then focussed on Havana, as a city, and the *habaneros* as citizens, hoping to rebuild a city identity and collective morale through physical improvement and cultural celebration. However, relatively few people attended those events, which were mostly held in the somewhat inaccessible far west of the city suburbs, in one or other of the convention centres located there.

From 2000, however, the Fair became the focal point for the whole cultural campaign. It became an annual event, located near the Old City (in the vast and imposing Cabaña fortress which dominates the eastern shore of Havana Bay), which was given over to a large event. The Fair also ceased focussing quite so much on writers, and especially overseas writers and publishers, and focussed instead on Cuban publishing, national and provincial, and on publications from each year's designated 'country to be honoured'. Everything possible was now done to attract as many Cubans as possible to the event: free buses were provided, schools and workplaces organised outings to the Fair during the working week, prices were kept low, musical and other entertainments and fast food were made available throughout (giving the event the atmosphere of a US State Fair), local iterations of the Fair were organised in different parts of the city for those unable to travel to the main site, and, alongside, there was a 10-day parallel programme of literary activities (book launches, prizegivings, seminars, round-table discussions), aimed at writers but open to the public, who now had the opportunity to meet their favourite authors. However, the most ambitious element of this drive to attract numbers was the decision to follow the Havana event by taking elements of the original Fair to the provinces, where a smaller version would be staged in significant provincial cities. This became so integral a part of the new initiative that it soon became crucial to go on increasing the geographical reach of the Fair, progressing rapidly from seventeen cities and towns visited in 2002 to 39 visited in 2007. As a result the attendance figures soared from 200,000 in 2002 to 5.6 million in 2006, spectacularly realising its aim of reaching as many Cubans as possible with as many books as possible (ICL 2009), and the Fair soon became a fixed and long-awaited event on the social, as well as cultural, calendar of each locality.

Moreover, the characteristic energy of this success was already being followed up by those other drives: the September 'Book Night' events in Havana (when unsold Fair books were again promoted in an evening-long mini-fair on one of Havana's main streets), 'The book in the Sierra' campaign to take books to the most isolated parts of Cuba's mountain regions, and all manner of similar drives to sustain the enthusiasm which the Fair had generated.

Recent debates and reforms

Despite the seemingly constant expansion of the cultural calendar for literary culture, however, a combination of internal and external forces began to emerge which would start to exert a significant influence on the UJC-driven cultural campaigns and spending under the 'Battle'. As already mentioned, the costs of post-hurricane reconstruction and the impact of the global recession on Cuba's principal income sources; however, political factors also played a role. The ongoing illness of Fidel Castro from 2006 was a reason for concern on several levels: with implications for maintaining public loyalty and confidence in a clearly ageing leadership, and for managing a transition to a successor, 2006-8 was a key period, when change was inevitable, but potentially dangerous, for the revolutionary project, not least bearing in mind the constant threat – both real and imagined – from the US administration. In this context, Raúl Castro's interim role as President in 2006-8 allowed old fears and anxieties to resurface among intellectuals and artists regarding the directions that Cuban culture would take, and soon an intellectual debate was in full swing (Kumaraswami 2009).

This debate was prompted by and crystallised around the television screening in January 2007, within the weekly cultural series, *Impronta*, of what appeared to be a homage to the Luis Pavón Tamayo, the former President of the Consejo Nacional de Cultura between 1971-1976, and thus a central figure in that nefarious period for Cuban culture later termed the grey five years, or *quinquenio gris*. The programme, produced within the state broadcasting institution, the ICRT (Cuban Radio and Television Institute), omitted all reference to this period of cultural repression, and, within a matter of days, Cuban intellectuals and artists began to articulate their fears and concerns that Cuban cultural life might once again turn grey. Initially taking place as a national, but also quickly international, electronic debate – immediately termed the 'guerrita de los emails – the State cultural infrastructure, under Prieto, responded by acting quickly to organise a series of meetings where those artists and intellectuals who had personally suffered the repressive effects of the *quinquenio gris* in the 1970s (and sometimes 1980s) could be allowed an institutional and public space to recount their experiences. Under the auspices of one of Cuba's most prominent cultural theory magazines, *Criterios*, and at a series of locations in Havana, the meetings, or *Encuentros*, took place in the first 6 months of 2007. In hindsight, the virtual and real exchanges of 2007 clearly revealed the crucial hand of Prieto in being able to defuse tensions between the fields of politics and culture, and the exchanges assumed several functions at a key moment of political change. Firstly, they served to publicly reincorporate once-marginalised artists and intellectuals, but also to remind the leadership more generally of the crucial role of the cultural field in maintaining and renewing the revolutionary project. Secondly, their effect was to send an early warning to the interim political leadership, under Raúl Castro, that Cuban intellectuals' and artists' principal loyalty to the Revolution continued to consist precisely in their ability to critique and question it from within. Finally, given the recent reputation of the Armed Forces in several areas of public life – in dealing effectively with the economy in the wake of the economic collapse of the 1990s, but also in perhaps underestimating the value of cultural life and for intervening in open socio-cultural and political debates – underlying fears

resurfaced that the 'good times' of the 2000s, largely under the leadership of leading UJC figures, would give way to two unwelcome new directions: firstly, a period of economic disinvestment in culture, and, secondly, a more instrumentalist understanding of the function of culture.

With Raúl Castro elected as President in 2008, and subsequently elected as First Secretary of the PCC at its Sixth Congress in 2011, and with the inevitable change of personnel that any change of political leadership implies, the changes for culture have indeed been far-reaching. Indeed, anxieties about the implications of cultural policy changes have been felt most acutely by the generations of cultural figures who 'cut their teeth' in the Revolution in the 1960s and 2000s.

What, then, are the principal dimensions of these changes, and what is the wider framework of values and policy in which they have been developed? The most significant element is the emphasis on economic stability, individual and local responsibility and gradual change, rather than the Fidel-style reliance on energetic state-organised voluntary commitment, human dynamism and fast-track change that characterised the Battle of Ideas. The 'batalla económica' has become a key term to stress to the population that moderation and measurement of public spending, and economic responsibility at the individual level, is key to guaranteeing a future for revolutionary Cuba. Thus, whilst some external commentators tend to suggest that policy changes are underpinned by the Cuban leadership's awareness of an inevitable transition to capitalism, many commentators on the island, including the political leadership, prefer to see the policy reforms as a way of preserving socialism through its transformation. The announcement in August 2010 of the expansion of activities legally defined under the category of *cuentapropismo*, or freelance work, combined with the gradual withdrawal of state subsidies such as free lunches in the workplace or the goods contained in the rationcard, the implementation of compulsory redundancies and the introduction of income tax and performance-related pay, all point towards a model where the worker is accountable, and their contribution measured more than ever before in economic terms.

Furthermore, the initial publishing of the new economic guidelines (and their relevance to political, social and cultural life) in Summer 2011, followed by an intense consultation process through mass organisations and labour unions, and the ratification and publication of the final policy reforms, the *Lineamientos*, at the Sixth PCC Congress in April 2012, indicate that whilst the political leadership perceives change as urgent, it is also aware of the sensitivity of many of the changes proposed, not least for the future of cultural life on the island. The Congress also ratified a change of cultural leadership which has similarly created suspicions and debate amongst cultural communities, many of those debates summarised as position pieces in www.cubadebate.com. Abel Prieto, having served as Minister of Culture since 1997, was replaced by Rafael Alemany Bernal, former Minister of Education but also one of Prieto's Deputy Ministers over the period 1997-2012. One interpretation amongst many for this change of cultural leadership (with Prieto being promoted to the role of advisor to the Council of State and Council of Ministers) is that the age of protection – or spoiling – of artists and intellectuals by allowing them relative autonomy to function largely outside the rules of the market has come to an end. Whilst the limited liberalisation of the 1990s allowed artists to ply their trade outside the island (not forgetting that they were taxed accordingly), these new reforms point to a further level of financial accountability and responsibility for cultural producers. Recent changes indicate that individuals and cultural groups who had hitherto used the state infrastructure of theatres, public squares and cultural centres to provide events such as concerts and literary readings to the public in the peso currency might now be required to generate extra peso returns in order to cover some the costs of maintaining the infrastructure, costs previously assumed (often in hard currency) by the Ministry of Culture. It is, however, crucial to recognise that this new understanding of the cultural

economy still allows substantial potential for cultural agency, introducing a new aspect of non-subsidised activity which is still facilitated, but no longer determined by, state structures. Early reactions from cultural producers and promoters indicate that this new 'hybrid' cultural economy is a mixed blessing, allowing for greater freedom and agency, but also removing important protections from cultural projects.

Although the implications of this model for cultural production are impossible to predict with any accuracy, the indications from contemporary debates point to two specific concerns: firstly, that culture's position within the hierarchy of policy and spending priorities is set to suffer through the leadership perceiving cultural life as peripheral to more important and urgent concerns; secondly, and equally significantly, the concern is being expressed that culture will gradually transform into an activity whose value is largely measured in economic terms – in short, that culture will become commercialised – and, given the necessary continued reliance on tourism as a hard currency income stream, that cultural projects will become increasingly targeted at foreign visitors, thus not only emphasising well-established stereotypes that accentuate the exotic and the tropical, but also making culture as everyday activity inaccessible to the domestic population. Especially in light of the geographical and cultural proximity of contemporary capitalist cultural models in the United States and in globalised Latin American cities, and given older generations of Cubans' memories of pre-1959 Cuba as being unevenly developed, elitist and dependent on exogenous cultural models and foreign prestige, cultural figures are keen to remind the political leadership that the hard-fought national development achieved by the sustained subsidy of culture should not be abandoned. They stress the centrality of culture to social integration, to definitions well-being and development, and, above all, they stress that the twin aspirations behind cultural policy – to massify participation in high culture and to provide the conditions for cultural producers to work within the revolutionary project – should not be dismissed as peripheral to that project. Perhaps the most crucial question for the issues raised in this chapter is how literary culture, evidently less 'marketable' than other, more popular, forms of culture such as dance or music, will both respond to and be shaped by the recent reforms.

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