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**“Si tú tienes divisas, tienes el mundo abierto”
(If you have foreign currency, the world is yours), Paulo 43 years
Legal and Illegal Ways of Securing a Livelihood in Havana, Cuba**

Angelica Wehrli

Abstract

The citation from Paulo – “if you have foreign currency, the world is yours” – makes allowance for the economic duality which has been a characteristic of life in Cuba for more than a decade. Along with his life history, combinations of legal and illegal activities as well as ideological convictions ranging from religious to materialistic ones will be highlighted. By means of his example, insights into an individual life and a contextualisation thereof in the realm of socio economic changes of the Cuban society will be provided.

Thereafter, on the basis of both my research results and a theoretical elaboration of the concept of duality, I will enquire if the economic duality leads to a dual society or if new challenges are emerging for the Cuban society.

Introduction

The aim of my paper is to highlight ways of securing one's livelihood in contemporary Havana, Cuba. The citation from Paulo – “if you have foreign currency, the world is yours”¹ – makes allowance for the economic duality which has been a characteristic of life in Cuba for more than a decade.

In this paper I will firstly describe the actual economic situation in Cuba by sketching out “milestones” which foster the understanding of the actual socio-economic situation. Relying on theoretical reflections originally expressed in the theory of modernisation I will thereafter elaborate the concept of duality, and exemplify how duality manifests itself in today's Cuba. The example of Paulo will provide insight into the individual life and thus serves as an example for the sometimes conflicting ways of living in Havana of the 21st century.

The results I present in this paper are based upon extensive field research which I conducted in Havana, Cuba during various field researches in the time span of 2000 until 2006.²

Finally, I will investigate if the duality of the currency can be taken as an indicator of a division within the society itself. By this approach it will become evident if the binary model is able to understand the complexity of the Cuban society in these days.

From the “Special Period in Peace Time” to the Legalisation of the US-Dollar

Since the socialist character of the revolution was declared by the “*máximo líder*” in 1961, the Cuban economy was no longer capitalist, and new forms of politics were emergent (Pérez-Stable 1993: 80). This involvement resulted in favourable trading conditions for Cuba which were not regulated by world market terms but by special contracts between the Soviet bloc countries and Cuba, and as Pastor points out “on a rubble ‘debt-financing’ mechanism” (Pastor 1996: 219). The near-collapse of the former Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc in 1989 was thus devastating for Cuba, and led to the proclamation of the “special period in peace time” by Fidel Castro in 1991.

Accurate information on the “special period in peace time”, and socio-economic details can be found in (e.g. Bähr and Widderich (ed.) 2000; Burchardt 1999 and 2001; Carranza-Valdés

1996; Eckstein 2003; Hamilton 1992: 36-53; Pastor 1996; Pérez-López and Travieso-Díaz (ed.) 1998; Schulze 1993: 90-97, Zeuske 2000: 245-294; <www.one.cu>).

In order not to exceed the limits of this paper I refer to Fernandez whose statement summarizes the severity of the circumstances:

“With a 73 percent drop in imports (in 1992) and a particularly sharp cut in Soviet oil shipments, the country was paralyzed” (Fernandez 1999: 81).

The consequences of the austerity affected both the Cuban economy as well as the Cuban population. Shortage took various forms; pressure on Cuban individuals was felt as a lack of food, clothes, numerous sorts of materials, and electricity. In 1990 drastic measures were imposed to ration petroleum. Daily gas and fuel deliveries were to be reduced by 50% in the state sector and by 30% in the private sector (Schulze 1993: 90).

Along with this prevalent insufficiency the black market³ started to gain weight. Estimations about the volume involved in the black market are almost by its very nature differing, therefore not leading to one coherent result. As one example I refer to Carranza Valdés estimations after which the accumulated backlog of currency was around 6.125 billion Pesos by the end of 1991 (1996: 23). According to Carranza Valdés only 53% thereof were deposited on bank accounts, making it clear that the backlog was not equally concentrated among the population but rather among few people, most probably speculators of the black market. This argument gains weight if we take into consideration that 70% of the depositors had less than 200 Pesos on their account (equivalent to around 10 US\$), and only 30% had larger sums of money (1996: 23). As a consequence the money circulating abroad was much higher.

From the point of view of a social anthropologist, participant observations can lead to promising insights about basic needs of the population, about relevant prices, and also about strategies in order to slip through official laws. Hence, it is easily traceable that someone who is working within the sphere of illegality prefers to transform his saving into another type of wealth (for example owning gold or jewels like Paulo is an indication that they are doing well) rather than to deposit them in bank accounts. The underlying motive thus consists in avoiding the attention of the government who would doubtlessly wonder how such a high income can be achieved.

Nevertheless, the authorities were well aware of the importance of the informal and black markets, and tried to bring “dollars” back into the official economy; as a consequence, a policy change was imminent.

“Capital Yes, Capitalism No”

In an attempt to capture “dollars” which circulated in the black market economy, and therefore were “lost capital” for the government, the possession of “dollars” by islanders was decriminalized in the mid-1993.

Along with the liberalisation of “dollars” went the establishing of “‘dollar’ stores”, named “*shoppings*” by the locals, and unlike in the past – where those stores were exclusively accessible for diplomats, foreigners, and like my research results make evident, for persons of the Cuban nomenclature – everyone who possessed “dollars” was allowed to purchase items.

In the same line of policy the free markets for agricultural products reopened in 1994, after having been shut down six years earlier by Fidel Castro himself. Another measure lays in the allowance of self-employment and private family-based service work which was regulated in the Fourth Party Congress in 1991 (Eckstein 2003: 618), thus leading to the issuing of licenses, and a new set of job possibilities which stepped out of the former illegality.

Even with those changes it is important to note that not everyone who applies for an official licence in order to work in the private sector receives one. My data makes evident that until these days, the receipt of a licence (apart from money, and a well elaborated network of influential persons) depends on the location, and on the frequency of already existing private businesses. Hence, the selection criteria neither seem to be consistent over time – in some years it was easier to receive a license than in others – nor transparent. As a consequence more persons seek a license than actually receive one; a fact which leads to a rather high number of persons who work illegally or whose work borders on legality.

Pastor comes to the conclusion that small businesses are suppressed (1996: 229). An unsurprising fact as this is consistent with Cuban policy which – unlike the one in Vietnam for example – intends not to promote private enterprises or family household businesses. All those happenings can be summarized by Fidel Castro’s public statement “capital yes, capitalism no” (Eckstein 2003: 612).

I consider the small steps granted by the Cuban government towards private self-employment as a valve to release pressure inside the balloon. Regardless of being important measures which allow for an amelioration of the situation for just a few, the revolutionary vision of the nominal equality among all citizens however since then has been undone. As a consequence the society is characterized by an economic duality which leads to a division within society.

Duality and Beyond

With the aim to deepen the understanding of duality I refer to the discussion in the realm of theories of modernisation.⁴ The concept of duality was first used by Julius Boeke 1978 (1953) an economist who conducted research in Java and formulated his central theses in “Economics and Economic Policy of Dual Societies as Exemplified by Indonesia”. Some of his concepts prove to be very useful in order to understand, and theoretically set out, the frame for duality.

Boeke describes that the economic development in Indonesia is uneven because the local population is confronted with the imported capitalist system which leads to a dichotomy. Whereas modern institutions and a market economy are developed in the cities, traditional structures and the ongoing use of subsistence economy remain predominant in the rural area.

If we compare Boeke’s statement with the situation in Havana some parallels are obvious: first, the Cuban population prior to the socialist breakdown in 1989 was – apart from the few exceptions mentioned above – secluded from products reflecting a market economy. This led thus to a formal equality as far as basic needs were concerned. Second, the population – at least officially and prior to the legislation of the US-dollar – was excluded from the foreign currency. Since 1993 however, a dichotomy has existed between those who have access to the foreign currency, and those who are excluded from it.

Boeke continues to describe that the traditional sector, in his example corresponding to the agrarian one of the rural economy, has its own socio-cultural elements which are impeding modern patterns, thus forming an obstacle against notions of profit maximising. According to

Boeke's thesis a gap is thus evolving between the rural and the urban sector leading to apathy and the maintaining of "feudal" structures.

Compared to the situation in Cuba, duality is equally observable although rather in the economic sector than between rural and urban areas. Within Cuba differences of the latter are of relevance, but they do not serve as an example to illustrate duality in the Boeke's sense because both sectors are influenced by "dollars" (e.g. remittances, tourism).

Seen from a general point of view one could consider the binary model of coinciding with the situation in contemporary Cuba: On the one hand a "traditional" sector can be made out and finds its parallel in the national currency, the Peso Cubano; on the other hand the "modern" sector characterised by the "dollar" is apparent.

Taking the theory of modernisation as a starting point I will enquire if the duality of the currency is finding its equivalent in a social one, hence if a rigid division exists between those persons who have access to the modern world (e.g. to the "*shoppings*"), and those who are excluded therefrom.

Paulo – From an Electrician to a Babalawo

Paulo⁵ was born in 1964, five years after the onset of the Cuban revolution and was raised by his parents who lived in Havana and earned hardly enough to survive. He explains in detail the poor background of his family and, although the parents' financial situation improved with the onset of the revolution, Paulo's childhood was still marked by economic hardship. At the beginning of the revolution his parents were enthusiastic about the intended changes within society, and – as Paulo continues, sighing – compared with his parents' childhood and adolescence his own was a privileged one. Paulo's subjective impression of an increase in his parents' living standard can well be documented for example by relying on Brundenius, who states:

“At least 60 percent of the labour force benefited from the reforms and the real average wage for the bottom 40 percent probably doubled” (1981: 149).

Despite some improvements in the economy, the family suffered a tragedy when Paulo's mother died before he reached the age of ten. A decade later, at the beginning of the 1980s, Paulo's father emigrated to the United States. After having finished his school education of nine years and his apprenticeship to a technical electrician two years later, Paulo decided to quit his job after six months of practical experience:

“Después viví como decimos nosotros ‘la virtud de evoluciones’, porque tenía ciertas relaciones, que me facilitaban ciertas cosas.”⁶

Paulo worked for about ten years exclusively in illegal activities: ranging from selling rum, clothes, motorbikes, and even to cars. It was the period of the “diplomat stores”, hence the black market was flourishing and Paulo was one of the profiteers. As Paulo – like most of the Cubans who do not form part of the nomenclature – was not allowed to enter the “diplomat stores” one of his numerous strategies consisted in sending his former study colleagues from Mozambique, Angola and Ethiopia to the shops in order to buy products which were on Paulo's “shopping list“. Later on, and after the exchange of a certain percentage to his colleagues, he sold everything on the black market which, thanks to his wide network, allowed him to live “well”. Paulo contentedly smiles, and points out that his living standard compared with the disastrous situation at the beginning of the “special period” was even excellent because his family unlike others did not have to suffer from hunger.

In 1995 Paulo's life was meant to change as he fulfilled his personal dream, and thus became initiated into *Santería*.⁷ During one of the ceremonies he was told that his faith consisted in studying to become an *ifá-priest*, a *Babalawo*. Paulo was not surprised by this notice because he had been told the same as a child by persons who foretold his future.

Subsequently Paulo started to save as much money as possibly in order to undertake the expensive ceremony, and finally he became a *Babalawo*.⁸ A few years later – Paulo's high income shortened the generally long period which is used for preparations and the collecting of money – he was initiated into *ifá*. Since then he exclusively lives – as he points out – for religion. His daily life is now dedicated to further studies in the realm of *ifá*, to consult his clients, and to exercise ceremonies. The exclusive reliance upon his job as a *Babalawo* is useful on the one hand and important on the other hand; important because the work of a *Babalawo*

needs a lot of knowledge as the *ifá*-system is extremely elaborated, and useful for his “spiritual” and economic development.

Paulo’s Network and Income

Paulo’s clientele is widespread; from different socioeconomic fields, and from inside and outside Cuba. Generally his “godchildren” contact him frequently in order to receive an advice or to perform a ceremony. A simple consultation in contrary to a ceremony has no fixed price and therefore the money given to Paulo depends upon the will of the consulted. This explains why satisfied persons tend to be more generous and sometimes offer him presents ranging from food, to daily items like house equipments and clothes.

Although Paulo no longer engages in activities which doubtlessly have to be situated in the realm of illegality, his job as a *Babalawo* needs – seen from an official point of view – to be classified as an illegal one. If he had an official licence his work as a *Babalawo* would be legal.⁹ Apart from being extremely difficult to achieve because of “elaborated bureaucratic processes” Paulo however does not consider it as being something important. Despite numerous checks by police forces in the streets of Havana who inspect the identity card in order to find out if someone is working in a legal job, Paulo never faced noteworthy problems. This rather surprising fact can possibly be explained because Paulo like all *Babalawo*’s, wears a yellow-green *ildé* (*a bracelet*) on his left wrist, a symbol which is self-evident for his profession in the context of Havana and thus demands respect. Even – as I myself observed – from people who state not to be religious or on behalf of authorities. Not without pride Paulo even starts to name the responsible chefs of the nearby “*cuadras*” (“*blocks*”), of policemen, and even of party members. According to him all of them know about his job performed without an official license but no one would even think about causing problems for him. Paulo is sure that this depends upon his disposition as a sincere and competent, religious person, and his ability to provide helpful advice to his customers. It is not surprising sector chiefs and party members are to be found among his clients, too.

During some days he consults various persons, on others he performs ceremonies for his clients, and on yet others he assists together with other *Babalawo*’s in important ceremonies (for example the initiation of a new *Babalawo* or someone into *Santería*). Those irregular activities lead to his monthly income which for some months is “extremely high”, and

amounts for more than 700 Peso “dollars” whilst in other months “it is around 300, 200 or only 20 “dollars” a month.”

As an average salary he calculates his small jobs for ceremonies which amount at least to 50 Peso Cubano daily and lead to an income of 1500 Peso Cubano per month (around 60 “dollars”). Additionally around 20 to 40 “dollars” are earned through consultations. Hence, his average income – which also corresponds to the household income because his wife exclusively works as a housewife – ranges from 80 to 100 “dollars” a month. Additionally, and like in numerous other households, the family income is upgraded every now and then by remittances sent by Paulo’s father.

The importance of remittances for both the Cuban population and, hence, the countries’ economy is (unlike the *amount* of remittances) not questioned. Seen in general Cuban statistics claim the remittances to be lower than statistics from outside Cuba do, thus pointing to the ideological meaning involved; e.g. types of dependency (for a discussion thereof see Pérez-López and Díaz-Briquets 2005, or Burchardt’s estimation of 800 million US\$ in 1999 (1999: 33).

If we assume that Paulo would have continued to work as a technical electrician for the government his salary amounted in 2002 to 319 and, in 2006, to 398 Peso Cubano, equivalent to 12 and 15 “dollars”, respectively (<http://www.one.cu/anuariopdf2005/capitulo6/VI.4.pdf>). His job as a successful *Babalawo* on the contrary leads to earnings which are around six to ten times higher. Although his financial situation is better situated than those of persons who work in an official job – the average salary in 2002 was 261 Peso Cubano (around ten “dollars”) – he judges his situation as a difficult one.

“Si tú tienes divisas, tienes el mundo abierto”¹⁰

Paulo points to his main problem: the fact that the “dollar” is extremely important in order to buy daily items. His salary allows him and his family to buy products in the so called “*shoppings*”. Apart from “luxury products” which are agreeable for daily life but not indispensable, numerous undeniably are: oil, some kinds of hygienic products (soap, shampoo, toilet paper, sanitary towels or household cleaning agents), clothes, shoes etc. Thanks to his rather

high income he has the opportunity to both earn “dollars” or – if this is not the case – to exchange some of his earnings from the national into “dollars”, either on the street or in one of the official exchange bureaus the “*Cadecas*” (*Casas de Cambio*).

During the last years some alimentary products of the “*shoppings*” became gradually accessible in the national currency. In my last field research in 2006 I observed that almost all products are also available in the national currency although to the equivalent “dollar” price; which is equally difficult for a person who is earning an average governmental salary without a bonus.

Fresh products like fruits, vegetables or meat can also be purchased in the agricultural markets where prices are generally lower than the ones in the “*shoppings*”. Nevertheless, the prices in Peso Cubano are comparatively high, and for those who need to rely on the official income without an additional one, regular shopping in order to supply daily needs is impossible. One bottle of oil for example amounts for one fifth of an average monthly salary and costs around two “dollars”.

The food provided by the *libreta* (a rationing system of food distribution that has existed in Cuba since 1962) is neither sufficient for Paulo’s family, nor does the quality meeting their needs and expectations (for an analysis of the *libretas*’ importance for the Cuban population see Merkle 2000: 25-48). His children for example suffer from allergies connected to the consumption of some of these products – a phenomenon which according to my research data is not unusual and leads to the replacement of some products, for example of the “*pica-dillo de soya*” (*soya minced meat*).

Along with the expansion of tourism some parts within the city like restaurants, bars, hotels, and entry to some concerts of popular Cuban bands are offered exclusively in “dollars”. Another division is due to remittances which contribute to further differences within society. Hence, Paulo’s statement “if you have foreign currency the world is yours” can well be understood with respect to spheres within society which are linked not only with different professions but also by a restriction of access to realms within society.

The case of Paulo is by no means outstanding, but rather an indication for numerous others. Or as Mesa-Lago notes, possibilities for earning “dollars” in tourism and the black market results in the fact that:

[...] “Waitress, taxi drivers, and informal plumbers or carpenters are living much better than intellectuals, university professors, engineers, teachers, artists, military officers, middle-class cadres and surgeons” (1994: 30).

Since Paulo left his official job as a technical electrician he has never doubted his choice on how he earns his income. Despite being dedicated to the spiritual and religious aspects of life he considers his ideological conviction as a very materialistic one. Nevertheless, he vividly tells about his wife’s luck to “*sacar el bombó*” (“*hit the jackpot*”): She played with the hope to emigrate to the United States. Even during the moment of conducting the interview, weeks after his wife told him the news, his voice is marked by excitement and he asks rhetorically if I could understand how difficult the decision was: on the one hand he came to know his destiny to live his last decades of life outside Cuba as a *Babalawo* when he was a child and met the fortune teller, on the other hand he did not expect his emigration to happen so soon.

As Paulo told me, despite his wife’s joy and the unquestionable close change in his life he did not celebrate like most of the Cubans who participate in this lottery do. Moreover, he tried as quickly as possible to sell all sort of material goods like his car and furniture which he can’t use abroad. The motivation to emigrate – although some elements like in a self-fulfilling prophecy can be of relevance – is his conviction to considerably improve his economic situation, once he lives in the United States. After the interview was finished he nevertheless organized a *toqué* (a religious ceremony where initiated men play on “*batá drums*”) for his “saints” but of course numerous people joined to say farewell to him and his family before they left the next day.

In the local parlance of Havana Paulo’s way of securing his livelihood has to be situated in the realm of the term “*la lucha*”, literally translated (“*the fight*”). Fighting one’s way through society is a euphemism for all different kinds of activities which mean that someone is trying to make his living in an independent and unofficial way. *La lucha* is connotated by referring to a heroic aspect of self realisation despite risks and dangers. In this way (and well-known for people who are familiar with Cuba) the term *jineteando*¹¹ is also employed, although lacking the courageous aspect. Both in the scientific literature and in the local language use the term *jinetero/a* is well known as a synonym for prostitution. Interestingly my research results from people within and outside of this realm confirm that *jineteando* can but

doesn't have to include a sexual subtext. Although mostly used in connection with tourism, thus involving a "business-relationship" between foreigners and Cubans, the term *jineteando* is also used between Cubans themselves if they refer to someone who is engaging in illegal activities.

Paulo's example demonstrates the floating between both the judging of legal and illegal activities and the negotiating process of daily life. These circumstances lead to a certain amount of freedom which to quite a high degree depends on the person who is *jineteando*. By no means is the fact that Paulo is involved in religious activities connected with *jineteando*; his example is used in order to show how a person within two decades has performed legal, semi-legal, and illegal activities. Paulo's maxim thus consists in optimizing his "living" in order "that the world is his".

Duality Re-Thought

If we analyse the complexity of the socio-economic situation in today's Cuba it becomes obvious that there is a distinction between the "traditional" sector characterised by jobs and professions which are situated in the realm of the national currency (the Peso Cubano); and between the "modern" sector which provides access to "dollars", for example in the realm of tourism, and hence leads to a new set of possibilities.

The division between the "traditional" (Peso Cubano) and the "modern" ("dollar") sector corresponds to the obvious realm within society. But reality is far more complex if we take into consideration elements of legality and illegality on the one hand, and remittances on the other hand. Both elements transcend the binary categories because neither are legality and illegality exclusively related to the "traditional" or the "modern" sector, nor is the receipt of remittances (hence "dollars" equivalent to the "modern" sector) an illegal activity.

The way out is offered by the intermediate sphere, in which people try to make their living by negotiating their own business, thus transgressing the borders of society which leads to a redefinition of realms within the society, and eventually of the society itself.

Let me illustrate these thoughts through concrete examples:

The intermediate sphere – in the case of Cuba – corresponds to the informal sector where legal and illegal activities can be located, *and* also to the legal one within the society itself.

As the Cuban government for example became aware of the growing significance of the informal sector some employees received a bonus in addition to their monthly salary in the national currency.¹² This bonus, although a relatively small amount either in “dollars” (in general around ten to twenty per month) or in form of “*jabas*” (bags which contain “*shopping*” products mainly the most wanted e.g. oil and hygienic products), makes a significant difference compared to the national salary by at least doubling the former.

For this reason it is apparent that the government knows about the scarce living conditions of those citizens who need to depend exclusively on their official salary.¹³ If we look at the government sponsored forms of bonus it reflects a way of coping with duality, and thereby is an attempt to motivate people to refrain from engaging in the informal sector. Nevertheless, the core problem remains because not all people have access to the same goods. And far from everyone is in a domain where a bonus can be gained; therefore some try out other ways.

My research results prove clearly the relevance of the informal market and, although not of equal importance for all Cubans, I estimate almost everyone to be involved by some means or another. These findings are confirmed both from other scholars as well as from within the Cuban society.

Burchardt for example states:

“Los economistas cubanos murmuran en los pasillos que desde hace tiempo la mayor parte de las actividades económicas del país no son absorbidas por el Estado sino por el mercado negro”¹⁴ (Burchardt 1999: 35).

Another comparison offers a Cuban journal:

“[...] según cifras oficiales el 20% de los gastos en alimentos del cubano en los últimos años se hace en el mercado negro o informal, alimentos que provienen del robo o desvío de recursos de distintos sectores, mayoritariamente del Estado [...]”¹⁵ [Revista *Bohemia*, 4 diciembre 1998, No. 25, p. B35].

The existence of the black market thus seems unquestionable. Another common practice of people who still engage in official jobs consists in theft of the means of production (ranging from the baker who offsets flour in order to bake some extra bread and to sell it independently, to university professors who retail basic books at higher prices or exclusively against “dollars”).

Conclusion

In order to conclude I will provide answers to the questions posed at the beginning of this paper.

The example of Paulo illustrates that economic hardship led to his choice to abandon the official and legal position as a technical electrician for the sake of an individual profit-maximising activity. His earnings, first through “his gift of negotiating” as a profiteer in the black market economy and later as an *ifá*-priest, have freed him from problems in the economic sense, and hence “the world became his”.

Paulo exemplifies how ways are found in order to move from one “world” to the other. Furthermore, combinations of legal and illegal activities which he engaged in during different periods of life, point to the floating of these realms. His life style is characterized by various ideologies which neither exclude nor contradict each other – seen from Paulo’s perspective. He rather maintains his individual choice without suffering disadvantages since he manages to uphold his networks: on the one hand his religious network of Cubans and foreigners, and on the other hand with Cuban officials.

Derived from my analysis the dual currency (the Peso Cubano and the “dollar”) is *not* leading to a dual society as suggested by the theory of modernisation with respect to a division between the “traditional” (Peso Cubano) and the “modern” (“dollar”) sector would suggest.

Thus, the society of today’s Havana is not marked by a simple duality but rather by intermediate spheres. Activities in the intermediate sphere transgress the borders of society as exemplified by the economic with remittances, the awarding of bonus, and the merging of both legal and illegal activities; or in the social with a shift in judging legal and illegal activities. As a consequence some realms within society are already redefined and different lifestyles which go along with corresponding ideological convictions are being promoted.

Consequently, the Cuban society is neither a purely socialist society nor has the impact of the “dollar” led to a simple class society between those who have access to “dollars” and those who are deprived thereof. The results gained from my field research rather indicate a growing diversity among citizens: some realms both in the economic and ideological spheres are drifting apart, thus bearing separate ideals, values and roles. Consequences thereof on the society’s level most likely lead to one of the biggest challenges for the Cuban revolution.

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Notes

¹ In 1993 the Cuban government legalised the US dollar as a means of payment. Until 2004 the US dollar existed as a method of payment besides the Peso Cubano (the national currency) and the Peso Convertible (the domestic equivalent to the US dollar) which allows (like the US dollar) the purchase of higher quality goods and also serves as a means of payment for tourists. Since 2004 the Peso Cubano, the Peso Convertible and, in some tourist centres, the Euro remain means of payment. In order to simplify this monetary complexity I will consistently use “dollar” for both the Peso Convertible and the former existing US dollar. This is in line with the locals’ language usage because “dollar” is used for both the US dollar and the Peso Convertible. (Recently, “*Chavitos*” has also started to be used by locals for Peso Convertibles but for the sake of coherence I will not use it throughout this article).

² The data material collected during this time span forms the basis of my PhD thesis which is still in progress. First results however are highlighted in this paper.

³ Following the Cuban *Revista Bohemia* I will use informal market and black market synonymously. The scientific discourse on the informal sector that started in the 1970s has not led to a consistent definition (see Widderich and Wehrhan 2000: 133 ff.). The same has to be said about characteristics of the informal sector as, for example in the opinion of Elwert et. al., neither illegality nor illegitimacy are characteristic for the informal sector (Elwert et. al. 1983: 282, quot. in: Widderich and Wehrhan 2000: 14).

⁴ Although the theories of modernisation have been criticised among other things for their oversimplified division between “tradition” and “modernity”, they serve as an interesting starting point and have inspired my reflections in respect to duality.

⁵ In order to guarantee anonymity the name has been changed and the exact years of incidents in “Paulo’s” live are generalized. By this way the accuracy of the information can be preserved without giving too many insights which would otherwise possibly allow a reconstruction of his identity. A more detailed portrait of Paulo with explanations about Afro-Cuban cults, like the *Santería*, *Palo Monte* etc. is to be found in my PhD.

⁶ “Afterwards, I was living like we [here, ‘we’ means Cubans] express it as ‘the gift of negotiating’ because I had certain relationships which facilitated certain things.”

⁷ The *Santería* is an Afro-Cuban religion which originated in Nigeria amongst the Yoruba. A first description of *Santería* (also called Regla de Ocha) within Cuba is to be found in Ortiz 1995 (1906). Actual information on *Santería* is numerous (e.g. Barnet 1995, 1997; Palmié 1989; Zeuske 2004: 287-310).

⁸ Although prices vary in dependence of the socio-economic context, the ceremony, and the number of individuals involved they are rather high. Paulo told that he had to pay between 40’000 – 60’000 Peso Cubanos (equivalent to 1500 – 2500 US dollars). Inside Cuba the initiation to a *Babalawo* is exclusively for men.

⁹ Since the Fourth Party congress in 1991 religious activities can be performed by anyone, and members of religious groups – at least officially – are no longer excluded from the Communist Party. As a consequence religiousness is no longer hidden, and some people also wear religious symbols (like the *ildé*) in public.

¹⁰ “If you have foreign currency the world is yours.”

¹¹ A person who is *jineteando* is called a *jinetero/a* which can be translated as “jockey” or “horseback rider” (Fernandez 1999: 81).

¹² The bonus is paid to various professional groups; e.g. in the realm of tourism and the “*shoppings*” but also in exclusively state-related jobs like in the military or offices related to science and culture.

¹³ One prove of this reflection can be found in the general heightening of the salaries from an average 238 Peso Cubano in 2000, to 330 Peso Cubano in 2005 (<http://www.one.cu/anuariopdf2005/capitulo6/VI.4.pdf>). These salaries however have to be analysed with caution because state and mixed enterprises are combined in the same statistic. Thus, the state salary most probably is lower.

¹⁴ “The Cuban economists mumble in the walks that for a long time the economic activities of the country are not absorbed by the state but by the black market.” [Translation A.W.]

¹⁵ “According to official numbers 20% of the expenditures for food by the Cuban have been satisfied in recent years by the black or informal market, food that emanates from the theft or diversion from resources of various sectors predominantly from the state [...]” [Translation by A.W.]