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THE ITINERARIES OF HAVANA: FROM THE PORT TO THE WORLD

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Abstract: Among the emblematic cities of Latin America, Havana distinguishes itself with a peculiar characteristic: it ascended from a particularly miserable infancy to a true metropolis through its role in trade intermediation. This article analyzes the early stage of this evolution, when Havana assumed its dual condition of border: an outpost of the Spanish Empire facing other rival empires and an interface for Spanish Empire/world and the emerging new economy/world. This condition triggered an intense process of accumulation and converted Havana into a flourishing metropolis at the center of the most formidable agro-exporting complex of its time, while simultaneously modeling a peculiar cultural matrix that has defined Havana as a typical port city.

Keywords: Caribbean, Cuba, Havana, Border.

Introduction

Initially Havana was a particularly miserable village, being the last of the first seven towns founded by the Spanish conquerors between 1510 and 1511. Without precious metals and with little indigenous population there was nothing to induce its maturation as a town.

This settlement's fate began to change in the second half of the 16th century. While in 1540 its population had been estimated at 40 *vecinos*, i.e. adult male Spaniards, by 1590 it increased to 800. By 1630, 1 200 *vecinos* were reported; and by 1660 a stable population ranging between 8 and 10 thousand inhabitants was living in the city (Moreno, 2002). Finally, a census taken in 1754 (Navarro, 1983) reported 63,000 inhabitants. Slightly more than 13,000 of them had overflowed the city walls and extended the urban area, forming small neighborhoods in the outskirts, mainly on the southwest side. Similarly, the census reported slightly less than

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11,000 inhabitants residing on the great plains south of the city (Navarro, 1983). Thus, Havana concentrated 34% of the inhabitants of the Island of Cuba, while other significant settlements barely exceeded 10 thousand inhabitants, and only one – Santiago de Cuba – had any fortifications. It is worth mentioning that, curiously, in 1754 Havana's population was twice the size of San Juan de Puerto Rico in 1900 and four times larger than Santo Domingo in 1893.

The objective of this article is to examine this process from the perspective of the reproduction in and from Havana of a series of border situations[1], which converted the young city into a dynamic borderland. These fostered substantial accumulation of capital and the empowerment of urban elite, who demonstrated high capacity to articulate economic, political and symbolic resources to position the city within the global system. This made it possible for this port-city to disengage itself from Spanish mercantilist web and stimulated productive intermediation between its national spaces and the world market, subordinating the former to the latter. It is a case of an authentic metamorphosis, as described by Morín (2010), i.e. a shift involving socio-spatial breaks and realignments, which gave rise to a "developmentalist city" that enjoyed a central role in the Caribbean for almost two centuries (Dilla, 2014).

This article is a story of how the Havana's elite, and the population of the city in general, managed to make the most of market opportunities stemming from the city's condition of border, in respect to other territorial settlements and to the new economy/world. As Wallerstein (1999) and Moreno (2002) explain, under these circumstances the city played a role of a peculiar semi-periphery. However, this should not lead to a false belief that the growth of Havana and its metropolitan metamorphosis between the 16th and 19th centuries were exclusively the work of the market. The fact that Havana was able to benefit from its location was a consequence of the actions taken by the State, as well as a result of the emergence of local elite capable of creating a complete institutional mechanism to suit their ends. This elite´s city project, which as we shall see prevailed until the first half of the 20th century, was essentially shaped by an intra-elite consensus and attained within

[1] I shall use here an operational definition of border as a line dividing and connecting different and unequal social spaces that eventually develop relationships based on the exploitation of differential profits or higher forms of exchange/cooperation. The interaction of the parties involved generates cross-border regions as described by Jessop (2001): the expressions of the relativity of scales and space densification that have accompanied the process of capitalist globalization. Explained in this way, the notion of border can be applied to different spatial situations and serve as a methodological resource.

the elite's own guilds and organizations. Since the end of the 18th century the most prominent of these organizations were the *Real Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País* and the *Real Consulado de la Habana*. In addition, the nascent Havana elite had already "cornered" the colonial power mechanisms, starting in the 16th century, by taking over the modest city town council or *Ayuntamiento*.

Although this article covers the early period of urban history, it is worth noting that the proliferation of border situations has been a usual occurrence in Cuba and its capital. For instance, during the revolution and the immediate post-revolutionary periods (1959-1985), the island represented an incipient attempt in search for uniqueness or differentiation, which demarcated a border against capitalist environment hegemonized by the United States. This had strong geopolitical connotations. Today, the former "Nice of the Caribbean" looks north insistently and may well become a part of a Cross-border Urban Complex (Dilla, 2015), which would include the urban areas in the south of Florida and, in particular, Miami. This type of situation is usual in the Caribbean Basin and, occasionally, has had tragic geopolitical results[2]. In this sense, what differentiates Cuba is the country's capability to take advantage of such circumstances to attain development goals.

The Fortress City

The first historical reference to what is now known as Havana Bay dates back to a circumnavigation expedition, which took place in 1508, which used this bay to careen the ships and perform caulking works in a natural tar spring. Thus, they named it *Carenas Bay*, and it was there that the first settlers arrived around 1519. With them came a name that had been bouncing along the western geography, which they used to identify their hamlet: San Cristóbal de la Habana. Nothing in the squalor of that handful of poverty-stricken colonists anticipated that they were laying the foundations for a complex border situation, which would change the

[2] Thus, it is no coincidence that prominent Caribbean thinkers, such as Juan Bosch and Jorge Mañach regarded this border character as a historical burden and, with inconsiderate optimism foresaw its end. Juan Bosch (2005) was a disappointed liberal in transit to radicalism, who wished to the said ending in the final victory of the peoples over dominant imperialisms – starting from the defeat of American aggressions against the young Cuban Revolution. Jorge Mañach (1970), on the contrary, was a liberal who reaffirmed his convictions in his later years, and predicted a virtuous merging of different worlds that would find its panacea in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Both were wrong in their predictions, but managed to leave behind spheres of thought that should deserve closer attention in the future.

fabric of regional powers in a radical way. For, in addition to favorable physical lay of coastal geography (a large water enclosure protected by a narrow yet wide enough entryway, almost as if man-made), the bay had another virtue which, at the time, was just becoming known to the most experienced Spanish sailors – the proxymity to a strong oceanic river that carried ships towards the Iberian Peninsula, namely, the Gulf Stream.

When Spain – egged on by those dispossessed by the Tordesillas Treaty – began to organize a monopolist trade system, it realized that this current was the most expeditious access route to the ports of Seville. Thus, it chose Havana as the final rendezvous point for *las flotas*, i.e. convoys comprising dozens of merchant vessels escorted by warships, capable of dissuading the boldest of privateers.

The system consisted of two fleets that would sail together or independently: the *Nueva España* and the *Tierra Firme*. Regularly, every year, they set sail from the Guadalquivir River, stopped over for supplies at the Canary Islands and sailed into the Atlantic taking advantage of the Trade Winds. When the ships reached the Caribbean, they made another supplies stopover at the isle of Dominica and a small part of the fleet was redirected to the islands of Cuba, La Española and Puerto Rico, and to other minor settlements on the continent. The larger part of the fleet would sail to the viceroyalties.

The *Nueva España* fleet dropped anchor at Veracruz, protected by the magnificent San Juan de Ulúa castle, from where the goods were transported over land to several places in Mexico, including Acapulco. This port was the point of departure for a small fleet of two or three vessels that sailed to the Philippines, called the *Galeón de Manila*. These ships would come back promptly, with their cargo of merchandise from China, taking advantage of the system of currents on the Pacific Ocean.

The main port of call of the *Tierra Firme* or *Galeones* fleets was the *Nombre de Dios* fair, which later became Portobelo (in modern Panamá). According to Ward, it was the largest trade fair of the early modern period (Ward, 1993: 67). Upon arrival or before departure, the fleet docked in Cartagena for two weeks or so, to unload the cargo bound for Bogotá and to replenish fresh water and food supplies. Cartagena, which housed the largest African slave market of the empire, was ideal for these purposes due to its natural location and inexpugnable fortifications.

When the circuit was completed and the vessels were loaded with goods from the viceroyalties – including Crown taxes – the fleets congregated in Havana between February/March where they would normally spend two months or so pur-

chasing supplies and completing their cargo. However, it was not unusual for these stays to be extended due to different types of setbacks.

From Havana the ships headed for the Bahamas Channel and sailed to the North Atlantic and eventually their final destination in Seville, where their entire cargo was logged. The round trip could take between twelve and eighteen months depending on weather conditions, the speed of cargo clearances, and other factors that could delay departure – to the detriment of merchants and ship-owners and the benefit of the host cities.

The Fleet System was conceived as a result of a reorganization process of Spanish defensive system elaborated by the most prominent of imperial strategists. Among them was Pedro Menéndez de Avilés who later became the governor of Cuba and *adelantado* of Florida. The latter was this Asturian admiral's dearest concern, and to prove it he sent to meet their maker as many French Huguenots as only the perpetrators of St. Bartholomew could have dreamed of. He was a well-esteemed server of the Spanish monarch Philip II, and thus was entrusted with challenging missions. In fact, he died during one of them, i.e. during the organization of the Spanish Armada whose defeat marked the beginning of the decline of the Spanish power that Menéndez had served with particular zeal.

Menéndez was also a strategist who enjoyed projecting issues in the long term. Thus, he recommended erecting fortifications in Havana, Santiago de Cuba, Santo Domingo, San Juan and other mainland ports and setting up the fleet system that provided supplies and guaranteed communication between the imperial posts. He also suggested using the Florida Channel as a route to Spain and the port of Havana as a rendezvous point for the ships. He was, for a decade, the first "strong man" of the Caribbean, as well as the first politician to consider the region as a system conditioned by geopolitics − a tradition that has prevailed for centuries − and as a border with a different and a potentially hostile environment.

Essentially, Menéndez's actions were flexible defensive project that combined patrolling the sea with selective fortification on land. Inevitably, this implied larger transfers of funds to finance the fortifications and military garrisons, to protect the colonial enclaves and routes and, ironically, to curb the contraband trade whose main beneficiary was the colonial bureaucracy – including the family of Menéndez de Avilés. Bauman (2014: 114) would have probably said that these were the "statements of intent" from a colonial power that was as exclusivist as it was corrupt.

These expenses, as far as the Caribbean is concerned, were funded by a system of transfers, known as *situados*, which were sent from Nueva España. This was one of the most solid and long-standing intercolonial subsidy systems in history. Between 1582, when they started, and 1814, when the Independence of Mexico inevitably put an end to the practice, the *situados* probably transferred billions of pesos. Between 1729 and 1799, the transfers to what was called the "critical nodes" of the West Indies Route (*Carrera de Indias*) amounted to 216.6 million pesos, a huge fortune at that time. Marichal and Souto have argued that the decapitalization of Nueva España due to the *situados* was one of the reasons of the discontent that led to its independence (Marichal, Souto, 1994).

Due to its key location as a "critical node", Havana was the main beneficiary of the *situados*. According to Pérez Guzmán, between 1700 and 1750 Havana received 11.5 million pesos, five times more than Santiago de Cuba and San Juan, and over twice as much as Santo Domingo (Pérez, 1997). In addition, the accounts reviewed by Marichal and Souto indicate that in the second half of the 18th century Havana received on average between 1.4 million and 5.2 million pesos annually, while Santo Domingo and San Juan were only allocated between 100 thousand and just under 400 thousand pesos per year respectively (Marichal and Souto, 1994). In turn, Grafenstein argues that between 1779 and 1783 (the time of the reforms of the Bourbon monarchs) remittances averaged 8 million pesos per annum, half of which went to the Cuban capital (Grafenstein, 1993).

A significant portion of these funds was used to pay the salaries of civil and military personnel, positively impacting local markets. Similarly, the funds could make a direct contribution to promote economic activities, considered to reinforce security. Such was the case, for example, of shipyards and tobacco crops in Havana, two crucial sectors of the urban economy, as we shall see later on. Above all, the *situados* had a decisive effect on military constructions and generated an entire network of creating jobs.

The fortification of Havana began in the second half of the 16th century and consisted of two components. One was the wall whose construction began in 1667 and was completed in the late 18th century; the extremely long period of time needed to build a structure roughly six kilometers long, may be explained as a result of economic interests nestled in the works themselves. In any case, when the wall was completed, it had already been swallowed up by the city and no longer served its purpose. It was demolished in 1863 amid a speculative orgy in the real estate market, which rushed to take over its glacis and to build a new urban center, still the most elegant in the city (González, 1994; Venegas, 1990).

The second component was a dozen of fortresses of different dimensions, which guarded the city. The oldest, La Fuerza, was built in the late 16th century and is located opposite of the main square. The last one, La Cabaña, dates back to late 18th century and is a huge stone structure situated on the east side of the Bay, and is reputed to be the largest colonial castle in America – an honor contested by its contemporary Castillo de San Cristóbal in San Juan de Puerto Rico. All of them were part of an intense mercurial bustle in which many of the most ostentatious fortunes of the colony were amassed.

The walls and the castles were the most eloquent symbolic displays of Havana's imperial border vocation. They were the expression of the construction of an urban ethos and a symbol of strength. They also served to safeguard the territoriality of the colonial power against hostilities not only from overseas but also from the rural settlements. On the other hand, it was within these walls where the loudest disputes between territorial power, i.e. the military, the bureaucrats and the priests and the powers based on the flow of goods, money and people took place. These walls witnessed the most snobbish requirements of the empire clash with the temptations of the economy/world.

Trade Intermediation

According to Immanuel Wallerstein, a connecting thread in modern history is the counterpointing of empires/world and economy/world in the formation of a global system, with boundaries, structures, member groups, legitimation rules, and coherence and whose life comprises conflicting forces that hold it together by tension and tear it apart (Wallerstein, 1999). The former refer to the work of enterprising states, which impose law-defined structures. The latter, to a bourgeois system, which prioritizes the creation of economic spaces to increase the flow of surpluses from the lower strata to the upper strata, from the periphery to the center, from the majority to the minority, while eliminating the 'waste' of an exceedingly cumbersome political superstructure (Meinig, 1986).

In turn, D. W. Meinig has noted the conflicting coexistence of two forms of European expansion (Meinig, 1986) in America, which can be easily related to Wallerstein's theoretical construct.

The first one had its starting point in the Lisbon/Seville axis and led southwest. It was organized along a trade route from the metropolis, with the famous

Carrera de las Indias being its emblematic avenue. A sole route, as Meinig puts it, from a sole port connected with two American gateways, a maritime hub of a vast imperial system that claimed exclusive territorial rights over most of the American world (Meinig, 1986).

The second was conceived in Northeastern Europe (north of Portugal, the Basque Country, la Rochelle, Brittany, Normandy, The Netherlands) as an open trade led by a vast number of entrepreneurs from numerous local ports, which would give rise to different form of colonization (Meinig, 1986: 56), better tested in North America and on what the Spaniards considered the "useless islands" of the Caribbean. Although in the heat of this dynamics some intense population settlement processes were generated, it was a trend that, for the sake of production of cheap caloric foodstuff, namely sugar, favored (or had to make do with) scattered trade and factory pontoons rather than large permanent settlements, which turned out to be vital for European and American capitalism.

The Caribbean was a place of confluence of these modalities and, hence, a counterpoint. Thus, from this perspective, Havana acquired yet another border connotation: one that permitted it to act as an intermediary between the vast territorial economic preserves of the Spanish Empire and the dynamic flows of world economy.

It was not simply because of its location on the defensive edge of the Empire, which provided fortifications and soldiers. Other cities in the region held similar positions, as was the case of San Juan, yet all they got in return was a second rate life, permanently marred by scarcity. As we shall see, neither did its specificity lie in its active participation in the traffic of goods in the official trade. Veracruz did so and never progressed beyond being an uninteresting settlement. The same goes for Cartagena, which enjoyed a period of splendor but could not endure the disappearance of the fleets and the competition from Buenos Aires, and ended up – in the words of a visitor − sunken deep in "…a somber, cloistered aspect" (Lemaitre, 1983).

The fact that Havana outgrew its walls and was able to survive the end of the commercial monopoly successfully, was due to its role as an active commercial *entrepôt*, generating production and services chains that included activities of relatively high technical complexity at the time. Havana, according to Moreno (2002), operated as a typical flow-articulating semi-periphery, vis-a-vis the world economy. The poem by Francisco de Quevedo on the travels of "the mighty knight Don Dinero", born in the West Indies and buried in Genoa, could well have mentioned his loss of innocence in the docks of Havana.

Alejandro de la Fuente has analyzed the commercial intricacies of Havana between 1571 and 1610, a crucial moment for understanding metropolitan development of the city in the late 18th century (De la Fuente, 2008). A fundamental conclusion is that the docking of the fleets triggered a frantic commercial traffic between the metropolis, other American colonies and the interior of the island. Thus, Havana became the port of call for small freights for the entire hemisphere. This resulted in an additional advantage, which increased the traffic of ships sailing on their own and of smaller fleets. It also kept business brisk throughout the year, including active contraband that did not require heroic actions but rather as much corruption as control.

The city's trade balance points to the evolution of the *entrepôt* connecting several ports and benefitting on a large scale from differential profit generated by the difference in trading prices of commodities, including currency[3]. Moreno (2002) observed that in the 17th century, half of the cargo capacity of the fleets was taken up by shipments from Havana (Moreno, 2002), and although this prompted early development of a productive hinterland, idle capacities could only be filled with imports from other colonies in the Caribbean basin.

It is worth noting that between 1571 and 1610 records show that over 2,000 ships associated with the metropolis or other colonies on the Caribbean docked at or were dispatched from Havana Bay. Imports worth millions were unloaded there: 47% from other colonies, 45% from the metropolis, and only 8% from the rest of the island. As for exports, 70% went to Seville, 18% to other colonies and the rest to other towns on the island. The most important colonial markets were Mexico and Florida; Santo Domingo and San Juan were only marginal. In Cuban hinterland, three villages concentrated 80% of the shipments' worth: Bayamo (which in the first part of the 16th century had been the main settlement on the island because of its active smuggling), Puerto Príncipe and Sancti Spiritus (De la Fuente, 2008). The former capital, Santiago de Cuba, preferred to deal with the Eastern Caribbean and with its direct ancestor, Santo Domingo. What is more, Havana itself was somewhat dismissive of the territory that later was to become its national space.

When going through the list of traded products, the magnitude of the city's trade intermediation becomes clear. Three products concentrated most of trans-

[3] A very suggestive case narrated by de la Fuente is the overvaluation of the *real* at 44 *maravedíes* instead of 34, which was the normal rate in the Empire. This generated a purchasing spree of precious metals and other commodities, which were sold with an extraordinary profit margin, until by a royal decree the price was set at the same level as in Spain.

oceanic imports: textiles, wine and slaves – mainly paid for in silver and hide. The silver came from inter-colonial imports, especially from Mexico and Florida, and the hides from other islands. Havana exported food and textiles and silver bullion to other cities, and "exported" food, textiles, silver and slaves to the island (De la Fuente, 2008). It was a perfect circle, which, as noted above, also generated differential profits on cheap freights, currency overvaluation and different kinds of commercial speculation.

This role of regional trade mediation remained unchanged for centuries and outlived the fleets. During a period of eleven months in 1775, according to Knight, 183 ships docked in the port of Havana, 127 of them with trading purposes (Knight, 1977). Of these, 53% came from the Spanish colonies in America, 28% from Spain and the Canary Islands, and 7% from Cuba and other foreign ports.

Alexander von Humboldt observed this a quarter of a century later, only on a much larger scale and in a new context, in which Havana already had established itself as a hub of a growing sugar emporium (Von Humboldt, 1930). According to this German humanist, every year, between 1,000 to 2,000 merchant ships called in at the port of Havana – plus a hundred of war ships − totaling some 170,000 tons, carrying goods worth around 75 and 80 million pesetas, some of which "were re–exported". "Havana – wrote Von Humboldt – buys abroad much more than it needs, because it exchanges colonial textiles for products manufactured in Europe, which it resells mostly in Veracruz, La Guaira and Cartagena" (Von Humboldt, 1930: 8).

Havana was, unquestionably, the kingpin of an economic region that included the western Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico, and subjected the region to inequitable exchanges, sometimes resorting to extra-economic mechanisms.

In this regard, the relations with the Spanish settlements in Florida, originating from Florida's complex historical relationship with Havana – which still endures today – are very revealing. Despite the early efforts of Menéndez de Avilés, the Spanish population of the peninsula was limited to a military center, San Augustine, and some forts such as San Marcos, San Luis and Pensacola, whose fates were ephemeral and marked by uncertainty. The colonial development of the area was, in fact, never possible: the agricultural projects never went beyond mere survival farming, and the Spaniards remained there only to protect the fleet and to contain the British, who in 1607 had already settled in today's Virginia (Navarro, 1983).

From the very beginning, it was clear to the strategists in Madrid that the physical survival of the frail Florida forts depended on supplies from Havana. This in turn represented an excellent opportunity to increase profits for traders and offi-

cials in Havana. It was obvious that Florida had become a sort of captive market, always in debt and transferring resources to the Cuban capital. Consequently, the peninsula became one of the most important colonial commercial destinations for Cuba. The island supplied it with food – re-exported or produced on its vast western plain – for which Florida was only able to for with its *situados*.

According to Cusick, around the year 1803 some 15 ships from Havana supplied 43% of the goods, which arrived in the port of San Augustine (Cusick, 1991). Goods from Havana were very expensive for the inhabitants of Florida, compared to the North American wares, which came from Charleston. However, Havana was in control of high-consumption goods, such as wine, rum, oils and sugar, and particularly, over the money coming from the *situados*. More often than not, the full annual allocation of money was used to pay for previously purchased goods and city's services. Hence, the soldiers of San Augustine worked for their food, with merchants of Havana pocketing their wages.

Another effect of this relation with the "flow spaces" of this incipient globalization was the development of an active economy that produced goods and services, satisfying the needs of the fleet and its operators. It is not hard to picture a city overflowing with visitors looking for food, entertainment, sex or lodgings. During much of the 17th century, the number of visitors almost matched the number of local inhabitants, which increased demand and, in consequence, the prices to the benefit of the latter. This dynamics brought about social mobility of large sectors of the black and mestizo populations. This has been narrated with wonder by more than one chronicler. As reported by Eguren, "scattered and vagrant" Indians and "wandering… shocking and insolent" Negroes horrified the white elite of the city, who demanded a solution in the form of "order and a good police force" (Eguren, 1986).

No less relevant was the effect on agricultural production in the city suburbs. It was the starting point of an intense process of urban intermediation, which implied the subordination of a sprawling productive and residential hinterland.

Thanks to the physical qualities of local topography − a vast, fertile and well irrigated, albeit monotonous plain. The city was surrounded by several agricultural and livestock production units, which supplied the fleets, the expanded urban market and, eventually exported to Europe. These production units were excellent laboratories for cultural merging. Making use of permanent or occasional slave labor, they combined European and African products and techniques. Besides breeding cattle and pigs, the farms cultivated cassava, bananas, corn, rice and beans. As

the 17th century went on, other commercial crops such as ginger, tobacco and sugar cane began to spread. Of these, the second became the main agricultural export commodity until it was displaced by sugar in the late 18th century.

Finally, the expansion of fleet-related services included the establishment of shipyards, repairing and building vessels for various Imperial armadas. In the 17th century there were at least six shipyards around the city, three in the bay and three at nearby coastal sites. Their output placed Havana as the top shipbuilding city, way above the traditional shipyards in the north of the peninsula.

These shipyards produced deep-draught ships, at the expense of the local natural forests, which thus suffered their first blow, with the next wave of deforestation to come in the 19th century, triggered by sugar cane plantations. According to de la Fuente, 31 ships of an average of 400 tons were built as early as between the years 1600 and 1620. This generated dynamics of crafts and manufacturing (foundries, production of navigation instruments, woodwork, etc.), which significantly increased the number of workers in the city (De la Fuente, 2008).

Renowned ships, such as *El Retiro* and *El Bizarro*, were built in Havana Bay, which became the main ship supplier to the *Armada de Barlovento*. However, when the armada was suppressed during the first half of the 18th century, the shipyards of the city continued to be essential for the maintenance of the imperial, military and commercial fleets. It is estimated that 74 frigates were built between 1700 and 1775. Between 1723 and 1796, the shipyards delivered 114 ships equipped with about five thousand cannons. Although shipyard production declined in the 18th century, four out of the fifteen Iberian ships that fought in Trafalgar (1805) were built in Havana. Among them was the colossal *Santísima Trinidad*, built 40 years earlier (Kuethe, Serrano, 2007), equipped with 136 cannons and manned by a crew of over one thousand.

The Transformation of the Urban Space

The growth of Havana in this early colonial period is captured in its maps. The first map that came to be known, shows a handful of modest houses, some streets and, surrounding the squares, a few larger dwellings made of stone and masonry, most likely the homes of the local oligarchy. Probably it dates from 1567, when Pedro Menéndez de Avilés ruled the island, in his spare time between his carryings-on in Florida,

It is not a very artistic map – curiously, it faces East and the Holy Sepulcher − and brings to mind the chronicles from that time, which describe houses made of wooden boards and straw, similar to Arawak huts, which often ended up consumed by fire, and whose rustic furniture was made by local artisans using materials available on the island. Only four streets displayed regular alignment of houses "The rest (says a chronicler) are placed according to their owner's whim and fancy, and are fenced or defended in the front, back and sides, by a double wall of sharp prickly-pear cacti" (Leuchsering, 1963). It was not possible to go out at night without risking an attack of packs of stray dogs and feral animals, wandering through the village in search of food.

The map happens to be also quite a political discourse. Two buildings stand out – the two bastions of colonial power in the city. The first one is represented by a slightly bigger house, topped with a cross, indicating the location of the main parish church – a construction that probably was being finished when the sketch was made. It is a building which, according to all the chronicles, lacked elegance and had been conceived to solve the urban dilemma of serving both God and the Church with the least possible damage to the local citizens' budget.

The second building to stand out is the *Castillo de la Fuerza Nueva* or simply, *La Fuerza*, also under construction at the time, whose symbolic significance must have been so remarkable to the artist, that he assigned it an area equal to 20% of the total urban area. Moreno Fraginals, has written an allegory of this castle in fine prose calling it "(...) the most significant architectural accomplishment of the time in Havana, and also the one with the highest symbolic content" (Moreno, 2002: 50). It should be noted that at the time the map was drawn, Havana had only one other defensive element: a chain that closed the entrance to the port, with bastions at the ends. This is shown on the map, in a spot where the forts of *la Punta* and *del Morro*, built between the late 16th and the early 17th centuries, are today.

There was also another work, which the 1567 map was unable to capture, as its construction was just beginning: *la zanja real*. This was an 11 kilometer-long, stone-lined canal, which transported water from the Almendares River to the central fountain in the city. The work, financed with taxation on meat, wine and soap, started in 1566 and was imperfectly completed in 1575. In 1589, final rectifications were entrusted to a prominent family, the Antonellis, who concluded the works in 1592 – the same year that Havana received its official designation as a city. According to Weiz, the canal's capacity catered for the needs of water consumption of 200,000 people and, with successive improvements, was the main source of water

for the expanding city until the 19th century (Weiz, 1979). *La Zanja* put an end to the uncertainty of water supply and encouraged an unprecedented expansion of port businesses and farming activities in the hinterland.

This building urge, which furnished the town with an infrastructure unique in the Caribbean and triggered its development in the following centuries, must have required, in the first place, a strong consensus among the emerging urban elite and the colonial powers. However, it also must have presented an enormous tension between the plans and the resources available to the population of only a few thousand inhabitants at the time. Weiz (1979) mentions labor shortage, which drove the colonial authorities to enforce draconian measures, such as relocating slaves from agricultural tasks. This resulted in reduction of food inventories and the setting up of a system of forced labor with meager wages for "*mestizos*, as well as *negros* and *mulatos*, to make them work (...) and a penalty of 10 pesos or a hundred lashes" (Weiz, 1979: 35).

Another early map dates from 1603 and was drawn by Cristóbal de Rodas, an Italian cartographer and the builder of the extensive fortifications of Cartagena, also related to the Antonelli family. Unlike the 1567 chart, this map is perfect in its details and reveals a hand of a cartographer, as well as a regulatory urge that goes beyond mere description.

The map shows an unorthodox grid with two perimeters. The first, is the one known as the "old fence", which delimited an area of about 15 blocks and was about to be replaced with a second perimeter – which was to be walled − some six kilometers long and with an internal area of two square kilometers. The urban center consisted of a north/south axis, aligned by the three main squares: *de Armas, San Francisco* and *Nueva*. Around this axis were the main public buildings and the homes of the local oligarchs. Some of these buildings represented unmistakable signs of urban development, such as: a hospital, a foundry, a slaughterhouse, the main church, several shipyards, warehouses, a monastery, several small forts, squares, a customs office and a jail, etc.

However, the new urban perimeter was only an aspiration, an area that Rodas intended for future growth, which actually did not materialize until but a century later. Thus, large part of "urban" plots was occupied by orchards and pens.

In a way the map by Rodas may be considered a document that shows the transition from a village to an expanding urban center, a fact acknowledged in 1592, when Havana was emblazoned as a city and pompously designated as the "Key to the New World and Bulwark of the West Indies" (*Llave del Nuevo Mundo y Ante-*

mural de Las Indias). Only a short time after Rodas finished his cartographic work, the city was officially recognized as the capital of the island (1607).

From the 18th century onwards, frequent visits of chroniclers and cartographers were a sign of growing importance of the city, which left future historians with a considerable number of maps and diagrams. Pierre de Chassereau made one of these maps in 1739. By then, the city was a compact *urbs*, almost entirely walled, and, as he amusingly documented in a sketch, still had the wooden chain that closed the entrance to the city bay. Nonetheless, there are two noteworthy features in the maps from this period, accurately recorded by Chassereau.

One of them is the settling of inhabitants outside the city walls. They were so numerous that in a few decades they outnumbered those dwelling within the walls. Thus, the walls became an urban obstacle, which taunted the greed of urban developers and traders. The other feature shown by Chassereau is a certain spatial discrepancy. There is a central zone, which up to a certain extent, has a proper grid (in fact, Havana's grid was never rigorous) and there are others that show irregular space patterns, particularly, to the south. These features reveal spontaneous peopling, only loosely adhering to urban regulations. They also reveal a city marked by class and ethnic cleavages, whose less favorable features had gone unacknowledged by cheerier sketches and chronicles.

Although the city had already begun to boast elegant buildings and recreational spaces, revealing the hedonistic turn of mind of the emerging bourgeoisie and the hygienistic intentions of city planners, Havana in the mid-18th century was a dirty city, plagued with frequent epidemic outbreaks. Demographic densification − and, above all, an overwhelming floating population − was not balanced by basic infrastructure works. This resulted in overcrowding of uncobbled streets and lack of basic sanitary services in city's neighborhoods. All the chronicles corroborate the tremendous filth of the city, especially, the proliferation of waste and litter on the banks of the bay and in the moats surrounding the forts.

The transformation of Havana into a city with an urban air started in the late 18th century, and was accompanied by two, related spatial processes. The first one was the aforementioned transition from port city to a center of coordination and services for an agro-exporting economy based on sugar. This shift started in the late 18th century and was definitely consolidated at the time when, in the name of freedom, the slaves from Saint-Domingue set fire to every inch of what until then had been the most profitable colony in the New World. Although the port remained a fundamental component of the economy and urban landscape, it was not a port *per se*, but a part of an exporting and importing web offering productive activities.

As a result, although the city continued to keep its arrogant distance from the island, it could not do without it and commenced a process of spatial expansion. Whereas initially, its area covered no more than a few square kilometers – the land irrigated by the *Zanja Real* − from the second half of the 18th century onwards, it sprawled over the entire western extent. For all purposes, the expansion of Havana border was a sort of "civilizing" onslaught of periphery capitalism in regions that were still inserted in a simple trading system. It involved a new way of socialization, based on overexploitation of slave labor and ethnic segregation, reinforced by strong immigration of Spanish settlers – functioning as complementary producers – and by a white strike force whose purpose was to keep the increasing African slave population in check.

The new border advanced, destroying forests and making a vast plain of high-quality land available for sugar cane crops. It excluded eastern Cuba, with its least economically favored, *mestizo* and irreverent provinces. This was what has been called Cuba B, as opposed to western Cuba A, with Havana as its center. It was the revolutionary Cuba, with its leaders always eager to march with their troops into a city, strongly identifying the sense of nation with sugar production: "no sugar," said a slogan, "no country".

At the center of the city's transformation was an elite that had already started – in the well-known metaphor of Marx − "a bath of blood and mud" in the docks of the port. It was a versatile elite, who had started by taking control of the town council and seizing the best lands and Arawak *encomiendas*, and continued its ascent by appropriating favorable contracts, embarking on all sorts of trade ventures and exploiting servile labor in their vast cattle and agricultural estates. In a comprehensive study, Knight has explored the process of recomposition of the *élite* of western Cuba. He found that one third of the 450 white families at the top of the social scale in the mid-19th century could trace their roots back to the 16th and 17th centuries. In addition, 42% of them originated from the 18th century and only 25% emerged in the first half of the 19th century (Knight, 1977). In other words, the elite had been undergoing a steady transformation, but at the same time, it is evident that the great ascent of the 19th century was conditioned by extremely large fortunes amassed in the port enclave.

As it happened in the late 16th century, Havana's development in this period was associated with an intra-elite consensus involving entrepreneurial capability, political will and substantial capitals. The urban oligarchy knew how to take advantage of the tide of events and opportunities of the late 18th century to place

Havana in a new position in the world capitalist economy. If, recalling Sauer, in the 16th century Havana had managed to become the gateway to the royal route of the West Indies, in the late 18th century, the city managed to position itself at the epicenter of stock exchange markets of economic power centers (Sauer, 1984).

Cuba, and the Havana center, remained a Spanish colony but with no fundamental economic links. Such links were directly established with the centers of the global capitalism, particularly with the United States: a peculiar replication of the economic and political borders that would lead to the paradox of a colony that was more wealthy and prosperous than its mother country. In the words of a witty Asturian who visited Havana in the 19th century, it was a city where:

> (...) the progressive spirit of the United States has been inoculated more than in any other part of Spanish America (...) a communications center for Europe and the main countries in America (...) a large population that has reached the level of the main European cities, not only in terms of material and cultural progress, but also, in its insouciance and freedom of customs (Barras, 1925: 24).

The distinct aristocratic *habitus* and sophisticated bourgeois view of the world of the elite made this class an object of attention for many observers, some as challenging as Alexander von Humboldt, who recognized that they had the "(...) most extensive views over the state of the colonies and the mother country" (Barras 1925). In my opinion, no one has described with more accuracy and detail than Manuel Moreno Fraginals:

> (…) a power group capable of laying the foundations of what shall be the largest sugar complex in the world … will set up a technical and material base that will be even more advanced than many European countries in the use of industrial equipment and social reforms; its culture will move along the positive lines of profitable knowledge (…) but in particular (…) it shall force the restructuring of the Spanish colonial system by creating a brand new relationship with the parent country (Moreno, 2002: 147).

However, this evolution belongs to another time in history: the one in which the aforementioned developmentalist city restructures its border with the island and subordinates it to the world economic system − of which the city is a privileged periphery − while keeping an arrogant distance and setting up other internal spatial frontiers stemming from stratification and ethnic/class segregation.

Conclusions

It is not possible to understand the evolution of Havana, and its transformation into a colonial semi-periphery in respect to Western Caribbean, without taking into account its role as a border pontoon. As noted before, this border condition was generated from two kinds of relationships.

The first one was the status of Havana as a border with regard to the mosaic of imperial possessions in the New World and safeguarding of the Imperial fleet. This condition provided a geopolitical *added-value* that was supported by heavy investments in fortifications and defensive works, which still attract visitors today. At the same time, the city hosted a large garrison which constituted a decisive component of its increasing internal market. Finally, this role placed the city in a hegemonic position in the Western Caribbean. Havana became the main center of distribution of Mexican subsidies, which in some occasions constituted an opportunity for additional revenues, as it happened in the relationship with Florida and the Eastern Caribbean.

Simultaneously, Havana was the border between the declining Spanish Empire/World and the emerging Economy/World. The city, overrun by boats and traders, who would stay in its harbor for several months a year, constituted an active nucleus of trade with the "others". A myriad of practices of exchange of goods and currencies, smuggling, financial speculations, and tax evasions were undermining the rigid system of bureaucratic control, in favor of a city that became as dynamic as it was corrupt.

When, in the heat of the Bourbon mercantilist reforms, the system of the fleets disappeared, the city-ports of the Western Caribbean suffered terrible depressions. Havana, by contrast, continued its expansion. It replaced the French colony of Saint-Domingue – destroyed by a violent antislavery revolution – in the global sugar market and transformed the western part of the island into a huge plantation, based on the brutal exploitation of servile labor force. A new bourgeois class emerged as a dominant economic sector and an influential political actor in the metropolitan circles. Since then, its evolution was motivated by strong links with the United States; a new and contradictory border relationship that still remains the main reason for "love and hate" relations between the two countries.

Havana, forged in the heat of these processes as an elegant and cosmopolitan city, undeniably became the most important city in the Caribbean. Yet, it was an inequitable, racist and arrogant city that at a very early age learned to conceal its

hovels behind its promenades. It was, in short, a city marked by contrasts, which a 19th century poet described as set between "The beauty of the physical world/ the horrors of the moral world".

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