

SOCIAL FORCES AND THE POLITICS OF TRANSITION: LESSONS FROM THE CUBAN EXPERIENCE

Enrique S. Pumar

Rule by one has innumerable times been reproached for the contradiction which is supposed to lie in the purely quantitative disproportion between the oneness of the ruler and the many-ness of the ruled.

—Georg Simmel¹

Unlike most, if not all, of the research on the breakdown of authoritarian rule, the Cuban case affords us the unique opportunity to investigate the transactions between a daring opposition, the *desgaste* of authoritarian politics, and the contention of the island's future in the international arena as they unfold. Skeptics may view my summation of the regime's capacity to rule and the challenges it faces from the mounting opposition as grossly exaggerated. These critics insist that the anfractuoso recent history of the opposition abates their capacity to grasp media attention or the hearts and minds of the populace. Furthermore, the crisis of the early 1990s demonstrates the resilience of the ruling elite. As for international mindfulness, any discussion of the island's future is a de facto consequence of its hostility with the United States. Even the inevitable question of "transition to what?" begs one of Yogi Berra's most favorite predic-

ament, that it "is hard to make predictions, especially about the future."

This paper takes issue with this quizzical perspective and argues that actions by the opposition are precipitating the regime's demise. Moreover, the future of pluralism depends on how the various social forces opposing the regime relate to one another during this period of transition. Building on the intellectual foundations laid in new social movement and regime transformation theorizing, I will demonstrate how the framing tactics of *the disgruntled opposition*, coupled with the dire economic and social situation in the island, are eroding the social base of support for the regime.² The fact that some observers may overlook the weight of framing options reflects either the extent to which they analyze Cuba's contentious repertoires with, as Charles Tilly would say, "alien eyes," or their overestimation of the invincibility of authoritarian rulers.³

One of the most relevant lessons to be learned from the Cuban case is that peaceful defiance and avocation of *antisystem frames are among the most successful tactics during the process of transition in any authoritar-*

1. Georg Simmel, "Subordination Under an Individual," in Kurt H. Wolff, ed., *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York: Free Press, 1950), p. 201.

2. For a good illustration of this literature see, Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Lawrence Whitehead, eds., *Transition from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Enrique Laraña, Hank Johnston, and Joseph R. Gusfield, eds., *New Social Movements* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); and Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

3. Charles Tilly, "Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758-1834," in Mark Traugott, ed., *Repertoires and Cycles of Collective Action* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 15-42.

ian situation.⁴ Antisystem frames alter the rules of the game that govern state-society relations, corrode popular expectations about the efficacy of the government, and promote an increasing number of political opportunity structures by challenging existing norms of political toleration and demanding further change. In the final analysis, the delegitimizing effects of an alternative construction of reality proposed by challengers demonstrate the contradiction between the rhetorical claims of universal accountability, i.e., “esta revolución es del pueblo,” and the regime’s disdain for political toleration.

Analyzing the Cuban predicament from this perspective generates several consequential hypotheses for the study of regime change and the field of social mobilization in general:

1. Political mobilization under authoritarian rule is prompted by the erosion of political authority rather than by institutional openings. This means that disequilibrium of authoritarian rule is not necessarily marked by political liberalization from above.
2. The content of *sociation* among actors in a civil society is autonomous for it makes use of materials and symbols, i.e., mobilizing frames, of protest that reflect their interests and operations as conditioned by structural holes embedded in particular state-society relations.
3. Challengers to authoritarian regimes maneuver different repertoires of contentions; but with the passing of time, frame of meanings—of which antisystem frames are a part—tend to predominate.

4. The survival of an authoritarian ruler depends on inter-network ties among challengers and in particular strong ties between *disgruntled opposition and skeptical supporters* of the regime.

In developing my argument, I will first explain the notion of repertoires and frames and discuss their significance to the Cuban situation. Then, I will map the contending social sectors in Cuba’s political scene. I assess the capacity of different groups to take advantage of the increasing weakness of the regime and to outline their repertoire. This section also stresses that the absence of a meaningful coalition among the different sectors comprising the dissident political scene has guaranteed the survival of the regime thus far. Lastly, I will demonstrate how the cascading actions of internal opposition are weakening Castro’s rule. In short, the Cuban case offers some theoretical as well as practical challenge since the transition is not developing according to the prediction of observers. I will conclude by summarizing the implications of my argument.

REPERTOIRES, FRAMES, AND THE POLITICS OF OPPOSITION

Repertoires and frames are interchangeable strategies of popular protests. These tactics go a long way in explaining the behavior of the opposition during the transition from authoritarian rule. Yet, many political sociologists rarely focus their attention on the role of the opposition during these situations. Rather they concentrate on the repression/toleration calculus of the ruling elite⁵ or on the capacity of the regime to overcome structural crises.⁶ In the case of Cuba, both of these trends are dominant the literature.⁷

4. The notion of antisystem frame comes from Mario Diani, “Linking Mobilization Frames and Political Opportunities in Italy,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 61, No. 6 (December 1996), pp. 1056-57.

5. See Robert R. Kaufman, “Liberalization and Democratization in South America: Perspective from the 1970s,” in Guillermo O’Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, eds., *Transition from Authoritarian Rule: Comparative Perspectives* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

6. See John Sheahan, “Economic Policies and the Prospects for Successful Transition from Authoritarian Rule in Latin America,” in *ibid.*, pp. 154-164.

7. For an appeal to adopt a more “holistic understanding” of events in Cuba beyond the focus on economic decision, see Benigno E. Aguirre, “A Skeptical View of the Announced Demise of Castism,” in *Cuba in Transition—Volume 3* (Washington: Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy, 1993), p. 148.

A convenient definition of repertoires has been proposed by Tilly. For him, these are “the established ways in which pairs of actors make and receive claims bearing on each other’s interests.”⁸ Frames, on the other hand, are the cultural artifact and symbolic meaning manipulated by actors who desire to justify and dignify collective action and social mobilization.⁹ Simply put, repertoires encompass action-oriented tactics against the regime such as strikes, insurgencies, or urban sabotages. Frames depict the social construction of reality for the purpose of delegitimizing government institutions and practices.

This dichotomy begs three theoretical questions. First, when are those who disagree with authoritarianism more likely to employ repertoires or frames to articulate their grievances? Second, what prompts the choice between one tactic, the other, or both? Third, what are the effects of either strategy in the organizational game plan of detractors of the regime?

An analysis of the Cuban situation today offers some striking conclusions to these queries. A history of the opposition’s tactics to confront the Castro regime reveals a significant transformation in the course of action of the opposition. This point is illustrated below, by distinguishing between the first and second waves of opposition. In the early 1970s, the number of subversive strikes against the regime began to decrease substantially as the anti-system frame became the preferred mode of dissent among internal and external foes. Several factors contribute to this pattern. First, the longer authoritarian governments stay in power the more sophisticated their security and repressive apparatus become. With the accumulated experience of ruling, governing elite also learns the “tricks of the game.” With time, political leaders realized that the means to sustain are different from the ones they used to win control of the state. Second, since authoritarian regimes monopolizes the means

of communication, it can indoctrinate the populace on how opponents’ action-oriented repertoires are impeding their efforts on behalf of the people. Third, from a public relations point of view, it is not in the best interest of detractors to sustain a menacing campaign against a regime, especially if it is one they cannot win in the interim.

Contrary to the stimulating conclusions drawn by Diani’s study of the Northern League in Italy,¹⁰ the opportunity structure that leads to the predominance of anti-system frames among opposition groups derives from the current cost associated with exploiting the contradictions inherited by the regime’s attempts to institutionalize its rule and its efforts to quiet discursive dissent over time. Diani’s case study takes place in a democratic setting, hence concealing this insight. However, when the state remains autocratic after a process of institutionalization is in place, even some supporters question the efficacy of governing institutions, the prospects for political participation, or the absence of rules governing political succession. Another source of contradictions is the repetitive exercise of political repression despite constitutional norms guarantee the articulation of a popular political voice.

The choice between repertoires and frames is an area that remains unexplored by proponents of social movement theories. This is partly because many of the historical grounded studies of this form of social mobilization deal with a single movement or coalition.¹¹ Once we consider a situation with multiple groups, each with their choice of repertoire, frames, or both, the choice of strategies among them will have *contentious* consequences on the other, as well as on the incumbent. For this reason, the possibility of a network between two or more opposition groups will depend in part on the choice of tactics. Groups that embrace similar tactics will have a better chance

8. Charles Tilly, 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

9. This definition derives from the work of Sidney Tarrow, “Cycle of Collective Action: Between Moments of Madness and the Repertoire of Contentions,” in Traugott, ed., *Repertoires and Cycles of Collective Action*, p. 94.

10. Diani, *op. cit.*, pp. 1056-57.

11. For an illustration, see Mayer N. Zald and John D. McCarthy, eds., *Social Movements in an Organizational Society* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1987).

Table 1. Repertoires of Contention among Social Forces^a

	Skeptics	Outsiders		Disgruntled
		Duros	Blandos	
Cohesion	low	high	high	high
Competitiveness	high	low	low	high
Setting	internal	external	external	internal
Distinctiveness	low	high	high	high
Goals	reforms	change	reforms	change
Strategy (main)	gradual liberalization	breakdown	democratization	democratization

a. The criteria used to compare the different ideological positions are taken from Robert Dahl, "Patterns of Opposition," in Dahl, ed., *Political Opposition in Western Democracies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 332.

of collaborating with one another, for strategies are a reflection of political inclinations.

To summarize, two structural conditions seem to expedite the choice of strategy among opposition: the longevity of power of the governing elite and the apparent contradictions throughout the routine of governance by authoritarian governments. When multiple groups of dissenters compete to depose a regime, intra-organizational networks are more likely among clusters of actors with similar strategic outlooks and shared visions. The experience of the Cuban opposition shows that there is a great deal of coordination and contacts but no formal ties among various cliques.

MAPPING THE CUBAN POLITICAL STRUCTURE

Table 1 compares the social forces that are part of the political spectrum in Cuba today.¹² It focuses on groups that promote a forward-looking solution to the island's trouble, even if that solution is not democratic in the short term. One such sector are the *skeptical supporters*, which are not formally part of the opposition, but play an important role in the future either because of their access to political power, or for their determination to introduce reforms. The table leaves out any representation of hard-core supporters of the regime (i.e., the military, members of the in-

ternal security apparatus, or old cadres) who participated in the insurgency against Batista and generally have remained loyal to Castro since he grasped political power. These supporters owe allegiance to the ruler out of conviction, patronage, and their stake in the survival of Castroism.

The First Wave: The opposition to the Cuban revolution is perhaps one of the most vocal and indefatigable any Latin American regime has faced. Its history falls into two distinct phases. The first ten years after the revolution, the detractors of the regime manifested their repertoire in the form of what Traugott calls "barricades."¹³ This tactic of political opposition was never very successful, as the events in Escambray or the Bay of Pig fiascos remind us. On the one hand, the shortcomings of these operations could be attributed to early revolutionary euphoria or to popular faith on the official rhetoric promises of future panacea. On the other, these tactics tried to match the regime militarily. Authoritarian rules with firm control over the armed forces possess a comparative advantage to avert violent confrontations. At an ideological level, the regime also had a relatively easy time offsetting the appeal of the early opposition, since Castro managed to stigmatize early detractors as foreign-funded mercenaries backed by the tradi-

12. The tendency to group the opposition into factions follows Alfred Stepan's "On the Tasks of a Democratic Opposition," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Spring 1990), pp. 41-49.

13. See Mark Traugott, "Barricades as Repertoire," in Traugott, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-48.

tional elite wanting to procreate a tarnished republican policy of the past.¹⁴

Besides the intolerant ideology and exclusionary politics of the regime, three other reasons triggered the polarization between supporters and opponents of the Castro government. First, the timing of the coming to power of the revolutionary elite provided its rivals with the ammunition to claim that policies based on a Marxist-Leninist ideology were not warranted for the nation. By the end of the 1950s, through a combination of Cuba's integration into the world economy, its dependent development relation with the United States, and its populist policies backed by every government since at least 1940, afforded the island with the third-highest standard of living in the hemisphere. Even sympathetic observers of the revolution have noted the relative success of republican politicians.¹⁵

More importantly, Cuba's location and its proximity to Florida made it a transit hub for visitors and immigrants alike. This factor is politically relevant because it contributed to the deepening of transculturation and provided a sense of distorted regional identity.¹⁶ Popular culture and expectations were closer to the North than to the South or the rest of the Caribbean. Whatever the fate of the revolutionary initiatives, they were measured against the developmental experiences of the United States or nations throughout Western Europe.¹⁷ The cultural affinity with Western values forged popular suspicions about the intentions of the new allies of the revolutionary

regime during the Cold War, principally the Soviet Union and China.

A third triggering factor was the degree of intra-elite cleavages experienced during Castro's consolidation of power. During the early years of the revolution, Castro first formed a coalition government with moderates who had opposed Batista, only to maneuver them out of power soon thereafter. Fewer than a handful of his ministers came from other groups who had fought side by side with the 26th of July movement. Castro's alliance with the Cuban Communist Party and his embrace of socialism alienated several former associates.¹⁸ This political brinkmanship made strange bedfellows out of moderate Batista supporters and dismayed former revolutionaries. As Simmel predicted some time ago, "common enmity is one of the most powerful means for motivating a number of individuals of groups to cling together."¹⁹

In short, the first wave of dissent was dominated by a sector that could be called the opposition from abroad. As its name indicates, these opponents took refuge in the United States. They also recruited most of the sector's members from the upper and middle classes. Two of the accomplishments of this sector are that it has managed to survive until today and that it has changed its repertoire from violent confrontation to peaceful provocation. At present, its biggest leverage is the capacity to steer American foreign policy towards Cuba and its endowment to mobilize the Cuban exile community living in the United States. However, its influence is undermined by its unyielding image and its splits along ideological

14. A detailed history of this period can be found in Hugh Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 1214-1384.

15. A good overview of the political economy of the 1950s in Cuba can be found in James O'Connor, *The Origins of Socialism in Cuba* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970).

16. For a discussion of transcultural Cuban identity, see Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, *The Cuban Condition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

17. It is interesting to see that in a recent manifesto published by four opposition leaders within Cuba, they compare Cuba's standard of living prior to the revolution with those of Spain and Italy while making references to Western Europe. The document in question will be further discussed below. See Vladimiro Roca, Martha Beatriz Roque, René Gómez Manzano, and Felix A. Bonne Carcasés, *The Homeland Belongs to Us All* (Washington: Freedom House, 1997).

18. Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo, Húber Matos and Carlos Franqui are particular illustrations.

19. G. Simmel, "Subordination under an Individual," in Wolff, *op.cit.*, p. 192.

and generation lines. In general, three points of contention divide this group into *duros* and *blandos*: position with regard to the U.S. embargo; political aspirations in post-Castro politics; and the question of whether increased communication or alienation is the best mean by which to topple the regime.²⁰

The *duros* tend to support the embargo, the isolation of the regime, and follow a Machiavellian approach to the overturn of the revolution. The majority are professional and business leaders; few come from academia. This attitude is also popular among a generation of Castro's peers who believe that he betrayed the Cuban nation. Two celebrated institutions that represent the hard-liners are The Cuban American National Foundation and Of Human Rights, both of which are very effective lobbying Cuban-American organizations in Washington, D.C.²¹ While most of the public attention has been focused on the Cuban American National Foundation, Of Human Rights has tirelessly defended the political aspirations of individuals inside the island and the freedom of political prisoners. It also publicizes political essays and manuscripts authored by internal dissidents.

The *blandos* support democratization through a careful rapprochement with the regime. They have few illusions about the political role of exiles once Castro is gone. Another aim of this group is to deter a violent transition of power. They too support the political freedom of dissidents but believe that those would be better secured if the American government were to gradually relax its embargo on the island. For them, the embargo has lost its forte and may event be assisting Castro to blame the United States for his regime's missteps. According to this group, a policy of national reconciliation is what Castro fears most.²²

The soft-liners consist of baby boomers, young academics, and some professionals. They travel frequently to the island and therefore have numerous contacts with dissidents and skeptic supporters of the regime. The most vocal groups among the *blandos* are the Institute for Cuban Studies, the Cuban Committee for Democracy, and Cambio Cubano.²³

The Second Wave: Events in 1967-68 triggered new waves of dissent against the regime. Externally, these years marked the aftermath of the death of Che Guevara, the Prague uprising, the Breshnev Doctrine, and worldwide student protests. Inside Cuba, the crushing of the microfacción, Cuba's own version of the Cultural Revolution, and the beginning of a rapprochement between Castro and the Soviets alienated many former government supporters. Unlike the earlier opposition, this group evolved tediously and attracted intellectuals and professionals with previous close ties to the revolution.²⁴ Today, this sector, which I named the disgruntled opposition, comprises several groups that advocate a wide variety of concerns and grievances against the state, ranging from the environment to human rights issues. This faction derives some of its leverage from having organized an alternative press with frequent contacts with international media outlets and from its residency in the island.

Several structural factors have recently propelled the proliferation of groups within the disgruntled opposition. After the crisis of the early 1990s, the regime today has embarked on economic policies that try to imitate the Chinese development model whereby regulated foreign investment is sought without the state giving up the reigns. For skeptics supporters behind the push for more market deregulation, the vac-

20. A good synthesis of the various political position among Cubans today can be found in Manuel Ramos de Zayas, "Who's on First?: The Cuban Political Ballgame," *Apuntes Postmodernos*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Spring 1991).

21. For a critical overview of the Cuban American National Foundation and the *duros* see, Carla Anne Robbins, "Dateline Washington: Cuban-American Clout," *Foreign Policy*, No. 88 (Fall 1992), pp. 162-182

22. An example of this position is Marifeli Pérez-Stable, "Cuba en los albores del Siglo XXI," *Apuntes Postmodernos*, Vol. 6, No. 2 -Vol 7, No. 1 (Spring/Fall 1996), pp. 49-53.

23. See Stan Yarboro, "The New 'A' List," *South Florida* (July 1994).

24. Gustavo Arcos of the Cuban Committee for Human Rights and Elizardo Sánchez of the Comisión Cubana de Derechos Humanos y Reconciliación Nacional are good examples.

illation of the regime in implementing these reforms causes concerns and discontent. This group realizes that there are fundamental differences between Cuba and China in terms of market size and abundance of natural resources which makes inapplicable this development strategy. Critics of the regime have reached similar conclusions. Martha Beatriz Roque, a leading figure within the unofficial Cuban Institute of Independent Economists, has offered the following assessment:

El Gobierno toma una serie de medidas que pueden constituir un paliativo en el corto plazo, pero que en definitiva, no solucionarán la crisis, ya que todas ellas van encaminadas a mantener el centralismo estatal, la propiedad social, y la distribución de acuerdo a los principios socialistas.²⁵

Yet, the shared preoccupation has not produced enough grounds for coalition between these two cliques. The risks of joining the opposition encompass not just the chance of physical repression but in addition silencing and marginality from potent decision-making. In addition, there are sharp differences between these two factions as to whether reforms should come from within or outside ruling circles. Observers who have recently visited the island and contacted many of reformers report of a growing discontent within this group regarding the pace of economic reforms. This point of contention has made many of this reformers *skeptic supporters* of the regime.

Another significant factor promoting today's discontent in Cuba are the unintentional consequences of economic change. Tourism, for example, has created a market for prostitution and a secondary market for goods and services, two activities the revolution is alleged to have eradicated. There is also a small but burgeoning informal sector. With the legalization of self-employment, the government has also opened a Pandora's box, for these *trabajadores por cuenta pro-*

pia are providing the same services—but of better quality and more efficiently—than the state used to render. Hence, the state bureaucracy is becoming obsolete and in the eyes of many, rent-seeking and repression are perhaps the two state functions that seem to work effectively.

Finally, the need to replace old revolutionary cadres with younger, more professional leaders is creating new tensions between core supporters and the *skeptics*. Promotion of new leaders was prompted by attempts to provide appearances of democracy and to calm the evident disillusionment of the youth. However despite the benefits core supporters continue to enjoy after leaving office (including the appointment of many to head state-run corporations and joint ventures), this move is creating some friction that only the presence of the Castro brothers, particularly Fidel, seem to ease. Ironically, like the exiled community, these two brands of supporters evidently disagree about the extent of change necessary to resolve the current quagmire on the island.²⁶ So far, the regime has reluctantly sided with those pushing for reform, but last year Communist hard-liners managed to persuade Raúl to order an internal security investigation into the practices of the growing semi-autonomous “think tanks” where reformers tend to congregate, a sign of the precarious political atmosphere between these two factions.

One conclusion that can be drawn from this mapping of the political discourse regarding Cuba is that contrary to popular perception, emerging forces of dissent have the capacity to cluster together around a core set of values. However, unsustainable intra-organizational ties among the wide political spectrum are guaranteeing the longevity of the regime. Wide-ranging and growing dissident factions within civil society have demonstrated their willingness to cooperate and organize interlocks, as the case of *Concilio Cu-*

25. Martha Beatriz Roque, *La Crisis Económica en Cuba: Cuba Vista Desde Dentro*, Buró de Información del Movimiento Cubano de Derechos Humanos (1996).

26. For a penetrating discussion of the different factions within the governing elite see Juan O. Tamayo's analysis in *The Miami Herald* (September 4, 1997).

bano clearly shows.²⁷ The principal opposition groups also consort on the futility of action-oriented repertoires.

POLITICAL DECAY AND OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES

This section investigates the relationship between the frame activities of two networks within the disgruntled opposition and how they are contributing to the incumbent's political decay. The groups in question are Concilio Cubano and the more recently formed, Grupo de Trabajo de la Disidencia Interna para el Analisis de la Situación Socioeconómica Cubana (or the Cuban Dissidence Task Group). First, I briefly discuss the socioeconomic context in which dissidence activities take place.²⁸

The process of transition from the current authoritarian rule is already underway in Cuba. According to Schmitter, the breakdown of authoritarianism is characterized by "the launching of the process of dissolution of an authoritarian regime."²⁹ Although, there are no reliable public opinion polls on the island that could confirm this trend, such indicators as the massive number of sympathizers who defect or emigrate, the innumerable calls for unity by the ruling elite, the defiance of the opposition, and the gradual experimentation with market-oriented economic reforms substantiate this assertion. In one respect, the pattern of political change in Cuba today, however, is distinct from the one that unfolded throughout the rest of Latin America in the late 1980s. Cuba's transition is marked by political decay rather than liberalization.³⁰

In practical terms, the implication of this situation is that the regime is arbitrarily choosing when, how, and how much to change while it desperately searches for a way out of the current economic conundrum. In addition, it has decided to arbitrarily champion its own brand of socialism rather than embark on a political opening. Still, the government has not found a solution to the persistent challenges it faces from the growing organized opposition in the island. The recent call to abstain in the next voting by the disgruntled opposition could potentially turn the current economic crisis into one of governance. In short, the sociopolitical environment in Cuba for the last eight years has been one of diminishing expectations, popular anger, and an ongoing crisis.³¹

Two networks that have taken advantage of this situation are Concilio Cubano and the Cuban Dissidence Task Group. Concilio is an umbrella organization founded in October 1995 with the purpose of representing the diverse opposition groups throughout the island. Today, it encompasses 101 organizations with critical perspectives on every political contending issue. One of its most audacious moves was to send a letter to Fidel Castro asking for permission to hold a peaceful national assembly.³² That event was scheduled for February 24, 1996 but the meeting never took place because the regime used the downing of the Hermanos al Rescate's plane to suspend this meeting and jail the organizers.

The most significant defiance Concilio brings to politics is the exposition of official double standards with regards to political representation and the rules

27. One of the early documented sources of this cooperation among diverging groups inside Cuba can be found in Christopher Kean, *Diez Días en Cuba* (Washington: Of Human Rights, 1992).

28. A more thorough investigation of these events and their effects can be found in any of the annual ASCE publications, *Cuba in Transition*.

29. See Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 6.

30. The concept of political decay derives from Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 86.

31. For the first time in three decades, frustrations are turning into sabotage. Raúl Rivero, a journalist with the independent agency Cuba Press, recently told journalists in Miami that since the explosions in the hotel Capri and Nacional, there are rumors of other bombs throughout the country and that in the city of Havana "hay muchos policías en todos los lugares y también un clima de tensión," *El Nuevo Herald* (July 23, 1997), p. 6A.

32. This letter and other documents of the *Concilio* are available in the World Wide Web at www.fiu.edu/~fcf.

of the game governing political assembly.³³ In its letter to Castro, the organization defends its right to hold the aborted meeting on the basis of Article 54 of the Cuban Constitution and on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of which Cuba is a signatory. Furthermore, it refers to Jose Martí to endorse its call for freedom of expression and describes itself as an association of different groups representing divergent criteria and issues, alluding to the intransigence of the Cuban Communist Party.

This sends a very clever message for delegitimization. It supports Concilio's right to freedom of assembly on the same premises than the ruling party and confronts the regime on its own terms. Moreover, it denies any opportunities by officials to claim that this organization is subversive. Finally, by appealing to constitutional grounds and cultural icons like Martí, it opens a window of opportunity for others to follow the same course of action and escalate their demands.

Abroad, the continued arrests, detentions, and contempt for unofficial political mobilization has damaged relations with international investors, donors, and political associates. Concilio has placed the ruling party in the shameful position of defending repression against peaceful and conciliatory efforts behind coexistence and change. In the public sphere, the regime symbolizes conservatism while Concilio has emerged as a progressive reformer.

A more recent network of dissidents challenging the legitimacy of the governing elite is the *Cuban Dissident Task Force* organized by Vladimiro Roca, Martha Beatriz Roque, René Gómez Manzano, and Felix A. Bonne Carcassés to draft a document entitled *The Homeland Belongs to Us All* (or *Homeland* hereafter). This document was published on June 27, 1997 and, like the case of Concilio, shortly after publication the four leaders were incarcerated.³⁴ The purpose of the manuscript is to present a counterhegemonic interpretation of the Cuban reality as discussed in "The

Party of Unity, Democracy and the Human Rights We Defend," a report drafted by the Cuban Communist Party as a working platform for its upcoming Fifth Congress.

The infrastructure laid out in *Homeland* is a message of unity, tolerance, and reconciliation. As James C. Scott demonstrates in his recent book *Domination and the Art of Resistance*, hidden meanings are the infrapolitics of subordinate political actors.³⁵ By making their manifesto public, Roca, Roque, and their associates seem to be inviting the Cuban nation to an open political dialogue transcending ideological lines. As the title clearly states, this document departs from the assumption that there is only one homeland regardless of ideology. This discourse is a clear contradiction of the long official policy in Cuba of deporting its vocal opponents and encouraging popular *actos de repudio* against anyone who does not publicly patronize the state. In addition, the fact that it was presented to the public at all demonstrates the courage of these dissidents. The timing of this publication is also significant, for it was made public at about the same time the remains of Che Guevara were scheduled to return to the island. In effect, the publication of *Homeland* and subsequent detentions of dissidents seem to cast a shadow on this event and on the celebration the Communist Youth Festival currently underway in Havana.

Homeland deconstructs the prevalent political reality in Cuba by asserting five discursive claims challenging the elite rhetoric. These are: First, the Cuban government distorts the meaning of nation by narrowing the space for political dissent and stigmatizing their opponents as enemies or wreckers of the revolutionary social well-being. Second, the continuous references to certain historical events in order to legitimize the revolutionary process reflects an intentional mobilization of bias which obscures the historical reality. Third, the argument that the unity of the

33. Sidney Tarrow has asserted: "Collective action embodies claims in dramatic ways that show others the way." See his *Power in Movement* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 97.

34. According to *El Nuevo Herald* of July 30, 1997, the police has arrested more than 50 dissidents and suspects.

35. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Art of Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), especially pp. 183-201.

political elite leads to national unity makes for a circular argument. The imposition of a single party leads to errors of judgment in public policy and fosters an image of associating the regime with autocratic leaders worldwide. Fourth, the main objective of the state is not to serve the populace but to dominate. Fifth, the government's economic policies impose limitations on the people it is supposed to serve resulting on inefficiency.

More importantly, the antisystem frame discussed in *Homeland* also undermines official arguments about the revolution being under siege since it calls attention to the ruling dogmatism and wavering support for state policies. They also bluntly associate Castro's rule with some of the most dictatorial governments of this century by contending: "The Cuban Communist Party, in imposing a single party system, places itself in the unenviable company of Stalin, Mussolini, Hitler, Franco, Trujillo, Pol Pot and Sadam Hussein, among others."³⁶

Antisystem frames such as those discussed in this paper deepen the ongoing political decay in Cuba in several ways. As the government attempts to depict the crisis of the island in technical, economic terms, dissidents continue to invalidate this depiction by introducing a political dimension. Discussion of the contradictions between rhetoric and practices moves the state to take actions that produced embarrassing results and violate norms of democratic behavior. On the other hand, if the states chooses to overlook or tolerate criticism from civil society, it may be perceived as weakening thus further escalating demands

from below. Finally, dissident groups have contributed to the transparency of the regime substantiating recurrent human rights violations and other accounts of repression.

CONCLUSION

As the discussion in this paper demonstrates, the opposition to the Castro regime has become more sophisticated and, in many respects, effective with the passing of time. Under adverse and dangerous circumstances, the internal opposition has highlighted the cleavages between rhetoric and official conduct. By making their claims in the public sphere, they have also challenged the regime to eliminate or else tolerate escalating demands from other dissident groups. Today, the provisions advocated by dissidents have become the performance criteria the international community employs to measure the accountability of the Castro regime. On its part, the government has been left with no choice but to admit the arrest of dissidents and tacitly concede the weight of the opposition.³⁷

In sum, the Cuban case offers two insightful conclusions for the study of regime change. First, antisystem frames are effective means to undermine the legitimacy of authoritarian regimes and open opportunities for further political actions. The reluctance to admit open dissent seems to have the opposite effect. Second, perhaps one of the reasons for the duration of authoritarian regimes is the unsustainable cross sectional ties among its adversaries and skeptic supporters.

36. *Homeland*, p. 3.

37. See "Cuba admite arresto de opositores," *El Nuevo Herald* (July 18, 1997).