

STAYING THE (POST)SOCIALIST COURSE: GLOBAL/LOCAL TRANSFORMATIONS AND CUBAN EDUCATION

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In 1992, in the wake of the fall of the Soviet Union and the termination of a 30-year economic relationship, the Cuban government ratified a new constitution. In place of a statement asserting that Cuba “bases its educational and cultural policy on the scientific conception of the world, established and developed by Marxism-Leninism,” the constitution was changed to indicate that educational and cultural policy was based on “the progress made in science and technology, the ideology of Marx and Martí, and the widespread Cuban progressive pedagogical tradition.” This change to the text of the national constitution captures many features of post-socialist transformation in Cuba, the first notable element of which is that Marx (and socialism more broadly) hardly disappears from the scene. In fact, given the continued rule by Fidel Castro and his brother Raul as well as by the Cuban Communist Party over what is now nearly two subsequent decades, one can even question whether the designation “post-socialist” is appropriate to use in the Cuban context. Yet, the Cuba of 2010 is considerably different than the Cuba of 1990 and the aforementioned changes to the language of the constitution hint at the continuities and discontinuities between Cuba’s “socialist” and “post-socialist” period.

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While Marx is not banished from the pantheon of official heroes, the position accorded to the 19th century Cuban nationalist Jose Martí (1853–1895) rises significantly. As we will discuss below, Cuban socialism has always been closely linked to ideas of national independence and the politics of establishing an “authentic” Cuban identity. However, over the last two decades the Cuban state has placed increased importance on national figures like Martí. In one part, this is clearly a regime legitimation strategy; yet, it also has important implications for how education in Cuba has been positioned and has navigated betwixt and between “local” and “global” pressures since the fall of the Soviet Union.

The Cuban case of post-socialist transformation is important to scholars of comparative and international education for reasons that go well beyond the need for comprehensive geographic/regional “coverage.” Generally speaking, one might say that the Cuban case sheds light on the ways in which and purposes to which states use public education. This is an issue that has long been a mainstay of comparative education scholarship, but one that has recently garnered new attention because it appears to some observers that over the past several decades neoliberal political rationalities have altered the traditional contours of society–school relationships around the globe. The unique positioning of Cuba vis-à-vis neoliberal and state socialist modes of governance prompts our curiosity and interest in what the situation in Cuba might have to say (or portend) about contemporary educational transformations more broadly. As we discuss briefly below, there are uncanny points of contact between socialist theory – epitomized in Lenin’s writings on state power and the “withering away of the State” – and certain liberal and neoliberal notions of autonomy and freedom (Valiavicharska, 2010). The governmental strategies of promoting and fashioning civic engagement as well as administering populations might not be as radically different between state socialist and liberal democratic regimes as has traditionally been thought (Sobe, 2007). Despite the North American tendency to view Cuba through Buena Vista Social Club lenses and see the island as a quaint and dated aberration, and as cut off from the “realities” of the contemporary global system, it will become clear across this chapter that contemporary Cuba is hardly “a land that time forgot.”

The Cuban case of post-socialist transformation is also extremely instructive, both for what is anomalous about Cuban post-socialism and for what is similar to other post-socialist contexts. First, Cuba raises a set of questions regarding how social science and education researchers should conceptualize “transformation.” A powerful corpus of political science theory and scholarship has long conceptualized post-socialist change

in terms of a “transition.” Principally grounded in the political changes experienced in Latin America and Southern Europe in the 1970s, this scholarship has tended to conceptualize post-authoritarian political and social transformation as a “path” along which nation states move as they become more and more successfully functioning democracies, that is, so-called “third wave democratization” (Carothers, 2002). The self-privileging teleology of the transition concept has long garnered criticism, and very early on scholars of the Soviet Union and East/Central Europe had vigorous debates about the (f)utility of drawing on a transitology problematic (Schmitter & Karl, 1994; Bunce, 1995). However, even leaving aside the question of the extent to which post-socialist change mirrors post-authoritarian transition in other parts of the world, the very idea that there is a master paradigm of post-socialist transition itself has been widely disputed (Gans-Morse, 2004; Silova, 2010). Nonetheless, in surveying post-socialist change globally, Herrschel (2007) suggests that unique to post-socialist transformations is the “comprehensive new start” which involves the establishment of completely new state structures, economies, and social formations (p. 5). Despite this emphasis on newness, Herrschel – like most other scholars – is also quite attentive to the profoundly important communist-era legacies. Of course, these legacies exhibit significant variation and are not at all the same from society to society. Nor are these legacies as if “dinosaurs” bound for extinction; rather they are themselves integrally constitutive of the new social, political, economic, and cultural formations that we have seen emerging since the fall of the Soviet Union (Burawoy & Verdery, 1999). Amidst all these complexities and debates, Cuba stands as a case of post-socialist (or at least post-Soviet) transformation that undoes any notion that there is a definite “path” to democratization and economic liberalization.

Second, within Cuba, the political and cultural discourse on change has fascinating contours that are notably different from what we can observe in other settings. Nostalgia for the pre-1992 period takes on an entirely different form than the campy “Ostalgie” of the former East Germany and the “Yugostalgia” found (though to a lesser degree) in the Yugoslav successor states. In part, this is due to the fact that within Cuba itself, the past two decades are seen as anything but a *post-socialist* period. From the viewpoint of the Castro regime, to acknowledge a deviation from the socialist mission would be to acknowledge the failure of *la revolución* and would signify a surrender to counterrevolutionary elements (Bönker, Müller, & Pickel, 2002). Yet, because *la revolución* in Cuba is conceived of by authorities as a process of social, economic, and cultural change, one

might say that “transformation” itself has long been a self-defining feature of socialism in Cuba. As a result, some of the noteworthy changes in Cuba since the fall of the Soviet Union are downplayed in official discourses as continuity with the goals and principles of *la revolución* is emphasized, while other changes are explicitly framed as part of the necessary unfolding of *la revolución*. All of this means that in addition to thinking carefully about the social science framing of transformation as discussed in the previous paragraph, it is also important to pay attention to the ways that “change” and “transformation” are ideologically framed in Cuban political discourse.

This chapter focuses on the education sector in Cuba and we interrogate the questions about historical continuities and discontinuities and global/local dynamics that we have been raising by first discussing the history of education in Cuba, specifically its importance in the context of the 1959 revolution that brought Castro to power. Over the first three decades of socialist rule in Cuba, as we will detail, great strides were made in developing an education system designed to expand and equalize educational opportunities, particularly between urban and rural communities. The chapter then discusses the fall of the Soviet Union and what is called in Cuba the “Special Period in a Time of Peace,” which was a time of great economic suffering and transformation but also shows the Cuban government’s ability to adapt and persevere.

EDUCATION IN CUBA BEFORE THE “SPECIAL PERIOD IN TIME OF PEACE”

Prior to the 1959 revolution, Cuba’s dependency on the United States was deeply entrenched, with the United States virtually controlling the island’s economic and political institutions. Through military occupation (in the immediate aftermath of the Spanish–American war), missionary activity, and a plethora of consultant and aid/development projects, Americans had also been deeply influential in shaping the Cuban education system (Epstein, 1987; Yaremko, 2000; Sobe, 2009). Nearly all of Cuba’s sugar cane crop was exported to the United States, which granted preferential economic treatment and supplied a steady stream of US tourists and gamblers. This arguably exacerbated severe economic gaps between urban and rural areas. It is important to note, though, that in comparison with its Caribbean and Central American neighbors, Cuba under the Batista regime had unusually high literacy rates and an unusually well-educated population. However,

these accomplishments were severely limited to the urban and wealthy sectors of the population, while rural and poor Cubans had notably less educational access. Dissatisfaction with these disparities in educational opportunity, along with urban–rural inequalities more broadly, arguably in part led to the revolution and popular support for Castro’s seizure of power.

Remedying these economic and educational achievement gaps was among the revolutionary leaders’ primary goals. In one of the first widespread educational reforms, the Castro regime eliminated all private schools, converting them into public, free, equal access schools. In 1961, two years after seizing control and shortly after declaring Cuba a socialist country, Castro shut down all schools and mobilized teachers and students alike to take to the countryside to educate the rural population. The goal of this campaign was to eliminate illiteracy on the island. The year 1961 was declared the “year of education” and within nine months the illiteracy rate dropped from 21% to 3.9%, and by 1964, UNESCO had declared Cuba to be a territory free of illiteracy (Carnoy, 1990; Breidlid, 2007).

The Castro regime’s early focus on education reform and the two-year gap between seizure of power and the official declaration of socialist orientation have important implications for what later occurred in the post-Soviet period. The extent to which Castro’s revolution was from the outset, an anti-colonial, anti-dependency, and “national liberation” struggle is also extremely relevant for what has happened in Cuba in the 1990s and 2000s. Though some critics have maintained that in geopolitical terms in the early 1960s the Castro regime merely traded American tutelage for Soviet tutelage, it is nonetheless the case that the legitimacy claims and ideological posturing of the Castro regime were deeply rooted in ideas of national autonomy and independence. During the Cold War, the United States tended to view Cuba merely as a Soviet outpost, yet it is noteworthy that in Cuba, as in a number of African countries (and in contrast to East/Central Europe and Central Asia), socialism has long been closely associated with a *break* from external control/domination (Herrschele, 2007). With all this in mind, it becomes plausible to see the “nationalist turn” that the Cuban government has taken in the post-Soviet period not as a novel strategic development but as a consistent, if reinvigorated, emphasis.

During the first decade of *la revolución* the government sought to gain support by expanding educational opportunity and by harnessing schooling to produce citizens in the image of Che Guevara’s vision of “the new socialist man.” This individual was to be, among other things, driven by moral imperatives rather than by promises of material rewards, and was to exhibit a desire to function as part of a community of equals rather than as an

individual (Kozol, 1978; Wald, 1978; Lutjens, 1996). In this project of refashioning collective consciousness, schooling was used in conjunction with other social institutions such as the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs) that were established as, in essence, neighborhood associations with the mandate of fostering community-minded civic participation. By the 1970s, Guevarism in Cuba had been replaced by a somewhat more pragmatic form of market socialism associated with Soviet economist Evsei Lieberman. Ties with the Soviet Union were consolidated and in 1972 Cuba joined COMECON, the socialist world's trade and economic cooperation organization. Earlier attempts at completely leveling the educational system were suspended, and with increased allowance for material incentives in many areas of social life, Cuban education policy began to point toward elaborating and making improvements in a system that would develop targeted areas of higher education and would track high achieving primary students into secondary schools and others into vocational schools.

Achievements in the education sector are widely recognized as one of the Castro regime's notable accomplishments. Alongside expansion of educational opportunity at primary and secondary levels, Cuban higher education has expanded, with universities now appearing across the island, as opposed to simply in Havana as was the case before 1959. In certain areas of technical and medical education Cuba has become a recognized world leader and Eckstein (1997), for example, has argued that by the early 1990s Cuba faced the "diploma disease" problem of having an overeducated populace.

ECONOMIC COLLAPSE AND THE *PERIODO ESPECIAL EN TIEMPO DE PAZ*

At the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, approximately 80% of Cuba's exports and 80% of Cuban imports were with the Soviet Union. Over the course of 1990, oil imports from the Soviet Union decreased to almost nil; Cuba's transportation networks and the heavily petroleum dependent agricultural sector ground to a halt. In point of fact, and tellingly for what would come next, the Cuban relationship with the Soviet Union had already begun to deteriorate in the mid-1980s. Castro had been strongly critical of Gorbachev's reform agenda, to such an extent that in the late 1980s, Soviet publications were banned in Cuba for being too critical of communism (Herrsche, 2007). By the end of 1991, the last of the Soviet military presence was withdrawn from the island and the close alliances that Cuba had with the socialist world evaporated (COMECON was disbanded

in the summer of 1991). This precipitated an intense economic crisis in Cuba. Cubans remember the early 1990s as a time of hunger, helplessness, and general deprivation. A black market thrived and a literary scholar who has written on the Cuban fiction produced during this time notes that "the fierce competition for extremely scarce resources further cleaved a society already divided by suspicion and distrust, but also created a strong cohort-type consciousness based on the common experience of those years" (Hernández-Reguant, 2009, p. 2). Such a profound moment of economic and social change could well have portended significant political changes. But, while there were street demonstrations in Havana in August 1994 and political opposition movements that have gained visibility and momentum for short periods (such as the *Movimiento Cristiano Liberación*, or Christian Liberation Movement, closely tied to the Catholic church and the Varela Project which has been strongly supported by former East/Central European dissidents such as Václav Havel [Gershman & Gutierrez, 2009]), the Castro regime has nonetheless managed to maintain firm political control and rebuild a considerable measure of social and economic stability in the country.

In 1990, the Cuban government declared that the country had entered a "Special Period in a Time of Peace," which alluded to the contingency plans – a "Special Period in a Time of War" – established in the 1960s to respond to a US invasion. Food rationing was significantly increased and numerous austerity measures were introduced. Castro pledged to continue the Cuban state's commitment to socialism and began adding the phrase "*socialismo o muerte* (socialism or death)" to the exclamation "*Patria o muerte* (homeland or death)" with which he characteristically closed his speeches (Hernández-Reguant, 2009). Throughout this period, Castro pledged (and asserted) that health, education, and other social welfare programs were not being interfered with. As we noted at the outset of this chapter, the constitution was amended in 1992. In addition to placing additional emphasis on Cuban national heroes and traditions, the Cuban legal system was changed to enable the country to open up to foreign investors and international economic networks that had been excluded from the island for over 30 years. As Cubanologists off the island awaited the political change that was seen as a necessary accompaniment to these changes in economic policy, the Castro regime's incremental and experimental approach to introducing market-based reforms had, by the end of the 1990s, led both to a significant restructuring of the Cuban economy and to a reassertion or stabilization of political control by the Castro-led Cuban communist party. A momentary "flowering" of civil society initiatives in Cuba in the mid to late 1990s had been for the most part

rolled back by the early 2000s. And, as Hernández-Reguant (2009) suggests, for a short period of time there was “broad space for autonomous social action” (p. 4). Although there is today a steadily growing presence of and significance to Cuban cyber activism (Timberlake, 2010), it is fair to say that whatever ambiguities and opportunities presented themselves in the confusion of the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union were relatively rapidly stabilized and brought within the sphere of governmental control and regulation.

Since the 1990s the Cuban government has focused on three primary areas of economic development: developing tourism, revamping the sugar industry, and developing Cuba’s biotech sector (Reid-Henry, 2007). Although – as we discuss in the following section – the expansion of tourism in Cuba has had the greatest effect on education, a brief examination of the post-Soviet growth of Cuba’s biotech industry is instructive. Cuba’s biotech sector was initially developed in the early 1980s with the mastery of the production of interferon, a protein that triggers the protective defenses of the human body’s immune system. Cuban-produced interferon was used with great success in ending a Dengue fever outbreak in 1981 and Cuba began exporting it to world markets. Thanks to extensive government investments in research and the construction of a massive science park on the outskirts of Havana, Cuba had by the end of the 1980s developed the world’s only meningitis B vaccine (a vaccination that, as of this writing, is still not available in the United States). As Reid-Henry (2007) discusses, in the 1990s the Cuban biotech industry increasingly moved in the direction of joint-ventures and market-driven pharmaceutical production and development, all of which provided a much needed source of hard currency for the government. The increasing globalization of Cuban biotech was not, Reid-Henry argues, a contradiction in terms that suggests Cuba was a victim of circumstance and “compelled” to develop this economic sector. Rather, this “in fact points up the success of Cuba’s response to transition” (p. 451). As noted above, historical experience and circumstances mean that Castro’s Cuba can easily represent itself as working toward a strengthening of Cuban independence. Nationalism has always been a tricky question for socialist theory because of the Marxist inclination to consider national identity a form of bourgeois false consciousness (Anderson, 1991; Hobsbawn & Ranger, 1992); yet the longstanding anti-colonial thrust of Cuban national identity projects means that a plausible claim can be made that both socialism and engagement with global capitalism are reconcilable in the Cuban context, in that both can be seen as furthering Cuban independence and strengthening the Cuban nation. From this perspective, the case of the biotech industry in

Cuba would then refute the view that transitional states are, necessarily, unusually vulnerable to the logic and power of global capital.

In the tourism sector, however, the trade-offs between “opening up” the country to the global tourist market and the Cuban state’s traditional (socialist) commitments to ensuring the social welfare of its population become somewhat more acute. Nonetheless, we would argue that Cuba’s turn to tourism is highly strategic and by no means merely the forced consequence of accidental or circumstantial vulnerabilities – even as it is hard to refute the fact that tourism in Cuba presents a double-edged sword for the Castro regime (Sanchez & Adams, 2008).

The upgrading of tourist facilities (hotels, beaches, airports) and, for example, the renovation/restoration of parts of downtown Havana so as to present a particular kind of “branded” touristic experience to visitors (Hill, 2007) presents a series of stark contrasts with the hardships and deprivations experienced by everyday Cubans. For instance, American journalist Corbett (2004) notes that when rice was priced at 50 pesos a pound in 1992, the Cuban government invested US\$8 million into a golf course in the coastal resort town Varadero. The apparent contradiction with *la revolución’s* original principles of ensuring fair and equitable opportunity and treatment for all Cubans is further highlighted when we consider that initially this golf course, like many of the tourist facilities built through foreign joint-venture partnerships, was off-limits to Cuban citizens.

One of the more contentious features of the “Special Period” was the creation of a “dual economy” and what was described as “tourism apartheid.” State salaries are paid in *pesos nacionales* whereas the tourism sector operates using a different currency, *pesos convertibles* (CUC) which were introduced in 1994 and are pegged to the US dollar. In the late 1990s and early 2000s the US dollar was also widely used as the currency of luxury shops and tourist facilities, though this practice was ended in 2004. For a number of years – just as tourist hotels, the Varadero golf course, and certain beaches were off-limits to them – Cuban citizens were officially prohibited from using the CUC currency. Over the past five years these restrictions have been eased and Cuba increasingly has a de facto dual currency system. In sum, since the beginning of the “Special Period” and continuing through the present, for ordinary Cubans, having access to foreign hard currency or CUC has frequently been essential for basic survival. The black market, remittances, and links with the tourist industry are the primary sources of hard currency; many researchers have commented that this has led to a notable worsening of the socioeconomic position of Afro-Cubans (de la Fuente, 2001). In general, the importance of foreign hard currency (or even

possession of CUC), coupled with some, albeit limited, easing of restrictions on private ventures has led to the (re)emergence of socioeconomic class divisions on the island (Mesa-Lago & Pérez-López, 2005). In addition, the growth of Cuba's tourist sector has, according to some analysts, begun to introduce elements of consumer society in Cuba (Taylor & McGlynn, 2009), as there has been, through the influx of European and North American tourists, considerable undermining of governmental efforts to insulate Cuban society from the materialist and symbolic/lifestyle consumption practices that pervade contemporary global capitalism.

CUBAN EDUCATION IN THE "SPECIAL PERIOD" THROUGH THE PRESENT

The economic pressures of the post-Soviet period have created numerous pressures on the Cuban education system. Perhaps most prominent, at least in the 1990s, have been teacher shortages as educators have left the profession for work in the tourist industry. It is estimated, for example, that as much as 10% of the teaching force left the profession in 1993 to pursue employment opportunities connected with tourism (Lutjens, 2007). However, even with the resultant shortages and a controversial emergency teacher certification program, the Cuban education system has been found to be extraordinarily successful by numerous international standardized test measurements. In this final section of the chapter, we discuss the challenges of maintaining an education system sometimes alleged to be one of the gemstones of Castro's rule in the midst of an economic crisis and governmental reforms that are at times at odds with one another.

In 1997–1998, UNESCO's Latin American Laboratory of Educational Evaluation conducted an assessment and achievement survey of third and fourth graders in 13 Latin American countries. The results were startling, in that researchers found that the average score of the bottom quartile of Cuban students was higher than the average score of the top quartile of students in the rest of the region. Cuba's average test scores in both reading and mathematics were about two standard deviations above the regional mean (Willms & Somers, 2001; Lutjens, 2007). UNESCO retested Cuban students from five randomly selected schools and found the results held. Carnoy, Grove, and Marshall (2009) point out, however, that the five retest schools hailed from the original sample of 100 schools that had been initially

selected by the government for inclusion in the study – an observation that points to the difficulty of reliably conducting research on the island given the government's level of control and strong desire to portray social welfare provision in Cuba as well above international standards (on this point, see also Epstein, 1979). In a 1998 article on the reliability of Cuban statistics, Aguirre and Vichot examined the statistics produced in UNESCO's yearly reports and concluded that while international independent statistics were reliable, those published by the Cuban government are not. As is the case with other social scientists studying Cuba (e.g., Mesa-Lago & Pérez-López, 2005), education researchers are forced to do a considerable amount of interpolating and hedging. All this considered, however, there is little doubt that Cuban students are more academically successful as compared to their Latin American counterparts.

In a 2009 book that tries to explain Cuba's "academic advantage" over wealthier neighbors such as Chile and Brazil, Carnoy et al. propose that it is a social environment in which educational achievement is highly valued that can be pointed to as responsible for the impressive academic performance of elementary school students in Cuba. Drawing on James Coleman's theory that academic success is related to the amount of support given to and value attributed to education in the family and in neighborhoods, these authors argue that the primary cause of such impressive academic achievement is "state-generated social capital." According to Carnoy et al. (2009), Cuba enacts this through "state interventions in children's welfare and a national focus on education," and in this way has created "a cohesive and supportive educational environment on a regional or national scale that creates learning benefits for all students" (pp. 14–15). Taking a long-term perspective similar to what some US scholars (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 2006) recommend when addressing the "achievement gap" that seems to stubbornly persist between test scores of black and white students in the United States, Carnoy et al. (2009) note that those Cuban students who participated in UNESCO's 1997 survey benefitted from 40 years worth of governmental policy focused on creating and maintaining an equitable education system. Given the government's efforts to equalize economic opportunity through mass education, families trust the state with their children and the state has created space for "the development of a youth culture and social norms wherein even lower SES groups value academic success" (Carnoy et al., 2009, p. 53). Taylor (2009) has documented that even in recent years there are still high levels of community trust in the state-run schools and proposes that his research supports Carnoy's thesis (which also appeared as Carnoy & Marshall, 2005).

Coming at these questions from a different angle, Lutjens (2007) proposes that the Cuban government under Castro can be considered a "caring state" that has convincingly demonstrated its commitment to fairness and egalitarianism and to norms of respect and responsibility. All of this, she proposes, has resulted in the creation of "a caring classroom" in which teachers are both "caregivers and embodiments of the new socialist person" (p. 175). Yet, characterizing Cuban classrooms and teaching practices with any measure of reliable generalizability proves extremely challenging given the state involvement in researchers' site selection. Nonetheless, alongside reports on researchers' officially sanctioned visits to Cuban classrooms (e.g., Coe & McConnell, 2004), we have occasional "unsanctioned" glimpses such as a lesson observed by two American literacy scholars (Worthman & Kaplan, 2001) who happened across an opportunity to see a teacher at work in a Havana primary school. They concluded that while the Cuban government characterized its literacy curriculum as one focused on dialogic exchange, the teacher questions they witnessed often contained a suggestive "correct" and ideologically driven answer.

In the Cuban case, both in the socialist and the "post-socialist" period it is extremely difficult to reliably study the school system. Despite the generally acknowledged and accepted successful performance of Cuban students on international assessments, there is considerable divergence in the research literature on how successful the Cuban government has been at maintaining quality in the education system over the past two decades. For example, Cruz-Taura (2003) of the University of Miami's Cuba Transition Project proposes that the education system, like other the pillars of Cuba's social welfare system, is "corroding at the base" (p. 10). Whether the Cuban education system is truly delivering on its commitments to the extent claimed by the government and some foreign researchers is a question that cannot be decisively answered as of yet. It is abundantly clear, however, that teacher shortages are one of the key challenges that the Cuban education system has faced since the fall of the Soviet Union.

As noted above, the departure of teachers from the education system began in the early 1990s. In 1999 the Cuban government increased teacher salaries by 30%, to the equivalent of approximately US\$20 per month, which was still inadequate to compete with money that can be earned in the tourist sector (Bredlid, 2007; Lutjens, 2007). To address the continuing shortage of teachers, Cuba has created an emergency teacher certification program through which secondary and university students studying pedagogy can enter the classroom (as teachers "*emergentes*") after only one year of training/coursework. At the same time, Cuba has embarked on a

campaign to bring modern information communication technology into the Cuban school. On the one hand, this can be seen as an effort to more adequately prepare students for a technologically driven economy (Lutjens, 2007), while, on the other, it can be seen as a desperate measure to ensure quality uniform learning and a concession to the shortage of teachers (Bredlid, 2007). Although televisions do not replace the presence of a teacher in the classroom, Bredlid (2007) argues that they are an attempt to compensate for the lack of experience the *emergentes* bring into the classroom. Prior to the creation of the *emergente* training programs, teachers studied for four to five years before entering the classroom; under the new system, students spend one year studying and then enter the classroom full-time under the loose supervision of an experienced teacher. The *emergentes* continue to take classes on weekends and over the summers until their coursework is finished. Although the program originally only sent *emergentes* into primary school, they are now being sent to secondary schools as well, which can create situations where, for example, there are 19-year-old *emergentes* teaching 17-year-old students. As Bredlid notes, teacher shortages that date to the beginning of the Special Period and the development of emergency teacher certification programs suggest the eroding of the high esteem that once might have been accorded to the teaching profession in Cuba. Thus, despite tight governmental controls, and – ironically – with some resemblances to the "retreat of the state" that we witness in neoliberal economic contexts in other sites, the experience of the last two decades appears to have undermined the ability of the government to foster the state-generated social capital that Carnoy et al. (2009) proposed to be supporting Cuba's culture of academic achievement. This does not deny the possibility, however, that this general social capital is persisting/ will persist through these transformations if it is indeed embedded at multiple social levels and in multiple institutions.

CONCLUSION

Post-socialist educational transformation in Cuba has as of yet not "settled" into any predictable pattern or path. Though they had been preaching the decay of the communist model across the Cold War, Western social scientists (almost across the board) famously missed the boat on predicting the fall of the iron curtain and the revolutions of 1989. Ex post facto explanations and theories to explain the "inevitability" of post-socialist transition immediately cropped up to fill the absence. While, as we noted at the outset and as this

volume conclusively shows, careful examination of other post-socialist settings puts lie to the claim that there is a single transition path, the Cuban case – possibly more than other cases – shows that today, 20 years out, we are farther from “the end of history”/“the end of social science prognostication” than perhaps at any other moment. The fact that the Castro regime “mystifyingly” defies all predictions of its death, unviability, and obsolescence speaks to the uncertain, contingent, and nonlinear nature of social, cultural, economic, and political change in general.

One of us (Sobe, 2009) has argued that “historically speaking, modern schooling has been very much a state-centered enterprise – of government and for government” (p. 124). Thus, to focus too much on the ways that the Cuban communist regime uses schooling as a means of so-called “indoctrination” is to lose sight of the extent to which all forms of schooling (qua schooling) inscribe normative principles and regulate modes of reasoning and possibilities for “rational” or “acceptable” behavior – regardless of the political persuasion of the regime, agency, or institution involved. As noted above, Cuba’s inaccessibility (but not its isolation – claims for which, we argued, are quite exaggerated) makes fine-grained, reliable, and valid research on classroom realities close to impossible. The challenge of the next decade will be to try to understand, as Cuba’s transformations continue, what role(s), purpose(s), and techniques are ascribed to the educational system; what results or outcomes they produce; and how they too have transformed and continue to transform over time.

The Cuban post-socialist experience also allows us to overcome the misleading question that so often bedazzles political scientists: whether we can point to exogenous or endogenous forces as more responsible for the shape and pace of social, political, and economic change. Social scientists clearly need to move beyond a preoccupation with the question of whether global forces or local, cultural patterns and histories are more important. Both are. The question really needs to be: What combinations and sets of interaction between different sets of actors and institutions have shaped social, political, and economic trends and trajectories? On the one hand, the uniqueness of the Cuban post-socialist experience might suggest a powerful influence of local path-dependency. However, many commentators have advanced the entirely plausible argument that the Castros have only retained power, thanks to the militant agitation of the Cuban exile community in the United States as well as – for most of the past two decades – fierce opposition on the part of the US government. Cuba’s attraction as a tourist destination and willingness to accept foreign investment has had a profound impact on the country across multiple

sectors. One can say, then, that the situation does not reduce to determining whether “global” models or “local” models hold sway. Rather the task is to establish how what structures and patterns have emerged through multiple sets of interactions and the ways in which the Cuban government (and other actors) describe and acknowledge those interactions.

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