



Contesting the mechanisms of disinformation, Part II. Castro, Cuba, and the Empire: 'you are not a liberator'

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Articles

Contesting the mechanisms of disinformation, Part II.* Castro, Cuba, and the Empire: 'you are not a liberator'

Clive Kronenberg

Abstract

Part II of 'Contesting the mechanisms of disinformation' inspects prevalent Western imperialistic notions regarding revolutionary Cuba, and Fidel Castro's official contestation thereof: are Cubans denied basic rights that the 'free world' takes for granted? Is Cuba ruled by a totalitarian, Stalinist regime? Have the Cuban people surrendered their basic liberties, even though they might have achieved their equality? How is the concept of *democracy* perceived and practised on the island? In terms of freedom of speech, what are the deeper meanings and implications of Castro's enduring cultural decree: *within the revolution, everything, against the revolution, nothing*? Since the capitalist system is based on a 'philosophy of selfishness and brutal competition', is it able to resolve the problems of today's world? In this regard, the article brings 'socialism' back into the equation, contending that it has remained fundamentally relevant in a world typified by exceeding levels of deprivation, conflict and partition. Revolutionary Cuba, in effect, has come to embrace a distinctly humanistic socialist belief system, portrayed, for example, in its unremitting *concrete* expression of internationalism and universal solidarity. As the supreme (prior) leader of the revolution, Castro himself is particularly recognised for his abhorrence of human prejudice, marginalisation and discrimination – an ethical framework that is manifested in Cuba's official position on race and racism. For obvious reasons, this distinguishing philosophy can be considered highly significant and appropriate to all spheres of South African society. In sum, the article sustains Fidel Castro's counter argument that the current global economic order – imposed by capitalism-imperialism through both calculated, predatory means *and*

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veiled mechanisms of disinformation – is not only ‘cruel, unfair, inhuman and contrary to the inevitable course of history, but also “inherently racist”’.

Keywords: capitalism, colonialism, culture, Fidel Castro, humanism, revolutionary Cuba, socialism, US imperialism

Introduction

Long overdue in South African scholarship, this article (Part II) examines an established revolutionary political model that endeavours to *oppose* and *contradict* commonly accepted perceptions, beliefs and values propagated by those power systems as outlined in Part I.¹ Inspected here are key aspects of Cuba’s political culture, as formulated, rationalised and defended by Fidel Castro, the revolution’s supreme commander, strategist and guardian for close to fifty years.



Figure 1: Fidel Castro

Source: www.photobucket.com

Given his prominent status internationally, politically and historically, together with his inimitable, highly persuasive oratorical skill, in the scholarly domain of rhetoric (i.e. ‘the art of persuasion’), Castro’s speeches are a fitting example of ‘executive oratory’ – something that has been employed through the ages as a powerful mechanism to defend and preserve, and/or to oppose and demolish prevailing power systems. Exceptional speakers, ranging from Aristotle and Socrates to Lenin, Churchill,

Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, Castro himself and others have, for varying reasons, very convincingly swayed their audiences with their individual 'modes of persuasion'. Though highly peculiar at times, George W. Bush's verbal dexterity encapsulated the sentiments of United States (US) imperialism when he proclaimed the impending occupation of a sovereign nation state, the dire consequences of which *The Times* of London (2008) has been compelled to record as follows:

For millions of people individually, Iraq has become one of the burning issues of our times. Intellectuals in Paris have raged over the war. Dinner parties in London and New York have broken up in acrimony between the pros and cons. Publishers and filmmakers have invested millions in reproducing the stories and images of the conflict that will live with us for a generation. (*Sunday Times*, 16 March)

The discussions that follow thus perceive and locate 'executive oratory' as a means to (1) impact on and mould (social) *consciousness*, and thus (2) transform or alter the course of history itself. It is in this framework that 'executive oratory' is construed as a category or artefact of 'culture'.

For many, Fidel Castro is a living emblem of the Cuban social revolution. Endeavouring to thwart and contradict the formidable forces of imperial dogma, Castro is, therefore, a significant cultural force. Since 1959, with the triumph of the revolution, and above all from the moment in which the economy became nationalised in 1962, Cuba has been a source of concern, if not exasperation, for US officialdom. The defiance and endurance of the revolution must, of course, also be attributed to the faithfulness and allegiance of the Cuban people themselves. Weeks after Raul Castro took state command, the international corporate elite became, as Roldan (2006) puts it, 'disappointed at the lack of any movement on the Island and the calm that has surrounded the transfer of power.' The devastating economic setbacks resulting from both a stringently enforced US economic blockade *and* the collapse of the USSR and Eastern-European socialist bloc in the early 1990s (with whom Cuba had 80 per cent of her foreign trade), transformed the island into an even more exceptional emblem of anti-imperialist resistance. However, the individual role of Fidel Castro in these and several other crucial moments in modern Cuban history can never be discarded or ignored. He was, and has remained until recent years, revolutionary Cuba's most important and discernible protagonist, strategist, spokesperson and custodian. In this way, the article also acknowledges one of the few daring, often-overlooked rational-critical heads of state of the modern era, in the entire Western hemisphere.

The timing of an article of this specific nature is most opportune for further reasons: not only does the present epoch mark the 40th commemoration of the death, as well as the 80th celebration of the birth of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, one of Cuba's most venerated revolutionary personalities (whose ideas are also afforded scrutiny below), but it also signifies the 50th anniversary of the triumph of the Cuban

revolution. This being a very rare occurrence in the historical development of the Western hemisphere in itself compels contemplation of the ideas of Fidel Castro Ruz, the main thrust behind this extraordinary juncture in the annals of humankind.

The article inspects, on the whole, Castro's official responses to (1) widespread negative perceptions of the island's socio-political order, and (2) some of the major pertinent issues of our time: racism and xenophobia, the concept of democracy, the neo-liberal global economy, and the ongoing quest for human freedom and equality. Of special import to African readers, particularly, is Castro's devoted alliance with the poor and marginalised of the continent – something that is concretely expressed in Cuba's historic bonds of solidarity with Africa.

Perspectives from the Empire



Figure 2: The Caribbean island of Cuba

Source: www.sacred-destinations.com

Supreme executive spokespersons of imperial power systems habitually are in the frontline of the onslaught against what they commonly perceive as ‘threats to the civilised world’ (see McLaren 2001). A few days in advance of the 2007 United Nations (UN) General Assembly poll on the legality of the US economic blockade of Cuba, President George W. Bush convened a meeting which received wide coverage in major media outlets globally.² Delivered at the US State Department, he addressed and petitioned the support of the Miami-Cuban rightwing community, as well as the ultra-conservative faction of the US Republican Congress (Mel Martinez, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Lincoln Diaz-Balart, Mario Diaz-Balart, Chris Smith, Thaddeus McCotter, Debbie Wasserman Shultz and Tim Mahone, amongst others) to sustain the

now almost fifty-year-old economic blockade of the Caribbean nation (see Bush 2007).³

Table 1: International vote on the US blockade of Cuba, 1997–2007

Year	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07
Against	143	157	155	167	167	173	179	179	182	183	184
For	3	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	4
Absent	22	14	23	15	16	11	7	7	4	4	3
Abstentions	17	12	8	4	3	4	2	1	1	1	1

Source: © 2007 Lázaro Barredo Medina - Avenida General Suárez y Territorial, Havana, Cuba

President George W. Bush opened his address by noting that despite the ‘promise’ from Cuban rulers to ‘grant Cubans individual liberty’ they have ‘denied their citizens basic rights that the free world takes for granted’. Cuban officials ‘promised freedom of the press’ but ‘they closed down private newspapers and radio and television stations’. According to the US statesman, the Cuban government has ‘jailed and beaten journalists, raided their homes, and seized their paper, ink and fax machines’. The president remarked that, despite pledges of ‘human rights’, the Cuban regime offered the people ‘rat-infested prisons and a police state’. He then declared that ‘the time has come to support the democratic movements growing on the island’. ‘Now is the time to stand with the Cuban people as they stand up for their liberty. And now is the time for the world to put aside its differences and prepare for Cuba’s transition to a future of freedom and progress and promise,’ the US president announced. Following this, President Bush proceeded to appeal directly to broad sections of Cuban society – the military, police, government officials and even school children – to ‘make a choice’. ‘You may have once believed in the revolution. Now you can see its failure. Will you defend a disgraced and dying order by using force against your own people?’ he enquired. In similar vein, at a media announcement during July 2006, Jorge Mas Santos, president of the pro-imperialist/pro-capitalist Miami-based Cuban American National Foundation, explicitly appealed to the Cuban military to stage a coup: ‘You have an opportunity to give the highest and most noble service to our homeland through quick, patriotic and decisive action by establishing a transitional civilian-military government that brings an end to the dictatorship of the Castro brothers’ (in Roldan 2006). And in a statement issued in August of the same year, the then US secretary of state merely reiterated the voice of US imperialism:

The United States are closely watching events in Cuba All Cubans who desire peaceful democratic change can count on the support of the United States ... we stand ready to provide you with humanitarian assistance. (ibid.)

These utterances, petitions and claims, by and large, can be interpreted and summarised as follows:

- Cubans do not enjoy personal liberties
- Cubans are denied rights customarily enjoyed in the global community
- In Cuba there is no freedom of the press, and as such, freedom of expression
- The Cuban state shows little or no concern for its citizens
- Cubans customarily experience brutality and violence, hence
- Cuba is a highly repressive state – a ‘police state’
- Cuba is not a democracy, but ruled by a ‘dictatorship’
- The ‘democratic movements’ operating on the island must be supported by outside agencies
- The Cuban revolution has been a failure
- The Cuban government coerces/subdues its citizens into supporting the revolution
- The revolution itself, and not US policy, is liable for Cubans’ misfortune and hardship⁴
- The ‘world’ must join in and support US initiatives to bring about the demise of the revolutionary state
- Social revolution, or radical social change, is not only idealistic, unrealistic or impractical, but a reprehensible, appalling and scandalous act
- Ideas and concepts for real and fundamental social change have not only become obsolete, but entirely superfluous
- Taken cumulatively, revolutionary Cuba constitutes a ‘threat to the civilised world’.

If one were to pass *fair* judgement on these claims, then it could be concluded that this portrayal of revolutionary Cuba largely boils down to a depiction, rather, of conditions under Stalinist totalitarian rule. As we may recall, under Stalin’s regime, over a period of two decades millions of ordinary citizens were subjected to outright repression, brutality and tyranny (see Deutscher 1964). From a theoretical/historical perspective, bourgeois condemnation of Stalinism customarily also means an automatic denunciation of Marx himself. This view of Marx presents his ‘socialist paradise as one of millions of people who submit to an all-powerful state bureaucracy, people who have surrendered their freedom, even though they might have achieved their equality’ (Fromm 1961: 2–3). As claimed by the island’s adversaries and echoed in the global media, is this what revolutionary Cuba represents? The passages to follow aim to illustrate that, to summarily (though indirectly) equate Cuban rule with ‘Stalinism’ is not only perilous, but also quite fanciful.

Historical overview

Cuba and the Stalinist order

Besides Cuba's close association with (and to some degree, emulation of) Soviet bureaucratic political practice during the period 1971–1974, the island embarked on an independent (and, at times, openly critical) socialist political course (see Fagan 1969; Karol 1970; Mesa-Lago 1974; Ramm 1978; Dominguez 1979; McLaren 2001; Deutschmann 2003). In the mid-1960s already, Fidel Castro's scepticism of USSR-style politics reached a high point. A disagreement over the goals of the historic 1966 Tricontinental Conference revealed a growing rift between Cuba and the Soviet camp. Latin-American representatives also joined in the protest, condemning, for instance, the Soviets' 'interventionist tactics' (Ramm 1978: 42). In his May Day speech of the same year, Castro sought to slate the 'stagnation and rot' (*ibid.*) that, for him, ensued from those Kremlin functionaries who contested Cuba's national projects – a position which was also echoed by Cuban delegates to the World Federation of Democratic Youth. Adherents of the Marxist theoretical textbooks formulated and published by the USSR's Academy of Sciences also came under fire. As Ramm (*ibid.*: 42–44) reveals: 'The manuals soon became objects of ridicule and the focus of Cuba's diatribes against Soviet theory.' On the political front, Castro accused the Kremlin of not 'doing enough for Vietnam', of making 'friendly overtures to reformist regimes', and of not fully supporting the guerrilla movement. Castro particularly opposed the claim that the masses can rise to power 'without breaking their imperialist ties with the US', labelling Soviet officials 'pseudo-revolutionaries' and the 'most important allies' of 'Yankee imperialism'.

Following his initial 'blind admiration', in time Che denounced the Stalinist order, causing a decisive breach of protocol in the socialist enclave (see Zeitlin 1970; Suchlicki 1972; Anderson 1997; Taibo II 1997). He had publicly criticised what he equally viewed as the Soviets' 'capitalist-style profiteering' in their relationship with Cuba and other developing nations. As a result of his utterances, the Kremlin was 'outraged', especially by Che's assertion that it is 'imperialism's accomplice' (Anderson 1997: 625). More pertinently, since the post-Leninist Soviet model included material incentives which induced vast socioeconomic inequalities, including the use of extreme force to repress dissent, Che and others ultimately came to reject it as a prototype for socialism (Zeitlin 1970: 1). For him these developments spawned social discrimination and dictatorial controls which, in turn, reinforced and strengthened each other. In the end he labelled the tyrannical paradigm 'a pigsty', a political standard unequivocally untenable for the ideals and goals he envisaged for the Cuban socialist revolution (Suchlicki 1972; Anderson 1997; Taibo II 1997).

Cultural policy⁵

Despite Castro and Che's anti-Soviet positions, Cuba's cultural sphere has had its fair share of hopeful bureaucrats with strong leanings to Stalinism. In earlier times, certain government functionaries attempted to sway Cuban cultural policy *towards* repressive forms like *socialist realism* (see Karol 1970; Dominguez 1979). In this regard, not only did Castro declare that 'socialist realism should not monopolise art' (Dominguez 1979: 392), it was through his support that the Cuban Institute for Cinematographic Arts (ICAIC) successfully resisted dictatorial supervision. When Blas Roca, in his official capacity as party secretary, had tried to prohibit the screening of the works of the Italian master-filmmaker Fellini, he had been 'severely and publicly rebuked' (Karol 1970: 394). Roca's condemnation of Fellini's landmark *La dolce vita* met with strong resistance from the ICAIC – an act which, by implication, also portrayed Castro's support (ibid.). In the sphere of painting, 'freedom had been complete long before Cuba extended her invitation to the *Salon de Mai*', an undertaking which was affirmed by Castro: 'Our fight is with the imperialists, not with abstract painters' (ibid.). The Union of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC) similarly thought it prudent to enlist Castro's aid to compel repressive elements in Cuba's armed forces to disband their endeavours to 'extirpate' homosexuality in the country through rehabilitation methods (Karol 1970: 395; Dominguez 1979: 392–393).

Fidel Castro's *Words to intellectuals* (1961) represents, to this day, the revolution's most instructive and definitive doctrine on cultural expression. Delivered in 1961 to several hundred of Cuba's foremost artists and intellectuals, the speech covers a range of topics, such as the revolution's new cultural-political orientations and stance on artists' social role and creative liberties. With the address Castro advocated creativity as an integral part of the revolutionary process, with artists having the complete freedom to choose their channel of articulation, while making allowances for both the country's own national customs and the cultural triumphs of other societies. While freedom of artistic *form* was assured, the exact meaning and implication regarding *content* was not as coherent. Quite prominent in the address is the now-famous and enduring decree, '*within the revolution, everything, against the revolution, nothing*', which, in the most basic terms, captures the essence of Castro's cultural doctrine. Coupled to this was Castro's perception that the revolution could not, by its very nature, be an enemy of freedom; it could not, therefore, stifle the creative integrity of the artist or intellectual.

The modern epoch

Freedom of speech

This is how Fidel Castro, in recent years, has summed up and defended the country's official standpoint on free speech:

I wonder if it is fair to discuss 'freedom of expression' and thought [when] the immense majority of the people [globally] are either totally or functionally illiterate. It sounds like a cruel joke, but it is much worse. Many people in the world not only lack freedom of thought but also the capacity to think, it has been destroyed. (2002a: 15)

A most remarkable or definitive 'challenge' to the perception that Fidel Castro's rule has outlawed 'freedom of expression', lies in the fact that the Latin American Federation of Journalists (FELAP) deemed it fitting to bestow on Castro himself a special and exclusive award. Castro earned this honour in February 2007 for his 'early and constant vocation of struggle for the truth, for his fine understanding of the importance of the role of the press and journalists, and for continuing to wage an unceasing battle against lies, disinformation and media manipulation' (FELAP 2007: 6). Created in 1976, FELAP has a membership of some 80 000 journalists located across several countries. In presenting the medal to the Cuban Political Bureau (as Castro could not attend due to illness), FELAP's president, Juan Carlos Camaño, remarked that Castro 'has been and is a sustainer of ideas in the battle of ideas not only at the present juncture but also in the field of the journalistic profession' (ibid.).

The current leader of Cuba's Culture Ministry, Abel Prieto Jiménez, rationalises that Fidel Castro's cultural decree ('within the revolution, everything, against the revolution, nothing') is entirely reasonable, given the extreme risks posed by US imperialist aggression (see Cuban Council of State 2001).⁶ Notwithstanding this, the policy does allow for much flexibility (Cantor 1999). Prieto Jiménez contends that certain basic revolutionary principles must, at all cost, be defended and safeguarded, hence to encourage an attack on those principles amounts to an 'act of suicide'. In this regard it is fundamental to consider (albeit briefly) some of the hazards associated with US-imperialist policy toward Cuba.

As a start, Castro (2002a: 18; see also CCS 2001) maintains that the so-called 'pro-democratic counterrevolution' underway in Cuba is 'wrapped up in lies and slander'. The 'dissidents' both in- and outside of Cuba have "the same origin and the same leadership and are mere instruments of US policy against Cuba": they are pro-imperialist, antisocialist and in favour of annexation [to the US]. Those who claim to be leaders of the anti-Cuba/anti-revolutionary movement are, in reality, 'former CIA members or the children of well-known war criminals who had escaped to the US when the revolution triumphed.' Imperialist actions against Cuba have included,

amongst many other covert missions, offering support to subversive groups to carry out acts of sabotage, commit political crimes, and introduce pests and biological germs in harvests and crops. Imperialist agencies have also organised their own military apparatus with the aim to assassinate Cuban revolutionary leaders (especially Castro) during their journeys abroad, 'with the full knowledge and tolerance of US authorities.' As Castro (2002a: 9) sums up the situation: 'It is outrageous to think about everything they have done against our homeland.'

Prieto points out that, from the point of view of someone who is 'committed' to the revolution, *everything* is within, i.e. any issue can be touched on (Cantor 1999). In the framework of the high levels of misunderstanding *and* anticipation that characterised Cuban society during the launch of the revolution, confusion arose about the second clause especially. 'Some thought that critical art could only be counterrevolutionary', and that to be revolutionary, 'art had to praise, to extol.' Prieto Jiménez argues that contrary to widespread Western perceptions, the country's 'lack of censorship and the excess of freedom of expression' have had the opposite effect and caused some damage in the sphere of the arts. In contemporary Cuban literature, for example, there is an excess of characters like 'prostitutes, the corrupt official, the person who sells medicine on the black market', etc. In this respect the literature could 'reach higher, obtain a much higher poetic level'. While other socialist countries did 'engender internal dissidence and heretical intellectual thought', in Cuba, he states, 'there's been an "officially promoted discussion", a so-called "artistic heresy" not prevalent in any other socialist society': 'It's an original and absolutely unrepeatable characteristic of this revolution,' Prieto Jiménez asserts (*ibid.*; see discussion below on 'democracy'; see also Knapton 1995; Wald 2001).

'Cuba is a police state'

In response to this claim, Castro (2002a: 17) replies: 'Do you really think that Cuba and the revolution would exist without a maximum degree of people's participation?' He maintains that, as (prior) leader and supreme commander of revolutionary Cuba, he can claim 'no moral rights'

if a single Cuban had been murdered by the revolution, if there were a single death squad in Cuba; if a single person in Cuba had been vanished or if a single person in our country had been tortured. (*ibid.*)

Castro (*ibid.*: 42) sees the Cuban nation as a 'rebellious people with a very high sense of justice' who would 'not have forgiven us a single one of these acts'. Western perceptions of wide-scale, rigorous political indoctrination are often presented as 'proof' to contradict Castro's claims. Rational-critical, open-minded readers are cautioned: the modern Cuban is by no means illiterate, uneducated, uncultured

or unintelligent (see Perez 2008). In effect, Cubans themselves – be they doctors, scientists, teachers, artists, writers, waiters or taxi drivers – feel deeply offended by such claims (Kronenberg 2005).

Castro (2002b: 42) furthermore notes that, under his rule, ‘not once’ has there been a case of tear gas being used against the people, or the ‘spectacle’ of riot police, horses or armoured cars repressing the Cuban people – ‘things that are seen very frequently in Europe and the US.’ Cuba, he says, has not witnessed political assassinations either, despite what is contended in official US circles. The Cuban leader challenges anyone to travel the country freely, engage with people, look for evidence, or find confirmation that the revolutionary government either ordered or tolerated such repressive action.

The CCS (2001: 7) argues that, contrary to US assertions, throughout the world people are ‘fighting back against the globalisation of plunder, poverty and hunger’. Institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organisation (WTO), G8, etc. cannot find ‘a single place on the planet to meet anymore’; Seattle, Washington, Davos, Quebec and Genoa, with ‘their brutal scenes of repression’ bear testimony to this claim.

‘But why have so many left’?

Though many have left Cuba’s shores, ‘no one is prevented from leaving’ (Castro 2002a: 17). Castro argues that if the same privileges granted by the US to Cuban emigrants had been given to those from beyond the country’s borders, ‘more than half of the people in the United States would be Latin American and Caribbean.’ By the same token:

Let these privileges be offered in Europe to the people living North and South of the Sahara, and let’s see how many emigrate. It should be said that we have never prohibited emigration from Cuba to the United States, and that 90 percent of those who have emigrated have done so for economic reasons. (ibid.: 18)

The CCS (2001: 8) documents that the US-Cuban Adjustment Act had been reinforced with new privileges and incentives that promote the smuggling of aliens and illegal migration. The Act, for instance, grants resident status and the right to work to all Cubans who arrive in the US by air, from anywhere in the world – even if they carry false documentation.

‘Cuba is not a democracy’

According to Castro (2002a: 4), Cuba’s national programmes – and especially its social difficulties – are regularly discussed not only in the National Assembly, but more pertinently

in hundreds of thousands of assemblies held in factories, centers of production and services, trade union, universities, secondary schools and farmers', women's and neighbours' organizations as well as in other social groups. (ibid.)

Castro's reply here calls to mind Che's renowned discourse on what is commonly perceived as 'popular democracy' – citizens' dialogue about, and more appropriately, participation in, aspects that unswervingly affect their lives and well-being (see Deutschmann 2003).



Figure 3: Ernesto Che Guevara de la Serna (1928-1967)
Source: www.Che-lives.com

As a principal architect, theorist and international spokesperson of the revolution during its early years, the duty fell on Ernesto Che Guevara to explicate the revolution's theoretical conception and practical application of 'democracy' (see Guevara 2003a, b, c & d). He argued that the word 'democracy' should not be utilised 'apologetically' in order merely to represent the 'dictatorship of the exploiting classes' (1963/2003c: 74). For him the deeper meaning of democracy should not be lost – that of *granting people their liberties*. To struggle only to reinstate a 'certain degree of bourgeois legality', without considering the fundamental interests of the masses, is to struggle for the return of a 'dictatorial order established by the dominant social classes'. Hence, Che maintained that the struggle for real participatory democracy should not be a struggle for continued oppression, albeit in subdued forms – 'for a lighter iron ball to be fixed to the prisoner's chain' (ibid.). The toppling of the erstwhile Batista

dictatorship presented Cubans with a ‘strategic objective’ to *re-establish all the ideas of democracy and sovereignty and independence* that were trampled underfoot by foreign monopolies (see Guevara 1960/2003a). Che endeavoured, especially, to offer greater clarity on the broader implication of ‘democratic centralism’ (1963/2003d). In this instance he considered the fundamental link that should exist between the ruling party and ordinary citizens:

The party of the future will be intimately linked to the masses and will absorb from them those great ideas that will then take shape as concrete guidelines. It will be a party that will strictly apply its discipline in keeping with democratic centralism and, at the same time, there will permanently be discussion and open criticism and self-criticism, in order to continually improve our work. (ibid.: 175)

As is perceptible, Che’s thought essentially contradicts totalitarian, autocratic or undemocratic governmental practice. His most premeditated pronouncement on ‘democracy’ conceivably appears in his historic 1961 Punta del Este speech (see Guevara 1961/2003b: 247). Citing entirely from the Havana Declaration, proclaimed on 16 April 1961, Che announced:

The National General Assembly of the People of Cuba expresses the Cuban conviction that *democracy cannot exist solely of elections that are nearly always fictitious and managed by rich landowners and professional politicians, but rather it lies in the right of the citizens to determine their own destiny* . . . [D]emocracy will come to exist in Latin America only when people are really free to make choices, when the poor are not reduced – by hunger, social discrimination, illiteracy and the legal system – to the most wretched impotence. (ibid., emphasis added)

This historic announcement marked Cuba’s official departure from Western-style democratic rule which, for Castro, symbolised but ‘the dictatorship of the capitalists’ (in Wright 1991: 25). Wright (ibid.) is of the view that the regime was ‘undoubtedly correct in asserting the incompatibility of Western democracy with social revolution, given the corrupting power of money in elections and the socio-political restraints offered by constitutional democracies’. Nonetheless, though the revolutionary leadership has consciously promoted mass discussion and debate within the revolution (Evenson 2009; Rodríguez 2009), the elemental socialist principle of *workers’ direct control and direction of the course of the revolution itself* appears to be lacking in its ideological course.⁷ It transpires that the revolutionary leadership saw the need to strengthen workers’ and/or mass participation purely in terms of cementing the control and organisation of the ruling party itself, something Che considered, however, should act in the people’s best interest. The assessment that perhaps most appropriately explains the ‘limitations’, as well as the positive

outcomes of revolutionary Cuba's political process, remains that of Zeitlin (1970). As he concluded from his field research findings:

For the masses of Cuba the most significant economic achievement of the revolution has been a substantial increase in living standards. This has been accomplished through a radically egalitarian redistribution of income and wealth, and a reorientation of the pattern of investment to priority to the construction of schools, homes, and cultural and recreational facilities The direct action of the working class in seizing industry and in many cases, in exerting democratic control over this industry *while [this] was not consummated in the actual control over the state by the working class, did give the masses a very real weight in the political life of the country. [This] brought the Cuban masses for the first time in history into partial control of their own destiny.* (Zeitlin 1970: ii, emphasis added)

Castro (see 2002c) regards contemporary Cuba as a united country, ruled by a party that guides, with no interference in the electoral process. The people, gathered in public assemblies, nominate candidates and elect delegates from 14 686 districts, the foundation of the island's electoral system. The delegates make up the assemblies of their respective municipalities which, in turn, nominate candidates to the provincial and national assemblies – the highest bodies of state power at those levels. Chosen through secret ballot, the delegates must receive at least 50 per cent of the vote in their corresponding jurisdictions. Although voting is not compulsory, commonly over 90 per cent of eligible voters take part in elections (Moya 2007).

Castro (2002a: 2) argues that, in contrast to the Cuban concept of 'democracy', the US advocates a multiparty system which basically consists of two dominant parties, very similar in method, objectives and goals. As a result it has produced the 'most perfect one-party system in the world'. Over 50 per cent of the people in that democratic country traditionally do not to vote, and the team that manages to raise the most funds often wins, with the votes of about a quarter only of the electorate. Castro (ibid.) regards the US system as 'undermined by disputes, vanity and personal ambition'; as *operating within an established economic and social model that offers no real alternatives for fundamental socioeconomic change*. Ultimately, he reasons, it is the capitalist system that, in reality, elevates large national and international companies to positions of actual governance:

They are making the decisions on investments and development. They are responsible for material production, essential economic services, and a large part of social services. The state simply collects taxes and then distributes and spends them. In many of these countries, the entire government could go on vacation and nobody would even notice. (ibid.)

In sum, for Castro, any discussion about ‘democracy’ must, as a rule, bear in mind ‘what is meant by democracy’ (ibid.: 7):

How many so-called ‘democratic’ states are up to their necks in debt? How many of them allow up to 30% of the population to live in conditions of extreme poverty? Why should countries with tens of thousands of children wandering the streets and countless numbers of illiterate people, be treated better than we are?

Cuban scholar Rodríguez (2009: 104) concludes that, for several years, popular participation in achieving the national goals of economic and social development, independence and sovereignty, has been one of the foundational principles of Cuba’s socio-political project. The process offers citizens the opportunity to present demands, turn these demands into concrete proposals for development, express their opinions on topics of collective interest, and evaluate daily work (ibid.: 108). It was particularly since the early 1990s – a period when revolutionary Cuba faced its most challenging economic needs ever – that academics and intellectuals called for participatory practices that would allow for the expression and exploration of alternative approaches to the trials confronting Cuban socialism. However, both objective and subjective obstacles have prevented a fundamental change from the hierarchical and formalistic constraints entrenched by traditional state structures. Nonetheless, during 2007, in response to the Party’s call to increase collective decision making, some 215 500 meetings were organised nationally in various sectors, including work centres and neighbourhoods, with well over three million Cubans participating. These gatherings offered the Cuban people opportunities to publicly articulate and consider criticisms and remarks with openness, and without fear of reprisal (Evenson 2009: 96).

‘Socialism is neither relevant, nor is it concerned about the welfare of ordinary citizens’

Castro (2002a: 1) is more convinced ‘than ever before’, that socialism makes ‘a great deal of sense’. For him the demise of the Soviet Union and the Eastern-European socialist block was ‘the naïve and unwitting destruction of a great historical process *that needed to be improved, but not destroyed*’ (emphasis added). Though much of the world anticipated that Cuba would not survive the collapse of its socialist partners, it survived ‘precisely because of its anti-capitalist/socialist system’.⁸ As Castro reasons, ‘we had the privilege of not being IMF members’, and Cuba was thus not subjected to its international monetary rules and principles (ibid.: 3). As a direct result of the current economic order, data on the social and economic situation in Africa, for instance, show that whole regions of sub-Saharan Africa risk annihilation from a multifaceted combination of economic backwardness, unbearable paucity

and serious diseases – a situation which is no less dramatic in numerous Asian countries. In addition, there exist massive and unpayable debts, unequal terms of commerce, overtly highly priced basic commodities, demographic explosion, and climatic transformations that generate long droughts alternating with intensive rains and floods (see Cheeka 2005; Kazeem 2008). Castro (2002d: 109) regards all of this as a ‘global predicament’ which, at the end of the day, ‘is unsustainable.’ Conversely, owing to Cuba’s socialist system, Castro (2002a: 4) argues, during times of extreme hardship the government

did not close down a single health care center, a single school or day care center, a single university or a single sports facility. Nobody was fired and left on their own without employment or social security, even when fuel and raw materials were most scarce. (ibid.)

Further to the notion that the Cuban state ‘does not care about her own citizens’, Castro (ibid.: 5) remarks:

There is schooling for all of our children, and no illiteracy. The development of our universities is considerable. We have numerous research centers carrying out important, high-quality work. Every child is given 13 vaccines, almost all of them produced in our own country

As the Trans-Africa Forum (Robinson 1999) confirms, by the turn of the century Cuba had some 250 000 teachers and despite the US embargo, the country did not close any of its schools or day care centres, or leave schools without teachers. Cuba’s comprehensive educational system is fundamentally extensive, assisting in eroding class, gender and human inequality. Though Cubans in various positions come from modest backgrounds, they are highly advanced intellectually, culturally and politically. Cubans regard the country’s free, high-quality education system as the most critical factor in their development (ibid.).

Cuba’s universal health care system similarly is highly impressive, achieving remarkable feats despite the negative impact of US economic restrictions. By 1999, Cuba had over 62 000 doctors and over 18 000 neighbourhood family clinics for its 11 million citizens. Despite shortages of medical supplies, the life expectancy of Cubans currently is in excess of 77 years, whereas before the revolution it was just over half this figure. Cuba’s positive health statistics are equal to, and in some cases better than, those of certain developed countries (Kronenberg 2009a: 74; see Prevost 2009). Cuba’s remarkably low levels of infant mortality, including infants born with low birth weight, its percentage of children enrolled in secondary school, adult literacy, and budgets earmarked for education and health, rank foremost in Latin America (Foran 2009; see also Brundenius 2009; Lutjens 2009; Prevost 2009). While medical care and education are *entirely free, from the most basic to*

the most advanced levels, the island has the most doctors per capita, with its health care system considered the most advanced on the continent (Foran 2009). Although current unemployment levels are negligible in comparison to Third-World standards, by 1990 redundancy was virtually nonexistent, with Cuba's rate being the lowest in the broader continental domain. After the revolution, rental fees were limited to ten per cent of income. Further, modern-day Cuba has virtually no beggars or slum areas, no starvation or chronic hunger. Until recently, the country's crime levels were among the lowest in the world, with rape reportedly very rare (ibid.).

By certain estimates, Cuba has been found to be *the most racially harmonious society ever encountered* (Benjamin, Collins & Scott, in Foran 2009: 22, emphasis added). This singularly unique feature can be attributed in part to the revolutionary leadership's unequivocal stance against racial profiling, racial differentiation, racial categorisation and, ultimately, racial discrimination. Following its fact-finding mission to Cuba, the Trans-Africa Forum had this to say:

What particularly impressed the delegation during their meeting with Castro was his sense of personal outrage he has over racial discrimination; his willingness to be critical, of how the revolution has not done all that must be done about racism, and therefore a resolve to figure out what must be done. (Robinson 1999)

The above forum determined that Cubans from all levels were proud of their accomplishments in fostering equality since the 1959 revolution. This was true among 'Afro-Cubans' and 'white' Cubans. This assessment is particularly remarkable, given that twentieth-century pre-revolutionary Cuba was considered to be the most racist of the Hispanic Caribbean territories (see Sarduy & Stubbs 1993).⁹ The Trans-Africa Forum concluded that the Cuban revolution has significantly improved the status of Cubans of African descent. Accordingly, African Americans have a 'promise of a home in Cuba' – a country that recognises 'the blood and sweat of the black slaves that built it'. Trans-Africa delegates found that Cuba accepts that there is history beyond Europe; that Africa has also been a partner in raising the new world (Robinson 1999). Although the Cuban leader concedes that the island's endeavours to stamp out intolerance and prejudice have left room for improvement – Castro (2002b: 59) grants that he 'does not claim that Cuba is a perfect model of equality and justice' – it nonetheless is a 'disgrace' that in the century which is just unfolding, with all its technological prowess, when humankind has aspirations to populate the planet Mars, there are children, teenagers and adults living in 'conditions of marginality, and that in many countries as well as being marginalised those people are discriminated against' (ibid.: 60).

Fidel Castro's detestation of human denigration is clearly mirrored in his protective outlook toward the dominated African continent (see Nimtz 2009). Cuba's ensuing foreign policy, especially in terms of Africa, has no comparison among other

small non-African Third-World countries (González 2004). Besides its profoundly philanthropic nature, this unique strategy rests on:

- Cuba's resolute support since 1959 for national liberation movements globally
- The protection of the code of sovereign equality among nations
- The broadening of solidarity to other underdeveloped nations
- The role that Africans, and their descendants, especially, have played in Cuba's anti-slavery and independence struggles, and hence
- The 'duty of compensation' to Africa that Cubans have come to take into account since 1959. (ibid.: 2004: 47–50)

In many public forums internationally, Che fervidly denounced the apartheid-colonialist administration (see Deutschmann 2003). A few years after his death, his standpoints became concretely endorsed with Cuba's direct engagement with the military strength of the racist regime. It is with a sense of esteem that this article acknowledges what often is unknown to ordinary citizens, or disregarded, suppressed or simply ignored by the island's adversaries:

During the 15 long years we were in southern Africa, mounting the guard against the forces of apartheid or actively fighting them, the major capitalist countries had large investments in South Africa and their trade with this racist regime amounted to billions of U.S. dollars every year When our forces left Africa, they took nothing with them but the remains of their comrades who had fallen in combat. We did not own a single square meter of land there ... or a single screw in a factory. No Western country had shed a single drop of blood there. Only one country had done this, a small and faraway country, located 10,000 kilometers from Africa: Cuba. (Castro 2002c: 92)

The revolutionary state's intrinsic alliance with ordinary Cubans is echoed further in its altruistic attitude toward the most vulnerable of humanity. As Castro (2002a: 5) notes:

... thousands of our doctors are providing their services, free of charge, in remote and impoverished areas of Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa, in comprehensive health care programs. (ibid.)

Revolutionary Cuba's unremitting, *concrete* expression of internationalism and universal solidarity has come to elicit praise and admiration from friend and foe alike (see González 2004; Othieno 2005; Nimtz 2009).¹⁰ Underpinning this outlook is a deep-seated humanistic, ethical belief system, espoused also by major religions and expressed in contemporary times as follows:

Those who do not believe in humankind, in its potential for noble sentiments, in its capacity for goodness and altruism, will never understand that we do not only hurt just

for every Cuban child who suffers or dies but also for every child in Haiti, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Africa and every country in the world. It cannot be claimed that the human species has attained a maximum of consciousness while it is incapable of feeling the suffering of others. Humanity will attain its greatest consciousness and potential qualities when people feel the same sorrow for the death of any family's child as they would for their own child or other close relative [T]his is exactly what Christ preached. This is what 'Love thy neighbour' means to us. This explains the efforts that Cuba has made for other countries, to the extent of its capabilities. (Castro 2002b: 41)

Emanating from all this is the Cuban concept of 'humanity', which is fairly austere and basic, and based on the ethical principle proclaimed by José Martí, the island's national hero, i.e. the existence of only one human race (see Kronenberg 2007a & b). Besides Martí's great moral influence, revolutionary Cuba's concept of 'race' is founded on a culmination of established psychological, cultural and anthropological research conclusions (see Sarduy & Stubbs 1993). All in all, as Foran (2009: 22) concludes, Cubans in general have a 'pervasive sense of dignity and confidence in the future' – a sharp contrast from the 'shame and hopelessness' one finds in almost all poor countries. Collectively, the above facts suggest that Cuba's missions and triumphs under the socialist revolution have been unprecedented in the history of the Caribbean, Latin America, the Third World, or even the world.

On capitalism, racism and poverty

As a rule, Castro (2002d: 108) takes into account the objective historical-materialist factors that have come to shape the social environment of the people of not only Africa, but the entire Third World:

The irrefutable truth is that tens of millions of Africans were captured, sold like a commodity and sent beyond Africa to work in slavery while 70 million indigenous people in that hemisphere perished as a result of the European conquest and colonization. The inhuman exploitation imposed on the peoples of three continents, including Asia, marked forever the destiny of lives of over 4.5 billion people living in the Third World today. Those people suffer terrible poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and health rates as well as infant mortality, low life expectancy and other calamities. They are the current victims of an atrocity which lasted centuries and they are the ones who clearly deserve compensation for the horrendous crimes perpetrated against their ancestors and people. (ibid.)

In response to all this, Castro conceives of the following issues which, for him, clearly demarcate the complicity and culpability of the neo-liberal, capitalist order in the broader sphere of human oppression:

- Since the capitalist system is based on a 'philosophy of selfishness and brutal competition between men and nations, and which is completely indifferent to any feelings of solidarity or honest international cooperation', will it be able to empathize with the grave problems of today's world?
- Whereas the current global order is ruled by 'blind laws' and the 'huge power of the ever growing, increasingly uncontrollable and independent transnational corporations', will they be able to understand 'the impending universal chaos and rebellion'?
- And, even if they wanted to, could they put an end to racism, racist discrimination, xenophobia and other related forms of intolerance, given that this is precisely what they represent? (Castro 2002d: 111)

In review of the current global situation, Castro (2002a: 12) contends that, while people used to talk about apartheid in South Africa, today 'we could talk about apartheid throughout the world, where over four billion people are deprived of the most basic rights of all human beings: the right to life, health, education, clean drinking water'. Reiterating what has been deduced by Martí, Cuba's national hero, and elaborated on by Che, one of the revolution's principal theorists, Castro pronounces that the 'wealthy world attempts to dismiss the fact that the root causes of underdevelopment and poverty are 'slavery, colonialism and brutal exploitation' (ibid.). The leaders of the developing world 'look upon us as inferior nations', attributing poverty to the failure of Africans, Asians, Caribbeans and Latin Americans, 'in other words, of black-skinned, yellow-skinned, indigenous and mixed peoples, to achieve any degree of development, or even to govern ourselves' (ibid.). Castro reasons that the current economic order 'imposed by the wealthy countries' is not only 'cruel, unfair, inhuman, and contrary to the inevitable course of history' but is also 'inherently racist' (ibid.). For him it reflects those racist conceptions that once generated the Nazi holocaust and concentration camps in Europe. These, he argues, are 'mirrored today in the Third World's so-called refugee camps, which actually serve to concentrate the effects of poverty, hunger, and violence. These are the same racist conceptions that inspired the hateful system of apartheid in Africa' (ibid.).¹¹

Conclusion

'You are not a liberator'

Responding to George W. Bush's sweeping allegations (see above), Fidel Castro (2007) composed a special, personal memo entitled 'a message from Fidel to Bush', parts of which read as follows:

Your genocidal blockade, your support for terrorism, your murderous Cuban Adjustment Act, your wet-foot/dry-foot policy, your protection of the worst terrorists in this hemisphere, your unjust punishment of the five Cuban heroes who exposed the

danger posed to US citizens and those of other countries of dying in mid-flight, must all end. Sovereignty is non-negotiable. Likewise, the shameful torture being carried out in the occupied territory of Guantánamo must also end. We were never intimidated by your threats of pre-emptive and surprise attacks on the 60 or more dark corners of the Earth. The outcome of that has now been seen in a single country: Iraq. Do not attack others; do not threaten humanity with a nuclear war. The people will defend themselves, and all would perish in that inferno. Thank you for your attention. (ibid., emphasis added)

Pronouncing the Cuban Council of State's official reaction to the overwhelmingly damaging portrayal the US statesman presented of the Caribbean nation (see above), Cuban Foreign Minister Perez Rogue (2007) noted that it amounts to a 'lying and ridiculous description of the situation in Cuba'; that he had 'never before witnessed a politician exude so much hatred and frustration'. For Perez Rogue this is 'pathological', since the US spokesperson gave a portrayal that 'only blindness, due to hatred and impotence, could lead him to fall into such extremes.' 'I don't know who prepared these speeches, these paragraphs. These extremes of hypocrisy, of a lack of basic respect for the truth, have really been limited. This is a new record, we should say, of indecency,' the Foreign minister pronounced (ibid.). Addressing his antagonist directly, and quite forcefully, Perez Rogue declared:

You are not a liberator, you are a brutal repressor! You invaded, massacred and tortured in the name of freedom. You authorised the existence of secret prisons, of clandestine flights. You legalised the use of torture, of humiliating prisoners. You maintain the torture centre on the Guantánamo naval base, which has been globally condemned. (ibid.)

It is relevant to reconsider that the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 offered the US the unique prospect of asserting its hegemony over almost the entire global population. One of its primary international goals had been to assemble a transnational judicial order that would validate its empire as a '*jus imperium*' (Goyos 2006: 122). This transformation was also perceptible in the brusque, no-nonsense foreign policy of trading international law for the dictates of an untouchable supremacy. In September 2002 the Bush Administration, in its National Security Strategy document, renounced no less than the Charter of the United Nations itself by invading and declaring war on Iraq (see Goyos 2006). It has steadily rejected measures to endorse the Vienna Convention on the Laws of Treaties of 1969. Similarly, the revised Kyoto Protocol of 2001, aimed at international environmental protection, was repudiated by the US, the country that constitutes the earth's greatest polluter. In the military domain, it has refused to sign the 1997 Ottawa Treaty, i.e. the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and their Destruction. Under the second Bush administration the US abrogated the Anti-

Ballistic Missiles (ABM) Treaty of 1972, which seeks to halt the proliferation of nuclear weaponry. It also sought to thwart the UN Conference on the Illicit Traffic in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects, thus preventing an efficient international regulation of the source of urban violence in many countries around the world (*ibid.*: 121–125). In the sphere of human rights, the US cast a single dissenting vote against the 1986 Declaration on the Right to Development (i.e. that the right to development constitutes a human right), while the United Nations adopted it by an overwhelming majority (Sengupta 1999: 1). In addition, the US rejected the New Protocol on the 1987 Convention on Torture, just as it rejected the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, including the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (see Goyos 2006). It opposed the creation of the International Court of Justice by treaty in 1998, fearing criminal prosecution of domestic political and military felons. As we may recall, the US withdrew from the International Conference on Racism, held in Durban in 2001. (Currently there is speculation it intends boycotting the next one as well.) In the field of labour, by 2006 the US had ratified only 14 of the 185 Conventions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (Goyos 2006: 121–125). Goyos (*ibid.*) concludes that the world's prevailing capitalist institutions – the IMF and the World Bank – function ‘as if they were departments in the Ministry of Trade of the US’, ultimately promoting and upholding the strategic objectives of the foreign policy of that country, by bestowing both favours and sanctions, as appropriate to the interests of the capitalist elite. It is in this context that Perez Rogue (2007) concluded his repudiation, demanding quite bluntly:

With what moral authority can you come and dictate to the Cuban people guidelines for their future, your concept of respect for human rights or your democratic system?

Postscript: race, culture and the ideological state

Although the United Nations Human Rights Charter comes close to emulating the Cuban concept of human equality (see UNESCO 2001) it has, nevertheless, remained somewhat unique in the broader context of individual national state policies pertaining to race. It is, therefore, interesting to note that since the 1940s a similar theory has been advanced by certain socialist groupings of the South African National Liberation Movement (see Tabata 1950, 1985; Kies 1953; Sandwith 2005). The Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), a non-racial political organisation with its roots in Cape Town's Trotskyist Left, became deeply responsive to the purpose of education and culture in duplicating flawed social relations – particularly in contexts of colonial rule. NEUM activists closely analysed the material frameworks of scholarly and creative production, throwing light on the mechanisms of Western

cultural supremacy, particularly 'Western civilisation' and 'culture' as markers of racial and class supremacy (Sandwith 2005: 1).

As a key founding member of the NEUM, B.M. Kies (1953: 38) argued that imperialism's imposed beliefs, norms and standards are but an embodiment of 'the diseased heart of the leadership of so-called "Western" and "Christian civilisation"':

This is the leprous psyche of the people who declare that without them Africa and India and China would relapse into barbarism. This is the measuring-rod of the people who declare that because the Russian workers and peasants took control out of the hands of the capitalists in 1918 they had thereby cut themselves off from 'Western' or 'European' or Christian civilisation and had become 'Asiatic', 'barbarous', and 'god-less'. (ibid.: 38–39)

Hence, even if we were to 'concede', even for the briefest of moments, that the cultures of the Third World (or of First People), were/are 'decadent', 'uncivilised', 'backward', 'barbaric', 'barbarous', 'primitive', 'god-less', and the like, what is it that Western civilisation, through its colonising mission, had hoped (and still hopes) to implant in unchartered territories?¹² In this regard, Kies's disparaging cultural critique, though formulated more than 50 years ago, has remained entirely applicable to our times:

Pornography, sadism, greed, and violence are the basis of 90% of the films produced in the US. There arises, moreover, a whole class of secondary parasites who makes no contribution to the wealth or culture of society, but exist as flunkies and sycophants to do the bidding of the well-to-do. Gamekeepers and deer-park attendants are less in fashion today, but night-club proprietors, owners of brothels and gaming-houses, drug-peddlers and a multitude of other dependants of the rich fulfil a similar role. The warped and perverted psychology of the ruling class is reflected in the art forms which it demands; these range from straightforward obscenity to escapism and obscurantism in its most sophisticated forms. (1953: 39)

Kies also sought to leap beyond the immediate, local domain to unravel the more intricate, often obscure forces that make up the intrinsic relationship between world cultures and large-scale economic systems. His conclusions highlight that social systems based on 'privilege and exploitation' generate 'a morbid psychology' in ruling-class elites, with dire consequences for ordinary subjects. In this sense ruling classes' 'corrupt moral and cultural standards' habitually become 'models for the whole of society' (ibid.). Unlike South Africa's prior (racist) film industry, North-American cinema reaches into all corners of the globe, offering a sound portrayal of the 'depths of degradation' to which art has sunk in twentieth-century capitalist society. Kies cautioned that a decline in cultural value also inspires *and* heightens manifestations of 'anguish' and 'alienation' (ibid.). In terms of music, for example,

today it often is 'the attitude', as showcased by the modern African-American youth, that becomes expropriated by the township adolescent (see Pillay 2002). The 'attitude', supported by a suitable wardrobe, resonates with marginalised youth precisely 'because it speaks within a discourse of alienation' (even if it is propped up by a 'fictitious' cultural power bred by global media and financial interest) (ibid.: 51). In addressing the same issue, Abel Prieto Jiménez, Cuba's renowned Culture Minister and an accomplished literary artist himself, reasons that such a regulated market effectively acts as a mechanism of censorship. In this process thinkers of world standing become 'restricted to intellectual circles', while popular icons become 'great fetishes'. For Prieto Jiménez this is nothing but an 'implacable censorship operation' (Cantor 1999; Wald 2001).

The NEUM, in particular, similarly sought to elevate the basic ethical-scientific theory of *one human race* in its efforts to counteract unadulterated, divisionist racist dogma widely disseminated and entrenched by the apartheid state. However, as Sandwith (ibid.: 2) argues, the contribution made by the NEUM to the South African liberation struggle is not widely recognised. As a radical political organisation steadfastly contesting African nationalism/tribalism, US imperialism, global capitalism, as well as 'multi-racialism/rainbowism' (as opposed to the pursuance of non-racialism) this has meant that the organisation does not enjoy prominence in the post-1994 capitalistic landscape. Its subordinate or detached status in erroneous petit-bourgeois politics is reflected in the neo-liberal academic domain as well. In contrast to the NEUM's policies and principles, influential officials have perpetuated racial and ethnic categories (as often defined by the apartheid state itself), which has hardly diminished South Africa's ingrained culture and legacy of racism. If anything, modern South African society has come to experience a marked increase in gross racist and xenophobic behaviour amongst ordinary people – a great national catastrophe that has left many lives shattered and others engaged in serious soul-searching (see Hercules 1995; Mthombothi 2004; Philips 2004; Alexander 2007). On occasion, Che argued that if socialism is to succeed with the reintroduction of capitalist laws and relations – as happened in the USSR and now in China – then it is doomed to failure (see Clarke & Barnes 1997). By the same token it can be contended that if non-racialism is to triumph with the reintroduction and elevation of categories of race and ethnicity, then such a process is doomed to catastrophe. In line with the official Cuban position, here is Hercules's (1995: 2) essentially lucent response to the ruinous developments that have taken their course across all spectrums of the new, so-called 'non-racial' South Africa:

And there are those who say that even though 'race' does not exist, we have to respond to it as if it exists, i.e. appeal to people on the basis of their 'Colouredness', or their 'Africanness', for example. *That is tantamount to treating the disease of racism with the poison of racist categorisation of people! Our response is that racism ... exists*

and has to be fought on a strictly non-racial basis. This means that our campaigns, nation-building strategies and discourse to deal with racism have to be consistently anti-racist pushing towards the eventual realisation of a genuinely non-racial society.
(ibid., emphasis added)

To recall the well-known tenet: while the repressive state *functions by violence*, the ideological state apparatus *functions by ideology* (see Althusser 1971; Benton 1984), which, more often than not in class society, is sustained entirely by a decorative system of disinformation. As cultural scholar Tomaselli (1988) so unmistakably confirmed, it explains how the dominated people of Germany and Italy could so effectively be swayed into supporting Nazism and fascism, even against their own better judgement and at the expense of their own interests. It is not too much to conclude that the distorted consciousness and vast social inequity of our time clearly ensue from debauched power systems, pillared on unencumbered bigotry and human denigration (see Castro 1999). This, plainly, impedes the growth of a new world order wherein human dignity, progress and equality for all, shall prevail.

Notes

1 Isolated and/or edited passages of this article are derived from the author's published works in *Unisa Latin American Report* and *Latin American Perspectives*. The research assistance of the Education Department of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology is hereby acknowledged. Special thanks, once again, are extended to the Cuban Embassy, Pretoria, for its kind and useful aid with the author's Cuban studies.

2 This speech is selected as it bears arguably all of the hallmarks of Western capitalist perceptions of revolutionary Cuba. All unaccredited quotations pertaining to this speech are from this source (i.e. Bush 2007).

3 Countries in support of the blockade in 2007 were The United States, Israel, The Marshall Islands and Palau. Countries absent during this vote were El Salvador, Iraq and Albania, while Micronesia abstained. In geographical terms, the overall vote count (in 2007) opposing the US blockade was as follows: North Africa and the Middle East: 17; sub-Saharan Africa: 47; Latin America and the Caribbean: 32; Asia and Oceania: 34; Western Europe and other states: 27 and Eastern Europe: 27.

4 This particular point is revealed more clearly later in the president's speech.

5 In the early 1970s, a period marked by heightened Soviet influence, the Cuban regime came under pressure from the Western art world for its attempts to impede or control free expression. This era, known as the 'grey period' in Cuban circles, is today openly acknowledged and considered an error by the revolutionary government itself (see Cantor 1999; Wald 2001). Certain policies proposed by leaders of Cuba's armed forces and pro-Moscow economists also sought to emulate those of the Soviet Union (see Zeitlin 1970; Karol 1970; Suchlicki 1972; Dominguez 1979; Wright 1991; Anderson 1997; Taibo II 1997).

6 Cuban Council of State, hereafter referred to as CCS.

7 This position is shared by socialist thinkers both inside and outside Cuba (see Martín 1999; Rey 2002; Roldan 2006). While Western neo-liberal thinkers and governmental agents argue for the institution of multiparty democracy underpinned by a fully-fledged market economy, i.e. capitalism, socialist thinkers commonly argue that for the revolution to survive and advance, especially after Fidel Castro's demise, the *socialist democratic process* – under the command of the workers and not a state bureaucracy – must be strengthened and developed. It is held by some that allowance must be made for diverse socialist philosophical trends to enter into the established, somewhat constrained political domain. The classical Marxist position advocates that the *working class* constitutes the key actor in socialist revolution (see Deutscher 1964), and not the peasantry, the social group Che predominantly targeted in his efforts to bring about social change. It must be noted that, despite this 'error' on his part, Che's revolutionary legacy commonly rests on his unswerving denunciation, including an elaborate analysis, of capitalism-imperialism and his magnanimous, concrete promotion of internationalism and universal solidarity amongst the poor and oppressed nations of his time.

8 Though recent years have seen the introduction of limited forms of the market economy, in large measure resulting from a rigorously imposed US blockade, this development has not been driven by what Castro calls, 'the insanity of privatisation' (2002a: 5). Despite this somewhat 'desperate course', Cuba's ideology and preference have remained socialist, which bears no relation to the 'selfishness, privileges and inequalities of capitalist society' (ibid.: 9), a sentiment shared by his successor, Raul Castro (see *Granma* reports).

9 Of great import is the fact that, rather than sidestepping or ignoring entrenched national racism (as was the case under both neo-colonial and dictatorial rule) revolutionary Cuba took deliberate steps to analyse, and subsequently, confront this historical impasse.

10 Cuba's protracted involvement in various social programmes in Africa, especially, was a main topic of discussion at the Friends of Cuba Society (FOCUS) meeting held on 27 January 2006 in Cape Town, South Africa. On this occasion the Cuban Minister of Foreign Relations, Perez Rogue, and the South African Ambassador to Cuba, Thenjiwe Mtintso, also delivered speeches, detailing Cuba's ongoing solidarity programmes with various poor and developing nations (see Kronenberg 2006).

11 Of note is that spokespersons of the South African ruling class often defend the growth of capitalist relations on the basis that it can bring about national poverty relief and improved social standards. In direct contrast, South African socialists, unionists and social movements argue that the wealth generated in the country (through foreign investment, for instance) has not benefited the majority of its citizens, i.e. the poor, homeless and unemployed (see Bond 2008). Edward (2006: 390–392) draws attention to the fallacious claims by World Bank researchers that 'the proportion of people living in poverty in the world as a whole is declining and hence that globalisation is good for the poor'. South African intellectuals Blade Nzimande (unionist, and now South Africa's Minister of Higher Education) and Salim Vally (educationist at Johannesburg University) are unequivocal in their condemnation of capitalism's rapacious association with South African university curricula, policies and goals. Nzimande reasons that it is no accident that contemporary neo-liberal institutions of higher learning can offer no viable answer to the recent global economic meltdown (Nzimande & Vally 2009).

12 The object is not to raise the litigious ‘anti-Eurocentric’ argument per se. Very similar to Cuba’s, the NEUM’s cultural thesis advances that humankind must embrace the artistic, cultural, technological and scientific successes from all civilisations and cultures, for the benefit of all humanity (see Kies 1953). Cubans argue that, because bourgeois culture has created much splendid art, they are entitled, and thus encouraged, to have contact with such art and the wisdom to grasp and value it. Under the revolution the classical arts occupy a dissimilar connotation and role in society, as they no longer serve a privileged stratum, but more exactly, the whole nation (Kronenberg 2005).

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