

Cuban Communism under Raúl Castro (2006-2014)



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To Our America

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Abstract

Drawing on a theory of non-transition from communist rule, in this thesis I argue that in the period 2006-2014 Cuba experienced a change from a charismatic post-totalitarian regime to a maturing post-totalitarian one. The basic argument behind these concepts is that the loss of the charisma of Fidel Castro as a source of legitimacy – he stepped down in 2006 – has pushed forward economic performance as a compensatory source, which explains the market reforms of Raúl Castro.

Thus, I demonstrate in this thesis that the Cuban regime during the presidency of Raúl Castro has experienced a ‘double political shift’ at the levels of *leadership* and *ideology*. On the one hand, I claim that the charismatic character of the leadership has been replaced by a collegial arrangement. On the other, I hold that the model of centrally planned economy (CPE) has been replaced by market-socialist ideology. After substantiating the existence of the leadership’s and ideological change, I discuss the relationship between them as part of a re-equilibration of legitimacy.

The peculiarity of the Cuban case is that socialist ideology is still central to Raúl Castro’s claims to legitimacy. Therefore, the new role of the market has been inscribed within a non-capitalist framework, as expressed in the official advocacy for a “prosperous and sustainable socialism” – i.e. a form of market socialism that, in contrast to cases such as China and Vietnam, have not yet restored capitalism.

Keywords: Cuba, regime, leadership, ideology, legitimacy, post-totalitarianism.

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1. Introduction

This study investigates the most salient changes in the Cuban political system since 2006, when Raúl Castro assumed the *de facto* presidency of the island. Since then, Cuba has experienced sweeping reforms depicted by Raúl Castro as an “updating” of the socialist model. Changes have included an overhaul of the public sector employment system, a vast increase in the space for non-state actors (*cuentapropismo* and, to a lesser extent, co-operatives), and an announced expansion of the role of foreign direct investment (FDI) in the Cuban economy.

Such reforms have given rise to wide-ranging reverberations at all levels of Cuban society, accelerating the pace of change on the island, with profound implications for the country's ongoing economic recovery, the wellbeing of individual Cubans, the Revolutionary project, and for Cuba's overall place in the world.

Although there have also been non-economic changes, like the introduction of term-limits for high-level functionaries or the loosening of official restrictions on foreign travel, academic debate on how the reform process has affected the political system or ‘regime’ as a whole has not yet fully emerged. Thus, the purpose of this thesis is to contribute to this nascent discussion by identifying the main processes that have re-shaped the regime in 2006-2014. Hopefully, my research helps to grasp Cuba today – the immediate past of the post-Castro era, expected to start in 2018.

The explicit political aim of this study is to challenge two influential ways of approaching contemporary Cuban politics: first, the view that the reforms have triggered a ‘liberalisation’ that will (sooner or later) culminate in ‘democracy’ (López-Levy 2011, 29-30); second, the view that the reforms most probably lead “toward a twenty-first-century socialism consistent with the historical roots of the Cuban Revolution” (Segrera 2011). In this thesis, I argue that both accounts fail to observe that the current reform process is neither in transit to democracy nor to socialism.

To be sure, Cuba today is not the tale of another Third World neoliberal transformation, but a rather peculiar development given that this Caribbean Island

has remained the only Western society still under communist rule. In this thesis, I suggest that Cuban communism, under Raúl Castro, has started to pursue a political path comparable to yet distinct from that of China and Vietnam. In these Asian nations a capitalist economy and a political system led by a Communist Party have co-existed, which is a combination that has been defined as a *maturing post-totalitarian* regime (Saxonberg 2013). The Cuban case has also undergone market reforms; however, these are different for they are still constrained by socialist parameters – i.e. they have not crossed the line of capitalist restoration.

Thus, the main argument of this thesis is that Cuba has experienced in 2006-2014 a transition towards a political legitimacy based on economic performance, which (in contrast to China and Vietnam) is still hold in check by socialist ideology. In other words, the private property of the fundamental means of production is still off limits – in this sense, the adjective ‘fundamental’ is the term of the Cuban constitution used to qualify the means of production under ‘socialist property’ (República de Cuba 1992).

In the rest of this Introduction I will clarify four key features of this thesis: 1) the political standpoint and intention; 2) the relation between the former and the theoretical framework; 3) the summary of the main argument; and, 4) the strategy followed to conduct the research. Together, these elements constitute the approach that the reader will find throughout the rest of this academic work.

1.1 Political intentionality

The political standpoint that informs this study is the Marxist tradition. In relation to the analysis of Soviet-like polities, my Marxist stance is rooted in a non-Soviet-like tradition. Paraphrasing an existing operationalization of ‘non-Soviet-like’, but applying it to Cuba, I identify this thesis with the Marxist tradition that a) does not conform to the official Cuban ideology, and b) does not regard the social structure of Cuba either as socialist, or as developing towards socialism (Linden 2009, 4).

Whether the endorsement of an explicit political vantage point leads to a ‘biased’, non-scientific study seems not only a misleading but also an outdated question. In

this respect, Colin Hay has explained (vs. positivism) that the ontological condition of the analyst of political processes is an engaged one. In particular, I agree with his assertion that “we are, at best, partisan participant observers; [...] there is no neutral vantage-point from which the political can be viewed objectively” (Hay 2002, 63). As part of the reality we analysts try to grasp, “the ideas we fashion of the political context we inhabit influence our behaviour” (Hay 2002, 64).

However, if even the political analyst is prey to the ideas of the polity s/he is part of, through which procedure can a well founded analysis be obtained? For Žižek, the answer to this predicament has been the invocation of an ‘empty space’:

[I]t is possible to assume a place that enables us to maintain a distance from [ideology], but this place from which one can denounce ideology must remain empty, it cannot be occupied by any positively determined reality – the moment we yield to this temptation, we are back in ideology. (Žižek 1994, 17)

However, the ‘empty space’ notion is rather unsatisfactory for it makes reference to a somewhat more ambiguous locus than the *ivory tower*: an ethereal place beyond space and time... Žižek himself abandoned this solution fifteen years later in a book written in response to the 2008 global financial crisis. In that intervention, instead of the ‘empty space’ notion, he advanced a *partaking* stance – just as if the old ‘empty space’ had been ‘filled’ with political intentionality in the interim:

What the book offers is not a neutral analysis but an engaged and “partial” one – for truth is partial, accessible only when one takes sides, and is no less universal for this reason. The side taken here is, of course, that of communism. (Žižek 2009a, 6)

A proposition thus arises: instead of trying to avoid or eliminate a ‘bias’ we, analysts would do better by openly acknowledging it. Such an approach is the one actually advocated by Colin Hay when I interviewed him about this problem:

I don’t think the bias can really be controlled and I certainly don’t think it can be avoided. Consequently, rather than strive to achieve the impossible – by devising spurious strategies or bias control or elimination – we are, I think, better simply to acknowledge the bias and to write in such a way as to draw attention to it. We can trust, if you like, the reader to control

for our bias if we are good and reflexive enough to acknowledge it and to share it with them.
(Hay and Centeno 2012)

This said, the political standpoint or 'bias' that informs this study is a Communist one. Nonetheless, just as Slavoj Žižek (2011) specified in a speech to *Occupy Wall Street*: "We are not Communists if Communism means a system which collapsed in 1990." While as far as I know Slavoj Žižek has not clarified his politics towards contemporary Cuba, it can be argued that the "system which collapsed in 1990" is the same that had been replicated in the Caribbean island, as Samuel Farber notes:

Soviet Stalinism established the structural paradigm of a one-party state ruling over the whole economy, polity, and society, a paradigm that was later implemented in its various national variations by countries such as China, Vietnam, and Cuba. (Farber 2011, 4)

A long-time analyst of the Cuban Revolution, Farber's "political roots are in the classical Marxist tradition that preceded Stalinism in the Soviet Union" (Farber 2011, 4). Such have been my politics too, which can be traced back to my days as a Trotskyite militant in Mexico – well before my academic research on Cuba began.

To get straight to the point, I have taken a 'side' in actual debates in Cuba that has made me been classified as a "self-managementist" (Piñeiro Harnecker 2013, 114, 117, Mesa Lago 2012, 292-3). Post-Fidel Cuba has witnessed the emergence of a public arena where socialists critical of the political system are one of the relevant contentious players (Geoffray 2015), which is nothing but a meaningful phenomenon in a country "where all possible socialisms are discarded by the only socialism in power" (Rojas 2010, 63). An intellectual offspring of such a 'new left' – a public face of which can be monitored on an everyday basis in the alternative media *Havana Times* –, the 'self-managementist' vision is one out of three contending visions in Cuba – the others being the 'economicist' and the 'statist' positions:

Three main ideological positions are behind the debate over current changes in Cuba: the statist position, which seeks to perfect a top-down, state socialism; the economicist [sic] position, which defends market socialism; and the self-managementist position, which favours democratic socialism and worker participation in company decision making. (Piñeiro Harnecker 2013, 107)

Each position has links to different parts of the Cuban polity. While the statist position “is well represented in state bureaucracies among those who fear losing their posts”, the “most fervent economists tend to be enterprise administrators who hope that they will be left to manage a state enterprise as they see fit” but also new state technocrats (Piñeiro Harnecker 2013, 113, 115). For its part, the “staunchest advocates of the self-managementist position are undoubtedly intellectuals and professionals who have been exposed to alternative, post-Stalinist socialist ideas” (Piñeiro Harnecker 2013, 118). From a general perspective, it can be fairly asserted that the ‘statists’ and the ‘economists’ are two competing visions within the political elite (the *old* and the *new*, respectively), while the ‘self-managementist’ view is mostly an *outsider* player whose bottom-up approach is an actual reaction to the top-down policymaking of the other two.

The antagonism between ‘economists’ and ‘statists’ was suggested earlier in an article published in Havana, which I co-authored with a Cuban academic:

Therefore, it is brought to the fore the discussion on how to promote the socialist democracy from the workplace, through a plan-market relation away from the recalcitrant statism and the extreme deregulation; based on forms of property away from the bureaucratic monopoly and the big private property. (Chaguaceda and Centeno 2011, 52)

Making reference to different interventions published in Cuba, including the above-mentioned one, Piñeiro Harnecker (2013, 114) sums up that proponents of self-management think that “genuine democratic management would lead to efficiency, productivity, equality, and justice”. A Havana-based academic, Piñeiro Harnecker has gone as far as taking a side in the triadic dispute: “if the goal is to create the fairest society possible, more space needs to be opened up for the discussion of self-managementist proposals in the public media” (Piñeiro Harnecker 2013, 120).

To be sure, this way to start the introduction of this thesis intends to disclose any potential “conflict of interest”, as is customary in academic journals. As such, I hope that by making explicit the side I have taken in Cuban politics and what does side mean, the reader is better able to situate the rationale of subsequent decisions I have made (and justified) regarding analytical choices. In this sense, while this study

will use concepts from the literature on democratisation for matters of definition, it will simultaneously reject its built-in anti-communist stance. Therefore, I will refrain from prescribing any policy advice aimed at helping a transition to liberal democracy for the same reason mainstream analysts have for not offering socialist advice.

The purpose of this thesis, however, is not to justify or theorise 'self-management', but to shed light on the political context in which the Cuban 'new left' is embedded. By the term 'political context', this thesis refers to the regime ruling Cuba. Deriving from the Latin 'regimen' – which is cognate with the Sanskrit 'raj', meaning rule or government –, the English term 'regime' is synonym of 'polity', which in turn preserves the meaning of classic Greek 'politeia' – i.e. system of government. Although my aim is to grasp the post-Fidel polity in order to inform the politics of a specific Cuban player, this work is also a contribution to the scholarly study of Cuba.

As this thesis is about the regime rather than its subjects, the analysis of other political aspects are out of the scope of this work, such as civil society, gender or race. Still, I do not claim that the study of the latter items is irrelevant or that the understanding of post-Fidel Cuba is reducible to its regime development. All I claim is that the presidency of Raúl Castro cannot be understood without a systematic analysis of the challenges and choices faced/made by his leadership for the sake of communist-led continuity. By "reform process" or "transition", this thesis thereby refers to the policy changes undertaken by the Cuban regime. In this sense, the main reason not to include civil society, gender and race in this thesis is that such issues have not been defining features of the Cuban reform process led by Raúl. A good case in point is the 41 pages document approved by the Sixth Party Congress (PCC 2011b), which lacks any single mention of such aspects – to be sure, such a meeting was all about the economy, whose 'updating' has been at the core of Raúl's worries.¹

1 Although civil society, gender and race have not been central concerns of the post-Fidel state reform, there have been some new developments in these areas. For instance, the incorporation, on the initiative of Mariela Castro – Raúl Castro's daughter – in the National Assembly, of sexual orientation into the list of discrimination items in the revised Labour Code enacted in 2014 (AP 2014). However, this demand predates Raul's presidency. Although Mariela partially succeeded in injecting a

As for the aforementioned rise of a *public arena* in Cuba – of course, a relevant civil society issue –, it is a *societal* conquest that consolidates a process that started in the 1990s (Bobes 2013) rather than a “reform process” as defined in the previous paragraph. In other words, civil society liberalisation has not been an item so far in Raul’s reforms, nor been a novel phenomenon during his leadership. In the broad sense, social pluralisation has been limited to the expansion of the private sector of the economy and – as explored in section 7.3 – a certain expansion of the individual space – i.e. more flexible migration rules and religious tolerance. In the narrower sense of political pluralism, the continuing US policy of funding like-minded organisations inside Cuba with a view to ‘regime change’ (Badella 2015) has effectively fed the regime’s rationale to block liberalisation in the current period.

As an attempt at political *reconnaissance*, this thesis intends to characterise the most salient changes in Cuba’s political system during Raúl Castro’s presidency. The politics of this dissertation, I would recap, far from embodying a weakness, has the potential to fuel commitment with the search for the truth. Here one is tempted to repeat Trotsky’s words in his preface to the *History of the Russian Revolution*:

The reader, of course, is not obliged to share the political views of the author, which the latter on his side has no reason to conceal. But the reader does have the right to demand that a historical work should not be the defence of a political position, but an internally well-founded portrayal of the actual process of the revolution. (Trotsky 1934, preface)

Similarly, I hope that this study succeeds in its attempt to present a well-founded and coherent explanation of Cuba’s political change. And while I also hope that a better understanding of the contemporary Cuban regime helps to enhance the

gendered perspective on discrimination into the Labour Code (which delayed its introduction for 6 months) the real novelty in the Code was the inclusion of rights of private sector self-employed and contracted workers, including the introduction of the legal categories of employer and employee, all intended to act upon the shift in economic ideology behind the labour market diversification. On the race issue, despite the public use in Cuban academia of the concept of ‘objective racism’ to distinguish inherited disadvantage from ‘subjective’ discrimination, calls in Cuba – prominently by black scholar Esteban Morales (2013) – for public policy reform to address this and other (notably educational) phenomena sustaining racism, have so far produced no policy initiatives.

political intervention of the emerging 'new left', such concerns are rather a *post-dissertation* affair. Nevertheless, the reader will find in the conclusions some thoughts on the implications that the changes analysed in these pages have for radical political practice – i.e. the ideas embodied in the 'self-managementist' view.

1.2 Analytical approach

Long ago, Trotsky (1972) defined the Soviet Union under Stalin as a degenerated or totalitarian workers' state – the term 'workers' state' capturing the prevailing non-capitalist socioeconomic relations and the term 'totalitarian' specifying the type of non-democratic political system. After World War 2, other like-minded Marxists defined the new socialist states of Eastern Europe in the same manner, but substituting 'degenerated' by 'deformed' (in Linden 2009, 106) – the point being that the Soviet Union was originally a workers' democracy, while the new states were deformed since the outset following the Russian totalitarian mould. Later on, Latin American Trotskyites defined Cuba as another totalitarian (deformed) workers' state (e.g. Moreno 1984). These concepts are the starting point of this thesis, whose relevance and adequacy within the Marxist tradition is discussed in chapter 2.

For Trotsky (1940b, np), totalitarian rule implies total control insofar as this type of regime "subjugates to itself all functions of the country's social, political and ideological life and crushes the slightest manifestations of criticism and independent opinion". However, if one is to elucidate political change from this *status quo*, one finds a gap in the Marxist tradition for it has no further concepts to define the communist regimes apart from 'totalitarianism'. For its part, mainstream Political Science has developed a toolkit created by Linz (2000) to analyse the retreat of totalitarianism in favour of the more restrained 'post-totalitarian' rule. The latter corresponds to an ideal regime-type that – despite still being ruled by a single party – replaces uniformity by limited pluralism, utopian by down-to-earth ideology, mobilisation by institutionalisation, and charismatic by collective leadership (Linz and Stepan 1996, 44-45). This regime-type encompasses three subtypes. Still close to totalitarian rule, in *early post-totalitarian* rule change has just started in at least one of the above-mentioned dimensions. From this two paths can follow: either the

regime ‘freezes’ (change is stalled) or ‘matures’ (change continues) (Linz and Stepan 1996, 42). Drawing on this literature – also known as *transitology* –, this dissertation has tried to understand the *post-totalitarian workers’ state* that has emerged in Cuba during the presidency of Raúl Castro. In consequence, this work proposes the integration of the ‘post-totalitarian’ regime-type into the Marxist literature.

My main argument is that from 2006 to 2014, Cuba experienced a shift from a *charismatic* to a *maturing* post-totalitarian regime. The *charismatic* starting point has been defined by Mujal-León and Busby (2001) as a regime undergoing an early post-totalitarian transition except for its leadership, which remains charismatic – i.e. Fidel Castro, founder and long-time undisputed leader of the Cuban state, was still in power. Emerging from the collapse of the USSR, this regime developed as follows:

This phase is characterised by a profound tension. The revolutionary founder still has the capacity to limit change, mobilise the population, and affirm the validity of his egalitarian ideology to elites and society alike. [...] However, there is growing evidence that regime ideology has become hollow, and there are signs of an embryonic economic and social pluralism in an increasingly stratified society. (Mujal-León and Busby 2001, 11)

As for the *maturing* endpoint, as already implied, it refers to one of the two ideal forms that can take the *late post-totalitarian* stage, which – in the upgraded terms of Steven Saxonberg – emerges out of the process of ideological undermining:

The communist regimes lose their grand-future oriented beliefs and instead promise improves living standards. Consequently they try to reach some sort of social contract with the population in order to induce it to “pragmatically accept” that *given certain external and internal constraints, the regime is performing reasonably well*. [...] The more the regime loses its ideological legitimacy, the more it must rely on its pragmatic acceptance, and the farther it moves beyond the early post-totalitarian phase. (Saxonberg 2013, 18, 68)

As the regimes “enter the late post-totalitarian phase, they evolve either in a maturing or freezing direction, depending on their pragmatic acceptance” (Saxonberg 2013, 105), which will be reformist or conservative, respectively. Although Saxonberg does not directly define the *maturing post-totalitarian regime*, such a concept can be fairly defined as a fully-fledged post-totalitarian polity that is willing to reform the (Soviet-style) centrally planned economy (CPE) and may even

liberalise the political sphere, except for the one-party system – as opposed to a *freezing* post-totalitarian regime, which rather sticks to orthodoxy, namely it refuses to reform the CPE, let alone liberalise the political system. This thesis argues that Cuba under Raúl Castro has become a *maturing post-totalitarian* regime. A more detailed treatment of the notion of post-totalitarian rule is offered in chapter 3.²

In order to make the analytical design of this thesis crystal clear, I have certainly employed insights from *transitology* for Marxist purposes – i.e. the purpose of upgrading the typology of Communist Party-led regimes ruling Soviet-style political economies (or their successors). Although there is no intrinsic contradiction in articulating concepts from distinct traditions –in this case, the Marxist ‘workers’ state’ and the transitology’s ‘post-totalitarian rule’–, such an approach is rarely used – a deficit that a Latin America-based scholar has addressed in terms I agree with:

We can group the bulk of the recent literature on the left according to whether it focuses on mainstream or alternative politics. [...] Mainstream and alternatives themes rarely mix in the literature, which is a shame because there is so much room for hybridity. (Arditi 2008, 72-3)

To be sure, it must be distinguished the Marxist literature this thesis is wedded to and the (partly Weberian) tools used for the specific task of characterising the contemporary Cuban regime. This type of theoretical articulation has been termed “pragmatist realism” by Erik Olin Wright (2009, 101), who argues that “Marxists should combine the distinctive Marxist-identified mechanisms with whatever other causal processes seem pertinent to the explanatory task at hand.” In the case of this study –as will be elaborated in the next section along with the concept of ‘post-totalitarian’ rule–, its pages will discuss the interplay between (the decline of) charisma – a classic concept of Max Weber, used to define the leadership of Fidel Castro – and (the rise of) market-socialist ideology – related to the characteristic Marxist attention to the political economy or, in this case, the ideas shaping it.

² To be specific, sections 3.3 and 4.1 detail from different yet complementary angles (see Table 2, in particular), how Cuba has moved beyond totalitarian rule – i.e. towards post-totalitarianism. As already mentioned, the adequacy of the term “totalitarianism” to refer to the initial years of the Cuban communist system is discussed in chapter 2, especially in section 2.1.2.

In focusing on the political system – i.e. the regime – of Cuba, rather than on its socioeconomic relations, this thesis is about the fate of the ‘totalitarian’ regime, rather than the fate of the ‘workers’ state’. The rationale behind this focus stems from the following fact: although Raúl Castro’s rule started in 2006, his main set of economic reforms was not launched until 2011, in the context of the Sixth Party Congress. On that account, in assessing the regime this thesis addresses the political changes that made possible – i.e. explain – such economic reforms in the first place.

This said, I do not claim that state transformation in Cuba “can be understood in abstraction from the underlying historical patterns of development, isolated from the political economy and the social relations” constituting Cuban society – to paraphrase Morton’s (2012, 1632) challenge to ‘internalist’ explanations of state crisis in contemporary Mexico. Although this is a sound Marxist contention, I would also resist the temptation of explaining *any* transformation of the state by making reference to the political economy and other social relations usually tackled by the Left. Therefore, socioeconomic changes – to exaggerate my point in dialectical terms – can neither be understood isolated from the state’s internal vicissitudes.

In this sense, even Engels acknowledged the causal role of non-economic factors:

According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. Other than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase. [...] Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasise the main principle vis-à-vis our adversaries, who denied it [...]. (Engels 1895, np)

Of course, for him it was still true that economic conditions “are ultimately decisive. But the political ones, etc., and indeed even the traditions which haunt human minds also play a part, although not the decisive one” (Engels 1895, np). Not surprisingly, later Marxists challenged this causal asymmetry, thus granting analytical autonomy to concepts such as ‘ideology’ (e.g. Therborn 1984, Žižek 1994, Laclau 2006).

Failure to appreciate when economic transformation is not the cause but the effect of political change invites an old objection of Weber, whom mocked the type of Marxist whose “need for a casual explanation of an historical event is never satisfied until somewhere or somehow economic causes are shown (or seem) to be operative” (Weber 1949, 68). Resorting to this quotation, in turn, may raise the suspicion that “inside every neo-Marxist there seems to be a Weberian struggling to get out” (Parkin 1979, 25) – an accusation that well serves to illustrate why for many Marxists “the main challenge is to recognize that what is most powerful within Marxist social science is its theory of a specific array of causal mechanisms, rather than its aspiration to be a comprehensive paradigm” (Wright 2009, 114-15). In other words, the Marxist analyst shall not refrain from borrowing conceptual tools developed by other traditions whenever needed: that is the bottom line of the pragmatist realism endorsed and applied in this thesis.

1.3 Summary of the argument

As has already been advanced, this thesis has measured political change in Cuba in relation to a certain regime-type: ‘post-totalitarianism’. In the ideal type of Linz and Stepan (1996, 44-45), this regime is the one that emerges from the relaxation of totalitarian rule – as in post-Stalin Russia or in post-Mao China. Based on this conceptual framework, Mujal-León and Busby (1997) argued that the downfall of the Soviet Union had turned Cuba into a *hybrid* regime: a ‘charismatic early post-totalitarian’ one. With this term, its proponents wanted to underscore that the only element that prevented Cuba from turning into a typical post-totalitarian regime was its (typically totalitarian) charismatic leadership embodied in Fidel Castro, whose relative importance had grown (compared to other sources of legitimacy) due to the 1990’s crisis that the Island was experiencing after the USSR’s collapse.

The ‘charismatic early post-totalitarian’ regime – starting point of this thesis’ analysis – lasted in Cuba from 1990 to 2006, when Fidel Castro fell ill. After this point, Raúl Castro took over and carried out the political changes covered in this work.

The research question that guided this thesis is then:

How and why has the Cuban regime changed during the presidency of Raúl Castro?

In order to answer this question, here I follow Linz and Stepan (1996, 42) in their disaggregation of any regime type in four “constituent characteristics”: *leadership*, *ideology*, *pluralism*, and *mobilisation*. In terms of this analytical scheme, the argument of this work is that the Cuban regime, during Raúl Castro’s term, has experienced a political change at two levels: *leadership* and *ideology*. I have focused this study on these two levels because there is a causal link between them; however, I have dealt with *pluralism* and *mobilisation* whenever I felt it necessary.

The change in the Cuban polity, in the period 2006-2014, can be defined as follows:

- from charismatic to collegial leadership; and,
- from centrally planned economy (CPE) to market-socialist ideology.

The change in *leadership* analysed here is related to the generational succession occurring within the Cuban political elite. Epitomised in the stepping down of Fidel Castro, the long-time *Commander in Chief*, due to illness and old age, the group of guerrilla fighters that won the 1959 Revolution and since then took over the highest offices of the new Cuban State is facing the end of its biological life. In Cuba, this group is called the *historical generation* (la “generación histórica”) and its leading figure at the present time, Raúl Castro, is the current head of the Cuban state.

As will be demonstrated, Raúl Castro has taken significant steps to fill the vacuum left by Fidel with a collegial type of leadership – an arrangement installed to succeed the “históricos” when they are no longer there. By doing this, Raúl Castro has precluded the Cuban leadership from adopting North Korea’s path, where charisma became an institution transmitted through the Kim family, from father to son.

As for the *ideological* change, this thesis refers to the new approach of Raúl Castro to economic policy, which more clearly emerged in the context of the 6th Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC, by its acronym in Spanish). In this event, held in 2011, the Party approved the *Guidelines of Social and Economic Policy* (referred to in Cuba with the Spanish word for “guidelines”: *Lineamientos*), which contained

general yet revisionist ideas on how the economy should be reformed. As this work will demonstrate, the *Lineamientos* de-stigmatised the role of market mechanisms in the Cuban economy, hence paving the way, for example, to the increase of small private businesses and a proportional reduction of people employed by the state.

Although this Raúl-led ideological revision does not restore capitalism, it does break with the old CPE model. To cut a long story short, this thesis argues that the Cuban regime is now guided by a *market socialist* ideology, which has been defined as “an attempt to reconcile the advantages of the market as a system of exchange with social ownership of the means of production” (in Calhoun 2002, 294).

To tackle the causal link between the change in the leadership and ideology of the Cuban polity, this thesis has relied on a Weberian-identified mechanism: *legitimacy*. The explanatory power of this concept lies in the political effects that a change in how a regime justifies its rule may have in the regime itself. In Weber’s words:

[Every system of domination] attempts to establish and to cultivate the belief in its legitimacy. But according to the kind of legitimacy which is claimed, the type of obedience, the kind of administrative staff developed to guarantee it, and the mode of exercising authority, will all differ fundamentally. (Weber 1978a, 213)

In addition to this, Weber defined *charismatic legitimacy* as the one “resting on the devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person” (Weber 1978a, 215). When Fidel Castro stepped down in July 2006, the loss of his charisma (an old source of legitimacy) generated a need of restitution. Although the predicament faced by a regime once its charismatic leader (or founder) is no longer there (another Weberian theme) will be discussed later, at this point it suffices to say that the decline of charisma in Communist rule has the potential to raise economic performance as a superseding source of political legitimacy.

It is important to clarify, however, that I am not claiming that all the legitimacy of the Cuban regime hanged on Fidel Castro. There have been other important sources of legitimacy, namely the role of the ‘conquests of the revolution’ (*Conquistas de la Revolución*, in Spanish) and the stance against US imperialism. The former refers to the endurance of the Cuban welfare state – e.g. free education and health – and the

latter to the nationalism embedded in the ruling ideology. It can be argued that these two aspects are highly valued by Cubans. However, the reason why I did not explore in his thesis the vicissitudes of the *Conquistas* and anti-imperialism is very simple: in contrast to Fidel's charismatic leadership, they did not disappear in the period under scrutiny. Thus, my claim that the dissipation of charisma caused a crisis of legitimacy does not mean that *all legitimacy* had dissipated. That only means that one source in particular was no longer there and some adjustments were made. Which adjustments? Ideological ones, in order to revise the ruling economic model in Cuba and make it congruent with a shift to performance-based legitimacy.

The conceptualisation of 'ideology' in this thesis is borrowed from Slavoj Žižek:

[A] set of explicit and implicit, even unspoken, ethico-political and other positions, decisions, choices, etc., which predetermine our perception of facts, what we tend to emphasize or to ignore, how we organize facts into a consistent whole of a narrative or a theory. (Žižek 2013, np)

Ideology is therefore relevant as an explanatory variable because "changes in policy are often preceded by changes in ideas" (Hay 2002, 166). In consequence, the framework proposed in this thesis may help explain the changing political economy landscape of the Cuban workers' state, from CPE to market socialism. Sparked by a generational crisis in the leadership, the regime experienced a change from charismatic to performance-based legitimacy, which is the causal process behind Raúl's reforms in the leadership and ideology. Now that I have outlined how the Cuban polity has changed –decline of charisma and rise of market socialism– and why it would have been the case –a re-equilibration in the regime's claims to legitimacy–, such a process can be conceptually restated for the sake of clarity.

First, the steps of Raúl Castro to adapt the regime to the dissipation of charismatic authority may have caused a transition from an 'early charismatic post-totalitarian' regime to a proper 'early post-totalitarian' one. As the *leadership* became decreasingly charismatic (typically totalitarian) and increasingly collegial (typically post-totalitarian), this regime's defining characteristic caught up with the other

three: *pluralism*, *ideology*, and *mobilisation* – each of the three were already post-totalitarian since the 1990s, according to Mujal-León and Busby (2001).

Second, the decline of charisma as a source of legitimacy would have pushed the regime to seek a new ‘contract’ with its subjects on the grounds of (economic) performance-based claims to legitimacy. As such new ‘contract’ relies on a reformist agenda –as opposed to a conservative one–, this process corresponds to what Saxonberg (2013, 29-30) has defined as a *maturing* path –as opposed to a *freezing* one. And therein lies the rise of market socialism in Cuba, as opposed to the obstinacy of CPE. In summary, the total change of the Cuban polity during Raúl Castro’s presidency (as modelled in this thesis) is thus a transition from a *charismatic early post-totalitarian* regime to a *maturing post-totalitarian* one.

In other words, Cuba may be said to have joined China and Vietnam into the club of contemporary ‘mature post-totalitarian’ regimes. However, the degree of ‘maturation’ is different given that Cuba under Raúl is, in strict terms, closer to China and Vietnam... in their early days of (pre-capitalist) market reforms in the 1980s.

1.4 Methods and data collection

The body of data collected, or *corpus*, was mainly formed by speeches and state documents published in Cuba. As both types of data were originally commented or published full-text in the official Cuban media, they can be fairly seen as material residues of a human (political) activity – i.e. as ‘texts’ or ‘artefacts’, to use the definition of Hodder (2002, 265). That is to say, as “texts are acts” (Skinner 2002, 120), those published by the official media render visible an intentional political action by the state apparatus aimed at the day-to-day orientation of the public.

However, although the relevance of official documents in the form of new party doctrine or new laws may be straightforward, the status of leader’s speeches may not. First and foremost, political discourse – speech being one such type – comprises “the communicative practices through which ideology is constituted, transmitted and made visible” (Maynard 2013, 304). *The analysis of ideology via speech can thus shed light on the policy-making process addressed by speech itself.* This approach

shall not be confused with discourse analysis (e.g. van Dijk 2006), which – as the editor of the *Journal of Political Ideologies* has explained – “can encompass all kinds of utterances, including those that have minimal or indirect impact on public policy-making, which is what ideologies engage in” (Freeden 2016, 4). Thus, I focused on those leader’s speeches with a direct policy impact – i.e. those whose purpose was to help both elites and lay public make sense of the state reform unfolding in Cuba.

In practice, I compiled all the public speeches of Raúl Castro in Cuba and abroad, in the period 2006-2014, to assemble a database of texts with the help of NVivo® software (version 10). With this tool – developed for the analysis of qualitative data – I was able to code the texts according to the interests of this research, namely leadership’s and ideological change, and grasp patterns and regularities that helped me to build the storytelling, after adequate contextualisation, of chapters 5 and 6.

Most leader’s speeches are easily accessible online in *Cubadebate* and *Portal Cuba* – both of them official websites of the Cuban government. In order to collect other speeches (between 2006 and 2008) and other specific political information – e.g. top promotions and dismissals, or reports of Party meetings –, the Cuban media I relied the most were the daily newspapers *Granma* and *Juventud Rebelde*. The first is edited by the Central Committee of the Party; the second, by the Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas (Union of Cuban Youth, or UJC), a Party-led mass organisation. To a lesser extent, I also consulted *Trabajadores*, a weekly newspaper edited by the Central de Trabajadores de Cuba (Central of Unions of Cuba, or CTC).

The role of the head of state (and his speeches) in non-democratic settings shall not be underestimated. In the case of Cuba, the leader of the regime is at the same time the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC, by its acronym in Spanish), the President of the Council of State and of the Council of Ministers, and the main chief of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR, by its acronym in Spanish). In practice, the leader’s speeches are the principal statements of policy and strategy. To cite just one example, discussed later in chapter 5, in late 2007 Raúl Castro instructed the PCC to conduct a national grassroots ‘debate’ (aimed at both party members and general public) around the speech he delivered on the 26th of July. Considered his

first major speech as acting President, on that occasion he criticised the CPE model and spoke about the need of economic reform in Cuba. Such national debate thus paved the way for the reformist plans of Raúl Castro. In this sense, even if leader's speeches have to be discerned in their political context, they are an infallible source of authoritative position statements. The subsequent legislation is, of course, the other main source of published evidence, and was included in this thesis' *corpus*.

The methodological importance of the official media for the analysis of state reform has been well explained by Hoffmann, a leading scholar on contemporary Cuba:

In the absence of pluralist political competition and its corollary institutions, the state media are more than just channels through which the Cuban authorities communicate their views to the population; rather, they constitute the principal way Cuban politics as such are made public. Their political bias and shortcomings are all too obvious. Yet, as the politics behind the scenes are kept as state secrets, it is these official manifestations in the media which represent the visible face of Cuban politics and hence become the key points of reference for political actors as much as for academic observers. (Hoffmann 2009, 232)

The ideology I analysed – via the interventions in the media (as texts/acts) that I collected as data for this study – still needed some form of contextualisation, namely I had to reconstruct “whatever context [that] enables us to appreciate the nature of the intervention” (Skinner 2002, 116). In this thesis I followed the classical approach of Gadamer (2014, 314), whom advised “to reconstruct the historical horizon” of the ‘text’ – i.e. the historical context in which it appeared – in order to make possible its interpretation. Thus, I carried out a longitudinal historical contextualisation of *state discourse* (across the period 2006-2014) whose subject matter was the two areas of political reform analysed in this thesis: 1) leadership style, and 2) economic strategy. As for the contextualisation I relied on a variety of sources that included journalistic coverage, academic journal articles, and fieldwork to conduct experts' interviews.

The reader will have noted that in the previous section I used the term ‘ideology’ in the sense of *economic ideology*, whereas in this section the same term denotes an all-embracing entity that mediates the formation of policy beyond the economy. In the former meaning, I am simply sticking to the literature on post-totalitarian rule; in the latter, I am referring to a methodological approach. Thus, in this thesis it needs

to be distinguished the 'ideology' as one of the elements of any regime, and 'ideology' as a source of qualitative data on policy change. To avoid confusion, in the rest of the thesis I will use the term 'ideology' according to the first connotation – i.e. as a characteristic of a regime distinct from the category of leadership.

To recapitulate, the methodology of this thesis is based on the *analysis of ideology*. In this academic field, the agents of ideological change include political organisations (as the PCC) and key political actors (as Raúl Castro); in consequence, the main data for analysis involve, respectively, 'major texts' (as party documents) and 'discourse' (as leader's speeches) (Maynard 2013, 314). Thus, I analysed ideology – through speech and documents – in order to discern a different policy approach within the Cuban regime towards the type of leadership and the type of economic doctrine.

In ideal circumstances, however, it would have been great conducting interviews with Raúl Castro and his associates to gain a more behind-the-scenes perspective. However, the difficulty of securing useful interview material in the Cuban political system is widely acknowledged. The absence of interview material from most academic published work on Cuban politics is evidence of the severity of this problem. The focus of this thesis on contested and ongoing reform makes this even more difficult. Another approach could have been conducting independent surveys but these cannot be carried out in Cuba. The surveys conducted on the reforms are either the (regular) confidential surveys carried out by the PCC, or surveys conducted clandestinely by US-based organisations like *Freedom House*, which rely on personal contacts and contacts of personal contacts such that these surveys do not use representative samples and thus have no robust methodological basis.

Besides, granted the difficulties of reproducing social science methods in the Cuban context, the issue of fieldwork resources is crucial. The very few academics that have been able to conduct such research have done so on the basis of long-constructed relationships based on long periods of residence on the island. A decision was therefore made to use the fieldwork time available to collect documentary materials, and to meet and interview, off the record, academic political economists.

I made two field trips to Havana during my PhD studies. I spent one month in Havana between June and July 2013 and another two weeks on November 2014. While there I was based at the Centro de Estudios de la Economía Cubana (Centre of Studies of the Cuban Economy, or CEEC), a research centre of the Universidad de La Habana (University of Havana). In the first trip I took a 'summer school' led by CEEC staff entitled "Cuban Economy: the Updating of its Model". As I was the only student of that course, the twenty hours I spent in the classroom were largely a conversation with four Cuban economists that presented to me their views and analysis of the reforms introduced during the presidency of Raúl Castro. Also in that trip, I attended a bi-annual Conference held in Havana of the *Cuba Research Forum*, a network headquartered at the University of Nottingham, UK. There I had the opportunity to present my research project and also listen to the analysis of the other academics that attended the event, mostly from Cuba but also from other countries.

In the second trip, I attended the annual International Havana Fair (FIHAV 2014), which is a commercial exhibition of foreign and Cuban companies with the purpose of boosting business links. The 2014 edition was especially relevant for the key purpose was to attract further foreign investment, in the context of the new more business-friendly FDI law approved earlier that year in Cuba. I was present in conferences offered by Cuban officials to foreign investors, presenting them the "opportunities" the Cuban economy offered to them. In this trip, I also conducted three expert interviews with scholars in Havana, based at CEEC and FLACSO-Cuba.³ Nevertheless, I did not use these interviews as evidence for this thesis. The main reason not to do so is that these scholars reiterated points they had already published, which made it unnecessary to transcribe the interviews because I was able to quote their published work directly. This does not mean that such interviews were pointless. Far from that, such interviews helped me to navigate through the academic literature on Cuba under Raúl Castro. In other words, I could quote the

³ It could be argued that I could have conducted more interviews by phone or e-mail. However, the former is very expensive and the latter, uncertain. The Cubans I approached actually expected me to go to Havana and talk. According to more seasoned researchers, the Cuban scholars fear intelligence officials may monitor their e-mail accounts, which is why they prefer to speak in person.

published work I quoted from these (and other) academics because I interviewed these scholars on the first place. In addition, Hoffmann has provided a compelling reason not to use the input of such interviews as primary but as auxiliary data.

As the [Cuban] political process at the upper echelons of power is solidly shielded from public view, any interview partner, no matter how “high up” he or she may be, can only present more or less plausible interpretations of a political reality played out behind the scenes, with no possibility of independent verification or falsification. As a result, speculation becomes inevitable. (Hoffmann 2009, 231)

In Havana I also held informal conversations with ‘ordinary’ Cubans from different backgrounds: workers, PCC militants, self-employed, employees in the tourist sector, intellectuals, and bureaucrats. These conversations gave me a valuable sense of the mood in the Cuban street, which helped me to calibrate my thoughts on the popular response to Raúl’s reforms. Again, whenever these conversations referred to information that could be independently verified, I included it in the data of this study. However, when this was the case I was not in the ethical position to disclose the identity of whoever led me to such data, as I was not granted explicit permission from these individuals to use and/or quote our conversation in this thesis.

Finally, I have also used for this thesis data I collected in previous field trips to Havana in 2009-2010, when I anonymously interviewed two professionals working at the Cámara de Comercio de la República de Cuba (Chamber of Commerce of the Republic of Cuba, or *Cámara*), an institution that has promoted Cuban exports abroad since 1959 but started claiming to represent the interests of the Cuban managers (“empresarios”) in the 2000s. I have also collected data from its quarterly magazine, *Cuba Foreign Trade*, which I updated in field trips in 2013 and 2014.

Make-up of this thesis

In this Chapter 1, I have already advanced the model used in this work to explain the changes undergone during the first Presidential period of Raúl Castro, which ended in 2013 and was then renovated for a final five-year period.

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical and political perspective adopted in this study. Hence I will discuss how the Marxist critique of Stalinism can be (and was actually) extended to the Cuban revolution because the two cases produced a ‘totalitarian’ regime, which stands opposed to the democratic *spirit* of socialist politics.

Chapter 3, which covers the theoretical framework of this thesis, conceptualises the relationship between charismatic leadership and market reform in a Communist system. I discuss in this chapter why the decline of charismatic leadership has the potential to cause a turn to performance-based legitimacy, hence to market reforms.

In Chapter 4, I will summarise the relevant historical background that I hope helps make sense of the presidency of Raúl Castro. Therefore, I discuss some key features of Cuban politics in the almost fifty years of Fidel Castro in power.

Chapter 5 covers the presidency of Raúl Castro before the Sixth Party Congress of 2011. There I discuss how the contours of *leadership* and *ideology* had started to change: charisma was uprooted and CPE orthodoxy had been challenged.

Chapter 6 covers the Sixth Party Congress and its aftermath. There I discuss the emergence of new *leadership* and *ideological* contours: collegiality had been installed and market socialism was in the process of becoming hegemonic.

Chapter 7 analyses the relationship between the decline of charismatic leadership and the rise of cautious reform in Cuba. This Chapter also analyses how each of these changes has affected the regime, which have morphed into an ‘early post-totalitarianism’ that has adopted an incipient *maturing* direction.

Chapter 8 contains the Conclusions of this work. In it I highlight the key findings of this thesis and briefly discuss their implications for both the literature on communist survival and for the analysis of Cuban politics from a socialist democratic view.

2. The Marxist critique of real socialism

For Žižek (2002, 3), “the moment one accepts the notion of ‘totalitarianism’, one is firmly located within the liberal-democratic horizon”. In this, he is opposing the concept of ‘totalitarianism’ as developed by “liberal rantings against Stalinism as the direct and necessary outcome of Marxism” (Žižek 2002, 4).

The basic claim of Žižek is the following:

[T]he notion of ‘totalitarianism’, far from being an effective theoretical concept, is a kind of *stopgap*: instead of enabling us to think, forcing us to acquire a new insight into the historical reality it describes, it relieve us of the duty to think, or even actively *prevents* us from thinking. (Žižek 2002, 3)

As “the key weapon of the West in the Cold War ideological struggle”, Žižek explains that the notion of totalitarian rule served Western hegemony by “dismissing the Leftist critique of liberal democracy as the obverse, the ‘twin’, of the Rightist Fascist dictatorship” (Žižek 2002, 2-3). Žižek’s critique of the liberal-democratic explanation of totalitarian rule is thus of contemporary relevance if one wants to challenge “the neoliberal claim that any radical emancipatory political project necessarily ends up in some version of totalitarian domination and control” (Žižek 2002, 5).

Although I do agree with Žižek’s stance against liberal democracy, in general, and in particular on the topic of ‘totalitarianism’, I disagree with his disqualification of that concept as a liberal-democratic notion. My contention is that in this point Žižek *completely* passes over an older, yet relevant radical elucidation of totalitarian rule from a Marxist perspective. The distinctiveness of my theoretical path can thus be summarised as follows: while I *do* retain ‘totalitarianism’ as an effective theoretical concept, I also endorse Žižek’s criticism of its mainstream appropriation.

Having said this, the purpose of this chapter is to recover the Marxist notion of *non-capitalist totalitarian regimes*, which is an articulating concept of this thesis. Hence in the first section I will summarise this approach as initiated by Victor Serge and Leon Trotsky in order to understand the Soviet Union under Stalin. Then in the

second part of that section I will introduce the equivalent approach in regards to Cuba after the revolution of 1959.

In the second section, I will criticise an alternative Marxist notion, “state-capitalism”, which I will discard as an adequate framework to grasp the vicissitudes of really existing socialism. In the second part of this section I will thus contend the notion of a ‘state capitalist’ Cuba – my objection to it being that it is theoretically flawed and, even on its own terms, poorly applied to Cuba. In the last section, I discuss the contemporary relevance of Trotsky’s approach, which I will also update with the inclusion of the scenario of totalitarian rule turning into a *softer* version of itself.

2.1 Totalitarian rule: a communist concept

2.1.1 From the critique of Stalinism...

According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2013, np), it was the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini whom “coined the term *totalitario* in the early 1920s to describe the new fascist state of Italy”. In an essay entitled *The Doctrine of Fascism*, the dictator summarised the aims of his totalitarian state in the slogan “everything in the state, nothing against the State, nothing outside the state” (Mussolini 1932, np).

Later on the term was widely used to describe the regimes of both Nazi Germany and Stalin’s USSR. So Hannah Arendt did in her influential work *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, where she examined these two cases as the embodiment of “total domination as a novel form of government” (Arendt 1962, xi). Nonetheless, the first to use this term to define Stalinism was apparently Victor Serge (Bourrinet 2001, Weissman 2001), who later claimed so in his *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (Serge 1980). In a letter sent from Moscow in 1933 to friends in Paris just before being arrested by Stalin’s secret police, Serge asserted that the Soviet State was “totalitarian, caste-ridden, absolute, power-mad State that does not care about human beings” (Serge quoted by Bourrinet 2001, np). Years later, in his 1940s exile in Mexico, he further elaborated his “democratic and libertarian” socialist view on the issue, clearly drawing a parallel between Stalin’s Russia and Hitler’s Germany:

If socialism doesn't vigorously maintain its democratic and libertarian (in the etymological and not anarchist sense of the word) physiognomy it will be torn apart and crushed. Its worst, its most destructive enemy at the current time is the totalitarianism of post-revolutionary Russia, Bolshevism transformed into an absolute totalitarianism of a type analogous to the reactionary [fascist] totalitarianisms. (Serge 2006, np)

As can be seen in this quotation, Serge at the same time separated "revolutionary" from "reactionary" totalitarian rule, Stalinism being of the first type and Nazism of the second. This distinction, though, did not imply a partial political concession to Stalinism, whose "revolutionary" nature was for Serge merely relative to the global hegemony of monopolist capital:

The Russian totalitarian system is revolutionary in relation to traditional capitalism, and reactionary in relation to liberal humanism and socialist aspirations. (Serge 2006, np)

In regards to Trotsky's adoption of the term *totalitarian* to characterise the Soviet regime it is unclear whether he "picked it up either from the popular press or from a reconsideration of Serge" (Twiss 2014, 416). In any case, when Trotsky introduced the term in his work on the late 1930s he used in the same way Serge did. Hence Trotsky likewise used it opposed socialist democracy to Stalinism.

Of [Soviet] party democracy there remained only recollections in the memory of the older generation. And together with it had disappeared the democracy of the soviets, the trade unions, the co-operatives, the cultural and athletic organizations. Above each and every one of them there reigns an unlimited hierarchy of party secretaries. (Trotsky 1972, chap. 5)

From this Trotsky derived the same conclusion reached by Serge:

The regime had become "totalitarian" in character several years before this word arrived from Germany. (Trotsky 1972, chap. 5)

It seems that Trotsky adopted the term as part of a new turn in his theory of Stalinism in which he had granted political autonomy to the ruling bureaucracy of the Soviet Union. Before, he had portrayed the Stalinist bureaucracy as a force incapable of standing on its own feet (Twiss 2010). However, more clearly since *The Revolution Betrayed*, Trotsky (1972) started to analytically differentiate the socio-economic order and the political system. The Soviet Union was thus a 'workers'

state’ – meaning that the bourgeoisie remained uprooted – whose political degeneration under Stalin had enthroned a ‘totalitarian regime’.

Although Trotsky did not explicitly define totalitarian rule, several passages of his late work “suggest some of the features he had in mind, including the concentration of enormous powers in the hands of a single individual, the abolition of popular control over the leadership, the use of extreme repression, and the elimination of contending loci of power” (Twiss 2014, 416) – a *status quo* Trotsky was opposed to.

Perhaps the most profound synthesis of Trotsky’s grasp of *totalitarianism* is contained in this fragment from his unfinished biography of Stalin, where he contrasted the Soviet phenomenon with 16th-17th century French *absolutism*:

‘*L’État, c’est moi*’ is almost a liberal formula by comparison with the actualities of Stalin’s totalitarian regime. Louis XIV identified himself only with the state. The Popes of Rome identified themselves with both the state and the church – but only during the epoch of temporal power. The totalitarian state goes far beyond Caesaro-Papism, for it has encompassed the entire economy of the country as well. Stalin can justly say, unlike the *Roi Soleil*, ‘*La Société, c’est moi*’. (Trotsky quoted by Deutscher 1948, np)

In this quote, the *regime* jumps out as a concept able to capture the autonomy of the political system, hence the endurance of the *Stalinised* Soviet Union. Although Trotsky (and most critical Marxists after him) paid more theoretical attention to the socio-economic role of the bureaucracy (the ‘workers’ state’ question), in his final years he was increasingly turning his attention to the bureaucracy’s logic of political domination. Days before he was killed by a Stalinist agent in 1940 in Mexico City, he had just finished an article with one of his few positive definitions of the totalitarian nature of the Soviet regime:

The Kremlin oligarchy is totalitarian in character, i.e., subjugates to itself all functions of the country’s social, political and ideological life and crushes the slightest manifestations of criticism and independent opinion. (Trotsky 1940b, np)

Nonetheless, he explained that that “the totalitarian character of the Kremlin politics does not flow from Stalin’s personal character but from the position occupied by the new ruling stratum before the face of the people” (Trotsky 1940b, np). In the same

article, after summarising once again his explanation of the rise of a privileged bureaucracy, Trotsky deals with the relation between the totalitarian regime and the *bureaucratically* planned economy:

This caste finds itself in a profoundly contradictory position. In words it comes forward in the name of communism; in deeds it fights for its own unlimited power and colossal material privileges. Surrounded by the mistrust and hatred of the deceived masses, the new aristocracy cannot afford the tiniest breach in its system. In the interests of self-preservation it is compelled to strangle the least flicker of criticism and opposition. Hence the suffocating tyranny, the universal grovelling before the “leader” and the not less universal hypocrisy; from the same source flows the gigantic role of the GPU as the instrument of totalitarian rule. (Trotsky 1940b, np)

He had earlier defined the totalitarian regime as “the regime of bureaucratic command in all spheres of life”, to the extent of falsifying the history of the Russian revolution “in the interests of glorifying a single human being, namely Stalin” (Trotsky 1940a). He had also made a similar point when he condemned how in the Soviet Union “the struggle of tendencies and schools [in artistic literature] has been replaced by interpretation of the will of the leaders” (Trotsky 1972, chap. 7). Such is the essence of the critique of Serge and Trotsky: totalitarian rule as total domination – a point later repeated by Arendt and today credited to *bien-pensant* liberal minds.

To claim that ‘totalitarianism’ is a communist concept, however, may be hard to swallow – even more in light of the standard liberal claim that the seeds of totalitarianism in the Soviet Union were present from the outset of the revolution in the Bolshevik Party. In this account, Leninism is viewed as a force whose evolution into Stalinism was inevitable – a thesis Žižek blatantly rejects:

Was the passage from Lenin to Stalin necessary? The Hegelian answer would evoke retroactive necessity: once this passage happened, once Stalin won, it was necessary. The task of a dialectical historian is to conceive it ‘in becoming’, bringing out all the contingency of a struggle that might have ended differently. (Žižek 2009b, 47)

Both Serge and Trotsky were aware of the historical interplay between necessity and contingency – a hunch present in their vindication of the emancipatory potential of the 1917 revolution. As for Serge, he “saw Stalinism as the corruption of Bolshevism”

(Weissman 2001, 9). While he was thus prepared to accept that the “authoritarian centralization of the Party contained the seeds of Stalinism as a whole”, he also stressed that the “revolution and Bolshevism also contained other seeds, notably that of a new democracy that Lenin and the others endeavoured to establish with good will and passion in 1917-18” (Serge quoted by Weissman 2001, 9).

For his part, Trotsky did not deny the dictatorial character of the initial regime with Lenin. Moreover, looking back he acknowledged that “it is absolutely indisputable that the domination of a single party served as the juridical point of departure for the Stalinist totalitarian regime” (Trotsky 1937, np); similarly, he admitted that “whoever prohibits factions thereby liquidates party democracy and takes the first step toward a totalitarian regime” (Trotsky 1939b, np). However, he insisted that from these exceptional measures taken in the middle of a civil war the subsequent totalitarian degeneration did not follow.

[O]ne cannot identify the laws of civil war with the laws of peaceful periods [...]. If one considered Abraham Lincoln’s policy exclusively from the point of view of civil liberties, then the great president would not appear very favourably. In justification of course he could say that he was compelled to apply civil war measures in order to cleanse the democracy of slavery. Civil war is a state of tense social crisis. One or another dictatorship, inevitably growing out of the conditions of civil war, appears fundamentally as an exception to the rule, a temporary regime. (Trotsky 1939c, np)

Instead, the *unfortunate* prolongation of civil-war measures after the civil war ended brought about the totalitarian regime – as a permanent yet *unacknowledged* state of emergency:

It is true that the dictatorship in the Soviet Union did not die out, but on the contrary took on monstrous totalitarian forms. This is explained by the fact that out of the revolution arose a new privileged caste which is incapable of maintaining its regime except through measures of a hidden civil war. It was precisely over this question that I broke with the Kremlin ruling clique. I was defeated because the working class, as a result of internal and external conditions, showed itself to be too weak to liquidate its own bureaucracy. (Trotsky 1939c, np)

Hence for Trotsky the civil war under Lenin was ‘open’ while it was ‘hidden’ under Stalin. For Žižek, there is a subtle distinction – but one of the highest political importance – between the Leninist ‘red terror’ and the Stalinist ‘totalitarianism’:

[I]n the early ‘Red Terror’, prohibition was openly admitted and announced, while under Stalinism, prohibition itself was prohibited – one had to pretend and act as if there was no terror, as if life had returned to normal. This difference, although it may look like hair-splitting, is crucial, for it changes everything: from the early Bolshevik ‘dictatorship’ which was open and transparent in its very exercise of violence (thereby also openly admitting its temporary character, its exceptional status), we pass to the Stalinist dictatorship which relied on its self-denial and thus on a basic mystification. (Žižek 2007, xxv)

In other words, how could Stalin’s “hidden civil war” have been put to an end if, in the first place, the official violence did not *officially* exist? This basic question explains why the Soviet constitutional termination of the state of emergency in 1936 meant in practice that “those who still opposed (or were presumed to oppose) the regime were [...] worthless scum to be excluded from humanity itself” (Žižek 2007, xxv). Having co-led the initial Lenin’s terror during the military defence of a nascent regime under imperialist attack, Trotsky later opposed the “monstrous” continuation of terror after the primary goals had been achieved. Trotsky’s theoretical and political relevance thus lies in his articulation of a Leninist critique of Stalinism.

Independently of whether one agrees or not with Serge’s and Trotsky’s analysis and militancy in the founding years of the Soviet Union, what matters for the purposes of this theoretical chapter is to highlight the examination of Stalinism as a ‘totalitarian’ regime presence within the Marxist tradition. Such an approach dates back well before the term was reinvented from an anti-communist perspective after WW2 in mainstream political science (Weissman 2001, Twiss 2014).

2.1.2 ...To the critique of *Fidelismo*

I revisited the communist critique of the Soviet Union under Stalin to recover the notion of *totalitarian non-capitalist formations*, which I apply in this thesis to Cuba. However, this is nothing new. To be sure, the Marxist critique of really existing socialism had a Latin American reception used to grasp Cuban events after the 1959

Revolution. In this sense, at least three Latin American Marxist intellectuals have defined socialist Cuba as a *totalitarian* regime: Moreno (1984), Azor (1998), and Farber (2006, 2011). They reached this conclusion independently from each other.

Totalitarian Cuba:

Samuel Farber, who was born and raised in Havana, has produced the most extensive scholarly literature on Cuba from a 'non-Soviet-like' Marxist perspective. I will mostly make reference to his last book on the topic hereinafter.

Farber draws a parallel between revolutionary Cuba and the Soviet Union based on the historical fact that the "eventual Stalinist outcome of the [Russian] revolution" had grown into a *hegemonic model* that "pre-empted or at least greatly diminished the opportunities for consideration of other revolutionary choices and possibilities" around the world (Farber 1990, 2). In other words, "the 'Marxist-Leninist' one-party state as interpreted and developed in Stalinist Russia was the common model" pursued and enforced in successive revolutionary upheavals claiming to be socialists during the 20th century, "e.g. in China, Cuba, and Vietnam" (Farber 1990, 2).

Although Farber notes that 'totalitarian' is "an ambiguous term that has been often used for political purposes to discredit the opponents of the West in the Cold War", he does not dismiss its utility for the Marxist tradition since such term "can be useful to designate something similar to what the Russian Communist leader Nikolai Bukharin called the 'imperialist pirate state'." (Farber 2011, 18)

This ['pirate state'] is a state whose social institutions "have a tendency to fuse with one another and to become transformed into one organization of the rulers... So there comes into being a single, all-embracing organization... with innumerable functions, with gigantic powers, with spiritual... as well as material methods." (Bukharin cited by Farber 2011, 18)

Farber traces the formation of this kind of (*totalitarian*) regime in Cuba back to 1961, two years after the US-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista had been toppled:

By April 1961, when the Cuban government finally took the step of officially declaring itself to be "socialist," it had achieved an almost total control of the polity, economy, and society. Cuba, along the lines of the Soviet Union, China, and Eastern Europe, was well on the way to

becoming a one-party state, increasingly controlling all social, political, and economic life on the island. It became a *totalitarian* country. (Farber 2011, 18)

Nahuel Moreno, a leading figure within the Latin American Trotskyite movement during the 'Cold War' era, had a compatible view. Moreno's point of departure was his endorsement of Trotsky's comparison of Stalin's Russia with Hitler's Germany:

Nazi Germany and Stalinist USSR had very similar political regimes: single-party governments, without the minimal democratic liberty and with a fierce repression. (Moreno 1984, 9)

Although in his perspective the two aforementioned cases shared the same type of regime, they were grounded on "diametrically opposed" socio-economic formations:

[T]he Nazi's is the state of the most reactionary and war-prone monopolies; the USSR is a bureaucratised workers' state, non-capitalist. (Moreno 1984, 9)

Based on this distinction between *socioeconomic structure* and *political regime* in Trotsky's framework, Moreno defined revolutionary Cuba in a way analogous to Stalin's Soviet Union. Hence for him Castro's revolution had produced a new *non-capitalist formation with a totalitarian regime*, the difference being that the Caribbean case had not been the product of degeneration of a workers' democracy, but a direct (though not linear) recreation of a bureaucratic, Soviet-style polity.

In a different yet noteworthy case, Marlene Azor, an academic from the University of Havana, defined Cuba as a *totalitarian state socialism* (Azor 1998). Although she vindicated Trotsky's analysis of the Soviet Union, she did not use the term 'workers' state'. Instead, drawing from literature apparently common to the socialist bloc's academia, she referred to the 'state socialisms', which she saw as a wide replication of the 'Soviet Model', Cuba being no exception to the rule. Her use of the term 'totalitarian', however, was based on mainstream political science at the time.

Although it is unclear whether she was aware of the socialist discussion of the term, she *was* aware (and critical) of its mainstream's anti-communist appropriation:

The concept originated in the Cold War and is, in the ideological language, an image that deprecates any system that does not present the formal features of liberal representative

democracy. However, the term became a concept in political sciences to designate specific political regimes. (Azor 1998, 87)

From this quote, taken from a paper based on her PhD thesis, it can be appreciated that although Azor incorrectly locates the origin of the term, she demarcates herself from its usual anti-communist connotation. In any case, perhaps not so surprisingly in Cuba, Azor was denied the doctoral degree by two different academic committees in 1996 and 1997 – for her it was a clear case of political censorship.⁴ With no academic opportunities in Cuba, she later moved to Mexico City.

The work of Farber, Moreno, and Azor overlap in two defining characteristics of the Cuban regime that make it totalitarian: 1) single-party rule, and 2) anti- pluralism.

1. Single-party rule

For Farber perhaps this feature summarises the totalitarian nature of the Cuban regime – a local adaptation of the Stalinist institutional framework:

In structural and institutional terms there was nothing original about the new Cuban model. Organized along the Soviet model of “democratic centralism,” it was a single party that allowed no internal currents or factions. A constitution that enshrined the political monopoly of the CCP, thereby making any other competing parties illegal, was eventually adopted in 1976. (Farber 2011, 18)

As for Moreno and Azor, this was also a salient element of their critique. The former rebuffed the regime self-identification with Marxist politics, reminding that “the Leninist [regime] was party pluralist before the civil war” (Moreno 1984, 68). The latter, similarly situated the monopoly of the Communist Party as the basis for an anti-pluralist regime as the single-party system “subordinates [the different social groups] to the ideological principles and imperatives” of the leadership (1998, 87).

But, how does the single ruling party actually rule? For Farber, this leads to the other key aspect of totalitarian Cuban: its prohibition of independent social organisations.

2. No social pluralism

⁴ Azor authorised me to confirm this in a personal communication (5-Aug-2015).

For Farber single-party rule means that “power is monopolized at the top in a system that does not allow any institutional constraints by unions or any other popular organization independent of the one-party state” (Farber 2011, 18). Instead, a *totalitarian* regime claims to represent all social groups, setting up mass structures that aim to embody the interests of the different parts of society. In practice, this means that the ruling party controls the allocation of leaders at the different levels.

The [Cuban] constitution also established the ruling party’s monopoly over Cuba’s mass organizations, such as the state’s trade unions and women’s organizations, which were to act as its transmission belts to the population at large. All organizations dedicated to the independent defense of the interests of workers, women, blacks, gays, and any other groups were left outside the bounds of the constitution and the law. (Farber 2011, 18)

Moreno had an almost identical appreciation which, again, contrasted Stalinism with the early days of the Russian revolution: “Under Lenin, the unions were independent of the state” (1984, 68). Taking this stance to the Caribbean, Moreno stressed that there were “no liberties” in Cuba: “if a worker in any Cuban organisation or of any other [deformed] workers’ state said s/he is Trotskyite or that s/he thinks that the United States is more democratic than Cuba, s/he would be immediately jailed” (Moreno 1984, 68). He observed similar obstacles in relation to creative work in academia, arts or journalism, where professionals cannot express “if they are not authorised by the government” (Moreno 1984, 68). However, regarding these views, it must be said that Moreno does not offer data that can be independently verified.

As for Azor, she concluded that “the total penetration of the social body” by the structures of the party-state in Cuba creates an “absence of social autonomy”; i.e. the lack of “all lines of distinction between the political apparatus and society” (1998, 87). In her view, this arrangement had facilitated “the permanent political mobilisation” demanded by the official “ideology” (Azor 1998, 87).

Alternative approaches:

Of course, the approach outlined above differs from the one advanced by Antoni Kapcia (2008, 2014), whose work is very influential in the British academia focused on Cuba. For him, the characterisation of the Cuban one-party system is “a vexed

question since this system offends conventional western notions of a functioning democracy, defining Cuba as a dictatorship in most western countries' eyes" (Kapcia 2008, 141). In response, Farber has criticised this Kapcia's epigram for it "avoid[s] a straightforward statement of whether he thinks the Cuban government is or is not a dictatorship" – an evasion that, Farber continues, intends "to undermine the notion that Cuba is a dictatorship by relativizing that judgment as 'Western' without actually saying or arguing that Cuba could be considered non-dictatorial according to some 'non-Western' criterion that is left unexplained" (Farber 2011, 35).

In a less oblique (and more recent) statement, Kapcia (2014, 9) has rejected that the single-party rule reflects a totalitarian, "monolithic Cuban state". Conversely, he argues that the Cuban state has always been weak from the beginning because of its low institutionalisation – which he attributes to an anti-bureaucratic sentiment of both ex-guerrillas and Fidel's leadership alike (Kapcia 2014, 9-10). Thus, he argues that "the absence of a state capable of effecting all the desired reforms meant that [...] a series of 'mass organizations' (created in 1960-62) took over the state's tasks" (Kapcia 2014, 11). Kapcia, however, separates here two notions that can be distinguished (in theory) but not disconnected (in practice). In other words, in Cuba the mass organisations *are part of the state*. And this is precisely the point of a totalitarian regime: to retain the exclusive leadership of participation structures.

Instead, Kapcia proposes to understand Cuba as a "post-colonial corporatism" (2014, 203). With this term he refers to a statecraft strategy that emerged in Third World countries during the 20th century in opposition to foreign capital power. Therefore, rather than locating Cuba as part of the family of "Communist systems", Kapcia puts it closer to the formation of the Mexican state after the 1910 revolution. While I do think that this is an insightful comparison that is worth it further consideration, I doubt that post-revolutionary Mexico was a case of "one-party democracy", as Kapcia (2014, 201) asserts. The purpose of Kapcia is politically clear, though: if Mexico was a "one-party democracy", then Cuba must be one too.

However, a different picture emerges if one scrutinises the conceptual framework informing Kapcia's comparative perspective on Cuba and Mexico. The first thing to consider is Schmitter's seminal definition of corporatism:

[A] system of interest representation in which the constituent units are organized into a limited number of singular, compulsory, non-competitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories, **recognized or licensed (if not created) by the state and granted a deliberate representational monopoly within their respective categories** in exchange for observing certain controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supports. (Schmitter 1974, 93-94) [The highlight is mine, as noted below.]

Schmitter indeed argued that Mexico fitted this definition (1974, 104), which he distinguished from the "monist" model of "the Soviet experience" (1974, 97). He defined 'monism' as almost like 'corporatism', exchanging the fragment I highlighted from the quotation above for this: "created, subsidized and licensed by a single party and granted a representational role within that party and vis-a-vis the state" (Schmitter 1974, 97). However, Kapcia bypasses the concept of "monism" by pointing out that "crucially, these [Cuban mass] organisations almost all pre-dated, and then ran alongside, the state that eventually emerged" (2014, 12). Nonetheless, Farber (2011, 134-40) has documented how the CTC, for example, was turned into a transmission belt of the emerging state after a purging process in 1959-61. The re-conquered union democracy of the first months of the 1959 revolution did not last long. At the end of the purge, "unanimity had now replaced controversy" (Farber 2011, 137) – the CTC's longer history making no difference in avoiding a Soviet-style fate.

However, even if one equates the (old) Mexican and (current) Cuban systems of interest representation, it is doubtful that the conclusion be that we are dealing with a common case of "one-party democracy". That time in Mexico is better defined as an "authoritarian bonapartism", as Rodríguez Araujo (2010, 38) has put it condensing most scholarly work on the subject. Incidentally, this label is reminiscent of Trotsky's grasp of 1930s Mexico as a "bonapartism sui generis", in reference to Cárdenas' government that in order to gain "the possibility of a certain freedom from the foreign capitalists" had opted for "manoeuvring with the proletariat and

even going so far as to make concessions to it” (Trotsky 1938a, np). Such a manoeuvring being anyhow achieved via a “semi-totalitarian... stateization of the trade unions” (Trotsky 1940c, np) – a co-option strategy that evokes what Schmitter called “corporatism”.

To be sure, since its inception “Mexican corporatism has been characterized by a lack of democracy in the trade unions”, as Garza Toledo (2004, 106) has stressed in order to explain why the subsequent assault on welfare concessions to the working class met no meaningful resistance during the neoliberal metamorphosis of PRI-dominated Mexico. If Cuba and Mexico shared a similar system of interest representation, it could hardly be called a democratic one. Yet both regimes emerged after a revolution they claimed to epitomise as a key claim to legitimacy – the difference being that Cuba took an anti-capitalist path. To be sure, the Mexican revolution (1910) occurred before the Bolshevik’s (1917), which helps to understand the absence of anti-capitalists pursuing state power in the Mexican insurgent ranks. In contrast, when the Cuban revolution erupted, communist forces were all over the world, Latin America of course included.

On the other hand, the regimes of both Mexico and Cuba shared an ideological trace: a bold *revolutionary nationalism* – a defensive stance against foreign intervention in internal affairs, aimed at the United States in particular. This convergence had laid the ground for a decades-long Mexico-Cuba “convenient partnership”, which could only be broken with the entrenchment of neoliberalism in Mexico in the 1990s, as Covarrubias (2011) has explained at length.

Thus, just as the non-democratic nature of Mexican corporatism proved self-defeating on the long term, arguably the same danger haunts the Cuban case.

Therefore, for Chaguaceda and Azor (2011), the party-state fusion in Cuba intrinsically implies the control of political participation of any social group. The customary suspicion of the Cuban state towards independent political action, explains the regime’s usual obstruction of the autonomous citizen’s organisation; i.e. pluralism. Hence political participation in Cuba is reduced to the exercise of the

individual voice. Although from a top-down perspective the aggregation of social demands is feasible, the bottom-up coordination to shape an agenda let alone managing it is excluded. Therefore, the political participation of Cubans is reduced to the discussion of plans already outlined (or decided) at the higher levels of the regime, such as the Council of Ministers or the Politburo. Ultimately, the Cuban leadership is free to interpret and communicate the popular will from above – while at the same time it groups the popular masses in vertical organisations led by the regime itself.

From a different angle, Roman (2003) has found democracy in Cuba not in the mass organisations, but in the electoral system, where the practice of both representation and participation at the *local* level would prove his point. However, a Cuban expert on the same topic has criticised that this view overlooks the role of *central* organs:

Although it is not the goal of the [Roman's] book to analyze this side of the problem [centralization of power], it is impossible to understand the efficiency and effectiveness of participation or representation without analyzing the distribution of real power, vertical (nation, province, municipality) or horizontal (executive and legislative organs). We are left here to accept that these powers are concentrated in the national executive organs and that representative or local action is simply an accessory. (Dilla 2002, 85)

Roman additionally argues that Cuba's legislative body, the National Assembly of the Popular Power (ANPP, by its acronym in Spanish), is very much independent from the Communist Party, pointing to the process of elaboration and approval of laws. Dilla equally challenges this insinuation that Cuba is thus *not really* a party-state:

His assertion that the legislative acts of the Cuban parliament do not involve prior approval by the party leadership is valid with regard to legislative details (as was confirmed for him in an interview by a former parliament president) but not with regard to their substantive aspects. In any case, we must bear in mind that the majority of legislative actions take the form of decrees issued by the State Council, whose leaders are all members of the Cuban Communist Party Political Bureau. The National Assembly, although it has the right to suspend or expel them, in reality has never done so and has preferred to approve them all with little or no discussion. Much the same thing occurs at the provincial and municipal levels [...]. (Dilla 2002, 86)

This said, Dilla nonetheless highlights that Roman's work represent a serious challenge to mainstream research on Cuba. Not least because it shows that "representative and participatory institutions can function in a one-party system as efficiently as in a multiparty one, and his reaffirming this in a world context of liberal dogmatism is a sign of his courage and intellectual honesty" (Dilla 2002, 85-86). Much the same can be said of Kapcia's work, which even shows that Cuban mass organisations can be more responsive to citizen's demands than the liberal democratic sporadic vote. My point, however, is that the institutionalised (single-party) exclusion of coordinated controversy is closer to Stalinism than to democracy.

2.2 A Marxist dead-end path

Up to this point, I have advanced the definition of Cuba as a *totalitarian non-capitalist formation*. However, an alternative view also inspired in Marxism defines Cuba as a case of 'state capitalism' – a notion I reject in this section.

Firstly, I will question the theoretical consistency of that concept – as developed after WW2 as a revision of Trotsky's analysis of the USSR. Then, I will argue against the transposition of this framework to the analysis of the Cuban case.

2.2.1 The invention of 'state capitalism'

Leon Trotsky had defined the Soviet Union under Stalin as a *degenerated worker's state* ruled by a *bureaucracy*. Trotsky developed his approach in the 1930s, more clearly in the book *The Revolution Betrayed: what is the Soviet Union and where is it going?* However, twenty years later and with WW2 already over, the Soviet Union annexed a substantial part of Eastern Europe – recreating there both the Soviet's socioeconomic structure and political system. Were they new 'workers' states'?

The debate over this question divided the Trotskyite movement among those who thought Trotsky's analysis was still relevant and those who concluded it was wrong and a new theory was needed. The revisionists converged in the view that the Soviet Union was actually a form of *capitalism*, which was ruled by a *new social class* – and as such socialists must not defend that system as Trotsky had argued.

For example, Claude Lefort and Cornelius Castoriadis in France, and Tony Cliff in Britain, were among several Trotskyite figures in different countries that attempted to develop an alternative to Trotsky's original framework (Linden 2009, 107). However, they did not share the same political trajectory. While Castoriadis actually departed from Trotskyism, Cliff set up a distinct yet *Trotskyite* tradition.

Regarding Castoriadis, he frankly explained that he and his comrades had departed from Trotskyism "on the most crucial problem of all, that of Stalinism" – in his account, "the history of our times has disproved again and again both the Trotskyist viewpoint and the forecasts that have been derived from it" (Castoriadis 1955, np).

Specifically, for Castoriadis political events after WW2 had disproved the following:

In the absence of a revolution, Trotsky said, the Stalinist parties would become more and more like the reforming parties and more and more attached to the bourgeois order, while the Russian bureaucracy would be overthrown with or without foreign intervention so as to bring about a restoration of capitalism. (Castoriadis 1955, np)

The conclusion he and his comrades drew from this did not hide their frustration:

Trotsky had tied this prognostication to the outcome of the Second World War. As is well known, this war disproved it in the most glaring terms. The Trotskyist leadership made itself look ridiculous by stating that it was just a matter of time. But it had become apparent to us, even before the war ended, that it was not and could not have been a question of some kind of time lag, but rather of the direction of history, and that Trotsky's entire edifice was, down to its very foundations, mythological. The Russian bureaucracy underwent the critical test of the war and showed it had as much cohesiveness as any other dominant class. If the Russian regime admitted of some contradictions, it also exhibited a degree of stability no less than that of the American or German regime. The Stalinist parties did not go over to the side of the bourgeois order. (Castoriadis 1955, np)

As the Soviet bureaucracy was not an ephemeral social group – on the contrary, it was a stable 'social class' that had undergone "the critical test of the war and showed it had as much cohesiveness as any other dominant class" – then Trotsky was wrong and a new understanding of the Soviet Union was needed. Hence for Castoriadis the Stalinist system was not a non-capitalist formation (a 'degenerated worker's state'), but a 'bureaucratic capitalism' (Linden 2009, 116).

Even more, the Soviet system was supposed to be “the final stage” of capitalism:

Once rid of the Trotskyist outlook, it was easy to see using the basic categories of Marxism, that Russian society is divided into classes, among which the two fundamental ones are the bureaucracy and the proletariat. The bureaucracy there plays the role of the dominant, exploiting class in the full sense of the term. [...] We see, therefore, that [...] bureaucracy personifies the final stage of capitalist development. (Castoriadis 1955, np)

For his part, Tony Cliff similarly theorised the Soviet Union as a ‘state capitalism’, which he identified with a situation where the state had “concentrated the total national capital in its hands which competition on the world market continued” (Cliff 1948, chap. 5). In contrast to Castoriadis, however, it was interaction with the ‘world market’ what conferred its capitalist character to any Soviet-like economy.

Linden, who has studied Cliff’s theory in depth, has synthesised it:

If one saw the Soviet Union in isolation, without taking into account the international context, then it would strikingly resemble ‘one big factory’, which was led from a central point. The capitalist character of this big state enterprise became visible if one included world relations in the analysis; then it transpired that the Soviet Union as a nation was comparable to any individual capitalist enterprise which sought to survive within competitive relations. (Linden 2009, 121)

Also similar to Castoriadis’ idea that the ‘bureaucratic capitalism’ was the consummation of capitalist development, Cliff saw his ‘state capitalism’ as “the extreme theoretical limit which capitalism can reach” (Cliff 1948, chap. 5). Although both Castoriadis and Cliff converged in the claim that the Soviet Union was the final/extreme stage/limit of capitalism, they differed on *where exactly* lay its capitalist character. While Castoriadis asserted that the Soviet Union was capitalist due to internal factors (the bureaucracy is an ‘exploitive class’), Cliff emphasised the external side (the USSR competes in ‘the world market’).

In what follows I will only examine Cliff’s theory as it has been more influential than Castoriadis’ (Linden 2009), my contention being that state-capitalism theory is inconsistent. To begin with, the weak spot of portraying the Soviet Union as a big

capitalist company competing in the world market – an idea central to Cliff’s approach – was actually anticipated by Cliff himself:

Russia’s backwardness has ruled out any question of flooding foreign markets with Russian goods. On the other hand, Russian markets are kept from being flooded with foreign goods by the monopoly of foreign trade which only military might can smash. (Cliff 1948, chap. 7)

Cliff’s solution to this theoretical tension (how can the world market affect the USSR if there is no foreign trade?), and the problems derived from it, has been well detected and discussed by Linden:

This circumstance could, however, be taken to imply that the Soviet Union as a national capitalist enterprise did not compete with other foreign capitals. And if that was the case, would it then still make sense to talk about ‘capital’ at all? Cliff thought he could neutralise the obvious objection by postulating that international competition did not take place by means of commodities, but by means of use-values in the form of armaments. [...]

Cliff’s approach forces him to reduce competition essentially to the arms race: a competition over military capacity. That, however, is still in conflict with [Marxian] orthodoxy. The arms race, after all, did not involve mainly commodities produced for an open market, and therefore cannot be considered as trade based on capitalist competition. (Linden 2009, 122, 312-3)

Thus for Linden, “we are forced to the conclusion that not a single theory of state capitalism succeeded in being both orthodox-Marxist as well as consistent with the facts” (Linden 2009, 313). Although for Linden the only inconsistency of Cliff’s theory is the issue of the world market, another problem that compounds the overall picture lies on the definition of the bureaucracy as a capitalist class.

To be sure, to talk about capitalism means, for Marx, to talk about capitalists:

The *capitalist*, as capitalist, is simply the personification of capital, the creation of labour endowed with its own will and personality which stands in opposition to labour. [...] [I]f one eliminates the capitalists, the means of production cease to be *capital*. (Marx 1972, 296)

Alternatively, Marx (1973, 512) underscored in his *Grundrisse* that “the concept of capital contains the capitalist”. If such is the case, therefore the concept of state capitalism must necessarily imply the bourgeoisie. The way Cliff circumvented this

problem was to theorise that the Soviet bureaucracy was indeed a bourgeoisie – even more, the “purest personification” of the *capitalist class*:

We can therefore say that the Russian bureaucracy, “owning” as it does the state and controlling the process of accumulation, is the personification of capital in its purest form. [...] The fact that the bureaucracy fulfils the tasks of the capitalist class, and by doing so transforms itself into a class, makes it the purest personification of this class. (Cliff 1948, chap. 6)

For Linden, the solution just quoted above “assumed the existence of a bourgeoisie in the Soviet Union”, therefore Cliff’s approach was “compatible with an orthodox definition of capitalism” (Linden 2009, 312). However, Linden’s assessment can only stand on its feet if one ignores another core element of Marx’s theory; i.e. that a capitalist class is such because its individual members own means of production. Each capitalist has a right on a property: s/he can sell it, let it, inherit it, etc. From this perspective, the bureaucracy of the old Soviet Union and that of the countries where its structure was later replicated cannot be conceived as a *capitalist class*. A bureaucrat is not a bourgeois: s/he does not enjoy the same privilege, which is qualitatively inferior. Trotsky disputed the first version of state-capitalism theory on precisely this point. For him, the issue of property rights was “sufficient to show how absurd are the attempts to identify capitalist stateism with the Soviet system” (Trotsky 1972, 245). He then further elaborated:

The bureaucracy has not yet created social supports for its dominion in the form of special types of property. It is compelled to defend state property as the source of its power and its income. In this aspect of its activity it still remains a weapon of proletarian dictatorship.

The attempt to represent the Soviet bureaucracy as a class of “state capitalists” will obviously not withstand criticism. The bureaucracy has neither stocks nor bonds. It is recruited, supplemented and renewed in the manner of an administrative hierarchy, independently of any special property relations of its own. The individual bureaucrat cannot transmit to his heirs his rights in the exploitation of the state apparatus. The bureaucracy enjoys its privileges under the form of an abuse of power [...]. (Trotsky 1972, chap. 9)

For Moreno the basic uncertainty haunting the privileged position of Soviet-style bureaucracies was still true as late as the 1980s, and he gave similar reasons to Trotsky's about why the bureaucracy was not a capitalist, hence propertied, class:

The bureaucrat is thus unstable [...] because is dependent on others [...]. A landowner owns his land; no bureaucrat is the owner of his post. He is dependent on the post and, therefore, lives nervously. Does the one above me like me or not? [The bureaucracy] lacks stability, does not have class certainty, and lives in a chimera. Is very weak in this sense, though is terribly counter-revolutionary by that same reason. She does not want the working class to move a single millimetre; she does not leave her any space. (Moreno 1982, 57)

More telling perhaps, the sole long-term economic crisis that provoked the collapse gave another blow to the state capitalism theory as the Soviet Union was supposedly a *higher* stage of capitalism. However, Cliff and his supporters “could hardly conceive of a *collapse* of state capitalism and the regression to a ‘lower’ stage of private capitalism which that could imply” (Linden 2009, 258). In my view, these theoreticians had mistaken a contingent historical product (the totalitarian Soviet Union) for a teleological historical stage (the consummation of capitalism).

2.2.2 The so-called capitalist Cuba

Recent Cuba has been defined as a ‘state capitalism’ by academics such as Rafael Rojas (2010) and Carmona Báez (2004). As already mentioned, this concept belongs to the theories developed by revisionist figures within the Trotskyite movement intended to re-characterise the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe after WW2.

Hence for Rojas (2010, 61) “Lefort and Castoriadis would not have hesitated to consider [Cuba an] authoritarian state capitalism.” For his part, Carmona Báez (2004, 23-6) has adapted Tony Cliff's theory of “bureaucratic state capitalism”. However, Rojas has not developed his definition in detail, as if asking the reader to trust the framework of Lefort and Castoriadis and its suitability for Cuba. In contrast, Carmona Báez has discussed thoroughly his Cliff-ean approach to Cuba.

To start with, Castoriadis/Lefort did not use the term ‘state capitalism’, let alone ‘authoritarian state capitalism’ as Rojas (2010) claims. On the contrary, they

disdainfully rejected this notion, which Linden, again, captured in his comprehensive study on the different Marxist theorisations of the Soviet Union:

Castoriadis later explained, that he regarded 'state capitalism' as 'an almost completely meaningless expression' creating 'a disastrous confusion [...], for it makes one think that capitalism's economic laws continue to hold after the disappearance of private property, of the market, and of competition, which is absurd.' (Castoriadis quoted in Linden 2009, 116)

Instead, Castoriadis/Lefort referred to the Soviet Union as 'bureaucratic capitalism', a label with which they "wanted to emphasise specifically the fact that, in the Soviet Union, *exploitation and oppression had persisted despite the elimination of classical private property*" (Linden 2009, 117). However, setting subtleties apart, it can be argued that Castoriadis/Lefort's approach was not at odds with state-capitalist ones like Cliff's, which is what Linden (2009, 107-126) implies when he groups them together as part of the 'theories of state capitalism' developed in 1941-56.

In a similar yet more disputable point, Rojas has wrongly attributed 'state capitalist' credentials to Moreno, an author actually adhering to workers' state theory.

Rojas's assessment of Moreno is as follows:

[T]his Argentinian Trotskyist makes some of the most serious criticisms that have been made to the Cuban Revolution from the Latin American left. Following the central ideas of Trotsky, Moreno argued that the history of the 20th century obliged to consider a stage [...] in which capitalism was not overcome by the workers' self-government but by a long phase of "state capitalism", led by a governmental bureaucracy. In his essay, Moreno referred, fundamentally, to three "frozen socialist revolutions" in the 20th century, the Soviets', the Chinese, and the Cuban. (Rojas 2011, np)

Nonetheless, I am afraid that in the essay quoted by Rojas, Moreno never mentioned state capitalism theory. Instead, he defines Cuba as a 'workers' state' – where a frozen or deformed revolution produced a totalitarian political regime led by a family's government, the Castro's (Moreno 1984, 11, 61, 68). Thus, a careful reading of Rojas' sources results in an objection to Rojas himself. One can only wonder why Rojas has so blatantly misstated the authors he relies on to make his case. In any

event, one can only draw the conclusion that the definition of Cuba as state capitalism advanced by him cannot be taken seriously.

Carmona Báez, on the contrary, has indeed developed a distinct approach. In the original conceptualisation of Cuba as a state capitalism, Cliff's collaborators asserted that the Caribbean island was "an international tentacle of Russian state capital" (Binns and González 1980, 33). However, this is a simplistic view that overlooks that Cuba was not a servant or satellite but a junior partner of the Soviet Union (Farber 2011, 125), in a type of relationship analogous to the one that has existed between Israel and the United States (Gleijeses 2002, 373-4). In this sense, Soviet-aided large Cuban military incursion in Angola in 1975-6 was read by the Cliff-eans as the proof that Fidel Castro was a "Brezhnev's agent" that provided "much cheaper" troops than the Red Army (Binns and González 1980). The reality, however, was so much different. As a high Soviet foreign officials later acknowledged, the idea of the Angola mission originated in Havana, not Moscow – which proved converging, not imposed interests between the USSR and Cuba (Domínguez 1986, 133-5). Furthermore, had Cuba been a Soviet lackey, why would it have been able to survive the collapse of its master? Such is the question Carmona deals with.

Carmona in turn proposed an innovation to Cliff's theory in light of the survival of Cuba to the collapse of the Soviet Union (hence its subsidy to the island's economy):

I would accept Cliff's argument that since production relations are essentially the same and the law of value continues to exist, Cuba's mode of production in many aspects resembles bureaucratic state capitalism; possibly a *decentralised bureaucratic state capitalism*. (Carmona Báez 2004, 25)

However, the politics of Carmona are at odds with Cliff's tradition for the former accepts state capitalism's theory, but giving it a positive twist – instead of lamenting its capitalist character, one should celebrate that at least Cuba was not a deformed entity like the Soviet Union. This is what transpires in Carmona's approach to Cuba's survival, which he looks as some sort of evolution of the state-capitalist creature:

Few Marxists anticipated the decentralisation of national industries under still state-controlled economies. The experience [...] concerning Cuba's new enterprise system, totally

negates the notion that the economy is centralised under the auspices of a central bureaucracy. There is a new development that emanated from the economic crisis that Cuba experienced during the early 1990s. [...] I will demonstrate that state-run economies are capable of surviving global pressures to return or transit to private competitive capitalism by adjusting their own lines of production in order for them to resemble those of private companies, thereby making themselves more competitive. (Carmona Báez 2004, 25)

Nonetheless, by depicting the 1990s ‘decentralisation’ of the Cuban foreign sector as an evolution (in the sense of progress) of state capitalism, Carmona tells more about his normative settings than about Cuba. While Carmona notes that the Cuban leadership “often shy away from critiquing their own production relations” (2004, 25), he makes the controversial claim that “the ideas that are promoted by the vanguard” are “currently demanded by the general population” (2004, 41). Of course one would like to know whether Carmona confers on the political system of Cuba an unacknowledged yet implicit claim to universality. Regarding this, one is rather tempted to evoke Rojas’ quip that many of “those who endorse the regime of the island uncritically [...] would never accept a single-party system or capitalism of the state in Rome, Paris, London or Washington” (Rojas 2010, 62).

On the other hand, if Carmona’s basic argument is that Cuba avoided a “return to private competitive capitalism” through the decentralisation of its “state-run” economy, whence does he derive the insistence on calling it ‘capitalist’? My contention here is that Carmona’s empirical evidence is trapped in an inadequate theoretical jacket. While he provides evidence for the 1990s decentralisation of the Cuban economy, he takes for granted that the formation he is dealing with is a capitalism of the state. Nevertheless, the case is that there is no native bourgeoisie (i.e. capitalist class in the Marxian sense of the term) in Cuba since the 1960s expropriations launched by the revolutionary state – and this makes a difference.

I hope that the previous discussion suffices to illustrate the lack of theoretical coherence behind the definition of Cuba as a case of ‘state capitalism’. Instead, I insist defining it as a *non-capitalist formation*. Although it is not enough to raise a negative concept – namely one based on what is not (indeed, if Cuba is *non-capitalist*, then what it is?) – arguably this term provides a better starting point.

2.3 Trotsky reconsidered

The question of whether Trotsky's analysis retained any value at all after WW2 – a key question in some theories earlier discussed in this chapter – is, at bottom, originated in a faulty posturing of the analyst. To illuminate this claim I will use to my advantage Žižek's challenge to an equivalent question regarding the contemporary value of 'the idea of communism' activated by Karl Marx in the 19th century:

Adorno begins his *Three Studies on Hegel* with a rebuttal of the traditional question about Hegel exemplified in the title of Benedetto Croce's book *What is Living and What is Dead in the Philosophy of Hegel?* Such a question presupposes, on the part of the author, the adoption of an arrogant position as judge of the past;

Alternatively, he suggests:

but when we are dealing with a truly great philosopher the real question to be raised concerns not what this philosopher may still tell us, what he may still mean to us, but rather the opposite, namely what *we* are, what our contemporary situation might be, in *his* eyes, how our epoch would appear to *his* thought. And the same should apply to communism [...]. The only way to grasp the true novelty of the New is to analyse the world through the lenses of what was "eternal" in the Old. (Žižek 2009a, 6)

Although Trotsky was not a philosopher, Žižek has conferred him a 'great' status – one that emanates from a political *continuum* from Marx to Trotsky via Lenin.

From Marx to Lenin:

Lenin violently displaces Marx, tears his theory out of its original context, planting it in another historical moment, and thus effectively universalizes it. (Žižek 2001, 3)

From Lenin to Trotsky:

[P]erhaps, the signifier 'Trotsky' is the most appropriate designation of what is worth redeeming in the Leninist legacy. (Žižek 2007, 20)

The following *Žižekian* proposition can be thus formulated: instead of reprimanding Trotsky for failing to predict the future correctly – let us put aside for a moment that nobody knows the future, never mind Trotsky who was murdered by a Stalinist agent

before the war broke out – the real question to be raised was *how the new situation (post-war Stalinism) would have appeared to his thought?*

Such was the procedure attempted by Trotsky's followers grouped in the Fourth International after an internal debate that lasted from 1947 to 1951, when the organisation adopted the view advanced by the US-Americans Joseph Hansen and Berth Cochran, for whom the Soviet occupied countries were workers' states that had been *bureaucratically deformed* from the beginning (Linden 2009, 106). They not only stated that the Stalinist system had been replicated in Eastern Europe, but they derived this from an update of Trotsky's analysis. The key argument was that the new states belonged to the same species existing in the Soviet Union at the time, but its formation had followed a different historical path: not through *degeneration* of an emancipatory project, but via *direct recreation* of the degenerated type.

However, the choice of words ('workers' state') causes distracting objections. A typical one is the axiom that "you cannot have a workers' state without the workers having power to dictate what happens in society" (Cliff 1979, np). If occupied Eastern Europe countries were not in the hands of workers, ergo they were (they could not be other than) capitalists. Such reductionism is at the centre of state capitalist's objection to following *Trotsky* after his time – then *ex post facto* not even in his time.

Linden (2009, 315) has objected the 'workers' state' notion along similar lines, signalling the contradiction of viewing the working class "as being economically the ruling class, but politically powerless". In his view:

The peculiar thing is that [...] in a planned economy, political and economic power *cannot* be so separated. Whoever formulated and supervised the implementation of the plan, and thus possessed political power, obviously also ruled the economy. (Linden 2009, 315)

However, for Trotsky the Soviet Union under Stalin was still a workers' state not in the sense that workers remained somehow a 'ruling class', but rather in the sense that the bourgeoisie *still* remained defeated, expropriated, and no private capitalists ran the economy. Far from the early days in which the Soviet Union was actually run by workers' councils, the bureaucracy had removed workers from power *but it had*

not yet brought the bourgeoisie back. By defining the USSR as a ‘degenerated workers’ state,’ Trotsky implied that although this polity had ‘degenerated’ into a bureaucratic totalitarianism, it was still a revolutionary conquest – a ‘worker state’.

Although Trotsky was addressing USSR’s domestic politics, there was also an international dimension in play. With World War II (WW2) at the doors, sides were to be taken, and Trotsky’s theory was also an international call to defend the USSR from imperialist and/or Nazi aggression. As the sole place where capitalists had been routed, how could socialists have had rejected the defence of a *workers’ state*?

Trotsky’s work was thus an instrumental *tailor made* answer to the predicament of the time. While the *external* threat against the Soviets demanded its defence, its *degeneration* demanded the removal of the *internal* threat: Stalinism. Reducing the workers’ state notion of Trotsky to its bare bones, it simply means *non-capitalist*. In other words, if the countries of the socialist bloc were *non-capitalist formations*, the political implication was that they embodied a key battlefield for socialists: ergo, it was necessary to reclaim these polities – both to be preserved and reinvented.

In this sense, Trotsky’s approach is reminiscent of Lenin’s hunch that “there is *not a single* phenomenon which, under certain conditions, cannot be transformed into its opposite” (Lenin quoted by Lukács 2009, 76). As “there are no areas of the class struggle in which revolutionary (or counter-revolutionary) possibilities are not present” (Ibid, 79), for Lukács the Leninist gesture *par excellence* is the compulsion to politically intervene in order to modify (and even lead) the course of events is.

‘The readiness is all.’ [...] [T]he figure of Lenin as the very embodiment of permanent readiness represents an ineradicable value – a new form of exemplary attitude to reality. (Lukács 2009, 97)

From this perspective, Trotsky’s key diagnose was that the Soviet regime embodied an *unstable political equilibrium*, namely on the brink of either rolling *forward* or *backward* – a crucial analytical suspense if one is to monitor and exploit political opportunities. It is in this sense that Stalinism was an *interim political formation*:

To define the Soviet regime as transitional, or intermediate, means to abandon such finished social categories as capitalism (and therewith “state capitalism”) and also socialism. But besides being completely inadequate in itself, such a definition is capable of producing the mistaken idea that from the present Soviet regime only a transition to socialism is possible. In reality a backslide to capitalism is wholly possible. (Trotsky 1972, chap. 9)

Trotsky’s approach thus echoed Lenin’s grasp that the future is not and cannot be written in advance. If the 1917 Russian Revolution had created a ‘worker state’ as a step forward to socialism, a ‘degeneration’ of it under Stalin meant a step back to capitalism. From this it followed that there were two mutually excluding political outcomes, the winner of which could only be decided by *struggle*:

The USSR thus embodies terrific contradictions. But it still remains a degenerated workers’ state. Such is the social diagnosis. The political prognosis has an alternative character: either the bureaucracy, becoming ever more the organ of the world bourgeoisie in the workers’ state, will overthrow the new forms of property and plunge the country back to capitalism; or the working class will crush the bureaucracy and open the way to socialism. (Trotsky 1938b, np)

Thus, the concepts of both *degenerated* and *deformed* workers’ state simply embodied the militant presentation of an otherwise unexciting definition: *non-capitalism* – hopefully not capitalist again / potentially put right via struggle.

Of course the suspense ended with the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, when capitalism was restored as a result. The die had been cast. Only after a large privatisation process, a layer of “lucky” bureaucrats turned into a capitalist class proper, not before. Two academics later summarised how Trotsky’s class analysis helped to grasp the capitalist restoration that followed the fall of the USSR:

Trotsky had long ago argued that the elite would find its privileged position unsatisfactory, as (under Soviet conditions) it depended upon the temporary control of office. Far better, from their point of view, to guarantee their advantage and make it heritable across the generations in the same way as ruling groups in other societies: by the private ownership of property and wealth. (Kryshtanovskaya and White 1996, 730)

However, even if Trotsky *was right*, it is also true that his expectation that Stalinism would either suffer a workers' revolt or a capitalist restoration *was wrong*, as it encompassed two mutually excluding scenarios that ultimately mixed up.

As Žižek has put it:

The ultimate irony, however, is that the two opposite outcomes predicted by Trotsky seem to have combined in a strange way: what enabled the *nomenklatura* to become the direct owners of the means of production was the resistance to their political rule, whose key component – at least in some cases (Solidarity in Poland) – was the workers' revolt against the *nomenklatura*. (Žižek 2002, 130)

The rising new technocracy of collapsing Soviet Union had managed to get popular support for their plans by using socialist language. The new elite argued they would now “free” the state enterprises from the hands of the “bureaucracy” as a cover for the *spontaneous privatisation* of state assets by former top bureaucrats – a process witnessed, advised and later reported by Western neoliberals (e.g. Boycko, Shleifer, and Vishny 1995). As the workers' revolts did not coalesce into a power alternative that reinvented the system, the morphing elite kept the upper hand, filled the political vacuum, and advanced their interests.

Yet the question can still be raised of Stalinist survival through WW2, which is another so-called proof of Trotsky's theoretical mistakes. As the USSR neither went through capitalist restoration nor democratic renewal – quite the contrary, it even expanded its influence and socio-political model as an outcome of WW2 – some rejected the concept of a ‘workers' state’ as a *transitory equilibrium*, and instead theorised a stable *status quo*: ‘state capitalism’. As opposed to this, Mandel (1979, 65) had argued that “the secular trend is and remains that posed by Trotsky [...]. However, the time-scale was obviously wrong”. Mandel thus removed the time factor present in Trotsky's work, which is a procedure whose consistency has been objected by Linden insofar as with such move

The force of Trotsky's argument is thereby undone, because the specific (and Marxian) considerations which originally brought the author of *The Revolution Betrayed* to his thesis

are now tacitly eliminated, and replaced by an abstract generality [“the secular trend”].
(Linden 2009, 314)

Two observations can be made. Firstly, despite the confidence of this assertion, Linden does not actually elaborate why the time factor would be a matter of Marxian orthodoxy. Second, his objection leaves two theoretical alternatives:

1. Either a new theory is proposed instead of Trotsky’s; or,
2. The lag-time is consistently explained.

The first path is the one actually followed by state-capitalism theory, which turned out to be both theoretically and factually incoherent as I discussed in the last section. As for the second path, it has remained largely unexplored by Marxists, which is why Linden has a point in claiming that Mandel’s explanation was unsatisfactory and abstract. If Trotsky’s “time-scale was obviously wrong”, as Mandel claimed, would not have been reasonable to explain the actual timing?

To be sure, Trotsky sensed that totalitarianism could only be a short-lived regime as for him “naked dictatorship” could only be “temporary”:

A totalitarian régime, whether of Stalinist or Fascist type, by its very essence can be only a temporary transitional régime. Naked dictatorship in history has generally been the product and the symptom of an especially severe social crisis, and not at all of a stable régime. Severe crisis cannot be a permanent condition of society. A totalitarian state is capable of suppressing social contradictions during a certain period, but it is incapable of perpetuating itself. The monstrous purges in the USSR are most convincing testimony of the fact that the Soviet society organically tends toward ejection of the bureaucracy. (Trotsky 1939a, np)

So why did not Stalinism fall as ‘soon’ as was it was supposed to?

Perhaps one way to deal with this question is to argue that what *fell* in 1991 was not *exactly* Stalinism. In other words, what if the Soviet totalitarian regime typified by Trotsky and Serge had already receded (well before 1991) in favour of an arrangement that rendered more palatable the *status quo* entrenched by Stalin?

Here I would like to introduce another distinction: that between the political system and the regime – the former referring to a certain set of institutions, and the latter

to *how* that set is articulated. From this proposition it follows that if the totalitarian regime cannot be a “permanent condition” (i.e. is “transitional”), a theoretical possibility is that it becomes less “severe” in order to succour and prolong the *same* political system. Hence the set of *Stalinised* institutions remains intact yet less cruel.

As I will elaborate in the next chapter, after a stage of maximum enthusiasm under an autocratic leader, totalitarian rule can slacken off to such an extent as to crystallise into a new type of regime: *post-totalitarianism*; for example, Russia after Stalin or China after Mao. Here is where mainstream political science can help.

Summary

In this chapter I introduced a ‘non-Soviet-like’ Marxist conceptualisation of the 20th century communist systems. To do this I recovered the framework developed by Trotsky in the 1930s to understand the Soviet Union under Stalin as a ‘non-capitalist’ formation with a ‘totalitarian’ regime – a framework that has also been applied (as I do in this thesis) to the Cuban polity after the revolution of 1959. My basic definitions are that an anti-capitalist socioeconomic arrangement has been in place since the Cuban revolution undertook an anti-capitalist path in the 1960s, while the totalitarian regime has undergone changes that I will address in the next chapters.

However, to define Cuba as a *non-capitalist totalitarianism*, from the Left, means to oppose the view that denies that Cuba is a ‘totalitarian’ regime, and also the view that denies it is a ‘non-capitalist’ formation. Supporters of the Cuban political system who instead argue that Cuba is some sort of ‘democracy’ usually hold the first position, while the second position is related to a distinct ‘non-Soviet-like’ view that sees Cuba and all 20th century communist systems alike as ‘state capitalist’ systems.

On the one hand, I contended that the political design of Cuba’s communist system was based on the institutional framework of the Soviet Union, which was far from had provided an example of ‘democracy’. On the other, I also contended that it is inadequate to talk about ‘capitalism’ when the native bourgeoisie (the capitalist class) has been expropriated, as all 20th century communist revolutions did.

Overall, in this chapter I have recapitulated the Marxist grasp of ‘totalitarian’ rule – a conceptualisation that I will connect in the next chapter to the literature of Political Science for the analysis of ‘post-totalitarian’ transitions. As I anticipated in the introduction, this connection has the potential to bridge a gap in the Marxist stance that pioneered the definition of the 20th century communist systems as totalitarian ones. As Marxism has long lacked an analytical framework to analyse the political evolution of this regime type, the comparative politics’ theory of ‘post-totalitarian’ development of communist systems can help to overcome this deficit.

If in this chapter I introduced the basic political concepts to approach Cuba, in the next one I articulate them into a theory of political development. The resulting framework is what informs the analysis of the empirical evidence in later chapters.

3. The theory of post-totalitarian Cuba

With the downfall of the Soviet Union, which had largely subsidised the Cuban economy (Mesa Lago 2000, 2012, Pérez-López 2003), it was clear that the Island would change somehow in order to deal with the new circumstances. Many analysts took for granted that both the collapse of Communism in Cuba and the rise of liberal democracy were *around the corner*. Typical of this mood was the book entitled “Castro’s Final Hour”, by Oppenheimer (1992). It was expected that Cuba would re-enact the communist collapse just seen in Europe. The downfall seemed not a matter of if but when. Since Cuba belonged to the same family and depended too much on it, the contagion of political disintegration seemed a natural consequence.

But Cuba survived... Other analysts then underscored the challenge this case posed for “realism in international relations, and liberal constitutionalism in comparative politics”: its “political exceptionalism”, the argument goes, makes Cuba a “hard case” that “test[s] the limits of our standard terminology” (Whitehead 2007, 21, 24). This line of inquiry thus resulted in the overemphasis on the *uniqueness* of Cuba.

The approach adopted here, in contrast, intends to circumvent both liberal democratic obsessions and the comparative scepticism of the exceptionality view. To do so, I will rely on the utility of the post-totalitarian regime-type advanced by Linz and Stepan (1996). On account of this, in the first section of this chapter I will first explain how the Marxist foundation of this work has engaged with the literature on post-totalitarian rule. Then in the second section I will discuss the properties of post-totalitarian rule and the theory of its evolution developed by Saxonberg (2013) for the comparative analysis of communist survival in Cuba, China, North Korea and Vietnam – this theory, in a modified manner, informs the rest of this study.

In the third section, however, I will argue against Saxonberg’s characterisation of the Cuban case as (in rough terms) another North Korea (a dynastic polity, the latter being more brutal). Instead, I will endorse and explain the already existing notion of ‘charismatic post-totalitarian’ rule in Cuba after 1990 (Mujal-León and Saavedra 1997, Mujal-León and Busby 2001). How can I use Saxonberg’s theory and reject his

analysis of the Cuban case at the same time? My argument here is that Saxonberg has poorly applied his own model to the analysis of post-Soviet Cuban communism.

Finally, in the last section I 'insert' the theory of charismatic authority of Max Weber into Saxonberg's theory of post-totalitarianism. I argue that this theoretical articulation can lay the ground for the understanding of Cuba after 2006. Hence I develop a model to explain why the withdrawal of the charismatic founder of a post-totalitarian polity can cause a turn to (pragmatic) legitimacy based on performance – ergo, suggesting a political path that Saxonberg's theory, as it is, is unable to see. In doing so, I also challenge one assumption of Saxonberg, namely that any attempt of communist systems to improve the economy undermines its socialist claims to legitimacy – ergo, I explain why 'market socialism' is a feasible solution. Of course, the specific analysis of Cuba under Raúl is the object of later chapters.

3.1 Marxist handling of *transitology*

In the previous chapter I argued that Cuba could be understood as a *bureaucratically deformed workers' state* or as a *totalitarian non-capitalist formation*. Although both terms are compatible, the second one allows appreciating the nature of the political regime – whose development I discussed in this chapter. Thus, while I do agree with Farber (2006, 2011) in that the Cuban revolution after 1959 followed a totalitarian path, I contend that relying on this concept alone for the whole period thereafter fails to capture the changes the regime has experienced since its inception.

In the introduction I explained the conceptual need to complement the Marxist conceptualisation of 'totalitarian' Cuba with the literature on 'post-totalitarian' regimes developed by mainstream Political Science. I also justified the articulation of these traditions on very pragmatic grounds, namely that Political Science has undertaken the comparative analysis of the 'surviving' Communist systems, while contemporary Marxism has not. Thus, my argument goes, there are valuable insights that the Left do not need to re-invent from scratch about the *survival* of (whatever is left of) the Communist system in China, Cuba, North Korea, and Vietnam.

Moreover, the Marxist tradition admits the pragmatic use of transitology-made tools because both literatures have compatible views regarding the term 'regime'. To begin with, Marxists have long argued that societies are regulated by a set of (preferably state) institutions through which a dominant class rules. For instance, Moreno (1984, 8) defined the 'regime' as a "certain articulation of state institutions", while Trotsky (1969, chap. 3) defined the 'revolution' as "a political struggle which the classes wage not with bare hands but through the medium of 'political institutions' (parties, etc.)". Hence, Moreno nails equilibrium down, while Trotsky underscores the struggle that precedes and shapes any such equilibrium. By merging these two complementary definitions into a single historical materialist construct, it can be said that a 'regime' is *the result of an ongoing or concluded political struggle synthesised in a specific institutional framework ruling a certain society*.

Following a different intellectual trajectory, Latin American political scientists have coined similar notions. Rodríguez Araujo (2010, 36), for instance, understands the 'regime' as "a form of the state that depends on the correlation of social and political forces in a given country and at a given moment". Similarly, Mujal-León and Saavedra (1997, 117) have noted that a regime "comprises a way of 'ordering' the relations between state and society and, consequently, every regime presupposes 'equilibrium'" – as opposed to "a situation of mere transition". By way of integration, Rodríguez Araujo, like Moreno, stresses equilibrium; and, like Trotsky, also highlights its political formation. Mujal-Leon and Saavedra, for their part, take a step further and include in their definition the transition from one regime to another.

This said, where the above-mentioned traditions clearly diverge is in their *politics*. If in the previous chapter I sketched what a 'non-Soviet-like' Marxist political vantage point may mean in contemporary Cuba, in the rest of this section I will clarify why this perspective is incompatible with the underlying standpoint of *transitology*.

As a sub-discipline within Political Science, Transition Studies or *transitology* acquired wide influence with the seminal four-volume book *Transitions from authoritarian rule* (O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead 1986a, b, c, O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986). One of the political events that motivated the three co-editors of

the “transitions” project was the overthrow of military dictatorships in Latin America, which was expected to inspire similar developments in other countries. Hence the goal of the work was to provide a framework to grasp and hopefully guide political actors in further transitions from ‘authoritarianism’ to ‘democracy.’

In order to support these transitions in Latin America and elsewhere, these authors proposed an elite-friendly approach that deliberately left hot topics, such as wealth distribution, for the future. O’Donnell (1996), for example, suggested that Latin American elites could accept liberties such as free press and elections if they felt confident enough about not envisaging any substantial loss of privilege – an expectation that experience seemed to corroborate (Weyland 2004). The primary goal of these scholars in the mid-1980s was to achieve some sort of *ground floor*: democracy. If such an institutional framework was installed, it could later channel *hot potatoes* like social justice. As one scholar has noted:

The new enemy was no so much the ruling classes or imperialism but authoritarian rulers, and the tacit agreement was that property relations would not be touched in a transition, all of which explains why the socialist agenda was either downplayed or deferred. (Arditi 2008, 64)

The standard rebuff of *transitology* concerns teleology of course. In this account, *transitologists* are fundamentally wrong due to one “core assumption”, namely that “any country moving *away* from dictatorial rule can be considered a country in transition *toward* democracy” (Carothers 2002, 6). However, if the contributors of *Transitions from authoritarian rule* had seen liberal democracy as the natural endpoint of modern political transitions, why would have they bothered with helping that regime to actually emerge? Quite the contrary, teleological expectations have been mostly resisted by researchers of transition as was later proved by Gans-Morse (2004) in a comprehensive examination of their academic papers.

The problem lies elsewhere. By sponsoring the liberal democratic regime as the best possible endpoint of any modern political transition, analysts frequently proceed as if asking their object/s of study: *why don’t you become a liberal democracy?*

For example, Whitehead (2007, 16) has raised the question of whether the “exceptionalist” political trajectory of Cuba “may impede a standard constitutional democracy” after “the inflexibility of the Castro regime begins to relax”. Thus, in order to lay the ground for a comparative study, Whitehead advances ‘constitutional liberalism’ as the standard against which the Cuban case must be measured. Curiously, he justifies this analytical strategy on the grounds that “it may offer some escape from the rigid ideological stereotypes” (Whitehead 2007, 17). Ironically, in trying to bypass ideology assisted by a supposedly neutral ‘standard’, he comes back to ideology by presenting his own standard as *ideology-free* – a typical regression into ideology “at the very point where we apparently step out of it” (Žižek 1994, 13).

This has an explanation. As it is widely reminded, when Communism finally collapsed in former USSR and East Europe, Francis Fukuyama (1992) became famous for diagnosing that we have reached the “End of History”, namely the triumph/reign of liberal democracy. Although Fukuyama has been refuted time and again, its political message summarises the ideological atmosphere after 1991: anything better to democratic capitalism is impossible. But perhaps with the global financial crisis sparked in 2008, such an assumption is not as self-evident as in previous years.

If one is to fuel some optimism, perhaps we are witnessing a hegemonic crisis, a symptom of which is *political morbidity* – a situation that Antonio Gramsci defined as that where “the old is dying and the new cannot be born”. He further explained:

If the dominant class has lost consensus, i.e. is no longer leading, but only ‘dominant’, exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and longer believe what they used to believe previously, etc. (Gramsci 1971, 275-6)

The potential loss of consensus around the virtues of dominant ideologies since 2008 arguably explains that, in stark contrast to Whitehead, O’Donnell later challenged his own assumptions – even displacing himself from standard liberal democracy. In one of his last yet unnoticed interviews, when asked about the persistent poverty and inequality in Latin America despite democratic transition, this ‘founding father’ of *transitology* adopted an unexpected and partisan radical stance:

I think we need policies authentically and simultaneously democratic and socialist, and that by being so they open a wide door to the active participation of the popular and middle classes. In our [Latin American] countries we are still far away from this [...]. [On Cuba,] by what I have learned about the tendencies you mention, all my values and desires go to the choice you support, both socialist and democratic. It would be wonderful that at the end of this thorny road, it managed to get realised! (O'Donnell and Chaguaceda 2011, np)

What if – let us conjecture – O'Donnell's final and unperceived theoretical gesture hinted an *immanent critique* of liberalism – at a larval yet genuine stage?

For Adorno, the critical academic is such insofar as s/he radicalises key concepts in order to push them to their logical conclusion. This why for him the task of *immanent critique* is to transform “the concepts, which it brings, as it were, from the outside, into what the object, left to itself, seeks to be, and confront it with what it is. It must dissolve the rigidity of the temporally and spatially fixed object into a field of tension of the possible and the real” (Adorno quoted by Benhabib 1994, 80).

From this *Adornian* perspective I draw the proposition that O'Donnell's call for the “active participation of the popular and middle-classes” hints that liberal democracy, *left to itself*, does not encourage the participation of most citizens. In this light, the potential compensatory role O'Donnell sees in socialist policies perhaps confronts liberal democracy with *what it is*: a regime at odds with social justice.

As clarified at the beginning of this section, this study does not take for granted the rarely contested assumption of liberal democracy as the ideal political regime – and in regards to Cuba I may add that I am sympathetic to O'Donnell's late aspirations.

Yet another step further can be taken: what if the exclusion criticised by O'Donnell is not a deviation but a structural feature of ‘really existing’ liberal democracies? After all, it can be argued that liberal democracy has fused largely contradictory elements, such as democracy and a capitalist economy (Geuss 2001, Žižek 2009b). What if contemporary democracies need to be freed from the capitalist burden?

Hence let us imagine a free election in Cuba that decided to restore capitalism. Of course, the standard reaction would be to celebrate that election as a legitimate

(democratic) achievement – as if the virtue of the founding act (a free election) determined the virtue of what comes next. However, the democratic origin of the act would not prevent it from unleashing an antidemocratic process thereafter.

Who would be the owners of what has been collectively built in Cuba since 1959? How can be democratically sorted out who will be *bourgeois* and who will not?

I find this predicament reminiscent of the 1980s transitions from authoritarian rule and state-led economies across most Latin America: “even if the free-market system – that is, the end product of neoliberal reform – is compatible with democracy, the process of neoliberal reform might not be” (Weyland 2004, 136). Adapted to mainstream desires about Cuba, this insight can be rephrased as follows: even if capitalism – that is, the end product of capitalist restoration – is compatible with liberal democracy, the process of capitalist restoration might not be.

The joint analytical approach followed in this study is thus neither ambivalent nor indifferent towards the political goals of the Marxist tradition and mainstream Political Science – i.e. the former aims at transitions from capitalism, while the latter pursues the transition to liberal democracy. In consequence, although the Marxist tradition is congenial to the democratic ideals implied in *transitology*, it discords with their fusion with capitalist economic relations. However, even if the Marxist tradition diverges from the political goals of *transitology*, both traditions may well share an interest in rigorously grasp political change. In practical analytical terms, the pragmatist realism of this thesis seeks to better *diagnosing* a polity, while bearing in mind that the literatures in question diverge in political *treatment*.

Thus, although *transitology* is central for this study since it applies important insights for the analysis of regime change, it also rejects and challenges its implicit anti-communist stance disguised as scholarly engagement. The latter point will be clearer throughout the rest of this chapter’s theoretical discussion, where the reader will find a socialist realignment and critique of *transitology* whenever needed.

3.2 The post-totalitarian regime-type

The seminal regime-change framework developed by O'Donnell, Whitehead and Schmitter revolved around 'authoritarian' and 'democratic' regimes. Herein lies the importance of the subsequent classic work of Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan (1996), where they put forth a *full* typology of contemporary regimes: 1) democracy, 2) authoritarianism, 3) totalitarianism, 4) post-totalitarianism, and 5) sultanism. With this work, they managed to set up a single comprehensive theory that shed light on the changes in Post-Communist Europe, Latin America, and Southern Europe.

Linz and Stepan (1996, 42) identified four "constituent" or "defining" characteristics of regimes: *leadership, ideology, pluralism, and mobilisation*. Based on these dimensions, they defined the features of the five regime types they proposed.

Table 1. Defining Characteristics of Totalitarian and Post-totalitarian Regimes

Characteristic	Totalitarianism	Post-totalitarianism
Pluralism	No significant economic, social, or political pluralism. Official party has <i>de jure</i> and <i>de facto</i> monopoly of power. Party has eliminated almost all pretotalitarian pluralism. No space for a second economy or parallel society.	Limited, but not responsible social, economic, and institutional pluralism. Almost no political pluralism because party still formally has monopoly of power. May have "second economy," but state still the overwhelming presence. Most manifestations of pluralism in "flattened polity" grew out of tolerated state structures or dissident groups consciously formed in opposition to totalitarian regime. In mature post-totalitarianism opposition often creates "second culture" or "parallel society."
Ideology	Elaborate and guiding ideology that articulates a reachable utopia. Leaders, individuals, and groups derive most of their sense of mission, legitimation, and often specific policies from their commitment to some holistic conception of humanity and society.	Guiding ideology still officially exists and is part of the social reality. But weakened commitment to or faith in utopia. Shift of emphasis from ideology to programmatic consensus that presumably is based on rational decision-making and limited debate without too much reference to ideology.
Mobilisation	Extensive mobilization into a vast array of regime-created obligatory organizations. Emphasis on activism of cadres and militants. Effort at mobilization of enthusiasm. Private life is decried.	Progressive loss of interest by leaders and nonleaders involved in organizing mobilization. Routine mobilization of population within state sponsored organizations to achieve a minimum degree of conformity and compliance.

Leadership	Totalitarian leadership rules with undefined limits and great unpredictability for members and nonmembers. Often charismatic. Recruitment to top leadership highly dependent on success and commitment in party organization.	Many "cadres" and "militants" are mere careerists and opportunists. Boredom, withdrawal, and ultimately privatization of population's values become an accepted fact. Growing emphasis by post-totalitarian political elite on personal security. Checks on top leadership via party structures, procedures, and "internal democracy." Top leaders are seldom charismatic. Recruitment to top leadership restricted to official party but less dependent upon building a career within party's organization. Top leaders can come from party technocrats in state apparatus.
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Source: Taken from Linz and Stepan (1996, 44-5)

Crucially, the post-totalitarian regime is different from the other four in which it “is not a genetic, but an evolutionary type” (Linz and Stepan 1996, 293) – i.e. it results from an overall relaxation of another polity: totalitarianism. In regards to totalitarian rule, Linz (2000, 4) would explain that his approach to that concept was based on “an intellectual need to distinguish a particular historical form of regime and society from other nondemocratic polities”. Therefore, in contrast to Arendt (1962), ‘terror’ was not at the centre of his typology, not the least because “the limits of terror in Cuba influenced my thinking towards the view that totalitarianism did not necessarily require terror on the scale of the Soviet Union” (Linz 2000, 5).

In order to distinguish the fully-fledged post-totalitarian regime from its totalitarian origin, Linz and Stepan (see Table 1) benchmarked such a transition according to the four defining characteristics they used to disaggregate the concept of ‘regime’.

If one is to summarise Table 1, it can be said that the emergence of post-totalitarian rule is marked by the following changes on each regime’s defining characteristics:

- *pluralism*: ‘institutional pluralism’ in contrast with the previous uniformity;
- *ideology*: ‘the faith’ in the guiding ideology weakens;
- *mobilisation*: mass mobilisation lessens and only aims ‘to achieve a minimum degree of conformity and compliance’; and finally,

- *leadership*: 'top leaders are seldom charismatic' due to the establishment of 'checks on top leadership' produced by the institutional pluralism.

The development of this regime largely depends on whether post-totalitarianism is reached "by choice" (implying a certain liberalisation from the leadership), "by decay" (ideology grows meaningless and mobilisation may degenerate into ritual), or "by societal conquest" (struggle of civil society's groups forces reform) (Linz and Stepan 1996, 293-4). However, the latter case brings us back to the first two alternatives: will the leadership decide to embrace the new situation or not?

Hence after the initial stage of "early post-totalitarianism", there are two possible developments that encompass a continuum varying from "frozen post-totalitarianism" (when decay allows no further evolution), to "mature post-totalitarianism" (when political choices propel further reform) (Linz and Stepan 1996, 42, 294). The three post-totalitarian subtypes are defined as follows:

Early post-totalitarianism is very close to the totalitarian ideal type but differs from it at least in one key dimension, normally some constraints on the leader. There can be frozen post-totalitarianism in which, despite the persistent tolerance of some civil society critics of the regime, almost all the other control mechanisms of the party-state stay in place for a long period and do not evolve. Or there can be mature post-totalitarianism in which there has been significant change in all the dimensions of the post-totalitarian regime except that politically the leading role of the official party is still sacrosanct. (Linz and Stepan 1996, 42)

As this conceptual framework was intended to explain the different transitions away from Communism (defined as Communist Party-led regimes, not (of course) as the end-state envisaged by Marx and Engels), Linz and Stepan's empirical contribution was a lengthy documentation of post-communist transitions in Eastern Europe. Their central argument was that "the style and consequences of the transition depended greatly [...] on the specific post-totalitarian subtype found in each individual country" (Linz and Stepan 1996, 294). In consequence, they advanced a regime-type classification of some salient cases before their departure from communist rule. According to this *pre-transition* taxonomical effort, Bulgaria as late as 1988 belonged to the early variant of post-totalitarian rule, which then experienced a leadership-*controlled* transition; Hungary from 1982 to 1988, to the mature variant, which then

experienced a *negotiated* transition; and, Czechoslovakia from 1977 to 1989, to the frozen type, which then experienced a transition after the regime *collapsed* (Linz and Stepan 1996, 294).

In the assessment of Saxonberg (2013, 13), the above-mentioned “regime type approach offers a good explanation of how regimes collapse when they eventually *do* collapse.” However, what if they *do not* fall? To be sure, this question is at the heart of Saxonberg’s comparative study of communist survival in Cuba, China, North Korea and Vietnam. Thus, while he accepts the typology of Linz and Stepan, Saxonberg did not add a new study of transitions from Communism. Instead, he has integrated the analysis of *non-transitions* into the field so as to understand why some regimes *fall* and others *survive*. As a result, he managed to take the post-totalitarian approach out of its focus on East Europe, and pursued its generalisation to the study of Communist rule as a whole – regardless of region.

Saxonberg’s point of departure is the explanatory power he grants to ideology in the rise and development of Communist systems:

All types of legitimacy are based, namely, on the belief in something, which makes a degree of voluntary compliance possible. However, while communist regimes do not worry about legitimacy during their totalitarian stage, ideology does play a major role in motivating their cadres to embark on a “messianic” mission to change society. (Saxonberg 2013, 16-7)

Furthermore, you know that a post-totalitarian transition is already there because ideology has adopted a key role after the decline of revolutionary fervour:

Once this messianic phase ends, the regime begins to institutionalize itself. At this stage, it needs to gain the support of the apparatchiks and of certain sectors of the intellectual stratum and working class. It is at this point that the regime enters the early post-totalitarian phase, where it uses Marxism-Leninism as a legitimizing religion to ensure the support of these key groups. (Saxonberg 2013, 17)

One caveat applies here. Of course I do not agree with Saxonberg’s definition of communism as a “political religion”, which implies a derogatory connotation to any ideas different from the liberal democratic ones. (Besides, if one gets ‘picky’, it can be argued, following Benjamin (1991, 100-3), that capitalism *is* a religion.) For his

part, Žižek (2002, 130) has taken the intellectual risk to argue that “despite its horrors and failures”, the Communist regimes still harboured valuable politics:

[A]lthough the Communist regimes, in their positive content, were mostly a dismal failure, generating terror and misery, they simultaneously opened up a certain space, the space of utopian expectations which, among other things, enabled us to measure the failure of actually existing Socialism itself. (Žižek 2002, 131)

Therein “the radical ambiguity of Stalinist ideology which, even at its most 'totalitarian', still exudes an emancipatory potential” (Žižek 2002, 131). The specific purpose of making that point is to highlight that the continuous vindication of socialist ideas “provided the spectators with new ethical standards by which reality was to be measured” (Žižek 2002, 132). Therefore, instead of conceptualising ‘Marxism-Leninism’ as an obscurantist tool that a regime “uses” at its discretion – i.e. a religion – I have opted to differentiate the set of ideas that both enabled and constrained the Communist regimes simply as ‘ideology’. With this theoretical caveat I intend to substitute the pejorative connotation of Saxonberg’s definition for the more analytical term of ‘ideology’, as inscribed in the field of ideological analysis recently mapped by Maynard (2013). Stripped from its anti-communist orientation, I have still extracted from Saxonberg’s comparative study his model of regime formation – which is the model that, in a modified form, guides my analysis.

Saxonberg’s basic argument is that the ideological legitimacy of the early post-totalitarian regime is eventually undermined by the failures of the centrally planned economy (CPE). When this reaches a certain critical point, the regime enters the “late post-totalitarian” phase marked by the growth of *economic-based legitimacy*:

The communist regimes lose their grand-future oriented beliefs and instead promise improves living standards. Consequently they try to reach some sort of social contract with the population in order to induce it to “pragmatically accept” that *given certain external and internal constraints, the regime is performing reasonably well*. (Saxonberg 2013, 18)

As this shift is likely to produce a crisis, the regime either moves in a “freezing” direction (the reformist path is stopped or reversed) or a “maturing” one (reformist path continues). Thus, instead of Linz and Stepan’s notions of “frozen” or “mature”,

this model observes “freezing” or “maturing” tendencies, so as to add a more dynamic connotation to the processes of political change (Saxonberg 2013, 16).

Applying this model, Saxonberg proposes that China and Vietnam had long been on a maturing post-totalitarian path. While European Communism exhibited a loss of ideological legitimacy due to the mistaken belief that the CPE model was superior to the performance of advanced capitalism, China and Vietnam lost their ideological legitimacy because they have, ironically, restored capitalism: “it seems communist countries have had to choose between either losing their ideological legitimacy by sticking to their ideology and having it fail, or giving up their ideology in order to meet their economic goals” (Saxonberg 2013, 272). Hence the Chinese and Vietnamese regimes would have prevailed because they bypassed their ideological decline by basing their legitimacy on the promise to deliver economic success.

Saxonberg also introduced a set of criteria on the likelihood of uprisings:

A revolutionary situation emerges if (a) there is an economic crisis or downturn; (b) expectations for wide-ranging reform or more radical change are arising (and are likely to reaching a breaking point if they are not met); and (c) the regime does something to anger the population. (Saxonberg 2013, 23)

In this model a revolutionary situation is more likely to emerge in the “late” stage of post-totalitarian rule because by then “the regime has lost its ideological legitimacy”, which means that the opposition is more willing to “confront the regime more directly”, and the regime itself “is less likely to shoot, because the rulers themselves no longer believe in their ideology” (Saxonberg 2013, 24-5).

Saxonberg also contests the previous characterisation of Poland and Romania as *impure* or *hybrid* cases of Poland and Romania. Linz and Stepan (1996, 255) had suggested that Poland never fully fitted the totalitarian type, instead calling this country’s regime an ‘authoritarian communism’. Conversely, Saxonberg (2013, 15) contends that although Poland was never fully totalitarian, after 1956 it experienced a similar post-totalitarian relaxation and development. Hence he introduced the notion of “failed totalitarianism”, which he used not only for Poland before 1956, but also to characterise “other regimes that were never able to consolidate their

power fully, as in Ethiopia, Grenada, and Nicaragua” (Saxonberg 2013, 16). In the case of Romania, instead of conceptualising Ceausescu’s regime as a totalitarianism turned into sultanism as Linz and Stepan (1996, 344) did, Saxonberg (2013, 17, 132) revisited the case and defined it as an early post-totalitarian regime that froze into “patrimonialism” – he uses the latter term instead of “sultanism” to avoid the cultural stereotype that associates this regime type with the Middle East.

Finally, Saxonberg (2013, 303-32) also uses the term ‘patrimonialism’ to grasp both North Korea and Cuba, because in both cases power has been transferred within the same (sultanistic) family – from father to son, in North Korea; and from brother to brother, in Cuba. However, as I will discuss throughout the rest of this thesis, such a characterisation is inadequate in regards to Cuba – not least in the sense that beyond Raúl and Fidel there is no other family member in the line of succession.

3.3 The (charismatic) Cuban hybrid

Originally developed for the comparative analysis of European Communism, Eusebio Mujal-León applied the typology of post-totalitarian transitions to the analysis of Cuban communism. As a result, he conceptualised post-1990 Cuba as a “charismatic early post-totalitarianism” (Mujal-León and Saavedra 1997, Mujal-León and Busby 2001) – incidentally, a solution that Linz (2000, 10) later agreed with. As a hybrid regime-type, Mujal-León’s term highlighted a nuanced deviation of the Cuban case from the *early post-totalitarian* ideal type constructed by Linz and Stepan (1996).

The counter-intuitive *hybridity* argument was that in the post-totalitarian adaptation of post-Soviet Cuba, the relevance of Fidel Castro’s charisma had “increased by the scope of the crisis in the 1990s”; i.e. “the crisis spawned by the collapse of the Soviet Union [...] made him even more indispensable” (Mujal-León and Busby 2001, 11, 15).

Mujal-León and Saavedra had explained this paradoxical process in few words:

[T]he charisma of Fidel Castro has been one of the key elements to understanding the Cuban process. At this height of the century, Castro’s charisma has turned into the main regime’s means of support. [...] In other words, the attenuation of the totalitarian elements of the

regime has meant a decisive increasing in the relative weight of charisma in regards to other alternative sources of legitimacy. (Mujal-León and Saavedra 1997, 119)

As Linz and Stepan (1996, 45) had defined the leadership of the totalitarian regime-type as “often charismatic”, the peculiarity of Cuba as conceptualised by Mujal-León was not so much the presence of charismatic authority, but its persistence beyond the regime type in which such element was supposed to be endemic. Ironically indeed, the *early post-totalitarian* ideal type was originally defined as “very close to the totalitarian ideal type” but differing from it “at least in one key dimension, normally some constraints on the leader” (Linz and Stepan 1996, 42).

However, Saxonberg ignores this application of the framework of Linz and Stepan to the analysis of communist survival in Cuba. Comparing the historical perspective of Mujal-León and Saxonberg on the development of Cuban Communism, both authors converge in the view that Cuba was already entering the early post-totalitarian stage before the fall of the Soviets (Mujal-León and Busby 2001, 8, Saxonberg 2013, 139-40). In both accounts, by 1970 the regime was abandoning the totalitarian stage and had started to institutionalise itself along Soviet lines, a turning point being the First Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba, celebrated in 1975. Accordingly, from 1970 to 1985 the regime pursued a ‘timid economic reform’ – a minor yet ‘pragmatic’ decentralisation of economic management when compared to the previous ‘idealism’ of the initial years of the Revolution (Mesa Lago 2012, 32).

Then from 1985 until 1991, as a reaction against Gorbachev reforms, Fidel Castro unleashed what he called the *Rectification campaign of errors and negative tendencies*. From the point of view of economic policy, Mesa-Lago (2012, 25) identified this period as a new ‘idealist’ cycle. In regards to this political interim point (and from that intervening period onwards) Mujal-León and Saxonberg diverge.

For Saxonberg (2013, 305), “in reaction to Gorbachev’s reforms, the [Cuban] regime began to move increasingly in a freezing direction”. On the other hand, Mujal-León and Busby (2001, 10) concluded that the late 1980s had brought the “end of the first Cuban transition to post-totalitarianism” and thus a (temporary) “return to the totalitarian schemes and mobilization politics of the past”. Although the difference

between both approaches is not apparent at first sight, its analytical implications are significant after a closer examination. To be sure, the freezing post-totalitarian path detected by Saxonberg and the totalitarian revival signalled by Mujal-León and Busby does not necessarily oppose each other (considering that both terminologies capture the political regression in late 1980s Cuba when compared to the 1970-85 period). However, concepts matter and, in this case, this leads to a diverging characterisation of the Cuban regime after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

In the 1980s, 85% of Cuba's foreign trade took place within the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) – the organ of the socialist bloc for such purposes (Pérez-López 2003, 174). As can be imagined, the downfall of this bloc brought acute economic adversity – just to have a quick glance, Cuba's GDP fell 32.8% from 1990 to 1993 according to official figures (CEPAL 2015). In response, Fidel Castro proclaimed in 1990 a *Special Period in Times of Peace*, which meant that a contingency plan originally developed in the early 1980s for *times of war* was being adopted to face the crisis (MINFAR 2015). Obligated by the circumstances, the leadership launched several economic reforms in 1993, including more space for FDI, the expansion of self-employment, and the reintroduction of farmers' markets – thus switching to a new 'pragmatic' cycle in the periodization of Mesa Lago (2012, 36-41).

Another Cuban economist assessed the reform of the 1990s in these terms:

[Cuba] adopted economic policies that meant on the one hand, more economic liberalisation, and, on the other, the implicit acknowledgement of the potential of the market to stimulate centralised economies in stagnation or recession. (Miranda Parrondo 2003, 41)

Although the 'maturing' tendencies in a post-totalitarian regime are not reducible to the presence of market reforms, Saxonberg has invariably interpreted them as a symptom of maturation – except for Cuba, which seems (to say the least) strange. Quite the contrary, in Saxonberg's account, post-totalitarian Cuba kept on 'freezing' after 1986-1991, throughout the 1990s, and even as late as 2013. The only innovation was that Fidel in the 1990s morphed into a dynastic, sultanistic leader, whom started a Castro lineage confirmed by the takeover of his brother in 2006.

According to him, since the fall of the Soviet Union, Cuba “had gone closer to the late post-totalitarian stage, and so had lost much of its ideological legitimacy” (Saxonberg 2013, 140). Why? Because Cuba’s ideological legitimacy “was based in large part on being an important part of a world communist movement in alliance with the Soviet Union” – then, by 1994 “the Cuban regime had clearly left the early post-totalitarian phase” (Saxonberg 2013, 305). This analysis is nonetheless shaky.

Saxonberg’s selection of the year 1994 as the year in which the freezing post-totalitarian path of Cuba was consolidated is no coincidence. As he explains, in “August 5, 1994, hundreds of youths rioted on Havana’s broad coastal avenue, the Malecón” (Saxonberg 2013, 305). In comparison, the 1989 protests of Tiananmen Square, in Beijing, did not make Saxonberg classify China at the time as a ‘freezing’ regime. Quite the contrary, “after the repression of Tiananmen Square uprising, China advanced toward the late post-totalitarian stage in a maturing form, as it continued with economic reforms” (Saxonberg 2013, 32). As the *Maleconazo* was, in fact, less violent than the clashes in Tiananmen Square – e.g. three dead versus several hundreds (Aguirre 2002, Al 2004) – it is clear that Saxonberg’s criterion for detecting a ‘maturing’ or ‘freezing’ trend is not the presence of protests.

Discontent only indicated a shift from the early to the late stage – i.e. the protests proved that the ideological legitimacy of communist rule was severely undermined. Saxonberg’s key sign of maturation is thus the restoration of capitalism. As China was undergoing such a process but 1990s Cuba was not, ergo the latter was still ‘freezing’ despite its market reforms. However, this assessment is self-contradictory for Saxonberg (2013, 105) has also classified 1970s Yugoslavia as a *maturing post-totalitarian* regime – a case whose ‘self-management’ embodied the paradigmatic “market socialism” of that time, far from both CPE and capitalism (Montias 1970).

This is not to say that post-Soviet Cuba’s economy was like that of 1970s Yugoslavia, but the idea that Cuba was ‘freezing’ in the 1990s is far from had been the case. Conversely, Mujal-León and Busby (2001) argued that the partial totalitarian regression of 1985-1991 was followed by a *de-regression* – i.e. the reactivation of post-totalitarian survival patterns now too dependent on Fidel’s charisma.

From the perspective of the four regime's constituent characteristics (*pluralism, ideology, mobilisation, and leadership*), Mujal-León's argument was that in post-Soviet Cuba three of them were departing from the attempt at totalitarian revival of 1986-1991 while the *leadership* actually remained totalitarian afterwards, specifically charismatic. In this account, Cuban communism experienced the reactivation of the post-totalitarian transition since the 1990s, not at the expense of charisma, but as a political accommodation to truly difficult times directed by the charismatic leader itself – bolstering him as a result.

As to whether 1990s Cuba was in the *early* or *late* post-totalitarian stage, the two positions reviewed here actually converge despite the use of different terms. Saxonberg (2013, 310) notes that after the Soviet Union collapsed, Fidel Castro pursued “pragmatic acceptance” based on the promise “to support the country's generous welfare programs and to stand up to the United States as well”. Curious indeed, the same was read by Mujal-León and Busby as the proof of an *early* stage:

The demise of the Soviet Union and its allies deprived the Cuban regime of an important ideological plank. In response, Castro directed the regime to reenergise its ideology by appealing to other core elements of its platform, including nationalism, social justice, and regional solidarity. (Mujal-León and Busby 2001, 12)

So even if the regime no longer claimed to be part of an international utopia, it turned its emphasis to the native roots of ‘Cuban socialism’. In other words, Marx and Lenin lost salience but José Martí and *Che* were kept in the front. However, Saxonberg's characterisation of the Cuban case depends too much on forcing the ‘late stage’ label – i.e. *failed* ideology – because “patrimonial communism” arises from “the desire of ambitious leaders to overcome ideological decay by personalising their rule” (Saxonberg 2013, 135). In any case, I disagree with the claim that Cuba's ideological legitimacy was lost and that a patrimonial leader emerged. Besides, even if one agreed with the ‘personalisation’ of Fidel's rule in the 1990s – which I do – a *patrimonial* leadership is way different from a *charismatic* one.

Without using Linz and Stepan's framework, other scholars have similarly underscored the charismatic (not ‘patrimonial’) nature of the Cuban leadership – the

persistence of which “always set the Cuban case apart from the bureaucratic state-socialist experiences of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union”, as Hoffmann (2009, 234-5) has stressed. In this account, Cuba may be conceptualised as a “charismatic state socialism” (Hoffmann 2009, 232). While I do agree with this hybridity underscored by Hoffman, using only that concept for the whole life of socialist Cuba fails to capture its most relevant political upheavals – except for the period after Fidel stepped down in 2006, which he has defined as a “bureaucratic state socialism” due to Raúl’s farewell to charismatic authority (Hoffmann 2009, 242).

Saxonberg’s diagnosis is actually taken from López (2002), for whom Cuba became a mixture of sultanism and frozen post-totalitarianism in the 1990s. López’s influence (characterisation and feedback) on Saxonberg (2013, x-xi, 139) has influenced the latter such that his Cuban case is affected by the analytical misjudgements of the former. Hence if López has been criticised because he “systematically ignores the writings of Cuban scholars, even those published outside Cuba” (Domínguez 2004, 189), an analogous criticism can also be applied to Saxonberg: although he has dealt with the work of some prominent Cuban academics, he has ignored the work of those (Cuban or not) who have dealt with Cuba through his same theoretical lenses – i.e. the regime-type perspective developed by Linz and Stepan (1996).

Indeed, the definition of Cuba as a ‘sultanistic’ regime, as López (1997, 250) argued, had already been objected to. Partially agreeing with the parallel López drew between Fidel’s overarching role and that of both Ceausescu in Romania and Kim Il Sung in North Korea, Mujal-León and Busby (2001, 11) “would not call the Cuban regime ‘sultanistic,’ not least because of its reliance on ideology and mobilization”. To be sure, Linz and Stepan (1996, 44-5) stressed that in the sultanistic regime type there is “no elaborate or guiding ideology [...] outside of despotic personalism”.

In addition, despite the fact that López “provides recurrent comparisons to regimes in former communist Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Romania”, he “refuses to believe that Cuba’s revolutionary experience, especially during the 1960s, may help to explain why its regime has lingered longer” as Domínguez (2004, 189) has put it. In other words, the link with the Soviets was not the sole ideological basis of Cuba. A

problem, then, is how to understand *ideological legitimacy* – a point I will return to later.

To summarise, I disagree with Saxonberg's claims that the Cuban post-totalitarian regime: a) has been 'freezing' since 1986, b1) has lost its 'ideological legitimacy' since 1994, and b2) therefore, its leadership had to morph into 'patrimonialist' (or sultanistic) mode to survive. In contrast, I have suggested, the reforms of the 1990s were far from 'freezing', the 'ideological legitimacy' (although undermined) was reshaped, and the charismatic authority of the regime has not changed in the period 1959-2006.

I think, however, that the failure of Saxonberg to apply his own model to the Cuban case cannot lead to the arrogant conclusion that his comparative study is worthless. He has done a great work (a work that I admire) comparing the trajectories of all the communist systems produced by the 20th century except four – he dealt with fourteen cases! In fact, as will become increasingly clearer, this thesis owes much to the theoretical insights advanced by him. Therefore, I have opted to re-apply the framework of Saxonberg to the Cuban case – but in doing so I have felt compelled to (try to) improve both his theory and our understanding of the Cuban polity.

3.4 Normalisation after charisma?

Up to this point, I hope I have convinced the reader in that 'charisma' is a central concept for the analysis of Cuban politics. In this section, I will thus inscribe such a concept in the framework of post-totalitarian transitions in order to understand the regime-type implications of charismatic dissipation. Redundant as it sounds, I will theoretically elaborate the expected re-equilibration of a charismatic early post-totalitarian regime *given the case* that its leadership loses its charismatic legitimacy. At that point, I will ask whether such a model fits the Cuban case – i.e. the scenario where the dissipation of charisma sparks a post-totalitarian normalisation.

By 'normalisation' I understand the process through which the constituent characteristics of a regime converge towards the same regime-type. In other words,

‘normalisation’ simply means the end of regime-type *hybridity* – e.g. a charismatic early post-totalitarian regime becomes less charismatic, ergo more post-totalitarian.

A brief caveat is needed regarding the potential causal effects of charisma (or its absence), a theme neglected and discredited as “Fidel-centrism” by Kapcia (2014).

To be sure, I mostly agree with Kapcia’s opposition to 1) “focus exclusively on the person and personality of Fidel Castro” (Kapcia 2014, 1); therefore, 2) to the interpretation of Cuba’s “complex process as attributable mainly, or even, solely, to one person [i.e. Fidel]” (Kapcia 2014, 7). Nonetheless, while I grant charisma (or its decay) an explanatory power, Kapcia limits the influence of this variable to minimum, punctuated conjunctures: “it is clear that he [Fidel] played a key role at moments of real or imminent crisis” (Kapcia 2014, 26). Paradoxically, Kapcia has also stressed the centrality of Fidel in Cuba’s political life for many years:

[Fidel’s legacy lies] in the widespread loyalty that he commanded, a loyalty which, on the one hand, and as already observed, created a tendency for many Cubans to personify ‘the Revolution’ in him, and, on the other, generated an enduring faith in his ability to find solutions. (Kapcia 2014, 27)

In my view, I do think that Kapcia’s insightful notion that Fidel’s influence (charisma) is better understood not as a personal quality but as a specific social relation could be taken a bit further. To that end, rephrasing Kapcia’s words, I would rather locate the importance of “Fidel” not so much in his persona, but rather in the loyalty granted to him, which indicates a potentially shaping force that in Weber’s terms is paramount. In short, my contention is that although Kapcia registers the force of charisma, he nonetheless underrates it in analytical terms.

Perhaps the role of charismatic leadership for a whole regime’s structure is clearer when charisma itself leaves the stage, forcing an adaptation at the upper levels. As I will argue hereafter, the political effects of the *finale* of charisma are twofold: 1) it can change the style (and power) of leadership; hence, 2) it can modify the claims to legitimacy made by the political elite ruling the political system.

I understand charisma as defined by Max Weber in his classic work on the subject:

The term 'charisma' will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. (Weber 1978a, 241)

Thus, charisma is not a 'thing' but a certain relationship. This relational dimension between the charismatic leader and its followers leads us to another key concept: *legitimacy*. In Weber's terms, legitimacy refers both to the consent granted to an order by those subject to it and to the way in which such a belief is cultivated by those in position of authority (Weber 1978a, 36, 214). Weber theorised that legitimacy may be claimed on three analytically different grounds: rational (stressing the legality of the system), traditional (appealing to the sanctity of immemorial traditions), and charismatic ("resting on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person") (Weber 1978a, 215).

As discussed earlier, Saxonberg (2013, 17) has theorised that Communist rule starts in a 'messianic phase', which Linz and Stepan (1996, 44-5) identified with charismatic leadership. To be sure, different totalitarian Communist states built the legitimacy of their leadership on charismatic grounds; i.e. on the devotion to Stalin (Russia), Mao (China), Ho Chi Minh (Vietnam), Tito (Yugoslavia), Enver Hoxha (Albania), Kim Il-Sung (North Korea), or Fidel Castro in Cuba. Although most post-totalitarian transitions were accompanied (or sometimes sparked) by the dissipation of the charismatic leadership, no theorist of post-totalitarian rule has explained the underlying causal process. Here is where I argue that some Weberian notions can fill the gap.

Weber (1978a, 246) explained that "in its pure form charismatic authority may be said to exist only *in statu nascendi*. It cannot remain stable, but becomes either traditionalised or rationalised, or a combination of both." Weber termed this process the 'routinisation of charisma', which perhaps he made clearer in this formulation:

When the tide that lifted a charismatically led group out of everyday life flows back into the channels of workaday routines, at least the 'pure' form of charismatic domination will wane and turn into an 'institution'; it is then either mechanized, as it were, or imperceptibly replaced by other structures, or fused with them in the most diverse forms, so that it becomes a mere component of a concrete historical structure. (Weber 1978b, 1121)

The dilemmas facing a charismatic community – and by this I understand groups like the Communist elites exemplified above – once the messianic fervour ends, are particularly acute when the ‘problem of succession’ arises, which is the predicament opened up by the biological disappearance of the charismatic leader (Weber 1978a).

In their post-totalitarian transitions, most Communist systems replaced charismatic leadership by “other structures”, following a path that Weber would have identified with a form of rationalisation. According to Linz and Stepan (1996, 45), the post-totalitarian regime institutionalises “checks on top leadership” in their departure from regularly charismatic arrangements. Perhaps this change is less elusive if the typical post-totalitarian, non-charismatic leadership is defined as a ‘collegial’ one.

In Weber’s terms, *collegiality* refers to “specific social relationships and groups which have the function of limiting authority” (Weber 1978a, 271). Empirically, the “principle of collegiality [...] is usually derived from the interest in weakening the power of persons in authority” (1978a, 277). To avoid conceptual haze, Weber also stressed that “collegiality is no sense specifically democratic” – it is merely an arrangement “to prevent the rise of monocratic power” (Weber 1978a, 277). As charisma is inextricably monocratic, collegiality indeed presupposes a challenge to it. However, collegiality is neither specifically horizontal. In this sense, on a macro political scale, Weber also implied that *a preeminent head* was a typical feature of collegial teams with leadership commitments over large groups:

Generally speaking, where collegial bodies have had executive authority the tendency has been for the position of the leading member to become substantively and even formally pre-eminent. (Weber 1978a, 277)

The *primus inter pares* is the head of a type of collegial body that Weber also terms “functional collegiality with a preeminent head” (1978a, 272). A typical “functional collegiality” – i.e. without a preeminent head – corresponds to a non-monocratic arrangement where “acts are subject to the rule that a plurality of individuals must cooperate for the act to be valid”, either by unanimity or majority vote (Weber 1978a, 272). In other words, the concept of the *primus inter pares* implies a vertical insertion on a horizontal collegial ideal type.

Weber theorises the relationship between a functional collegial body and its *primus inter pares* (whenever there is such) in terms of mutual dependence:

[A]lthough there is an actually monocratic *primus inter pares*, his acts are normally subject to consultation with formally equal members, and disagreement in important matters may lead to breaking up the collegial body by resignation, thus endangering the position of the monocratic chief. (Weber 1978a, 272)

For Weber, “the most important example” of this type of collegial body “is that of the position of the British Prime Minister in relation to his cabinet” (1978a, 273). Overall, this arrangement refers to a collective body of equals, in which the acting head of them needs some degree of endorsement from the rest of the team.

Has “functional collegiality with a preeminent head” emerged in Cuba? This is an argument I will empirically substantiate in the next chapters, in which I argue that this type of collegiality has indeed replaced charisma in the Cuban leadership.

In contrast to what I will discuss about Cuba, (still) totalitarian North Korea experienced a process of traditionalisation after the death of its charismatic leader. It can be said that the solution to the “problem of succession” after Kim Il-Sung died was “the conception that charisma is a quality transmitted by heredity” (Weber 1978a, 248). Such is the origin of the Kim’s dynasty, from father to son, currently led by the founder’s grandson.

But what happens if collegiality takes over charismatic leadership when the other three elements of the regime (mobilisation, ideology, and pluralism) have already adopted early post-totalitarian features? Firstly, this would imply that for some time two major types of legitimacy had co-existed in that Communist system:

- 1) Charismatic: as analysed by Mujal-León and Busby (2001) in regards to the renewed role of Fidel Castro’s leadership in Cuba during the 1990s.
- 2) Ideological: as theorised by Saxonberg (2013) as a highly distinctive feature of a post-totalitarian regime in its early stage.

If the first legitimacy dissipates then the regime will rely on the second. At that point, the regime may be said to have experienced a *post-totalitarian normalisation*;

i.e. all the four defining characteristics of the regime would align with each other (hybridity ends) in a converging process towards the early post-totalitarian type as developed by Linz and Stepan (1996). The causal chain may be theorised as follows: once a formerly charismatic early post-totalitarianism loses its charismatic leadership, its reliance on ideology as a central piece of its claims to legitimacy will confront the regime sooner or later with *Saxonberg's dilemma*, namely that it will have "to choose between either losing their ideological legitimacy by sticking to their ideology and having it fail, or giving up their ideology in order to meet their economic goals" (Saxonberg 2013, 272). As explained in the previous section, the first alternative is the *freezing* path, and the second, the *maturing* one.

In other words, Saxonberg identifies two solutions to the dilemma he proposes:

- Sticking to the centrally planned economy (CPE)
- Introducing market reforms (capitalist restoration)

However, I propose a third, intermediate theoretical solution that destabilises the dilemma posed by Saxonberg and its presupposition that anti-capitalist economic formations are incompatible with market mechanisms. The third solution to Saxonberg's dilemma would then be the following: instead of having to choose between socialist orthodoxy and economic pragmatism, *ideology itself may be modified in a manner that redefines the boundaries of admissible economic action according to socialist ideas*. This possibility is what I term in this thesis 'market socialism'. To use the language of contemporary theories of political analysis, the alternative I am advancing here presupposes a non-static, potentially mutable quality of ideas – as opposed to the fixed nature of Communist ideology implied in Saxonberg's approach – in processes of political change, as understood by authors of what has been called the *ideational turn*; for Colin Hay, for instance:

Actors must interpret their context in order to act strategically [...]. Consequently, interpretations of the environment in which they find themselves may play a crucial role in shaping actors' behaviour with consequent effects for the process of political change. Moreover, empirically, changes in policy are often preceded by changes in ideas. (Hay 2002, 166)

Kong (2014) has grouped the post-1990 economic strategies of the surviving Communist systems in three different types: 1) 'mono-transition' (China and Vietnam), 2) 'cautious reform' (Cuba), and 3) 'ultra-cautious reform' (North Korea). For him, 'mono-transition' refers to a capitalist restoration under the same political regime – as opposed to East European countries that experienced the 'dual transition' of capitalist restoration and regime change. In contrast, the "cautious reform strategy seeks to alleviate the problems of the centrally planned economy (CPE) while resisting transformation towards a market economy" (Kong 2014, 73). Finally, the 'ultra-cautious' approach seeks "to *restore* the CPE by limited market measures" (ibid., 74) – hence the term refers to the stubbornness of orthodox CPE.

Cautious reform in Cuba thus refers to the economic reforms of the Special Period. But things have changed since then. If the challenge for Cuban policymakers in the early 1990s was defined in terms of resisting the collapse of the Soviet Union – thus, the end of its subsidies – under Raúl it was about overcoming the deficiencies of the economic model itself. Keeping the discussion of the previous chapters in mind, a way to update Kong's conceptualisation of the emerging Cuban economic strategy in Raúl Castro's presidency after the adoption of market-socialist ideas is as follows:

- The *market socialist* approach seeks to improve CPE by delegating secondary functions to the market without restoring capitalism.

Such is the outcome, I will argue, of the revolt led by Raúl Castro since he took over the presidency of Cuba – temporarily since August 2006; officially, since February 2008 – when he unleashed the current 'pragmatic' cycle of economic policy. Although this cycle is a continuation of the one that took place between 1991 and 1995, the main cause of each one is different. While the cycle twenty years earlier was sparked after imbalances in the external sector of the economy, the *leitmotiv* of the current cycle has been focused on the problems of the internal economy.

If the 'market socialist' solution to Saxonberg's dilemma were verified empirically, some relevant analytical implications on the regime-type would follow. On the one hand, an ideological change oriented to economic performance would preclude a *freezing* direction. On the other, an orientation to economic performance without

giving up to ideology would still be distant from a fully-fledged *mature post-totalitarianism* as seen today in China and Vietnam. Perhaps an intermediate case could be conceptualised as an *incipient maturing post-totalitarian regime*. The central claim of this work is that contemporary Cuba fits this definition.

Therefore, the Cuban case would fit in the typology of surviving Communist systems as proposed in Table 2, which classifies their regime-type and economic policy.

Table 2. Economic policy and regime-type of surviving communist systems

	Economic strategy	Regime type
China, Vietnam	Capitalist restoration	Maturing post-totalitarian
Cuba	* Market socialism	* Maturing post-totalitarian
North Korea	Centrally planned economy	Totalitarian

Sources: Classification of economic strategy (except Cuba) based on Kong (2014); and the characterisation of regimes (except Cuba) based on Saxonberg (2013).

* This is the argument developed in this study.

This scheme presupposes thus that although Cuba belongs to the same type of regime as China and Vietnam, the Caribbean case has a different economic strategy. This may be the case because while the Asian cases have long adopted a maturing path, in Cuba this kind of political development has just started.

I would then distinguish two degrees of maturation: ‘minor’ and ‘major’ – each degree in turn informs and conditions correlated economic strategies. Closer to the early post-totalitarian stage, a ‘minor’ maturation implies an ideological adjustment that has not broken the standard Marxist stance against the private property of the means of production. If this principle is compared to a *taboo* then a ‘major’ maturation occurs when the *taboo* is broken, hence annulling the key Marxist anti-capitalist principle – e.g. contemporary China and Vietnam. Any maturing trend, either *minor* or *major*, if sparked as a regime’s response to the dissipation of

charisma, is another confirmation that charismatic decline sent economic performance to the fore as a compensatory source of legitimacy.

But what does 'market reform' mean in a society where there are no native capitalists as in Cuba? The view adopted here is that in a Communist system where there is no proper capitalist restoration, 'market reform' means a decentralisation of the former dominant centrally planned economy (CPE) and a diversification of its economic agents – as opposed to the state being almost *the only player in town*.⁵

The Cuban development would thus correspond to a distinctive political path. On the one hand, its ideological departure from orthodox CPE precludes a *freezing* path. On the other, an orientation to economic performance that retains socialist ideology is still distant from the current Chinese or Vietnamese *maturing* path.

Summary

Building on the post-totalitarian regime type advanced by Linz and Stepan (1996), Saxonberg (2013) proposed a theory of post-totalitarian evolution. As totalitarian rule is a temporary "messianic phase", after a time "the regime begins to institutionalize itself" (Saxonberg 2013, 17). A salient element of this process, however, is the endurance of socialist ideology as a key claim to legitimacy; such are the basic contours of the *early post-totalitarian stage*. Saxonberg's basic argument is that the ideological legitimacy of the early stage is eventually undermined by the failures of the CPE model, which pushes the regime to the "late post-totalitarian" stage, marked by increasing attention on the economy (Saxonberg 2013, 18).

As this shift is likely to produce a crisis, the regime either moves in a "freezing" (the reformist path is stopped or reversed) or a "maturing" direction (the reformist path continues). Applying this model, Saxonberg proposes that China and Vietnam had long been on a maturing post-totalitarian path. While in the European cases the ideological legitimacy was lost because of the wrong belief that CPE was superior to advanced capitalism, China and Vietnam would have lost their ideological legitimacy

⁵ I am indebted to S. Ludlam for the decentralisation/diversification distinction to grasp Cuba today.

because they have, ironically, restored capitalism (Saxonberg 2013, 272). Hence these Asian regimes would have remained in power because they bypassed this ideological tension by building their pragmatic acceptance on capitalist ground.

However, I contended that Saxonberg has poorly applied his own model to focus the survival of Cuba, which he equates to North Korea arguing that in both cases power has been transferred within the same family – from father to son, in Pyongyang; and from brother to brother, in Havana. In this account, since 1986 Cuba started to become a mixture of sultanism and *frozen* post-totalitarianism – i.e. the concept applied by Linz and Stepan (1996) to Romania, which later López (2002) extended to Cuba, and that Saxonberg later applied to North Korea as well. I argued that this characterisation is inadequate in regards to post-Soviet Cuba: on the one hand, the 1990s market reforms in Cuba were far from ‘freezing’, on the other, the importance of ideology and mobilisation are incompatible with the ‘sultanic’ regime type.

I thus adopted the definition of Mujal-Leon and Busby (2001) of the Cuban polity, in the period 1991-2006, as a ‘charismatic early post-totalitarian’ regime. As Linz and Stepan (1996, 45) defined the typical totalitarian leadership as “often charismatic”, the peculiarity of Cuba according to Mujal-León and Busby was not so much the presence of charisma, but its persistence beyond the phase in which such element seemed endemic – incidentally, a solution Linz (2000, 10) later agreed with.

Thus, I theorised why that the fall of Fidel Castro’s charisma had the potential to cause a post-totalitarian normalisation and a re-equilibration of legitimacy via a new emphasis on (pragmatic) economic performance. I developed this explanatory model through folding the theory of charismatic legitimacy of Weber (1978a) into the theory of post-totalitarian development of Saxonberg (2013). To create this alternative model, as I said, I first had to discard Saxonberg’s explanation of the Cuban case as a ‘patrimonial freezing post-totalitarian’ regime since 1986. Then, in my modified version of Saxonberg, I also challenged his assumption that communist systems can only stick to CPE or restore capitalism. I have thus introduced the theoretical possibility of *market socialism* – i.e. an anti-capitalist market economy.

From this point onwards I will thus reapply my modified version of Saxonberg's theory to the analysis of Cuba in the period 2006-2014. In other words, I will analyse how the 'charismatic early post-totalitarian' regime has changed after Fidel Castro stepped down. As my argument is that the dissipation of a charismatic leadership may have produced a market-socialist ideology, I will focus the following chapters in these two dimensions: the *leadership* and the *ideology* of the Cuban polity.

4. Vicissitudes of Fidel Castro's Cuba

In this chapter, I summarise the development of leadership and ideology in Cuba, before 2006, according to the post-totalitarian perspective theorised in the previous chapter. In the first section I will thus introduce a concise historical background of Cuba from 1959 to 2006 – i.e. I illustrate the development of the Cuban regime in a *historical map* that shows the alternation of ‘idealist’ and ‘pragmatic’ cycles identified by Mesa Lago (2012). I expect that my exploration of such a long-term picture (through the lenses of post-totalitarian evolution) will pave the way to my argument in regards to post-Fidel Cuban politics, namely that the decline of charismatic authority has brought the ‘idealist cycles’ to an end.

In the second section, I will outline the main features and transformations of the Cuban leadership in 1959-2006. Then, against a backdrop of continuous ideological stigmatisation of market-based subjects, in the third section I will explore the first (rare) case of acceptance of a non-socialist economic agent before 2006.

4.1 The oscillation of Cuban politics

In this section I provide a concise account of the development of the Cuban regime aided by a common theme in the academic analysis Cuba: its periodization according to a basic political oscillation throughout its history. As was already discussed in the last chapter, the non-linear political development of this regime has even included partial totalitarian regressions. The purpose of this section is thus to put Cuba under Fidel Castro in historical perspective, according to this thesis’ theoretical lenses.

Pérez-Stable (1999) has argued that one distinctive feature of Cuba has been its oscillation between ‘mobilisation’ and ‘institutionalisation’. In this account, while the former prevailed in the 1960s, the latter did so in the 1970s and early 1980s. But in contrast to other communist polities, in Cuba “institutionalization never reached an irreversible momentum” (Pérez-Stable 1999, 67). Facing Gorbachev reforms in the Soviet Union, “[Fidel] Castro – not the party or a faction of it – called for cutting back market reforms and renewing mobilizational politics”. After this political regression

Cuba stayed “precariously balanced between market imperatives and mobilizational politics, the latter thus far more determinant” (Pérez-Stable 1999, 67).

For his part, Kapcia (2014, 64) has divided Cuban politics in periods that can be distinguished “by the extent or absence of fluidity of the state and governing structures”. For him, the Cuban political system has been marked by ‘fluidity’ except for the period of ‘institutionalisation’ from 1975 (1st PCC Congress) to 1986 (start of *Rectification*). The main difference of this with Pérez-Stable’s framework is the ‘interregnum’ of 1970-75, when “the most Stalinist approach to culture was adopted” (Kapcia 2014, 135).

My point here is that different analysts (both advocates and critics) of the Cuban regime have tackled its oscillation through varied conceptual frames. Hence the periodization of Cuba’s socio-economic policy since 1959 has also been shaped according to one or another oscillation’s framework in mind – as explained below.

Helen Yaffe, advocate, asserts that “the economic history of the Cuban Revolution can be portrayed as a pendulum swinging between what is desirable and what is necessary” – she calls this ‘the *Guevarista* pendulum’ as for her “when new policy debates emerge, proposals are often phrased in terms of their proximity to Guevara’s analysis” (Yaffe 2009, 63). Based on this framework she divided Cuban economic history in swings ‘away’ or ‘towards’ Guevara’s ideas as follows: 1) 1965 – 67 (swing away); 2) 1967 (swing towards); 3) 1970s (swing away); 4) 1986 (swing towards); 5) 1991 (swing away); and, 6) 2000 (swing towards) (Yaffe 2009, 63-7). Using Yaffe’s terms, I would add the most recent cycle: 7) 2007 (swing away).

Mesa-Lago, critic, has similarly noted that socio-economic policy in socialist Cuba has alternatively switched from ‘pragmatic’ (market oriented) to ‘idealist’ (anti-market) cycles. As shown in Table 3, he identifies four idealist cycles, three pragmatic cycles, and one stagnant cycle. While market reforms in the first pragmatic cycle were “cautious and timid”, in the second and third they “became bolder”. Conversely, “the idealist cycles became weaker in the long run” (Mesa Lago 2012, 24).

The only apparent difference between Mesa-Lago’s periodization and Yaffe’s is in the early years of the revolution. For Mesa-Lago, the cycle of 1959-1966 can actually be divided into three sub-cycles: 1) “market erosion”, 2) “Soviet orthodox model of central planning”, and 3) “socialist debate between two alternatives (idealist and pragmatic)” (Mesa Lago 2012, 25). This last sub-cycle is what Yaffe sees as swing away Guevara’s ideas. So after all there is no substantial difference in periodization.

Table 3. Development of the Communist system in Cuba

	Economic cycles	Regime type	Political cycles
1959-1966	1 st Idealist (Spawn of new economic policy)	Totalitarian	Mobilisation
1966-1970	2 nd Idealist (Radicalisation of Guevarism)		
1971-1985	1 st Pragmatic (Moderate Soviet Model)	Transition to early post-totalitarian	Institutionalisation
1986-1990	3 rd Idealist (“Rectification of mistakes”)	Freezing path or incomplete totalitarian comeback	Mobilisation
1991-1996	2 nd Pragmatic (Crisis and market reform)	Charismatic early post-totalitarian	Mix of mobilisation and institutionalisation, with a tilt to the former*
1997-2003	Stagnant (Deceleration and paralysis of reform)		
2003-2006	4 th Idealist (Reversal of reform)		
2007 →	3 rd Pragmatic (Structural reforms of Raúl)	Transition to maturing post-totalitarian**	Institutionalisation**

Sources: Own elaboration based on Pérez-Stable (1999), Mujal-León and Busby (2001), Mujal-León and Buzón (2009) and Mesa-Lago (2012).

* I am assuming that Pérez-Stable’s characterisation of 1999 was still valid until Fidel Castro stepped down in 2006.

** This is the argument of this study.

Where paths clearly diverge is in identifying the *force* driving the shifts to new cycles. This is where Yaffe’s approach turns out weak. Her “*Guevarista pendulum*” is like the eerie appearance of some kind of ethereal spirit that comes back from time to time to fix the wrongdoings of Cuban policymakers – as if “Che” Guevara was a wandering ghost that does not find peace in the fate of the revolution. Yaffe’s acephalous view

implies that the desirability/necessity pendulum has shaped the strategic choices of the top leadership, not (at least as a dialectic supplement) the other way around.

Conversely, Mesa-Lago does not hesitate to underscore the key role of the Cuban leadership at every new turn. Similarly to what Pérez-Stable implies, he argues that the “ideas and decisions of Fidel Castro were the key internal factor in the generation of [economic] cycles for 48 years, until his illness in 2006” (Mesa Lago 2012, 26). Both founder and leader of the regime, Fidel Castro’s high concentration of top offices gave his (‘idealist’) ideological preference for a centrally planned economy an unrivalled leeway in shaping economic policy for a long time.

While Mesa-Lago acknowledges the role of external factors in the cycles (like the relations with the US, the former Soviet Union and, more recently, Venezuela), he also emphasises that Fidel’s charismatic leadership was the constant force pushing orthodox policies when the context permitted it. In this light, if idealist policies were the favourite strategy of Fidel, any pragmatic cycles were merely tactical retreats.

From an overall perspective, if the economic cycles are subsumed into the sequence of major re-equilibrations of the Cuban regime, then it stands out that ‘idealist’ cycles coincide with ‘mobilisational’ politics, and ‘pragmatic’ economics with ‘institutionalisation’. As shown in Table 3, this link is clear-cut at least in the period 1959-1990.

The concepts used by Mesa-Lago (idealist cycles versus pragmatic cycles) have been challenged by Morris (2014, 45), for whom that framework repeats a “fundamental assumption of transition economics”; namely, that “efficiency and dynamism will only be maximized when the transformation from a ‘socialist planned’ economic system to a ‘capitalist market’ one is complete”. While I do agree with Morris’ critique of Mesa-Lago’s underlying politics, her reluctance to describe or explain any cycles at all in Cuba’s socio-economic policy is striking. Thus, in order to standardise the language used in this thesis with previous research, I have adopted the analytical framework implied in Table 3 to pinpoint events in a ‘time-map’.

Table 3 also schematises the development of the Cuban communist system according to the regime-type perspective adopted in this study. In 1959-1970, revolutionary fervour was shaping a new state; i.e. it was a totalitarian regime that relied on mobilisation and pursued idealist economic policies. 1971-1985, for its part, was the period of Soviet-style institutionalisation; i.e. the regime was in transition to the early post-totalitarian stage – hence as part of its institutionalisation it advanced pragmatic economic policies. In the period 1986-1990 Cuba experienced in turn an incomplete return to totalitarianism: the regime returned to the high mobilisation of its subjects and switched to idealist economic policies. Then the disappearance of the Soviet Union in 1990 brought a complex adaptation of Cuba to its unexpected loneliness in the world.

After 1990, Cuba saw the co-existence of mobilisation and institutionalisation, a hybridity captured in the ‘charismatic post-totalitarian’ type of regime. Nonetheless, it is hardly the case that Cuba remained static ever since. On the contrary, as if to emphasise the contradictory nature of that type of regime, in 1991-2006 Cuba experienced three economic cycles. Perhaps the only constant defining characteristic in these years was, of course, the charismatic leadership of Fidel Castro.

The *historical map* implied in Table 3 can also be used to catch a glimpse of the analysis I will undertake from this point onwards. What if the *mobilisational relapses* of the regime have come to an end in the post-Fidel era? What if the end of charisma anticipates the end of “idealist cycles” in Cuba? Indeed, this is another way to present the central claim of this thesis; i.e. that when Fidel Castro stepped down and Raúl Castro took over the Cuban leadership, the regime started to lose its charismatic character and hence became increasingly ‘post-totalitarian’ proper.

In terms of the political cycles reviewed in this section, the argument of this study implies that mobilisation would have receded in the Cuban political horizon – laying the ground for a new institutionalisation. Thus, the new (third) pragmatic economic cycle launched by Raúl, “the strongest during the revolution” (Mesa Lago 2012, 25), would be the consequence of a post-totalitarian normalisation of the regime. If in the 1990s Pérez-Stable diagnosed that Cuba was caught between ‘mobilisation’ and

‘normalisation’, the former would have finally lost the battle... Likewise, paraphrasing Yaffe, the ‘*Guevarista pendulum*’ would have finally stopped – and would have done it in the farthest place it had ever been since 1959...

Finally, two theoretical caveats are needed in regards to the historical intertwinement of changes in economic policy and mobilisation patterns in Cuba.

First, if the defining characteristics of a regime are *leadership*, *mobilisation*, *ideology* and *pluralism*, how does economic policy fit any discussion on regime development? An expedient solution to this question is to bring into focus (as I do) not economic policy *per se*, but rather the ideological controversies that precede it and inform it. Of course I do not claim that economic policy summarises the whole set of ideas that informs the relationship between a state apparatus and its subjects. I simply presuppose that *economic ideology* is an important ingredient of that set, with potential causal effects in the political economy. In post-totalitarian regimes this link is especially decisive since the turning point from the ‘early’ to the ‘late’ stage is an ideological crisis that propel the revision of the CPE model, as discussed in the previous sections in regards to the theory of Saxonberg (2013).

Second, what would account for the intertwinement of mobilisation patterns and economic policy? A possibility is that the disjointed cohabitation of charisma and post-totalitarian change has been a source of a ceaseless conflict between two discordant imperatives: mobilisation (*totalitarian logic*) and institutionalisation (*post-totalitarian logic*). In practice, in Cuba this has been materialised in consecutive periods where one of the two imperatives (temporarily) prevails over the other. Crucially, these shifts and economic policy have walked hand in hand; i.e., while periods of mobilisation have generally been accompanied by ‘idealist’ policy cycles, institutionalisation has similarly seen ‘pragmatic’ cycles alongside.

An extra caveat: for the sake of simplicity, I am assuming that the opportunities and constraints placed on *pluralism* in Cuba, have ran alongside the opportunities and constraints placed on the other three regime’s defining characteristics. This is not to say that pluralism is not important. This simply means that if the regime is said to

have undergone a freezing turn, I assume that that process also affected pluralism – although this dimension is not the object of exhaustive research in this thesis.

4.2 Leadership: the FAR-PCC ruling coalition

Cuba never fitted fully comfortable in the family of communist systems. In contrast to the other countries of *really existing socialism*, a Communist Party did not take over power in Havana. The organisation led by Fidel Castro that won the 1959 revolution was a nationalist guerrilla that only *later* took on an anti-capitalist path. It was only after two years in power, on 16 April 1961, that Fidel Castro declared “the socialist character of the revolution” during a rally in Havana on the eve of US-organised invasion at the Bay of Pigs (F. Castro 1961). Nevertheless, this does not mean that Cuban Communism developed merely as a reaction to US imperialism, which is only partly true: the Cuban leadership was also favourably predisposed to such path. Farber has explained this structure/agency dialectics as follows:

Undoubtedly, the revolutionary leaders acted under serious internal and external constraints. [...] But at least as important was that these leaders indeed had a political and ideological view of reality that shaped their perceptions of danger, the appropriate responses to it, and especially what they regarded as the desirable form of social and political organization. As Ernesto “Che” Guevara told the French weekly *L’Express* on July 25, 1963, “Our commitment to the eastern bloc was half the fruit of constraint and half the result of choice.” (Farber 2011, 19)

Thus, in Cuba the Party was formed after the Communist takeover, whereas in the other communist revolutions it was the other way around. Rephrasing from the Bible: if in other countries ‘in the beginning there was the Party’, in Cuba ‘in the beginning there was Fidel’. But who was behind Fidel? To answer this key question, I will turn to the concept of *charismatic community*, which can be defined as “an organized group subject to charismatic authority” (Weber 1978a, 243). Although the term is wide enough to allow a variety of empirical references, Weber applied it primarily to the inner circle of the charismatic leader – his “administrative staff”, made up by his “followers” or “disciples” – as is clear in the ideal type he developed:

[A charismatic community] is based on an emotional form of communal relationship. The administrative staff of a charismatic leader does not consist of “officials”; least of all are its members technically trained. It is not chosen on the basis of social privilege nor from the point of view of domestic or personal dependency. It is rather chosen in terms of the charismatic qualities of its members. The prophet has his disciples; the warlord his bodyguard; the leader, generally, his agents. There is no such thing as appointment or dismissal, no career, no promotion. There is only a call at the instance of the leader on the basis of the charismatic qualification of those he summons. (Weber 1978a, 243)

It must not be so controversial to define Cuba’s top leadership as a charismatic community around Fidel Castro. Mujal-León (2011, 154) calls this elite the *partido fidelista*, “the core of the ruling class” distinguished by “their dependence and unswerving loyalty toward the *comandante en jefe*” – i.e. the *Commander in Chief*, Fidel Castro. Such ‘party’ is seen by Mujal-León as the staff of a charismatic leader (Fidel) at the top of a contemporary political regime. Mujal-León’s notion of ‘partido fidelista’ is thus reminiscent of Weber’s definition of a ‘charismatic community’:

By neither having a program nor formal structure, it is not a party [the *partido fidelista*] in the strict sense; but its members, defined around the nucleus of veteran mountain guerrillas, have not doubted their vocation of political power and have been recognisable by their loyalty, commitment and deference toward the figure and leadership of Fidel Castro. (Mujal-León and Buzón 2009, 35)

Of course Kapcia would dismiss the notion of a *partido fidelista* for its Fidel-centrism. However, he has conversely well captured the charismatic quality not of the leader but of the leadership’s “inner circle”, as reflected in the “historic pedigree” of its members. Hence the Cuban leadership has been shaped according to:

a hierarchy of respect, power and influence, dependent largely on the individuals ‘historic’ pedigree, within a structure that resembled an onion rather than a pyramid, with real power at the centre (an ‘inner circle’), outside which were layers of lesser influence, weakening the further from the ‘core’ now went. (Kapcia 2014, 81)

To be sure, the “inner circle” has always been the nucleus of veteran mountain guerrilla, known in Cuba as the *historical generation* (in Spanish, the “*generación histórica*” or “*los históricos*”). They fought in the Rebel Army (Ejército Rebelde) of the Sierra Maestra that in 1959 toppled down the dictator Fulgencio Batista. Some

late iconic figures of the *historical generation* still revered in Cuba today are Camilo Cienfuegos and (of course) Ernesto “Che” Guevara. Kapcia notes, however, a more subtle differentiation within that Cuban “core”:

What constituted that ‘core’ was still clear (with some exceptions, most notably Guevara): participation in the Moncada [1935], the Granma landing [1956] and the Sierra [1956-1959]. [...] [W]hat really mattered for authority was combat experience, especially as a guerrilla; indeed, the unity of the ex-guerrillas remained one evident feature of the Revolution until the 2000s. However, that unity had subtle variations: thus, while those who had participated in the Sierra struggle were considered part of, or close to, the inner group, those who were there from the early days of December 1956 were especially anointed. Moreover, those among them who were also veterans of either the Moncada or Bayamo attacks of 1953 (twenty-one of the eighty-two who landed on the Granma: Aladro Cardoso et al. 2007: 22-2) were clearly among the innermost inner group. (Kapcia 2014, 81)

From 1959 to 2006, Fidel was the unrivalled leader of the *historical generation*, thus of the elite ruling Cuba. Of course this does not mean that charisma acted in an institutional vacuum or that it was the sole political force. The *partido fidelista* rather prevailed because it developed an “interwoven core” formed by the “two hegemonic political institutions in the country”: the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) and the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) (Mujal-León and Buzón 2009, 18). Likewise, a friendly observer of Cuba with a military career in Canada and key elite connections in Havana, has defined the FAR and the PCC as the “two main pillars” of the Cuban state – of which Fidel Castro remained “the key figure” (Klepak 2005, 51).

Applying Weber’s insights around the “routinisation of charisma”, if charisma “in its pure form” only exists *in statu nascendi* and thus it must eventually be either “traditionalised” or “legalised” (Weber 1978a, 246); therefore the rise of the FAR-PCC ruling coalition was a form of legal-rational *routinisation* of Fidel Castro’s charismatic authority. This process is perceptible in Mujal-León’s summary:

[Fidel Castro] exerted a charismatic leadership both within the elite and in the Cuban society, but its authority has also had an institutional side of which the PCC and the FAR have not been the only tools, but certainly the most important ones. (Mujal-León and Buzón 2009, 35)

In similar terms, but ignoring the role of the FAR, Hoffmann has also stressed the co-existence of charisma and institutionalisation in Cuba throughout the Fidel era:

[T]he dualism of charismatic and legal-rational elements was still reflected in Fidel Castro's very titles. He acquired the titles of the state-socialist nomenclature, and official declarations named him as First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party and President of the Council of Ministers and of the Council of State; yet his foremost title never ceased to be that of the Comandante en Jefe – a title found neither in the country's constitution nor in the party's statutes. (Hoffmann 2009, 238)

The relation between the FAR-PCC has not been constant. It has varied across time depending on external and internal political factors affecting Cuba. At the beginning, perhaps not so surprisingly, the FAR and the *historical generation* embedded in it prevailed over the PCC, which was created in 1965 – a process that Klepak has summarised in his classic book on the Cuban armed forces:

Key individuals came to hold both Party and military positions of importance. The FAR seemed to have much the better of it. In most senses, the PCC was being subordinated to the military and not the reverse. Perhaps more important, there was to be only one chain of command, whatever influential Soviet practice seemed to suggest, and that chain was to be dominated by MINFAR, and not by the Party structures. (Klepak 2005, 44)

The FAR was the heir of the Ejército Rebelde of former guerrilla fighters as “the insurgents became the armed forces of the republic” (Klepak 2005, 42). Gen. Raúl Castro was the head of the FAR since its inception in October 1959 until 2008 when he was promoted to the Presidency. Thus, the precedence of the FAR in relation to the PCC is not simply chronological – it conditioned how the state apparatus was shaped and by whom. The relevance of this peculiarity of the Cuban case, from an institutional view, was well summarised by Baloyra (1996, 2): “There was a revolutionary army before there was a party of the revolution and the main mission of that army, is to guarantee the survival of the revolution, not of the Party”.

Kapcia has of course rejected “the notion that Cuba is a military-run system”; crucially for him, “we should remember that the FAR has its own party cells and structure, belonging firmly and loyally to the party-led system” (2014, 8). While I would accept this caveat, I would simultaneously challenge the implication that Cuba

is *simply* a Party-run system, with the FAR definitely subordinated to it. Since 1963, after tensions with civilian cadre leading political education in military units, Raúl Castro decided that only military personnel could serve as FAR political instructors (Walker 1995). From then on, the Party was built through a *fidelistista method* in the civilian sphere, and a *raulista method* in the military, as explained by Jorge Risquet⁶ in the 50th anniversary of the “initial act of Party building in the FAR”:

While the building of the Party followed the *fidelistista* method in the civilian life, it became necessary to create the ways to adapt this model to the conditions of a military institution, with its chain of command and exclusive discipline. Such was a task of the FAR Minister [Raúl Castro] [...]. A commission presided by the FAR Minister elaborated the method to start the work of creating the party organs in the armed forces. The method for [party] assemblies in FAR units, must not affect the inherent principles to any armed institution, such as hierarchies and military discipline. (Risquet Valdés 2013, np)

Therefore, the FAR’s high command is not only in charge of political instruction within the military; it is also assured that its chain of command will also be applied to its internal party structure. If the FAR is politically loyal to the project epitomised by the PCC, its communist engagement is rather one of *its own*. Hence FAR-PCC relations seem to follow a model closer to a partnership than to subordination.

Partially explaining this, it was not until 1975 that the PCC held its 1st Congress – despite being formally founded in 1965. To be sure, it was during the 1970s “process of institutionalisation”, when the Soviet-style institutional framework was replicated in Cuba, that the Party was finally enshrined in the newly adopted constitution as the “leading force in state and society”, expanding its influence on state bureaucracy (Hoffmann 2009, Mujal-León 2011). The fact that *the PCC was not the producer but a product of the Cuban revolutionary state*, surely prefigured its relative weakness and subordination to the *partido fidelista*, as suggested by Mujal-León:

⁶ Jorge Risquet played a key role in these initial efforts as political chief of the Eastern Army (one of the three territorial divisions of the FAR). He was a PSP cadre who joined the Sierra Maestra guerrilla in 1958. As member of the PCC Political Bureau from 1975 to 1991, he led the Cuban negotiation team at the end of the war in Angola in 1988. He is currently a Central Committee member.

The PCC had always been a secondary actor on the Cuban scene. [...] Although the PCC had ample parcels of power, it did not rule Cuba. The core of the ruling class held high party positions, but what distinguished them was their dependence and unswerving loyalty toward the *comandante en jefe* (commander in chief). (Mujal-León 2011, 154)

What were the tasks of the PCC once *institutionalised* within the regime?

Within this *partido fidelista*, the PCC was responsible for administering the party-state bureaucracy and coordinating the mass organizations that organized, directed and channelled participation in Cuban society. (Mujal-León 2011, 154)

To keep a long story short, the basic argument of Mujal-León and Buzón (2009) is that after the creation and consolidation of the state in 1961-1970, Cuba entered a long and stable period of Soviet-style institutionalisation until 1986 during which FAR-PCC functions were highly specialised. In those years, the Armed Forces and the Party focused on the international and national arena, respectively. The FAR-PCC relation evolved into some form of stable equilibrium between peers, each of them taking care of equally relevant political tasks. The Party was in charge of domestic policy on the Island while the Armed Forces pursued military missions abroad in convergence with Moscow's foreign policy. The problems, of course, came later.

Table 4. FAR-PCC division of labour from 1959 to 2006

	FAR priorities	PCC priorities	Main process
1961-1970	- National defence - Internal security - Social tasks - Mobilisation of people	- Consolidation of party and mass organisations	Creation of the state, mobilisation and guerrilla internationalisation
1970-1986	- National defence - International intervention	- Domestic policy	Institutionalisation, specialisation and new internationalism
1986-1991	- National defence - Adaptation to downsizing - Adaptation to purges	- Domestic policy minus economic management - Adaptation to purges	Great transformation
1991-2006	- National defence - Internal security - Economic management	- Mass politisation - Ideological watchdog	Survival, end of autarky and regime's transition

Sources: Own elaboration based on Mujal-León and Buzón (2009).

Overall, Mujal-León and Buzón identify four stages in the FAR-PCC relationship in the period 1959-2006, as summarised in Table 4. On each period, the relative power

within the *partido fidelista* of each of its two pillars varied according to the changes in their specific tasks. After several years of Soviet-style institutionalisation, Fidel Castro launched the *Campaign of Rectification of Mistakes* as a reaction to (and rejection of) Gorbachev reforms – which was a reversal of Cuba’s first transition to post-totalitarianism as discussed in the previous chapter. All in all, Fidel Castro’s focus switched to mobilisation again. In Weber’s language, from 1986 to 1991, Cuba’s charismatic authority reasserted its control over its legal-rational legs.

In 1986-1991, both the FAR and the PCC suffered deep crisis and transformations. The PCC suffered the purge of “almost all Party cadres in charge of economic management and the planning agencies” (Mujal-León and Buzón 2009, 48). As a result, the *historical generation* “recovered much territory lost in the previous years” of institutionalisation (Mujal-León and Buzón 2009, 49). The FAR did not have it better as it entered into a critical period whose initial episode was the purge of General Arnaldo Ochoa, last chief of the Cuban mission in Angola, and one of two generals at the time with the title of *Hero of the Revolution*.

Kapcia has captured the mood shaping what Cubans called the *Angola’s syndrome*:

[T]he returning officers, used to a degree of autonomy and prestige [...], might become frustrated at finding not a ‘land fit for heroes’ but a crisis-ridden and again besieged Revolution. (Kapcia 2000, 206)

Although Ochoa was accused of corruption and drug trafficking, his case remains largely a puzzle. His trial and execution looked more like a political response by the Castro brothers to some (undisclosed) behind-the-scenes crisis prompted by the juxtaposed effect of the return of all Cuban troops from Angola to a land witnessing (and opposing) Gorbachev reforms in the USSR (Preston 1989).

Besides Ochoa, four other persons were executed; 14 ministers, vice-ministers or directors of state companies had been dismissed; over 5% of the PCC Central Committee had been expelled; the Minister of the Interior had been jailed (subsequently dying of a heart attack in prison) along with eighteen top officers

subordinated to him; and, several thousand of officers in the FAR and the Ministry of the Interior (MININT) had been purged (Fogel and Rosenthal 1994, 33, 151).

The era of FAR military involvement abroad had ended and its purge ironically facilitated its adaptation to the subsequent economic crisis sparked by the fall of the Soviet Union. As the state budget collapsed, Raúl Castro downsized the FAR from 300,000 in full-time service in 1990 to “well under 100,000 and still falling” within the next three years (Klepak 2015, 76). Overall, the FAR and the PCC emerged from these turbulent years more loyal to the (once again prominent) charismatic leadership of Fidel Castro, while their roles were redefined according to the new top priority of the regime after 1991: *survival*. Therefore:

While the PCC acted as ideological watchdog headed political and administrative management in the national territory, the FAR (or at least an important sector within it) was the responsible of dealing with the economic problems. (Mujal-León and Buzón 2009, 62)

The Soviet Union had fallen and Cuba was alone in a hostile world: a communist island in a sea of capitalism. Abandoned to its own resources and with no more external economic subsidies, Cuba pursued economic reforms in the 1990s to cope with the new situation. Crucially, the role of private actors increased, including joint ventures with foreign capital mainly in tourism and in the extraction of copper and oil. The FAR played a major role in this, commissioning part of its personnel to the management of joint ventures (Klepak 2005) – an obvious choice for the task given the expertise acquired since 1987, when the military introduced the “System of Enterprise Improvement” (SPE, for its acronym in Spanish) in its enterprises. Such a system, based on managerial techniques developed in capitalist countries, was later intended to be extended to the rest of the state companies (Consejo de Ministros 1998). Since then, important personalities of military background started to outstand as executives, as was the case of Ramiro Valdés, one of the six vice presidents of the Council of Ministers and member of the PCC’s Political Bureau.⁷ He was not the only

⁷ He had been dismissed in 1985 as MININT head for apparent frictions with Raúl Castro, but gradually overcame his decline as director of *Grupo de la Electrónica* – the state company that in Cuba controls the production and import/sale of electronic goods and services, software and hardware.

one. The Tourism Ministry, a key institution of the post-Soviet Cuban economy, is led by Colonel Manuel Marrero Cruz, former director of *Grupo Gaviota*, an emblematic enterprise of the tourist industry developed by FAR managerial expertise.

Apart from its significant incursion in economic activities, the FAR had also been handed over the direction of the Ministry of the Interior (MININT) in 1989. By contrast, the PCC did not surmount the contraction of its power suffered during the institutional earthquake of 1986-1991. For Mujal-León and Buzón (2009, 57) the PCC after 1991 “focused on two fields – the political and the ideological”. While the Party was not irrelevant at all, it was not as multifaceted as the Armed Forces.

Overall, in the period 1991-2006 “the PCC and the FAR remained the central components of the *partido fidelista* until the dawn of the 21st century” (Mujal-León and Buzón 2009, 65). And of course, Fidel Castro, remained the leader of the charismatic community whose core was the *historical generation*. The differentiation of tasks between the FAR and the PCC had suffered variations and re-equilibrations along time but the two of them were still the key ruling coalition in Cuba.

4.3 Ideology: the case of the managers

As noted in the previous chapter, behind the idealist/pragmatic alternation of economic cycles, Mesa Lago (2012) equally highlighted that Fidel’s preferences were always inclined towards orthodox CPE – despite temporary and often unwished tactic retreats. Ideologically speaking, this means that the Fidel era was marked by one constant: the stigmatisation of market-based economic actors. However, there was one exception to this rule: the case of the managers. They were born on the eve of the Special Period and were integrated – as opposed to being stigmatised – afterwards. Their case is relevant for comparative analysis with future integration processes during Raúl’s presidency, as will be explored later on in this thesis.

When Ernesto “Che” Guevara, then Industries Minister, attended in March 1964 the United Nations Conference on Commerce and Development held in Geneva, Switzerland, he denounced the foreign investments as “penetration instruments in a developing country”, which therefore represented “a danger for world commerce

and peace” (CFT 1964). Later on, with the downfall of the Soviet Union, economic, political and military sponsor of the Cuban regime after 1959, things would change.

Although the second pragmatic cycle of economic policy has been located in 1991-96 (Mesa Lago 2012), reform in Cuba’s foreign sector had already started. In 1984, the Soviet Union had complained in a COMECON meeting in Havana about Cuba’s untrustworthy commercial commitments (Pérez-López 2003, 158). In response, Cuba started to build trade relations beyond the socialist bloc – which became the only available strategy after the socialist bloc itself collapsed, opening the Special Period.

In 1990, the first foreign direct investment in socialist Cuba started operations: the *Hotel Sol Palmeras*, with capital from the Spanish chain *Sol Meliá*. Fidel Castro, whom presided over the inauguration, signalled that Cuba, by its own means, would have managed to develop the beaches of Varadero “in thirty, thirty-five, forty, or forty-five years” (CFT 1990, 9). For him, this opening represented a “historical” moment in response to technological and scientific, “non-ideological” needs. Nevertheless – despite the wishes of the *Commander in Chief* – it was precisely an ideological change what had just occurred: an *imperialist* instrument had just been turned into a legitimate tool of economic cooperation and development.

The ideological green light given by the leadership to the reform of Cuba’s foreign sector kicked off a full reorientation of the country’s international trade relations. Exposed to the world market “overnight”, Cuba launched a new type of state enterprise oriented to the world market – frequently in partnership with foreign capital. Its mission was to collect hard currency through exports, which would enable newly isolated Cuba to fund its import needs. Such state enterprises gave birth to a new corporate subject in socialist Cuba: the managers (“*empresarios*”, in Spanish) – the native directors of the state companies operating in the new foreign sector.

Before the 1990s, “*empresario*” was equivalent to bourgeois and hence implied an antagonistic subject that deserved ideological condemnation. Accordingly, Ernesto “Che” Guevara always used the term “*directores*” (literally “directors”, in English) to refer to those in charge of leading state companies in Cuba, as in his speeches of

October-November 1961 (Guevara 1977). As a result, the later emergence of Cuban managers working in joint ventures with FDI was equivalent to the emergence of a native intruder; in other words, an ideological outsider.

A Cuban sociologist has cautiously captured the challenge the managers posed to the ideology of the regime for it was “necessary to consider their demonstrative effect, in the social inter-subjectivity, of the advantages and legitimacy of the non-state sector” (Espina 2008, 136). In the same vein, Bobes (2000, 36) observed that the “economic practices” introduced in the 1990s had contributed to “erode the collectivist and egalitarian values”. Therefore, the emergence of new “group identities”, like the managers, could be said to have contributed to the “ruptures with the revolutionary social order” in Cuba (Bobes 2000, 49).

Revealing a revision in the regime’s official ideology, the managers would no longer be called primarily “cadre” or “directors”. Such ideological distortion/adaptation is what I analyse in the rest of this section in order to grasp the underlying pattern.

The ideological irruption of the “empresarios” can be observed through the concomitant rise of the Chamber of Commerce of the Republic of Cuba, an institution attached to the Ministry of Foreign Trade (MINCEX, for its acronym in Spanish) that defines itself as “an association of enterprises [...] with recognition before the organisms of the State” (Cámara de Comercio 2015b). Originally focused on the promotion of Cuban exports internationally, the Chamber later developed – as an effect of the reforms of the Special Period – the intention of speaking for the “empresariado cubano” (roughly translated as “Cuban business community”).

Created in 1963 by the Law 1091, the Cuban Chamber substituted – with new structure and objectives – another organism with the same name founded in 1927. The latter, for its part, was the heir of an institution founded in Havana in 1876.

The Chamber of Commerce dates back to the 19th century, in very colonial times, when on May 1st, 1876 it was founded the “Havana’s General Council of Commerce”, grouping in its leadership a group of traders and industrialists tied to the merchant interests of the metropolis [Spain]. (Cámara de Comercio, 3)

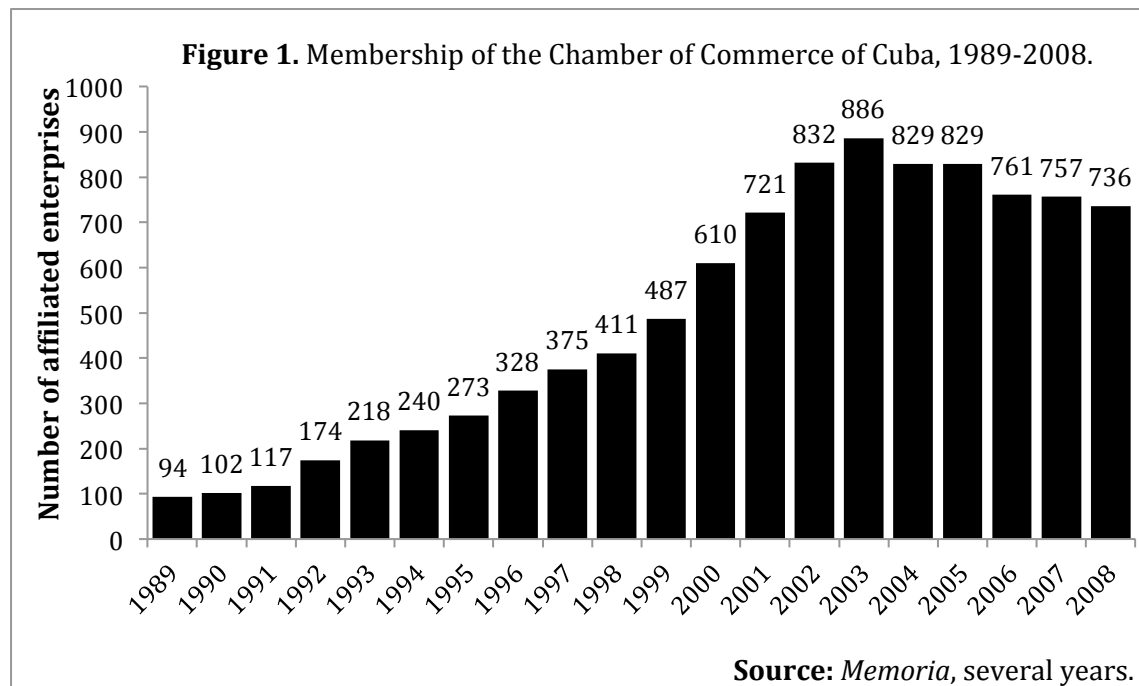
The interests of the old Cuban bourgeoisie were “represented and defended by the [old] Chamber of Commerce” (Cámara de Comercio, 13). Once Fulgencio Batista was overthrown in 1959 and the revolutionary government started the expropriation of the bourgeoisie in Cuba, this social class disappeared on the island. On this new political context, “the employees of the Chamber of Commerce themselves requested the intervention of the revolutionary authorities” (Cámara de Comercio 2015b). Consequently, the aforementioned Law 1091 explains the creation of the new Chamber in terms of the needs “in regards to foreign trade” of the new “economic structure” created by the “Revolution” (Consejo de Ministros 1963b).

In its early years, the main task of the Chamber was the organisation of Cuba’s participation in commercial or even cultural fairs and exhibitions, both at home or abroad. Additionally, from 1973 onwards the Chamber took over as the Cuban state’s agent of industrial property for international purposes (CFT 1988, 5).

However, from 1963 to 1980 only a few companies were members of the Chamber. In an interview the Chamber’s ex-president Carlos Martínez Salsamendi declared that at the time of its foundation, the organisation had 51 members, “of which nineteen were of foreign trade, functioning as monopolies, and the others were groups of enterprises called consolidated, big” (in CFT 1997, 7). However, the membership must have diminished in 1965 when several of these monopolistic groups were fused together (CFT 1965, np). Later, in the 1980s, the Chamber grew as a result of the Law of Foreign Investments of 1984 – the first of its kind in socialist Cuba. In 1989, the Chamber now had 94 companies affiliated to it (Cámara de Comercio 2000).

At the present, the mission of the Chamber is “to promote the development of the affiliated Cuban enterprises, for the wellbeing of the national economy” (Cámara de Comercio 2015b, np). All Cuban companies related to the foreign sector of the economy can apply for membership (Consejo de Ministros 1963a, b), which includes joint ventures since 1990. Each company is expected to pay an annual membership fee, the amount of which depends on its sales volume (Cámara de Comercio 2015a).

Voluntary affiliation and self-financing are traditions that persist from the pre-revolutionary predecessor of the Chamber. Given these rules, the membership of this organisation can be read as an index of its size. Figure 1 shows the rapid grow of the Chamber of Commerce after the collapse of the Soviet Union:



From 1989 to 2003, the Chamber’s membership increased 9.4 times at an average annual growth rate of 18%. These have been the golden years of the Chamber. The decline in the number of members after 2003 coincides with the last ‘idealist cycle’ of economic policy in Cuba, which spanned from 2003 to 2006. As this period accounts for the last years of Fidel’s rule, it will be tackled in the next section. For now it suffices to note that despite the Chamber has not seen a new increase in membership since 2003, by that time it had already developed a new identity. The Chamber’s outstanding expansion after 1989 due to the reorientation of Cuba’s foreign trade led to its conversion into a corporate organisation: it emerged as the voice of the Cuban businessmen.

The shift from export promotion to corporate representation was incubated in the 1990s and completed in 2001. The evidence that accounts for this change is in the documents discussed by the Members’ General Assembly (MGA) of the Chamber. On each MGA, the managers are given a *Memory* and a *Chamber’s Plan* – “*Memoria*”

and “Plan Cameral”, respectively, in Spanish; the former being the report of last year’s activities; and the latter, the plan for the year ahead.

The *1999 Memory*, for instance, proposed “a vision of the Chamber [...] for the year 2003, in which it stands out as a potential institution that represents the associated business sector” (Cámara de Comercio 2000, 25). This is arguably the first time that the Chamber raises this intention. As soon as a year later, the Chamber states as a fact its new representative character in the *2000 Memory*:

The Chamber, in its character of *representative institution of the business community* [empresariado] in the national sphere, has kept on the rise the close working and coordination links with the Organisms of the State’s Central Administration and the provincial governments. The presence and active participation of different working groups and commissions has enabled the Chamber to know and work with the strategies and policies of the different national organisms, as well as transfer the *interests of the [Chamber’s] associates*. (Cámara de Comercio 2001, 4)

By 2002, the membership of the Chamber had increased eight times in a decade. In this context, the Chamber concluded that “the current membership guarantees the institution a high power to convene that makes it a business forum par excellence where the members have the possibility to discuss the problems affecting them and take their opinions and proposals to the authorities on topics under their scope” (Cámara de Comercio 2003, 8). In other words, the regime had just recognised legitimate collective interests to the Cuban managers via the Chamber.

In the *2002, 2002, and 2006 Memories*, the Chamber underscored its “role of spokesperson of the interests of the Cuban business community” (2003, 17, 2006, 18, 2007a, 16). In 2007, the *Chamber’s Plan* offered a clearer, positive definition:

What are the Chambers of Commerce? Normally, the Chambers of Commerce are autonomous non-profit organisations created to protect and develop the interests of commerce and industry, locally and nationally. Their basic goal is economic development. In particular, *it aims to promote and protect the interests of its members in the commercial, industrial and services sectors*; in a very real sense, the members themselves are the Chamber of Commerce. (Cámara de Comercio 2007b, 5)

Right after the paragraph above, appears the question “What is the Cuban Chamber”; the answer: “it represents the Cuban business sector associated to it”.

In practice, however, the Chamber does not play a policymaking role, but an advisory one subordinated to the MINCEX. And as if to paraphrase Schmitter’s seminal definition of corporatism as a monopolistic system of representation recognised and controlled by the state, the head of the MINCEX defined the Chamber as an “indispensable advisor, [...] the most suitable institution to put together the concerns and initiatives of the national and foreign business community linked to the foreign trade so as to take them to the relevant organisms and institutions” (CFT 2008, np). The subordinated character of the Chamber was prefigured in its leadership structure, as designed in 1963 and unaltered since then.

The three leading bodies of the Chamber are its Members’ General Assembly, the Leadership Council, and the Executive Committee. The MGA is supposed to be the “superior organism of the Chamber of Commerce”, which is composed “of all its active members” (Consejo de Ministros 1963b, art. 5, 6). This framework, maybe inherited from the pre-1959 traditions of the Chamber, was never put into practice until 1987, when Julio García Oliveras, president of the Chamber in 1986-92, convened an MGA for the first time (CFT 1992, 73). In spite of García’s attempt to revive this tradition, Carlos Martínez Salsamendi, Chamber’s president in 1993-1999, would later acknowledge in 1997 that the MGA’s system had not really worked:

[I]n reality it has not worked like that [Law 1091], which even rules that the directing council of the Chamber has representatives of its associated members, but that has neither worked that way. We are working for these regulations to be fulfilled. But for this to happen, it is needed an appealing content for the associated members. (CFT 1997, 7)

To be sure, the Chamber would later manage to institutionalise the MGA’s. However, the MGA does not select the Chamber’s Executive Committee, which is “integrated by a President, Vice-President, and a Secretary, appointed and freely removed by the Minister of Foreign Trade” (Consejo de Ministros 1963b, art. 8). Besides this, although the MGA is entitled to elect three members that along with the Executive Committee form the Leadership Council of the Chamber, the latter is

less powerful than the former. While the powers of the Council are defined through verbs like “to know” and “to propose”, the Committee is enabled to “exercise”, “prepare” and “enforce” (Consejo de Ministros 1963a, chap. 6, 7). Thus, the Council advises and the Committee (i.e. the MINCEX) decides.

Therefore, although the Chamber is not a “mass organisation” – i.e. there are no “masses” of managers – its relation with the Cuban state is also a corporatist one. As such, the Chamber displays a state/non-state duality. On the one hand, the Chamber *is* an extension of the state because the MINCEX appoints its leadership. On the other, the Chamber *is not* either a mere extension of the state in as long as it channels concerns of the “empresarios cubanos”. And the point is: the regime had ideologically recognised a new corporate subject in Cuba, the “businessmen”.

If in Fidel’s times the exceptional figure of the communist businessman working in the world market had already emerged, what else would happen during Raúl’s?

Summary

To put the ‘charismatic early post-totalitarian’ regime type in historical perspective, I folded it into the main periodization efforts of communist Cuba. A key theme in these matters is the division of Mesa-Lago (2012) of Cuba’s economic history in ‘idealist cycles’ and ‘pragmatic cycles’. In the post-totalitarian perspective of Cuba, I have interpreted the former cycles with ‘freezing’ tendencies, and the latter with ‘maturing’ ones. In this discussion, I identified the leadership of Fidel Castro as the main force aborting the ‘pragmatic cycles’, which has led me to ask whether after 2006 (when Fidel stepped down) the ‘idealist cycles’ have come to an end.

Then I introduced a succinct historical background of the *leadership* and *ideology* of the Cuban regime in the period 1959-2006 – i.e. Cuba under Fidel Castro. I discussed key elements of the leadership, namely, the role of the *revolutionary veterans* who won the 1959 revolution and since then constituted the ‘inner circle’ of the ruling elite (Kapcia 2014), and also the significance of the FAR-PCC relationship as the two main institutional pillars of the political system (Klepak 2005, Mujal-León and Buzón 2009). Using the framework of Max Weber – advanced in the theoretical discussion

of the previous chapter – the Cuban ‘inner circle’ may be seen as the staff of the charismatic leader Fidel Castro, while the FAR-PCC ruling coalition can be understood as the legal-rational routinisation of charismatic authority.

In regards to the ideology of the Cuban regime, I followed a different strategy: I assumed that the stigmatisation of market-based subject was a constant. In the previous chapter I had introduced the periodization of Mesa Lago (2012), who argues that the CPE model pursued in Cuba experienced under Fidel Castro idealist and pragmatic cycles – the former being Fidel’s preferred ones, and the latter mere tactical retreats. Thus, in this chapter I argued that the last idealist cycle under Fidel (1991-1996) brought the first (partial) ideological revision of the CPE model, as happened with the insertion of Cuban managers into the world market – this was the only case of acceptance of a non-traditional socialist subject before 2006.

Both the persistence of a charismatic leadership and the first ideological revisions on the CPE model would shape the political opportunities and constraints that Raúl Castro faced when he took over in 2006. The charismatic post-totalitarian regime would thus confront the loss of its charismatic founder, while the accumulated failures of the CPE model compounded the political challenges ahead. As the ‘early post-totalitarian’ stage is defined by the fact that the CPE ideological legitimacy is still solid (Saxonberg 2013), the regime would need to reform the economy or have its ideological legitimacy further undermined and face the consequences – but this time without Fidel’s charisma as an always-reliable source of legitimacy.

5. The revolt of Raúl Castro

This chapter covers the presidency of Raúl Castro before the Sixth Party Congress, which was held in April 2011. To begin with, in the first section section I will summarise the political context in Cuba at the time Fidel Castro stepped down as President in 2006 – i.e. the regime as Raúl Castro received it. After this historical turning point, I will argue that the next period in Cuban politics was marked by Raúl's efforts aimed at creating the conditions for instituting a new type of leadership and a new economic model. Cuba thus underwent a revolt launched by the upper levels of the regime, and the Sixth Congress would become its culmination.

However, Raúl was temporary head of state from July 2006 to February 2008, which in practice excluded this period from any overt political offensive. But I include this period in the analysis not so much as to find any revolt in it, but in order to shed light on the signs that prefigured the new vision that later informed the changes.

Cuba, I argue, lived a three-year revolt thereafter (2008-2011), during which:

- The charismatic attributes of the leadership were largely removed
- The CPE orthodoxy of the ruling ideology was challenged in public

This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first one, I deal with Raúl Castro's provisional time in office. In the second, I cover the revolt he launched after being appointed new President of Cuba in order to prepare the Sixth Party Congress.

5.1 Cuba when Fidel stepped down

In this section I will explore the political context, or 'initial conditions', in which Raúl Castro took over the leadership of Cuba in 2006. The term 'initial conditions' refers to the value of certain key variables at a given time defined as the starting point ($t=0$). The starting point is, of course, the moment when Fidel Castro handed over his duties to his deputy and younger brother Raúl. The variables of interest are, as have been specified, *leadership* and *economic strategy*.

Fidel Castro had already suffered some minor health setbacks that had already highlighted his old age. On June 23, 2001, Fidel had fainted during a speech in Havana before 70,000 supporters. Then, in October 2004, he accidentally tumbled whilst leaving the stage after a speech in Villa Clara attended by 30,000 people – on that occasion he fractured both a knee and an upper arm. Although these personal minutiae may look politically irrelevant, this could hardly be the case in a regime that built much of its legitimacy on the importance of one individual.

Kapcia has well summarised the political relevance of Fidel's deteriorating health:

As he fell (twice) and as his legendary ability to lecture Cubans for hours on end, improvising and illustrating arguments with a seemingly endless stream of well-memorised facts and data, began to decline, loyal Cubans started to fear the stability and flexibility of the government. Thus a crucial element of the system's (and the old inner circle's) credibility and legitimacy began to be undermined. (Kapcia 2014, 181)

What was at stake in Fidel's health condition was no less than Weber's problem of the succession of a charismatic leader, thus of the future of a regime that would need to accommodate in one way or another to the loss of one of its pillars. As if to avoid any potential perceptions of political vacuum, Cuban TV channels were ordered to pan away from Fidel if any trouble arose – a decision reported by journalist Marc Frank (2013, 33) illustrates the regime's predicament around the role of its long-time leader.

In mid-2006 Fidel Castro fell gravely ill, interrupting his time in office for the first time since 1959. In the night of 31 July 2006, thirteen days before his 80th birthday, a handwritten "Proclamation" by Fidel was read by one of his aides at the time, Carlos Valenciaga, on national TV. In that text, Fidel "provisionally" delegated to 75-year-old Raúl his positions of First Secretary of the Party, Commander of the Armed Forces, and President of the Council of State and Ministers (F. Castro 2006a). The change proved fluid and, in contrast to the excitement and expectations in Miami, there were no signs of unrest in Cuba as post-Fidel times plainly emerged.

Furthermore, the problem of who would have succeeded Fidel, given the case of his absence, had long been sorted out from Fidel's perspective. He had openly

designated his brother Raúl Castro as successor well from the beginning of the revolution, and again in the 1990s. The first time ever Fidel unveiled his brother as the next in line, in January 1959, was to warn enemies “that if he were assassinated, his successor would be harsher and more radical” (Farber 2013, np). The warning made sense given Raúl’s reputation at the time as a communist hardliner, both in action and ideology. Before Fidel set up the group that would become the 26th July Movement that won the 1959 revolution, Raúl had been a member of the youth wing of the Popular Socialist Party (PSP), the name adopted by the Cuban communists aligned to Moscow. Almost forty years later, when Fidel promoted his brother again as his successor, it was during the 5th Party Congress in 1997, most probably signalling Fidel’s concerns over his own death.

By 2006, Cuba was in the third year of its fourth ‘idealist cycle’ – when Fidel Castro put forward a “reversal of the reform” encouraged by advantageous economic treaties with Venezuela (Mesa Lago 2012, 44-49). As part of this, the number of Cuban joint ventures with foreign capital fell from its peak of 403 in 2002 to 203 in 2006 (MINVEC 2008). Overall, Fidel had launched a “recentralisation” process of the economy: foreign currency savings in Cuba were centralised by the Central Bank, taxes to self-employed rose, and state companies lost decision-making power on revenues (Mesa Lago 2012, Sweig 2007). The Chamber explained the relative decline of its membership as the result of “fusions, extinctions or changes in the purpose” of several affiliated enterprises, joint ventures included, and the failure to pay the annual membership fees of several others (Cámara de Comercio 2007a, 4).

Encouraged by the alliance with Hugo Chávez’s Venezuela, Fidel Castro had partially dismantled some developments produced by the economic policies adopted in the 1990s Special Period. The backdrop of this trend was the rise of Hugo Chávez, whom by 2003 was firmly in power and had already pushed forward a partnership with his political mentor, Fidel Castro. Perhaps the most salient agreement was the exchange of Cuban doctors for Venezuelan oil. Although the Cuban side actually provided more than doctors and its assistance also included military and educative advice (Marcano 2014), Caracas covered more than the costs incurred by Havana (Mesa Lago 2012, 2013).

Overall, Fidel was never happy with the economic reforms introduced to cope with the collapse of the Soviet Union, as he made clear in the 5th Party Congress of 1997:

It is bitter this struggle in the economic field, tremendously bitter, difficult, hard. [...] Sometimes the sick has to ingest some unpleasant medication or go through certain surgical procedures and treatments that leave a sizable dose of suffering. (F. Castro 1997)

Therefore, Fidel must have read the appearance of Hugo Chávez in the Cuban political landscape as the chance to free the country from some “unpleasant medication”. Along with the ‘recentralisation’, Fidel re-launched the *Battle of Ideas* – a youth movement created and directly led by him since late 1999. Back then, the movement started with the original goal of bringing back home the boy Elián, who had survived a sea trip to Florida where his mother and the other passengers died. His father, who lived in Cuba, wanted his son back. In front of the US Interest Section in Havana, the Young Communists organised weekly rallies demanding the repatriation of the boy, which would occur in June 2000. Nonetheless, the weekly rallies continued now under the banner of the *Battle of Ideas*, with the purpose of reinvigorating socialist ideas and anti-imperialism in Cuba (Frank 2013, 36-39).

From the perspective of Cuba’s old alternation between institutionalisation and mobilisation, the Battle “had signalled that the pendulum of participation had again swum firmly away from [...] formal structures and towards ‘participation through (passionate) mobilization’” (Kapcia 2014, 162). Moreover, in the 2003-2006 ‘recentralisation’ of the economy, Fidel took the *Battle of Ideas* to a new level as he mobilised “former dropouts turned social workers, teachers, art instructors, and health workers as the battering rams against creeping corruption” (Frank 2013, 39).

In a famous speech at Havana University in 2005, Fidel defined and defended his intention behind the re-launch of the *Battle of Ideas*:

At the moment, while I’m talking to you about this [...] we are working, we are moving towards full changes in our society. We have to change again, because we have gone through some very difficult times, and these inequalities and injustices have arisen, and we are going to change this situation. (F. Castro 2005)

From a grassroots perspective, the renewed *Battle of Ideas* was visible in the urban landscape as the youth movement extended its reach to the economy:

[T]housands of student-age youths took over gas stations and started working in refineries and riding in fuel trucks where it turned out up to half of the precious resource was being stolen. The young people also raided bakeries, looking for stashed wheat and lard and checking how many rolls were needed to meet a neighbourhood quota, then adjusting wheat and other deliveries accordingly. (Frank 2013, 39)

At the leadership level, the fourth 'idealist cycle' would also bring some changes. The *Battle of Ideas* had grown into an extra institutional apparatus that was embedded into the regime as Fidel Castro's watchdog – an unchecked tool of the charismatic leader to keep in check the legal-rational foundations of Cuban communism. Most probably, the *Battle of Ideas* developed frictions within the FAR-PCC ruling coalition and its core: the *historic generation*. Again, the observations of journalist Marc Frank prove useful to sense the uneasiness experienced at the top leadership:

The movement called the *Battle of Ideas* was headquartered alongside [Fidel] Castro's office. Youth leaders gained tremendous power as representatives of Castro's revolutionary will and newfound [political] wealth. They worked parallel to, and sometimes bossed around, government and Communist Party officials. (Frank 2013, 38)

Nonetheless, the *Battle of Ideas* was not alone as an extra official tool directly led by Fidel. In a sense, the *Battle* was only the most visible and recent element of a broader apparatus created by/for the charismatic leader in 1975: the *Equipo de Coordinación y Apoyo al Comandante en Jefe* – Support Team of the Commander in Chief, also simply known as the "Grupo de Apoyo". According to Mastrapa (2001, 476), this team was an estimated twenty-member "parallel structure of government that answers to only Castro and is an extension of his power". This staff had the authority to order ministers what had to be done in his/her domain, which is why "other government officials resent them and their power" (Mastrapa 2001, 480).

The *Grupo* had gained more political weight as a result of the Special Period, which is consistent with the *hypertrophy* of charisma after 1990 (the charismatic post-totalitarian turn of the regime discussed in the previous chapter). Roughly speaking,

if the *Battle of Ideas* had become “Fidel Castro’s favourite project since late 1990s” (Mujal-León and Buzón 2009, 71), it was no coincidence that it looked like the younger sibling of his *favourite political tool since late 1990s*, the *Grupo de Apoyo*.

LeoGrande (2014) has summarised the development of the *Grupo*:

During the Special Period, he came to rely more and more on his personal staff [the *Grupo de Apoyo*], composed of young acolytes whom Fidel had plucked from the ranks of the Union of Young Communists (UJC). The *Grupo* evolved into a kind of shadow cabinet, operating at Fidel’s behest outside the normal lines of authority of party and state. The *Grupo* had a reputation for conservatism – being more Fidelista than Fidel – and Cubans dubbed them “*los Talibanes*” for their rigid ideological conservatism. (LeoGrande 2014, 64)

Chair of the *Battle of Ideas*, Otto Rivero was the leader of the Young Communists (UJC, by its acronym in Spanish) when Fidel recruited him to lead the campaign for Elián. Leader of the UJC, Rivero stepped down in 2004 in order to take over as Vice-President of the Council of Ministers – at the age of 36, this rise had been the quickest one ever from the UJC to a ministerial post. However, Rivero was not the only young leader recruited by Fidel to the top bypassing the official institutional lines in record time. Other leaders had followed the fast-tracking path from University students’ union leaders to the leadership of the Young Communists, then to the *Grupo de Apoyo*, and eventually to the Council of Ministers.

Although Rivero “skipped” the *Grupo de Apoyo* stage, he was also seen as part of the *Taliban* group that went through it. By the time Fidel stepped down in 2006, two other members of the Council of Ministers came from that *charismatic apparatus*. They were Carlos Lage and Felipe Pérez Roque. The two of them were the most powerful members of the Cuban leadership that came from the *Grupo de Apoyo*.

Lage, the most senior *Taliban*, was 39 when he joined the Council of Ministers in 1990 as secretary of its Executive Committee – he would later become member of the Council of State and of the Party’s Politburo. He had overseen the economic reforms of the 1990s and because of his young age in comparison with the *historical generation*, he was expected to have a leading role in the post-Fidel leadership.

For his part, Pérez Roque had been the youngest minister ever when he was appointed head of Foreign Relations at the age of 34, which also made him the first officer of that level to have been born after the 1959 revolution. He was the individual most explicitly seen as Fidel's man – in *Granma* his ministerial promotion was cheered for being “familiarised as few with the ideas and thoughts of Fidel” (Consejo de Estado 1999, np).

Finally, a minister-in-waiting perhaps could be seen in Carlos Valenciaga, Fidel's personal secretary and last co-ordinator of the *Grupo de Apoyo* – he would read on Cuban national television the famous “Proclamation” of Fidel when he fell ill.

In inverse relation to Fidel's reliance on his *Talibanes*, the Party lost Fidel's close attention as its First Secretary. Therefore, while the first five Party Congresses had more or less respected the five-year intervals between them as mandated in its statutes (in 1975, 1980, 1985, 1991, and 1997), the 6th Congress took place fourteen years after the last one, in 2011 – when Fidel had already stepped down. The postponement of the Sixth Congress reflected, besides renewed mobilisation, “a continuing weakness of the institutional apparatus of governance, political communication and involvement”, as Kapcia (2014, 163) assessed. It equally reflected a disregard (disappointment?) of Fidel, First Secretary of the Party, towards regular Cuban institutions, which was palpable in his growing preference for direct intervention through extra official channels controlled by him. When Raúl Castro took over in 2006, the *Fidelista* style of leadership had its days numbered.

5.2 The provisional leader (2006-2008)

5.2.1 Leadership: two models of succession

Even critics of ‘Fidel-centrism’ have acknowledged the predicament of the leadership around the loss of Fidel – hence confirming the serious situation faced by the elite:

While Fidel may have never exercised the supposedly total power that his critics had always alleged and that the ‘totalitarian’ label assumed, [...] the fact was that most Cubans [...] had always believed in his capacity to guide, lead and decide cleverly and with awareness of what

they felt. Once that was removed, or at least undermined, the rot had set in, and a new form of governance had to be found. (Kapcia 2014, 181)

As I will discuss in this section, there were two models of political succession within the top leadership at the time Fidel stepped down: 1) appointment of a new charismatic leader, or 2) advancing a collegial leadership (discarding charisma). Raúl supported the second alternative, which is the one that prevailed.

In hindsight, Raúl's departure from charismatic legitimacy was perceptible from the first month of his provisional takeover in 2006, when he openly acknowledged his discreet style – as opposed to the ever-present style of his brother Fidel:

It is not my habit to appear with frequency in public, except in the required moments. [...] Besides, I have always been discreet. That is my character and, by the way, I clear up that I plan to keep like this. But that is not the fundamental reason why I do not appear on the media frequently; it simply has not been necessary. (R. Castro in Barredo 2006, np)

For Hoffmann (2009, 240), such a *stylistic* shift “goes hand in hand with a turn to more collective leadership, in which Raúl Castro is a *primus inter pares* rather than a towering leader.” Connected to this, the new leadership style of Raúl brought the last idealist cycle to an end – including here the mobilisational politics epitomised in the *Battle of Ideas*. To grasp Raúl's political gesture, it will help putting it in comparative perspective versus the charismatic model of succession hinted by the *Grupo de Apoyo*. Indeed, the *Talibanes* aimed at a leading role in post-Fidel Cuba.

By 2006, almost a decade had elapsed since Fidel, the charismatic leader, had fortified his weight via the *Taliban* extra-institutional apparatus embedded in the Council of State, the top body of the Cuban state apparatus. As a result, when Fidel stepped aside that year, the FAR-PCC ruling coalition and the *historical generation* at its core were confronted with the fate of that charismatic outgrow.

According to Mujal-León, alongside the “proclamations of unflinching loyalty” of the *Talibanes*, “could be heard their claims to the mantle of succession” (2011, 156). It was Pérez Roque who expressed this more clearly in a speech to the National Assembly in December 2005, in front of all the leaders – Fidel Castro included. On

that occasion, Pérez Roque (2005, np) reflected on what had to be done “when there is the vacuum no one can fill” in reference to the time when the *historic generation* were gone. His answer to this question “underscored the charismatic character of Cuban socialism in order then to sketch a model of an explicitly charismatic rather than institutional succession”, as Hoffmann (2009, 238) has put it. Hence, after defining (and praising several times) the authority of Fidel as one that “comes from the example” and socialism as “the science of example”, Pérez Roque (2005, np) concluded: “As long as this country has a leadership based on example... this treasure... it is invincible”. For Hoffmann (2009, 238), such conclusion was “as uninstitutional as could be” and represented a “model of succession that is diametrically opposed” to the one pursued by Raúl Castro since Fidel fell ill.

Addressing the same succession problem, Raúl not only discarded any kind of transmission of Fidel’s charisma to the future: he buried it. As early as July 2006, just before Fidel fell ill, Raúl had “emblematically bid farewell to the Fidelista leadership” when he made clear “that neither he nor any other successor was to take on the title of “Comandante en Jefe” (Hoffmann 2009, 240). Raúl made that statement in a rally with FAR officials, demanding their loyalty to the Party:

The special trust granted by the people to the founding leader of the Revolution cannot be transmitted, as if it was an inheritance, to those who hold the main leadership posts of the country in the future. The Commander-in-Chief of the Cuban Revolution is one and only one, and only the Communist Party [...] can be the worthy heir of the trust deposited by the people in its leader. (R. Castro 2006b)

This solution defined Cuba’s succession problem not in terms of who would succeed this or any other leader (transmission of charisma), but in terms of which institutional arrangement will constrain and guide the power of any future leadership (principle of collegiality). To use Weber terms, instead of following “the conception that charisma is a quality transmitted by heredity” (Weber 1978a, 248), Raúl Castro “replaced [it] by other structures” (Weber 1978b, 1121), namely the Communist Party of Cuba. As a result, Raúl would shape the post-charismatic Cuban leadership according to “the “principle of collegiality”, which “is usually derived from the interest in weakening the power of persons in authority” (1978a, 277).

Condensing the shift from the last cycle of mobilisations, Raúl “quietly downgraded” the *Battle of Ideas* movement following Fidel’s illness (Kapcia 2014, 38) – hence, both the *Commander-in-Chief’s* office and the next-door Battle’s headquarters remained empty since then (Frank 2013, 39, 203). Similarly, as if to highlight their coming fall on disgrace, the *Talibanes* were now jokingly dubbed the *huerfanitos* or little orphans for Fidel was no longer in the driving seat (Farber 2008, np).

As this charismatic apparatus was not rooted either in the Party or the Armed Forces, and its political weight largely depended on Fidel, its days certainly seemed numbered – a situation that was compounded by Raúl’s known institutions-building approach. To use a Latin American phrase based on a novel’s title by Gabriel García Márquez, the fall of the *Talibanes* resembles, in hindsight, a *chronicle of a foretold death*. For example, Farber had forecasted the political death of the *Talibanes* before it actually occurred, comparing their case with the fate of Mao’s personal staff after his death, when Deng Xiaoping asserted his power as China’s new head of state:

China’s transition is a good example against which to compare the role of the *Talibanes*: their equivalents were the “Gang of Four” types who stood for the old Stalinist system. They were no match for Deng and what he promised: an improved standard of living and relief from Mao’s endless mobilizations and arbitrariness. (Farber 2008, np)

Raúl’s first blow to *Fidelismo*, as expressed in the extra-institutional apparatus of the charismatic leader – in particular, the leadership’s members whose rise was related to it – may be dated in February 2007 – just half a year after being provisionally appointed head of state. In a UJC national meeting, Raúl talked with the attendees about the new *cadre policy* (“*política de cuadros*”, in Spanish) for the organisation: in order to be eligible for a full-time leadership post, the youth cadre will need five-year ‘real’ job experience. After including Felipe Pérez Roque and Carlos Lage (both present in the meeting) among those “who thought they were leaders since childhood”, Raúl mocked their lack of professional experience on their fields of college training: “I would not send him [Felipe, engineer] to work on a thermoelectric because he can break it” or “I would not let him [Carlos, doctor] inject me” (García Ríos 2007, np). Unveiling his vision of the succession problem, a cathartic Raúl concluded: “it is our duty to open the path to the new generations [...],

but not to test-tube leaders” (García Ríos 2007, np). This open and sarcastic rebuke of Fidel’s fast-tracking promotion of young leaders was a forewarning of the fate of the *Grupo de Apoyo* caucus and its ramifications: it would be obliterated in the coming period.

The provisional character of Raúl’s Presidency turned permanent in February 2008. As expected, there would have come a moment in which either Fidel came back to office or a new arrangement was settled for his “Proclamation” of August 2006 implied that the *Commander in Chief* would probably return to his duties.

Despite the calmness surrounding the torch passing from Fidel to Raúl, the former’s proclamation read on TV to accomplish it was not at all obvious. Hoffmann (2009) has a point in reminding two alternative succession routes: 1) Fidel himself had openly expected either the Politburo or the National Assembly to “meet and elect” Raúl as successor if “something” happened to him (F. Castro 2007a, 620); which 2) was legally unnecessary as the Cuban Constitution already specifies that: “In case of absence, illness or death of the President of the Council of State, the First Vice-President substitutes him in his functions” (República de Cuba 1992, art. 94).

If the proclamation was not needed for Raúl to supplant Fidel, then *why* was it used?

It is the Weberian analysis of succession to charismatic authority which makes evident why the handwritten proclama was needed: it was the symbolic gesture that succession to leadership was not determined through the legal-institutional process (the deputy takes over) or through designation by the corresponding administrative staff (the National Assembly or Politburo) alone, but was rather enacted as “the designation on the part of the original charismatic leader of his own successor”. (Hoffmann 2009, 237)

The fact that Raúl had long been the second-in-command and that his time in office began as the choice of the charismatic leader, who (not the least) happened to be his brother, has misled observers that see in such a move a dynastic succession like that of the Kim family in North Korea (e.g. Saxonberg 2013). However, as counter intuitive as it seems, such was far from being the case. Although in the transfer of power from Fidel to Raúl their brotherly bond was indeed “a vital resource [...] in resolving the issue of succession”, yet that was not a case of “a transfer of charisma

by heredity”, as Hoffmann (2009, 243) has extensively substantiated. Far from trying to establish a Castro dynasty akin to the Kim’s in North Korea, Raúl said goodbye to charismatic rule and has instead put forward “a much more institutions-based model” (Hoffmann 2009, 242). In other words, Raúl would not seek the transmission of charisma onto him, but its dismantling – a process he set in motion in 2008.

In the electoral system of Cuba, the National Assembly of the Popular Power (ANPP, by its acronym in Spanish) is renewed every five years. Largely controlled by the Party, this electoral process reaches a point in which the renewed body meets and elects the deputies that will join the thirty-one members Council of State, including its president, first vice present, five vice presidents and a secretary. This Council in turn appoints the Council of Ministers, every member of which runs a ‘state’s administration organ’ on a daily basis. In the 2008 elections, as Fidel Castro was unsurprisingly re-elected a member of the ANPP, the speculation over whether he would be appointed President one more time would only end when Fidel himself declined the potential nomination for that position. He did so in a “Message” published in *Granma* on 19th February, some days before the Assembly’s meeting:

To my dearest compatriots, who have recently honoured me so much by electing me a member of the Parliament where so many agreements should be adopted of utmost importance to the destiny of our Revolution, I am saying that I will neither aspire to nor accept, I repeat, I will neither aspire to nor accept the positions of President of the State Council and Commander in Chief. (F. Castro 2008a)

As a consequence, Raúl Castro would formally (no longer provisionally) take over as President of the Council of State and Ministers. *Raulismo* was now fully on board.

5.2.2 Ideology: a change of tack

As for the ideas informing economic policy in Cuba, they also followed the pattern described in the last section about leadership. In 2006-2008 Raúl signalled his intention of reforming the economy, and he would actually take some bold steps. But the new direction would only emerge more clearly after February 2008.

Although Raúl Castro did not introduce any spectacular reforms when he was provisional president, he inaugurated a new governing style since the early days. In his reporting from Havana, Marc Frank captured interesting anecdotes. According to his sources, Raúl “sent out word to the ministries asking what they would do if Hugo Chávez was not around the next day” (Frank 2013, 68). Similarly, in a meeting with young people inefficiently renovating hospitals under the *Battle of Ideas*, Raúl asked the also present health minister and construction minister “why the kids were in charge of renovating hospitals in the first place” (Frank 2013, 69).

For Frank, the “change of tack” was perceptible:

And so the anecdotes kept coming those first months. True or false, they circulated through the system signalling there was indeed a new administration with the same ideology but quite a different approach. (Frank 2013, 69)

However, there is enough evidence to argue that Raúl’s “different approach” was *different enough* so as to turn the “same ideology” into a different one. Cuba was on the verge of experiencing the ideological relaxation of orthodoxy, sometimes even going as far as outlining the basic definitions of a new economic doctrine.

As early as October 2006, ordinary Cubans had available signals of the new times. In that month, the official newspaper *Juventud Rebelde* published blunt reports in the Sunday edition about the problems in the economy. For instance:

The current irregularities in the country's services, in the midst of the search for a better economic model, has meant Cuba still does not have a retail and services sector that satisfies people's expectations. (*Juventud Rebelde* 2006, np)

According to Frank (2013, 69), this was the first time since Fidel fell ill that the local media told the public that Cuba was in “search for a better economic model”. This language would evolve and adopt various forms, but the essence would still be the same: the acknowledgment of the need of change.

Also relevant, the lines quoted above were part of a piece informing that an academic team had been set up to study socialist property relations. Some members of that team had a long record advocating reform, but now their proposals finally

matched an appropriate context for them to be heard. For instance, one of the academics interviewed by *Juventud Rebelde* (2006, np), Luis Marcelo Yera, asserted that “the theory that came from the Soviet Union was skewed”. For him, it was necessary “to achieve the adequate balance between centralisation (strategic decisions) and decentralisation (operative decisions), mixed up frequently” – thus, his policy advice was to delegate “more decisions to workers’ collectives” in order to overcome “bureaucratic constraints” (*Juventud Rebelde* 2006, np). To be sure, this was not the first time Yera advocated workers’ control. In an older academic article, he had already proposed that leasing from the state to democratic workers’ collectives (co-ops) was “the lost paradigm of Marx and Engels” (Yera 2004, 10-13). Although the leasing scheme was later adopted during Raúl Castro’s presidency, its original democratic edge was not. But it is worth it noticing that the ideological roots of the new economic cycle were substantially Cuban.

On December 2006, Raúl polled Party militants on what the most pressing popular concerns were – the economy topping the results. Then on January 2007, Raúl asked Party cadre on economic commissions (municipal and provincial) and on enterprises to debate and submit proposals to improve economic performance without leading to bigger budgets (Frank 2013, 71). The results of this process were not disclosed, but it was another preparing step in the direction of reform.

The first public acknowledgment on the need of economic change would come on 26th July 2007. By far the most important date in the Cuban political calendar, that year’s edition marked the first major speech of Raúl to Cubans as (provisional) head of state. After criticising how the country was run economically, but insisting that “not everything can be sorted out immediately”, he expressed the need of “structural and conceptual changes” as a prerequisite of success (R. Castro 2007c). However, there were ideological limits: “What a Cuban revolutionary will never question is our decision which can never be given up of building socialism” (*ibid.*).

Then in September 2007 around 800,000 Communist Party members and a similar number of Young Communists were asked to discuss this speech and gather “opinions, suggestions and proposals” (Frank 2013, 73). This exercise would then be

replicated outside the Party, in the 1st public discussion on the Cuban economy among ordinary citizens between October and December 2007, the results of which would kick off the process to “forge the consensus that defines what is most rational and convenient” (R. Castro 2007b). An interesting feature, consistent with the corporatist logic of the Cuban regime, is the direct appeal to the general public through the mass organisations, which in this case were summoned in order to encourage outside pressure aimed at the orthodox bureaucracy inside the Party and the state from outside, as I will argue later.

In terms of the political attitude towards market subjects, by the time Fidel Castro stepped down in 2006 the Cuban managers were still the only ones accepted by the regime. Although the managers had long been on the road towards full integration (co-option through the Chamber of Commerce being a key element of this), their ideological harmonisation would only be completed under Raúl. If in the Special Period the managers had *just appeared* (so to say) and been co-opted (as discussed in the last chapter), after 2006 the regime praised and inscribed their activity within socialist ideology. In short, the figure of the *communist businessman* was born.

The Chamber’s quarterly magazine *Cuba Foreign Trade* (CFT) – published in Spanish and English – had always translated “empresario” as “business representative”, “business person”, or “businessman”. Sometimes the latter term was even *re-translated* to Spanish – hence the Cuban managers were presented as “hombres de negocios” – literally, “businessmen” (CFT 2006, 14, 2009, 2014a, 7). However, it was only when Fidel stepped down that the meaning of the term was elaborated.

Paradoxically, the *communist businessman* was born when the *golden years* of the Chamber were gone. As was shown in Figure 1 (chapter 4), in 2002-2005 its membership was over 800 companies, reaching a peak of 886 in 2003. After this, in a delayed effect (with intruding resonance in the Raúl era) of the “reversal of the [Special Period’s] reform” that according to Mesa Lago (2012, 44-49) was pursued by Fidel in 2003-2006, the Chamber’s membership gradually fell from 761 members in 2006 to 678 in 2013 (CFT 2014b, 4). This fluctuation is explained by FDI presence in Cuba, which after a boom in the 1990s was forced to decline after 2003, as Pérez

Villanueva (2014, 41) – a Cuban economist critical of restrictions on FDI – has noted. However, he also notes that despite the fall in the number of companies with foreign capital, those remaining have *matured* (Pérez Villanueva 2014, 42) – e.g. their sales grew in their respective niches in the world market (Domínguez 2012, 218).

Similarly, although the contraction of the Chamber was real, it was also relative in front of its previous boom – when its membership grew from 94 to 721 in 1989-2001. Furthermore, despite the Chamber’s membership decreased, the underlying ideological identity of the managers also *matured*. Hence the regime had not only given up the mistrust towards FDI as expressed in Che’s primal hostility, but now the Cuban managers could see themselves as ‘businesspeople’. But even if Cuba’s engagement with FDI in the 1990s did not tear apart the socialist claims to legitimacy, the emergence of Cuban “empresarios” still needed to make sense under such claims. This tension was dealt with after 2006 when the managers were enrolled in revolutionary lectures.

In the 2006 Chambers’ General Assembly, the MINCEX head explained to the attending managers that their export-oriented activities were part of the “selfless” determination “to keep open the external markets of the country” despite “the economic war of the United States against our country” (in CFT 2006, np). As is known, anti-imperialism has traditionally been a key element of Cuban revolutionary nationalism – the ideology to which the managerial activities have been aligned.

The regime’s call for the managers to export in the name of anti-imperialism and national pride is an ideological revision/innovation for it bridges the former gap between *business* and *revolution* in Cuba. In 2007, the then President of the Chamber of Commerce, Raúl Becerra Egaña, explained the coherence of managerial activities with Cuban socialism, presenting the former as an offspring of the latter:

[A]ll of us who perform in the world of foreign trade should particularly remember that Che was a precursor in the field of Cuba’s international commercial policy. (CFT 2007, 8)

As if to complete this view, Rodrigo Malmierca (MINCEX’s head) would later argue that “an export enterprise must be an example [...], above all, in the defence of the

principles of our Revolution” (CFT 2009, np). Besides, the integration of the managers into socialist ideology did not lack praise for them. Hence when García Oliveras was awarded for his work in the Chamber during its 2007 GM, he avowed his “great respect for all those who have a responsibility as enterprise directors in the economy” (CFT 2007, 8). Later, during the Second Business Forum of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Havana, the then head of the MINCEX, Raúl de la Nuez, told the public, composed of foreign and national managers, that the “businessmen... are the cell of economic work” (in CFT 2008, np). This metaphor, possibly unprecedented, contains a swift and drastic break with official ideology, for which the central actor of the economy is *the working class* – as the Cuban media still insists. Although this metaphor never reappeared in *CFT* and was possibly a simple gaffe, it serves to appreciate the positive atmosphere around the Cuban business community. Indeed, had the managers been seen as a threat, they would have never been called *the vanguard of the economy* by the MINCEX. Not surprisingly, the then Chamber’s president (in a GM speech) would reach the conclusion that a way to “stimulate the socioeconomic development of the country” was by “promoting the progress of the Cuban business community associated to the Chamber of Commerce” (CFT 2009, np).

5.3 Paving the way to the Sixth Party Congress (2008-2010)

5.3.1 Leadership: dismantling charisma

When Raúl swore in as Cuba’s new President at the National Assembly, he made explicit his legal-rational solution to the succession, hence discarding his accession as a new charismatic leader. This time he resorted to the constitution to repeat his stance for which the successor of Fidel Castro could not be other than the Party:

Only the Communist Party [...] can be the worthy heir of the trust deposited by the people in its leader. [The Party] is the utmost leading force of society and state, and this is established by Article 5 of our Constitution, which was approved in a referendum by exactly 97.7% of the voters. (R. Castro 2008c)

Almost immediately, a new political landscape started to unfold in Cuba since then, both in the leadership and style of government:

Raúl moved into a higher gear (after the hiatus of two years of relative inertia and following the 2008 National Assembly elections) and began to reshape the political structures and personnel to suit his agenda rather than the (by now embarrassingly inefficient and costly) *Battle of Ideas*. (Kapcia 2014, 174-75)

In this section I will focus on identifying what exactly was cut off from the top in order to prove that the charismatic character of the leadership (*Fidelismo*) was largely dismantled – a move that laid the ground for the subsequent introduction of a collegial style (*Raulismo*), which would be effectuated in the Sixth Party Congress.

Raúl Castro soon revamped the top leadership by promoting revolutionary veterans to top-level posts and dismissing the leaders that rose through the *Grupo de Apoyo* caucus. These initiatives, introduced during a one-year timespan, not only indicated that a new chief was now firmly in power – they also bore witness to Raúl's interpretation of what kind of leadership Cuba needed after Fidel (and himself).

In Cuba, when the National Assembly elects the President it actually appoints the whole Council of State – the President being the head of this body. Therefore, when Fidel declined to this post in February 2008, it was not only imminent that Raúl Castro would take over at last, but also the speculation over who would be the new First Vice President was inevitable – i.e. the first one without a Castro last name. Marc Frank found in the excited atmosphere of the Havana-based community of foreign journalists and diplomats a sample of a general feeling: most observers were expecting the promotion of Carlos Lage to the post of second-in-command:

Among those who did follow such matters, there was a great deal of speculation over who would become the first vice president. Most people put their money on Carlos Lage. He was a relatively young man, apparently being groomed for the job, and his role for more than a decade as the highly visible executive secretary of the Council of Ministers in many ways resembled that of prime minister. (Frank 2013, 107)

In other words, nobody was expecting José Ramón Machado Ventura to get that job. A relatively unnoticed apparatchik, Machado was a member of the *historic*

generation known as an orthodox hardliner. Another major promotion the same day Raúl was named President, was that of Julio Casas Regueiro, another revolutionary veteran whom then became vice president and new minister of the FAR – ergo, succeeding Raúl in the latter post. Overall, 12 of the 31 members of the new Council of State had participated in the 1959 revolution, and “the average age of the top eight positions was over seventy” (Frank 2013, 109).

In April 2008, some new promotions would come. Raúl Castro would propose, during a PCC Central Committee meeting, that general Ramiro Valdés (another *histórico*) and General Álvaro López Miera (known as Raúl’s *protégée*) joined the Politburo.

According to an undisclosed source of journalist Marc Frank, catholic Cardinal Ortega asked Raúl Castro, during a visit to the Council of State in 2010, why he had promoted so many military members in his government: “Raúl said simply that the country was in crisis and he had turned to men he knew and trusted, and that this would change over time” (Frank 2013, 204). Although these nominations were made with a certain leadership’s project in mind, at that time it was not clear which project was that. For now it suffices to appreciate that Raúl’s promotions would soon prove to have been made in anticipation to the dismissals that would come next.

In short, the top leaders nurtured around the *Grupo de Apoyo* would be removed one by one. The first to fall from was Hassan Pérez in September 2008, who was a leading figure of the UJC at the time and then appointed teacher in a FAR college (Cubaencuentro 2008); one month later, Carlos Valenciaga, the last coordinator of the *Grupo de Apoyo*, was dismissed and assigned to the National Library (Hernández Busto 2008b, a). Vice president Otto Rivero would be sacked later.

Speculation would thus arise concerning the fate of the most powerful ‘graduates’ of the *Grupo de Apoyo*, Felipe Pérez Roque and Carlos Lage. They would be dismissed in March 2009 – representing the ‘final touch’ of the restructuring of the cabinet started by Raúl thirteen months ago when his presidency kicked off.

In a Council of State meeting, Raúl Castro played video footage to the rest of the Council showing Lage talking to Valenciaga in a party also attended by Pérez Roque

held one year earlier, just the night before Raúl took over as President and announced the first changes to the cabinet. In that conversation Lage lamented he had not been promoted to first vice president, despite Castro's orders to Politburo members to keep the new appointments a secret until they became officially announced. Raúl argued that the true purpose of that party was to celebrate Lage's expected promotion, based on the confessions of a Spanish businessman that had been detained for being found to be working with Spain's intelligence services. The businessman, of Cuban origin, had become a close friend of both Lage and Pérez Roque. Raúl managed to get rid of Pérez Roque and Lage charging them for having failed to respect their elder leaders and for causing intelligence breaches.

Next day, the *Consejo de Estado* (2009) released the official announcement of the changes. A career diplomat, Bruno Rodríguez, substituted Pérez Roque. As for Lage, General José Amado Ricardo Guerra, then FAR's chief secretary, would take over as secretary of the cabinet. Otto Rivero was also finally dismissed as the transfer of the programs under the (now all gone) *Battle of Ideas* to the relevant ministries had been completed and now handed over to the revolutionary veteran Ramiro Valdés.

In toto, the whole top-leadership's reshuffle in general, and the expulsion of the "test-tube leaders" in particular, "reflected Raúl Castro's preference for trustworthy loyalists who respected institutional boundaries and rules" (Mujal-León 2011, 156). Far away from any model of transmission of charisma – either to the personal staff (*Grupo de Apoyo*) or by heredity (founding a Castro dynasty) – "Raúl Castro's thesis that the answer to succession is institutionalization has carried the day", leading to an overall regime transition "to a much more institutions-based model" (Hoffmann 2009, 239, 242). In orthodox Weberian terms, this proved that the charismatic claims to legitimacy of the regime had been discharged in favour of legal-rational ones.

In the official note about the fall of the *Talibanes*, the dismissals were portrayed as a renewed effort towards institutionalisation, paraphrasing a point Raúl Castro made in his first address as new President: "institutionalisation is one of the pillars of the invulnerability of the Revolution in the political field, so we must work in its constant improvement" (Consejo de Estado 2009, np). There was nothing left of the *Grupo de*

Apoyo – its surviving remnants, a few low profiled staff members, would be fired in May 2009 (Hernández Busto 2009, np). Fidel’s fast-track routes for handpicked talented youth to top leadership had been closed. Nonetheless, this qualitative change might have been obscured by the public support Fidel Castro gave to the fall of his former protégés – accusing them of having fallen prey to the “honey of power”, which caused “illusions” in the “external enemy” (F. Castro 2009a). Fidel even explicitly rejected the idea that the cabinet changes were a substitution of “Fidel’s men” by “Raúl’s men”. Equally noteworthy was Raúl’s spotless lack of criticism of Fidel while besieging the *Fidelista* style of leadership he had finally vanquished.

As Mujal-León has noted:

These *talibanes* had been Fidel Castro’s favourites, but in moving against them Raúl Castro never criticized his brother or undermined his image. Too much joined the two brothers. Not only was Raúl co-architect of the revolution, but his own claim to legitimacy was also inextricably tied to Fidel. In removing these “test tube leaders,” Raúl signalled that he intended to place his own imprint on the successor generation. (Mujal-León 2011, 156)

In this sense, both Fidel’s public endorsement of the new leadership and Raúl’s unrelenting praise for Fidel were like the two sides of the same coin... a coin that had just flipped with Raúl’s side now facing up. At this point it is important to highlight an important peculiarity of the Cuban succession: it occurred during the lifetime of the charismatic leader. Fidel would not simply disappear from the political scene; he would adopt the role of legitimator of the successor leadership. Fidel soon started to write regular op-eds in *Granma*, in a section entitled “Reflections of the comrade Fidel”. In them he only occasionally addressed domestic Cuban politics – and his endorsement to the Raúl’s cabinet overhaul was one of those few exceptions.

Hoffmann explained this Raúl-Fidel interdependency in Weberian terms:

[T]he Cuban case shows that the transfer of legitimacy from charismatic authority is not a one-time affair as the Weberian notion of “designation by the charismatic leader” suggests. Such designation may be a necessary, but not necessarily a sufficient, condition. As the

charismatic leader becomes the legitimator, the successor government needs to continually validate its actions through recourse to his legacy. (Hoffmann 2009, 241)

At least for some time, Raúl's leadership thus appeared "critically dependent on recourse to the charismatic leader for legitimacy" due to a "power-sharing arrangement between the outgoing leader and his successor" (Hoffmann 2009, 241). However, Fidel would lose relevance in the political scene bit by bit, not least due to old age. In this sense, when Raúl Castro and Barack Obama announced the normalisation of relations between the United States and Cuba on 17 December 2014 – a diplomatic breakthrough agreed after half a century – Fidel only gave his opinion over a month later. Fidel expressed in an op-ed both his support to the diplomatic process (with caution) and to "the President of Cuba" (with distance) – in the past simply referred to as "Raúl" or "comrade Raúl" by Fidel – but acknowledging that he had not "exchanged a word" about it (F. Castro 2015). Likewise, a few months earlier Fidel complained in *Granma* that he had not been notified of the death of a Cuban sports' figure he admired (F. Castro 2014a), which exposed the extent to which he had been sidelined. Despite Fidel acting as *legitimator* of Raúl for a while, the latter would consolidate a new, own-merited, leadership team.

In any case, by mid-2009 an era in the Cuban top leadership had just ended and a new one had begun. Both the *Grupo de Apoyo* and the *Battle of Ideas* had been dismantled and their leading representatives disgraced.

5.3.2 Ideology: relaxing CPE orthodoxy

After Raúl Castro was officially sworn new President of Cuba in February 2008 and thus the cabinet started to change, the ideological revolt unravelled more clearly. The first political signal that a new era had arrived was the removal of "excessive prohibitions" (R. Castro 2008c). In particular, Cubans were allowed in March 2008 to buy computers and DVD players, rent cars and book rooms in hotels; also, they were offered mobile phone services for the first time (Frank 2013, 115).

The relaxation of orthodoxy required a great deal of soul-searching, as was noticeable in Raúl's first address to the National Assembly as fully-fledged head of

state in 26th July 2008. In that event, Raúl made a rare public acknowledgement of the tensions in the elite, as reflected in the intimate personal level. After emphasising twice that in the near future there would be “eliminated wrong free-of-charge entitlements and the excess of subsidies”, he told the deputies how such and related plans afflicted him when going to bed: “In sleepless nights, which many times are caused by these subjects, I say: we are building socialism” (R. Castro 2008b). Raúl then went on to justify the path his government was embarking on, by distancing himself from tenets of the Fidel era – instead offering a new vision: “Socialism means social justice and equality, but equality of rights, of opportunities, not of income. Equality is not egalitarianism” (R. Castro 2008b). Even if it is true that Marx never advocated equality of income – which, by the way, was not the case in Cuba either – Raúl’s remarks served to make clear to everyone that even long-standing features of the Island’s economy, like the ration book, were being called into question.

The Cuban economy suffered two external shocks in 2008. Not only had the global financial crisis had a negative impact on Cuba, but also the Hurricanes Gustav and Ike that hit the Island in August and September, respectively. As a result:

The terms of trade fell 34.3%, the worst decline of the decade, due to the collapse of the world market price of nickel, Cuba’s main export, and the escalation in world prices of oil and food, Cuba’s two most significant imports. [...] [The hurricanes] caused losses estimated at US\$ 9,722 million, mainly in housing and food production, which required an increase in imports from 17.6 per cent of GDP in 2007 to 23.3 per cent in 2008, the highest degree of dependence on imports in the decade. (Mesa-Lago and Vidal-Alejandro 2010, 694)

The reform, in any case, did not stop but actually became bolder. In July 2008 Raúl signed the Decree-Law No. 259, which authorised a leasing program of idle land to private farmers and corporate bodies in order to “increase food production and reduce its importation” (Consejo de Estado 2008). Hagelberg and Álvarez (2009) have summarised the problems in the Cuban agriculture up to that point:

[In 2002-2007] the area under cultivation in the country had shrunk by 603,000 hectares, or 16.8%, while the area totally idle, i.e., not used even for pasture, had grown by 32.1% to some 1,230,000 hectares, constituting 18.6% of all agricultural land. (Hagelberg and Álvarez 2009, 230)

Two years after the Decree-Law No. 259, *Juventud Rebelde* reported that 1 million hectares had been transferred, of which 46% was producing (Lescaille Durand 2010). Despite this “big structural change in land tenancy”, food production had not taken off by then, as Hagelberg (2011, 111) discussed. Even by 2012 output had not yet taken off, according to official figures discussed by the Cuban economist Nova González (2013, 63), whom concluded that “land transfer is a necessary but not sufficient condition”. Notwithstanding the production shortfall, since 2008 the political debate had shifted from whether idle land should be transferred to private hands at all to whether the land transfer itself was enough. Yet this structural reform was just the beginning.

On December 2008, Raúl told the National Assembly that his ideological revolt would enter into a higher stage. After insisting on the reduction of subsidies, he made clear that “these issues are very closely linked to the structural and conceptual transformation that shall be submitted to discussion to and approval by the Sixth Party Congress” (R. Castro 2008d). In Cuban politics, this meant that the relaxation of CPE orthodoxy was not merely an ephemeral effervescence – it would continue and would be institutionalised in the overall rationale of the Party.

By April 2009, the leadership had just got rid of the charismatic apparatus of Fidel in general and of the *Talibanes* in particular, as covered in the previous section. Soon after, the recently revamped Council of Ministers approved an austerity plan that took into account the negative impact of the 2008 global financial crisis (Mesa-Lago and Vidal-Alejandro 2010, 711); and, in June 2009, Marino Murillo (Economy Minister) drew a plan to reform the Cuban economy, which would turn out to be a predecessor of what the Sixth Party Congress discussed in 2011 (Frank 2013, 160).

Up to this point, a telling signifier had emerged in public discourse: “rationality” – as synonymous of taking care of the public finances responsibly. The unpronounced implication was clear: under Fidel’s leadership economic policy was irrational. Perhaps aware of that interpretation, Raúl credited to Fidel the new direction:

It is now imposed on us to invest our limited resources with rationality, essentially in the obtaining of utilities that allow us to face the rising social spending of the country. The

production of food, import substitution, and export increasing, are still fundamental. Also savings, which as comrade Fidel has pointed out, is today our most immediate and feasible source of revenues. In the first place, [we need to save] fuel. (R. Castro 2008b)

Then in the December 2008 speech, as the global financial crisis ignited in that year unravelled, Raúl extended that notion from savings to cuts in managers' expenses:

Consequently, it has been decided, among other measures, to reduce by 50% the expenses contemplated by the state institutions for foreign traveling and the same has been decided with respect to the business sector. The objective is not to reduce necessary tasks or negotiations but rather to act more rationally. (R. Castro 2008d)

In August 2009, the need of "rationality" was pushed another step further, now including the welfare state; i.e. health and education:

The same rational approach will be adopted with regards to other decisions concerning education, healthcare and the remaining sectors included in the budget in order to eliminate simply unsustainable spending that have been mounting annually and that are not only rather inefficient but also have made some people impervious to the need to work. (R. Castro 2009c)

This last quotation is from an address to the National Assembly that would be taken to the grassroots for discussion – the second such exercise since Fidel fell ill (Frank 2013, 166). That speech acknowledged again the precariousness of the Cuban economy, compounded by the combined effects of two hurricanes and a global financial crisis. Raúl also announced the creation of a *Comptroller General* office to confront corruption and announced that the Party Congress would be rescheduled to 2011 – it was originally expected to take place in late 2009. Finally, Raúl also repeated his stance of economic reform within the boundaries of an anti-capitalist economy – now extending the political system as another untouchable topic:

I was not elected President to restore capitalism in Cuba or to surrender the Revolution. I was elected to defend, preserve and continue to perfect socialism, not to destroy it. [...]

The task lying ahead of the Cuban communists and all of our people is great. With the widest possible popular participation, we should define the socialist society that we want to build and can build under the present and future conditions of Cuba, and the economic model that will rule the life of the nation to the benefit of our compatriots. Also, we must ensure the

impossibility to reverse the socio-political regime of the country, which is the only guarantee of its true independence. (R. Castro 2009c)

The second consultation would have a dispirited response from the grassroots. In contrast, the first debate in 2007 “had created a great deal of enthusiasm... but that was before the 2008 hurricanes devastated much of the island and before the financial crisis broke”, as Frank (2013, 166-67) put it. Now in 2009, the purpose of the national debate had a different twist, as reflected in the guide that the PCC leadership sent to its cadres to lead the grassroots’ meetings:

This time, the idea is not to solicit critical demands, suggestions, and recommendations for higher bodies... but to stimulate a response in each workplace and community to confront and solve existing problems. (PCC in Frank 2013, 167)

As part of the end of free-of-charge ‘irrationalities’, the closure of workplace lunchrooms began in September 2009 – instead, each worker received an increase in the daily salary to compensate (Frank 2013, 164-66). The uneasiness created by this measure, added to the unenthusiastic second consultation, must have engendered a feeling of frustration in the leadership – as reflected in the *Granma*, when in October that year its then director published an op-ed calling the Cubans “pigeons” that walk with the “mouths open” as the state gives them “everything” (Barredo 2009, np).

In the National Assembly meeting of 20 December 2009, as if to calm popular anxieties in the Cuban street, Raúl clarified that “the changes we have to introduce in the functioning of the economy” were designed “in order to strengthen our socialist society” – in that same speech, all the enterprise of economic change led by Raúl Castro was finally summarised in a catchphrase: “the update of the Cuban economic model” (R. Castro 2009b). The notion of *update-of-the-model* had been born, and it would articulate the Cuban language of economic reform from then on.

On the same day, Marino Murillo (Economy Minister) explained to the National Assembly that in order to find more “efficient” economic “alternatives”, some “experiments” had been launched to “lighten the burden on the state in some services offered” (Murillo 2009, np). He did not say it at the time, but he referred to the transfer of a number of barbershops to the barbers by the state in leasing

arrangements (Leyva 2011c, np) – an experiment carried out in five municipalities that informed a general state’s retreat to be announced later in 2010.

The excitement over these experiments gave the reformist impetus a refreshed enthusiasm. In February 2010, in a meeting with top officials, Murillo attacked the “paternalistic” policies and made the case for a state’s retreat from small economic activity (Frank 2013, 175). If in December 2009 Raúl had been cautious – “there cannot be space for the risks of improvisation and haste... we have no right to make mistakes” (R. Castro 2009b) – in April 2010 he conferred a new intrepid aura to his call to “update” or “upgrade” (*actualización*, in Spanish) socialism in Cuba:

We are convinced that we need to break away from dogma and assume firmly and confidently the ongoing upgrading of our economic model in order to set the foundations of the irreversibility of the Cuban socialism and its development. (R. Castro 2010c)

As can be noted, the *upgrade-of-the-socialist-model* notion repeats the compromise between orthodoxy and change, between reform and the respect of principles. This tension would become a distinctive feature of economic reform throughout the presidency of Raúl Castro. Sometimes orthodoxy would discourage change, but sometimes reform would catalyse it. Such instability would be translated into the actual implementation of reform. Henken (quoted by Rathbone 2014, np) would later jokingly compare the Cuban rhythm of economic reform to a Caribbean dance: “I call it Raúl’s mambo – two steps forward, one step back”. I will come back to this tension later, but from now it suffices to note its ideological origin in the early days.

Summary

In the first section of this chapter I ‘zoomed in’ the immediate political context that preceded Raúl’s takeover. – i.e. the last period of Fidel in power. In those years the role of an extra charismatic staff grew (the *Grupo de Apoyo*), while yet another ‘idealist cycle’ entered the stage between 2003 and 2006. Hence the last years of Cuba under Fidel may be seen as a *freezing* charismatic post-totalitarian regime. To be sure, Raúl would bring an anti-charismatic and anti-freezing political turn.

Then, from 2006 to 2010, I showed that the Cuban regime experienced the fall of the charismatic character of its leadership as well as the dislocation of the CPE orthodoxy. The Cuban leadership lived not only the stepping down of Fidel Castro but the dismantlement of the parallel government directly linked to him, the *Grupo de Apoyo*. Such a charismatic apparatus, rooted on the will and power of Fidel's charismatic authority, lacked any solid institutional ground to deter any serious strike. Raúl disposed of it and advanced a new type of leadership, which (as I will later discuss) only fully emerged after the Sixth Party Congress elected the new Politburo. Also, since he took over as provisional head of state, Raúl implemented a new, rational style of economic management – far away from Fidel's last years in office. Later, when he took full charge of the presidency, not only a structural reform was implemented (the land leasing program) but Raúl was also vocal about the need of “conceptual changes” in order to “update” the Cuban economic model. Thus, the legitimacy of CPE orthodoxy had been called into question. A top-led revolt was sweeping Cuba, imposing a new dynamic to the regime, ergo to Cuban politics.

By 2010, it made sense the *Gramscian* assessment of the Cuban sociologist Haroldo Dilla, whom summarised the political situation as one in which “the old is dying and the new cannot be born” (Dilla Alfonso 2010, 9). However, the ‘new’ would indeed be born, although one had to wait until April 2011, in the Sixth Party Congress, when Raúl's revolt turned into a political victory that would accelerate the pace of change on the Island and shape the regime along new and clearer lines. In other words, by 2010 the regime was no longer ‘freezing’ or ‘charismatic’. Post-totalitarian Cuba was on the verge of change, as the events at the levels of *leadership* and *ideology* in the period 2006-2010 attested, and the events afterwards would confirm.

6. The victory of Raúl Castro

In this chapter I discuss the culmination of Raúl Castro's revolt: the Sixth Party Congress held in April 2011, when – as I will argue – a new type of leadership was set up and a new type of ideology was given the green light. The basic argument is that the subsequent period was marked by two political changes:

- The adoption (ratification) of collegial leadership
- The adoption (crystallisation) of market socialist ideology

These sweeping changes occurred after his government had responded to the generational succession of the ageing Cuban *dirección histórica* with the *finale* of charisma, and after an ideological relaxation of CPE made it possible to dislodge the last 'idealist cycle' of economic policy.

This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first, I discuss the final seven-month advance towards the 2011 Congress, which, when it finally took place, elected a new (type of) Politburo and approved the ideological metamorphosis of economic policy. Then in the second part I analyse how Raúl Castro capitalised on his victory at the Sixth Party Congress to reshape the polity's leadership and ideology in 2011-2014.

6.1 The battle of the Sixth Party Congress (2010-2011)

The march to the Sixth Congress started in 1 August 2010, when Raúl told the National Assembly that the leadership of both the Party and the state had decided two weeks earlier “a group of measures to accomplish, in stages, the downsizing of the considerably inflated workforce in the state sector” (R. Castro 2010a). Such a move, Raúl stressed, would be made up by a proportional increase of employment opportunities in the private sector – notably, an expansion of self-employment:

The Council of Ministers also agreed to expand the exercise of self-employment and its utilisation **as another alternative of employment** for the redundant workers, lifting several present prohibitions for granting new [self-employment] licences and for trading some products, relaxing the rules for hiring workforce. (R. Castro 2010a)

The highlight is mine for that phrase was the first explicit sign of official acceptance of the self-employed. In the Cuban context, defining the self-employed as “another alternative” shall be interpreted in the sense that they were now regarded a legitimate actor of the Cuban economy. Although this phenomenon will be further analysed in the next chapter, it is worth underscoring that such a major signal of market acceptance in the context of labour restructuring plans prefigured the ideological content of pre-Congress discussions inside and outside the Party.

Then on 13 September 2010, the CTC (2010) endorsed the labour plans announced by Raúl and made explicit the goal of firing 500,000 state workers by March 2011. As documented by Mesa-Lago (2010), the original plan was to alleviate these layoffs by adding 465,000 Cubans in the same period to the private sector – 250,000 of which would be self-employed workers (‘cuentapropistas’). In a country with a total workforce of 5.1 million people, this reform was a big overhaul. In another step forward, soon after the legislation to monitor the layoffs and a new (friendlier) legislation regulating self-employment were issued (MTSS 2010a, b).

At this point, “Raúl Castro and his associates obviously felt that they had arrived at a critical juncture and needed the endorsement of the highest party institution to strengthen their hand”, as Farber (2011, 279) has put it. Nevertheless, Raúl would leave nothing to chance. The state layoffs and the new stance to the market would not be decided by the Party Congress, whose task would rather be to legitimise the new facts on the ground and to devise the ways to adapt the regime to them.

The call for the Congress itself would finally be announced in November 2010, during a visit of Hugo Chávez to Havana to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Cuba-Venezuela partnership. Calling the Congress in the presence of Chávez was akin to a present to him, symbolising the importance given by Raúl to that relationship.

If Raúl Castro had already defined his goal as “updating socialism”, on this occasion he revealed how the Party would be aligned towards the same objective:

[T]he Sixth Congress will focus on the solution of the problems of the economy and in the fundamental decisions of the updating of the Cuban economic model, and will adopt the Guidelines of Economic and Social Policy of the Party and the Revolution. (R. Castro 2010b)

The Guidelines (*Lineamientos*, in Spanish) were the only document to be discussed in the Congress and it was intended to serve as the political tool to recast the Party's mind-set. On top of that, the *Lineamientos* would first be discussed in the grassroots, within and outside the Party, hence launching the third public debate on the economy:

The Congress is not just the meeting of those elected as delegates, but also the previous process of discussion by the militancy and by all the population of the guidelines. (R. Castro 2010b)

The *Lineamientos* consisted of 291 paragraphs sketching future reforms grouping them on different topics: financial policy, monetary policy, tourism, foreign sector, internal market, and others. The restructuring of the Cuban workforce was a salient issue of the document, but it was part of a wider agenda. However, the *Lineamientos* were very general and ambiguous at times, as Mujal-León has put in a nutshell:

Many of the measures it advocated (increasing labor productivity and agricultural output while reducing the size of the state and eliminating monetary and exchange rate duality) made good sense, but the document sometimes read like a laundry list that lacked strategic vision. Making socialism "irreversible" was its stated objective, but the *Lineamientos* offered no definition of Cuban socialism, other than to say that it did not mean "egalitarianism." (Mujal-León 2011, 157)

Since they were released, the *Lineamientos* were discussed at a national level for the next three months in two stages: the first, within the ranks of the PCC; and, the second, aimed at the rest of the population through the *mass organisations* of the PCC (in workplaces, schools, neighbourhoods, etc.). In the preparation of its Sixth Congress, the Party repeated the role it had played in the two previous national consultations, and acted as a political thermometer of the leadership to measure the popular mood about economic issues. But in this occasion, the grassroots would not discuss a speech of Raúl, but a long official Party document. The objective of this process as set out by Raúl Castro was clear: "there will be gathered up and analysed

the opinions and suggestions, which will be taken into account for the adoption of the document [the definitive *Lineamientos*] by the Congress” (R. Castro 2010b).

Consistent with its long-established political practice, the PCC-led consultation ruled out any challenge from the grassroots – i.e. the chance to collectively submit, let alone vote, alternative proposals. Unlike standard union democracy, the process was carried out via vertical atomised spaces where Party cadres listened to the opinions and complaints of the Cuban citizens. Farber criticised this as follows:

Thus, this discussion process, rather than having been a democratic debate, let alone democratic decision-making, was far more akin to a nationwide oral suggestion-and-complaint box. The CCP leaders responded to the thousands of opinions that the Cuban people submitted to them much like the owners and managers of a capitalist enterprise who implement those suggestions that they find most helpful to run their business and pacify the labour force. The discussion process that was carried out in Cuba was not even comparable to collective bargaining, let alone political and economic democracy. (Farber 2011, 285)

While this was very much the case, the consultation was also real. If eyebrows can be justifiably raised before Raúl’s depiction of the consultation as a “genuine democratic exercise” (R. Castro 2010d), one can be equally struck by the ability of this top-down approach to engage the public more effectively than standard liberal democracy. All in all, the three national debates Cuba lived from 2006 to 2011 rather proved that the corporatist model of PCC-led participation was still in good shape.

The consultation thus allowed the PCC to weigh the popular mood, ergo to recalibrate the rhythm of reform to keep opposition at manageable levels. In January 2011, a meeting of an “expanded” Council of Ministers scrapped the six-month deadline of 500,000 layoffs in favour of an open-ended approach (Frank 2013, 240). Similarly, the ambitious plans of self-employment’s expansion faced a new reality:

In March 2011, when the first stage had to be accomplished, there had been created 138.000 net self-employment posts, just 55% of the goal; besides, all of them were ‘unlinked to work’ (former rather than new unemployed) and a substantial part of them already performed illegally these activities and simply legalised them. [...] On 28 February 2011 Raúl Castro acknowledged the impossibility of fulfilling the goal [...]; he did not define a clear period to accomplish it and vaguely referred to the Five-Year Plan. (Mesa-Lago 2011, 14)

Hence the restructuring of Cuban workforce turned out to be far more timid than the original intrepid plan. Overall, Raúl seemed to have fully accelerated reform just to slam on the brake a second later. But more than an aborted agenda, this was simply a new turn to a cautious stance, as he later acknowledged when he told the PCC Congress that the changes would proceed “slowly but steadily” (R. Castro 2011a).

Officially, 163 079 meetings took place nationwide in order to discuss the *Lineamientos* “within the different organisations”, involving 8 913 838 participants that produced 3 019 471 interventions and 579 911 “opinions” (PCC 2011a, 13). As a result of this process, 68% guidelines were modified and 36 new were created. The explicit intention of this process was “to create a national consensus on the features that should characterize the country’s Social and Economic Model”, as Raúl explained to the Sixth Party Congress in the opening speech (R. Castro 2011a). As the case for a new model had been taken to apparently every corner of Cuba, the pressure from both the leadership and the grassroots deterred any overt opposition in the Party to the relaxation of orthodoxy. Raúl reassured the Congress:

I can assure you that the Guidelines are an expression of our people’s will, contained in the policy of the Party, the Government and the State, to update the Economic and Social Model in order to secure the continuity and irreversibility of Socialism as well as the economic development of the country and the improvement of the living standard of our people combined with the indispensable formation of ethical and political values. (R. Castro 2011a)

After the Congress approved the final version of the *Lineamientos*, they were republished after the event in a three-column format. The first two columns contrasted the original version with the final one, leaving the third column to explain why each item had been modified – more often than not reporting the number of opinions behind each change. There were fifteen guidelines that prompted over six thousand opinions each, referring to health, education and daily live issues intertwined with an oblique defence of socialist ideology (Ludlam 2011).

The guideline that attracted most opinions (54,979) contained the proposal to eliminate the ration book – a proposal that was not repeated in the definitive

Lineamientos due to its obvious unpopularity. In second place, in response to 32,171 opinions, a new guideline was added: it demanded price stability in essential goods offered by non-state actors – in Cuba the emerging private sector is not referred to as ‘private’ but as ‘non-state’, which is another index of the ideological difficulties in coming to terms with the economic changes. As price stability was not part of the original *Lineamientos*, its appearance revealed the concerns of Cubans regarding the retreat of CPE orthodoxy. However, although the government adapted its original intentions to the popular disquiet – as reflected in the modified guidelines – it made clear it would not give up in reforming the economy. In this sense, three guidelines of the final *Lineamientos* paraphrased Raúl’s warning that “excessive subsidies and inappropriate free-of-charge entitlements” – *subsídios excesivos y gratuidades indebidas* – would be ended (PCC 2011b, guidelines 69, 142, 173).

From a more strategic perspective, despite the lack of an articulated economic development project, let alone a new theory of socialist economics, the *Lineamientos* still exude the rudiments of CPE-market *love*. The guideline that most explicitly elaborated the departure from CPE orthodoxy was the first one, which stated that in the new socialism of Cuba, “planning will take the market into account, influencing upon it and considering its characteristics” (PCC 2011b, guideline 1). Although this is rather a clumsy engagement with the market – treating it as an alien from outer space whose features are yet to be discovered – it epitomises the ideological hardship of the Party in coming to terms with the ‘updating’ of Cuban socialism. In spite of these tensions, the second guideline was more confident in championing foreign investment, co-ops, private farmers, and self-employment as partners of “the socialist state enterprise” (the “main form of the national economy”) in the quest for “efficiency” (PCC 2011b, guideline 2).

The Sixth Party Congress also elected a new Politburo, which was the final touch of Raúl’s consolidation of power. Although I will discuss in the next chapter the contours of the new leadership, I have already anticipated the basic argument: there emerged a new type of leadership that reflected Raúl’s long-term solution to the succession problem. Of course the issue of the new Politburo had not been part of the visible face of the Congress and it was only announced at the end of it. What had

been public about the Congress was the discussion of the *Lineamientos...* and the public acknowledgement that the new leadership had based its legitimacy on the explicit promise of fulfilling them.

The Congress also named Marino Murillo, on the same day he was elected Politburo member, the *Chief of the Permanent Government's Commission for the Implementation and Development of the Lineamientos*. Raúl Castro explained to the Congress that this post was created due “to the strategic significance of updating the economic model and developing the national economy” (R. Castro 2011b).

Once more, now in the closing speech of the Congress, Raúl emotionally stressed that his economic reform was no surrender of the *históricos* to capitalism:

As for me, I assume this last assignment with firm conviction and I pledge my honour that the chief mission of the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba that gives meaning to his life is to defend, preserve and continue to improve Socialism, and to never allow the return of the capitalist regime. (R. Castro 2011b)

Changes kept going during the rest of 2011 but now endorsed at the highest possible level within the Cuban institutional framework – i.e. a special Commission had been set up to oversee the economic reforms. However, labour restructuring remained a thorny issue, as reflected in the decision of the Council of Ministers, on May 2011, to freeze all the existing state posts and extend the redundancies timetable without providing new dates (Prensa Latina 2011). In the meantime, as if to wait for a better political weather, the government launched a better-received group of reforms, related to the relaxation of unpopular restrictions.

First, in August 2011, Raúl announce that he and his team were “working on updating the emigration policy” (R. Castro 2011c). The law in question would come in 2012. Then in October, were issued a new legalisation authorising the buying and selling of cars and houses (Leyva 2011b, Leyva and Puig Meneses 2011) – measures that were not in the original *Lineamientos* but which were included by the Party Congress because Cubans had asked for them in the consultation (PCC 2011a, 43, 45). Killing two birds with one stone, these reforms allowed the state to deliver a blow to the black market while opening a new source of taxes at the same time.

Finally, in November, some restrictions were lifted on internal migration from the provinces to Havana (Consejo de Ministros 2011b). I will come back to these liberalising measures later.

Then in November, a different group of reforms was passed, directly related to the departure from CPE and towards decentralisation. First, the Sugar Ministry was abolished and was replaced by a state company: Sugar Group (*Grupo Azucarero*, in Spanish) (Delgado Guerra, Varela Pérez, and Leyva 2011). On December 2011, all barbershops and beauty parlours were handed over to the barbers, now legally turned into self-employed (Leyva 2011c), and farmers were authorised to directly sell their produce to the tourist industry in the open market (Puig Meneses 2011). Then on the same month, the self-employed and small farmers were offered banking services, loans included; similarly, all Cubans could now apply for loans for house repairs (Leyva 2011a). Just before the end of the year, the government announced that in 2012, over 2,000 services workshops (employing 7,000 Cubans) would be leased to workers, which would thus become self-employed – a model based on the barbershops (MINCIN 2011, Frank 2013, 264). In a similar vein, in order to diversify small private activity, in April 2012 the official press disclosed that some urban co-operatives had been launched at an experimental level (Puig Meneses 2012).

6.2 The new contours of Cuba (2011-2014)

6.2.1 Leadership: the rise of collegiality

In this chapter I divide the analysis of the transformed Cuban leadership into three dimensions: 1) the role of the leader, 2) the composition of the ‘inner circle’, and 3) the FAR-PCC relation. The argument is that the leader is now expected to no longer be a charismatic one, but a *primus inter pares*; that the ‘inner circle’ is expected to fill the upcoming vacuum of the revolutionary veterans by the FAR-PCC coalition; and, that the balance of the ruling coalition has been tilted towards the military.

The Cuban *primus inter pares*

After definitely burying any charismatic model of succession in 2008-2009, Raúl would complete the introduction of his own model in April 2011, in the Sixth Party Congress. The rationale of the new model had already been clarified since mid-2009:

There are those who say that in the US power circles they are betting on the demise of the historic generation of the Revolution, a sinister bet on the so-called “biological factor”, that is, the death of Fidel and of all of us. (R. Castro 2009c)

Raúl’s answer to this predicament was clear-cut; the FAR-PCC coalition was the heir:

Those who think this way are doomed since the successive generations of revolutionary patriots, first of all our magnificent youth, will never be ideologically disarmed, and along with them and the Party in the frontline will stand the Mambises of the 20th Century: our glorious Revolutionary Armed Forces which this time did walk victoriously into Santiago de Cuba on January 1st, 1959, headed by their Commander in Chief. (R. Castro 2009c)

In a crucial step towards the legal-rational substitution of charisma, the 2011 Congress would announce the adoption of collegiality, as expressed in term limits. Complementarily, the Sixth Congress would elect a new Party leadership.

As *collegiality* refers to “specific social relationships and groups which have the function of limiting authority” (Weber 1978a, 271), term limits can be understood as a form of *collegial relation*. In contrast to the (usually) lifelong duration of charismatic authority, the introduction of term limits revealed the intention of turning to a less monocratic arrangement. As Weber (1978a, 277) explained, the “principle of collegiality [...] is usually derived from the interest in weakening the power of persons in authority.” This new policy was disclosed by Raúl Castro in his main speech to the Sixth Congress, and was approved almost a year later when a Party Conference included it as one of the goals of its new *Cadre Policy*:

Objective n. 76: To prepare the gradual renovation of cadre in leadership posts, establishing term limits by time and age according to the functions and complexity of each [post’s] responsibility. Limit to a maximum of two five-year consecutive periods the [individual] performance of the highest political and state posts. (PCC 2012c, 7)

This legally turned the head of the Cuban state into the leading member of a collegial body, which Weber calls *primus inter pares* whose “acts are normally

subject to consultation with formally equal members, and disagreement in important matters may lead to breaking up the collegial body” (Weber 1978a, 272). Thus, the figure of the *primus inter pares* as implied in Raúl’s term limits, is required to seek a degree of peers’ endorsement to secure a second period in office – as opposed (let us repeat) to the lifelong charismatic title of *Commander-in-Chief*. As a result, Raúl Castro has institutionalised a predictable mechanism of circulation of the top offices, which may ease the generational renewal of the leadership after the *historical generation* is gone. In this sense, the term limits look like an institutional device to solve intra-elite conflicts – which, of course, is not the same as a step towards democratisation.

As if to highlight the seriousness of this reform, two years later Raúl Castro (2013b) confirmed in a speech to the National Assembly that “this will be my last term”. In that same event, which also confirmed his second and last presidential term, Raúl anticipated that the term limits in top posts would be introduced in the country’s constitution. One day before this announcement was made, Raúl even joked with journalists about his eventual end of term: “I will resign. I am going to be 82 years old; I have the right to retire. Do not you believe me?” (quoted by El País 2013, np).

The new rule implies more control on top leaders and potential changes in the government’s design. For instance, it can be imagined that a future leadership splits between different individuals the posts of head of government, head of the PCC and head of the FAR. To grasp this latter scenario, let us imagine that Raúl Castro dies during his second term (2013-2018) with the rest of the leadership intact. In that case, the Second Secretary of the PCC, José Ramón Machado Ventura, would take over as First Secretary; the First Vice-President, Miguel Díaz-Canel, would take over as President of the Council of State and Ministers. This situation can dissolve the figure of the *primus inter pares* in favour of a typical “functional collegiality” where the “acts are subject to the rule that a plurality of individuals must cooperate for the act to be valid”, either by unanimity or majority vote (Weber 1978a, 272). In other words, a collective leadership may well emerge in the future Cuban political landscape.

In the meantime, it is now a fact that Raúl Castro's presidency will end in 2018. As a result, this would bring to an end the rule of the *historic generation* in Cuba – hence bringing to the fore the status of the FAR-PCC ruling coalition.

Prefiguring the new 'inner circle':

Having received the legacy of a charismatic leader, Raúl Castro resembles a Janus-faced figure “with a legitimacy that comes from the past... but concerned about the future”, as Mujal-León and Buzón (2009, 67) have put it. If Raúl always was the answer to Fidel's succession, another problem still has to be sorted out since “there is no ‘equivalent Raúl’ for Raúl” (Valdés 2004, 251). Perhaps this is another dimension of the ‘succession problem’: not of the charismatic leader, but of the charismatic community *itself*. If one recalls Kapcia's definition of the ‘inner circle’ as the centre of the onion of power filled by the revolutionary veterans, Raúl Castro has clearly defined the next occupiers of the vacuum to come: the FAR and the PCC.

To catch a glimpse of the conditions in which collegiality is expected to operate after the *historic generation* is gone, it is worth it looking at the patterns of Party Politburo membership since Fidel Castro stepped down, as is shown in Table 5.

The Politburo that Raúl Castro ‘received’ in July 2006 was very different from the one elected in the Sixth Party Congress almost five years later. Only nine of the twenty-one Politburo members of 2006 were re-elected in 2011, when the body was sized down to fifteen members. In addition to this, the proportion of leaders with military background increased while the *historic generation* remained a key element. Most than half of the membership, twelve in 2006, held political careers in the Party, and two of them had been fast-tracked via in the *Grupo de Apoyo*. By 2011, the latter had already been dismantled, while the number of active FAR leaders equalled PCC's (five to five). However, considering members with a substantial military background (FAR background + revolutionary veterans), the actual ratio of ‘proper’ civilian to other Politburo members was one to three (five PCC in a fifteen-member body).

Table 5. Members of PCC Politburo, 2006, 2011 and 2015

Name	2006 ^a	2011 ^b	2015 ^c	Background	Entrance/Exit
Fidel Castro Ruz	x			REV	Declined re-election
Raúl Castro Ruz	x	x	x	REV	
Leopoldo Cintra Frías	x	x	x	FAR	
Esteban Lazo Hernández	x	x	x	PCC	
Abelardo Colomé Ibarra	x	x	x	FAR	
Ramón Espinosa Martín	x	x	x	FAR	
José Ramón Machado Ventura	x	x	x	REV	
Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez	x	x	x	PCC	
Julio Casas Regueiro	x	x		REV	Died after 2011 election
Juan Almeida Bosque	x			REV	Died in 2009
José Ramón Balaguer Cabrera	x			PCC	Not re-elected in 2011
Misael Enamorado Dager	x			PCC	Not re-elected in 2011
Concepción Campa Huergo	x			PCC	Not re-elected in 2011
Abel Prieto Jiménez	x			PCC	Not re-elected in 2011
Pedro Ross Leal	x			PCC	Not re-elected in 2011
Ulises Rosales del Toro	x			FAR	Not re-elected in 2011
Carlos Lage Dávila	x			GA-PCC	Removed in 2009
Pedro Sáez Montejo	x			PCC	Removed in 2009
Jorge Sierra Cruz	x			PCC	Removed in 2010
Yadira García Vera	x			GA-PCC	Removed in 2010
Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada	x	x		PCC	Removed in 2013
Ramiro Valdés Menéndez		x	x	REV	Added in 2008
Alvaro López Miera		x	x	FAR	Added in 2008
Salvador Mesa Valdés		x	x	PCC	Added in 2008
Lázara Mercedes López Acea		x	x	PCC	Added in 2011
Jorge Marino Murillo		x	x	FAR-TECH	Added in 2011
Adel Yzquierdo Rodríguez		x	x	FAR	Added in 2011
Bruno Eduardo Rodríguez Parrilla			x	PCC-TECH	Added in 2012

Key: REV = Revolutionary Generation; FAR = Military; PCC = Cuban Communist Party; GA= Support Group of the *Commander-in-Chief*; TECH = Technocrat.

Sources: *Granma* and *Juventud Rebelde*; data for 2011 taken from Mujal-León (2011, 160).

^a Membership at the moment Fidel Castro stepped down in July 2006.

^b Results of the election at the Sixth Party Congress in April 2011.

^c Membership as of February 2015.

Raúl would indeed explain the persistence of “históricos” in the new Politburo to the Sixth Party Congress’ attendees in the following terms:

[S]ome veterans of the historic generation remain, and it is only natural, for it is one of the consequences of the mistakes made in this area and criticized in the Central Report, the same that prevent us today from having a reserve of mature and sufficiently experienced replacements to take over the main positions in the country. (R. Castro 2011d)

Besides the acknowledgement that he and his generation (without criticising Fidel) had failed to rejuvenate the top leadership (in over fifty years!), Raúl also addressed the pre-eminence of Politburo members with leading posts in the Armed Forces:

As you can see, we have in the Political Bureau a proper representation of leading chiefs of the Revolutionary Armed Forces. This is only logical and to explain it I will quote some lines included by comrade Fidel in his Central Report to the First Party Congress: “The Ejército Rebelde was the soul of the Revolution. The new homeland emerged free, beautiful, strong and invincible from its victorious weapons... When the Party was founded... our Army, the heir to the bravery and patriotic purity of the Ejército Libertador whose struggles it had carried on victoriously, placed in its hands the banners of the Revolution and became from then on and forever its most loyal, disciplined, humble and staunch follower.” (R. Castro 2011d)

And if there were doubts of the FAR leading role within the Party, Raúl continued:

I have plenty of reasons to assert that the Revolutionary Armed Forces, which I am proud to have served as a minister for nearly 49 years, will never renounce that role and will carry on defending the people, the Party, the Revolution and Socialism. (R. Castro 2011d)

Military pre-eminence has also been reflected in the *core team*, those Politburo members with a simultaneous appointment in the Council of State, as shown in Table 6. From 2008 to 2011, from the nine members of the core team, those from the *historical generation* and with backgrounds in the armed forces increased from six to seven. Although these seven members still belonged to the core team in 2015, by then the number of Party ‘civilians’ had already increased from two to four since the Sixth Party Congress, for a new total of eleven members of the *elite of the elite*.

In 2015, the Politburo was still essentially the same since the Sixth Party Congress. Bruno Rodríguez, Minister of Foreign Relations, had been promoted, while Ricardo Alarcón, former president of the National Assembly, had been removed. The most important new developments since 2011, qualitatively speaking, were others.

Following the Sixth Congress, Mujal-León appreciated a new role of the FAR:

The novelty lies not so much in the dominant role of the FAR (which harkens back to the origins of the revolution when a triumphant rebel army defeated Fulgencio Batista and then

consolidated power) as in the role that military technocrats play in spearheading the implementation of economic reforms. (Mujal-León 2011, 159)

Jorge Marino Murillo, the rising technocrat in charge of the *Lineamientos* approved by the Sixth Congress, was playing an analogous role to that played by Carlos Lage in the 1990s. However, they embody two different kinds of technocrats: Lage (a doctor) was groomed in the *Grupo de Apoyo* after leading the UJC, whereas Murillo rose through the state apparatus after studying economics in a military academy.

Table 6. Members of PCC Politburo with Joint Appointments to the Council of State

Politburo member	Status in the Council of State			Background	Year of Birth
	2008 ^a	2011 ^b	2015 ^c		
Raúl Castro Ruz	President	President	President	REV	1931
José Ramón Machado Ventura	1st VP	1st VP	VP	REV	1930
Ramiro Valdés Menéndez		VP	VP	REV	1932
Abelardo Colomé Ibarra	VP	VP	Member	FAR	1939
Esteban Lazo Hernández	VP	VP		PCC	1944
Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez			1st VP	PCC	1960
Leopoldo Cintra Frías	Member	Member	Member	FAR	1941
Alvaro López Miera		Member	Member	FAR	1943
Salvador Mesa Valdés		Member	VP	PCC	1941
Julio Casas Regueiro	VP	VP		REV	1936
Juan Almeida Bosque	VP			REV	1927
José Ramón Balaguer Cabrera	Member			PCC	1932
Carlos Lage Dávila	VP			GA-PCC	1951
Lázara Mercedes López Acea			VP	PCC	1964
Jorge Marino Murillo		Member	Member	FAR-TECH	1961
Bruno Eduardo Rodríguez Parrilla			Member	PCC-TECH	1958

Key: VP = Vice President; REV = Revolutionary Generation; FAR = Military; PCC = Cuban Communist Party; GA= Support Group of the *Commander-in-Chief*; TECH = Technocrat.

Sources: *Granma* and *Juventud Rebelde*; data for 2011 taken from Mujal-León (2011, 161).

^a Membership at the moment Raúl Castro took over as President in February 2008.

^b Membership as of September 2011.

^c Membership as of February 2015.

The Congress also chose Adel Yzquierdo Rodríguez to be new Politburo member, whom then took over as Minister of Economy and Planning, replacing Murillo in the post he had held since he joined the Council of State in 2009. Yzquierdo had in the past been chair of the Entrepreneurial System of the FAR and chief of the Direction of Planning and Economy of the FAR. In September 2014, Murillo – while retaining

the post of chief of the *Lineamientos* – was re-appointed Minister of Economy and Yzquierdo became his deputy (First Vice-Minister). In any case, FAR-trained appointees ran the Cuban economy.

Not only had Raúl Castro replaced civilian technocrats by military ones (Murillo for Lage), but also his reform agenda was closer to earlier market experiments of the military than to the CPE orthodoxy of the PCC – which explains Yzquierdo's rise.

Another crucial change occurred during the 2013 National Assembly that confirmed Raúl Castro for his second and last presidential period. On that occasion, Miguel Díaz-Canel was promoted for the post of First Vice President of the Council of State – the first time ever that a revolutionary veteran did not held that position.

In that meeting, Raúl Castro portrayed the rise of Díaz-Canel to heir apparent as part of the former's concern over his own mortality and the overall generational shift:

We must guarantee the executive unity in the apex of government and state power in front of any contingency caused by the loss of the maximum leader [...]. This decision [of promoting Díaz-Canel] has particular historical transcendence because it represents a defining step in the configuration of the future leadership of the country. (R. Castro 2013b)

Equally significant, the appointment of the new successor was consistent with the new institutionalisation. Recalling his break with the model of succession embodied in the fast-tracking *Grupo de Apoyo*, Raúl highlighted that “comrade Díaz-Canel is no upstart or improvised” (R. Castro 2013b), praising him for his rise “from the bottom”, in his profession, up to Party leadership in two provinces – for ten years in Villa Clara and six in Holguín – before reaching the Politburo and a Ministry.

If one looks at the ‘core team’ without the revolutionary veterans, what is left is a FAR-PCC collegial alliance that prefigures the contours of the next leadership.

López Acea is currently the head of the Party in Havana. Mesa Valdés, then head of the CTC (a Party mass organisation), had also been a PCC provincial leader in Camagüey. Interestingly, of the sixteen provincial Party leaders, only two of them do not belong to the PCC's Central Committee (PCC 2015). If the background of Díaz-

Canel, López Acea and Mesa Valdés signals a pattern of future 'core team' membership, then provincial leadership emerges as a potential pool of top leaders.

In regards to FAR representation in the 'core team', there is no clear pattern of membership in the 'core team' beyond the revolutionary veterans. Although it would be odd if the FAR Minister, currently Cintra Frías, were set aside, the role of military leaders will be a key subject in the Seventh Party Congress, scheduled for April 2016 (Juventud Rebelde 2015), when a new Politburo is going to be elected.

The status of the FAR-PCC coalition:

The Cuban armed forces have historically had a qualitatively superior and different role when compared to other socialist experiences – both in relation to internal and foreign policy, and state economic management (Mujal-León and Buzón 2009, Domínguez 2009). During his presidency, Raúl Castro has tilted the balance of FAR-PCC power towards the former (Mujal-León 2011). If it is true that the leadership of both the PCC and FAR work as a team at the highest spheres of the Cuban regime, it is telling Raúl's reliance on the military to carry his reformist agenda and launch "a bigger market opening" – a move that stands in opposition to "the more conservative group entrenched in the party's bureaucracy" (Dilla Alfonso 2010, 13).

Not only has the FAR taken over economic policymaking, but also the Party has been forced to self-impose a ban on any temptation of meddling in the economy. This was the most remarkable outcome of the First Party Conference besides the adoption of term limits. As the Sixth Party Congress (April 2011) had focused on the changes in the economy, the Conference (January 2012) attempted to adapt the Party to the recently approved *Lineamientos* and to the end of charisma. As a result, the PCC's scope in the economy was reduced and top posts were now subjected to term limits. As the latter element has already been discussed, I will turn to the other aspect.

Between the Congress and the Conference, Raúl had already showed his teeth in a public warning: "all bureaucratic resistance to the strict fulfilment of the Congress' agreements [...] will be useless" (R. Castro 2011c). This and several other similar blunt statements signalled that Raúl's government regarded "an urgent shift in

political culture to be a condition of successful economic reform” (Ludlam 2012, 252). In this sense, the Conference outlined what was expected from the Party afterwards. A key theme was “the purpose to definitely eliminate from the methods of the Party, the interference and substitution of the functions and decisions that belong to the Government and administrative entities” (PCC 2012a, 4). Therefore, the Conference approved a call to “free” – *liberar* – the *núcleos zonales* (territorial grassroots party cells) “from all those activities that does not relate to the aim of its work in the community” (PCC 2012a, 4). Thrown into a new *habitat*, the Party’s role had virtually changed from policymaking to policy advice and support.

LeoGrande has synthesised what was at stake in such a move:

With economic recovery key to regime stability, the party gave in to the temptation to usurp management responsibilities from provincial and local government – ‘bossiness’, Raúl Castro called it at the Party’s First National Conference in 2012. In so doing, it neglected its political task of cultivating regime support at the grassroots. (LeoGrande 2015, 381)

The PCC would emerge from its Conference with a mandate to sort out the co-option of the new economic subjects, as was publicly acknowledged in the *Granma* pages:

The participants [of the PCC’s Conference] expressed their approval to the call to strengthen the political and ideological work in a differentiated and personalised manner towards those who perform different modalities of non-state economic management and at the same time combat the existing prejudices around them, which was thoroughly debated both in its socio-economic and legal implications. (PCC 2012b, 5)

In consequence, the *Documento Base* – the guiding document of the Conference – called the Party militants to “favour the direct contact with the masses”, “strengthen the national unity around the Party and the Revolution”, or to “improve the political attention to those performing diverse modalities of non-state economic management” (PCC 2011c, 6-7). In general, the Party Conference revealed the leadership’s fears of alienating the growing non-state sector. Hence the *Documento Base* insisted, sometimes repeatedly, in the need of “systematically evaluate the effects resulting from the social and economic measures” (PCC 2011c, 6).

6.2.2 Ideology: the rise of market socialism

The depth of the reforms has led Mesa-Lago (2012, 49) to conclude that Raúl Castro introduced “the strongest” ‘pragmatic’ cycle of economic policy in socialist Cuba. As opposed to the ‘idealist’ cycles where the Cuban leadership stuck to “anti-market” central planning, the new pragmatic cycle has seemingly reached a point of no return: “the alternative of returning to a new idealist cycle seems impossible today”, in the words of Mesa-Lago (2012, 52). Although this author does not elaborate why this would be the case, I have located the long-term robustness of Raúl’s reforms in a fundamental ideological break of this pragmatic cycle with the past.

My argument is that such a ‘fundamental ideological break’ lies in the shift from the rejection of the market to its acceptance. I will illustrate this point by exploring the integration of self-employment – a key non-state sector – into the ruling ideology.

I will also argue that the regime’s ideology, for its part, has in turn been modified by the acceptance of the market. Hence CPE-market *love* started to replace CPE orthodoxy. In other words, market socialism is becoming the ruling ideology.

The market is pardoned:

I have already described the legitimisation of the managers, which started in the 1990s and were completed in the early years of Raúl Castro’s presidency. In the case of the self-employed, their integration occurred in a brief period as a result of the Sixth Party Congress. The cases of both market-based subjects were similar.

I have identified three steps in the integration of market-based subjects. The first step is the legitimisation of the economic activity in itself – an ideological acceptance that takes the form of *praise*. As this type of actor was ostracised in the past, its new depiction has been accompanied by reassuring that the old bad days are gone and that a new, friendly, astrosphere has emerged. The next ideological operation has been the integration of the actor into socialist ideology. This takes the form of an ideological innovation that turns an intruder into a *friend*, underscoring that the new insiders are not at odds with the ruling ideology or the pre-eminence of the state.

The first two levels (praise and integration) are reciprocal for the validation of the actor is a prerequisite for its integration into the ruling ideology and vice versa. The third level is an organisational effect of the former: *co-optation* through corporatist representation, which leads to what can be termed fully-fledged, institutionalised integration.

By 2010, the post-Soviet foreign sector of the economy was seen as here to stay – despite partial setbacks that in any case would not reverse the new trade relations of Cuba. However, an entirely different environment reined in the internal economy, where other market-based subjects bolstered in the 1990s were never embraced.

Although the quantity of self-employed Cubans had increased from 50,000 in the 1980s to 121,000 in 1994 after the approval of the Decree-Law No. 141 in 1993, thereafter the numbers followed an “erratic behaviour” (Vidal Alejandro, Pérez Villanueva, and González-Corzo 2011, np). Such a fluctuation reveals the back and forth of the regime’s relation with the self-employed, as can be seen in Figure 2.



Behind the up and downs in the size of self-employment, Henken (2008) identified one constant: the ideological ostracism of this economic activity. Therefore, he forecasted a grim future for non-state actors, like the notorious small restaurants:

The aura of illegitimacy that accompanies any independent economic activity and the government's antagonistic attitude towards self-employment effectively condemns these private restaurateurs to an informal, provisional existence. (Henken 2008, 169)

To be sure, from 1994 to 2006 the regime basically viewed self-employment as a *necessary evil* or even as a capitalist embryo that threatened to undermine the Revolution from within. In 1997 Raúl Valdés Vivó, then director of the Party's ideological training school and Central Committee's member, warned in *Granma* that self-employment could "introduce a social force that sooner or later would serve the counterrevolution" because they were "piranhas... capable in a minimum time of devouring a horse down to the bones" (in Rice 1997, np).

Such an "aura of illegitimacy", according to Henken, had a legal foundation:

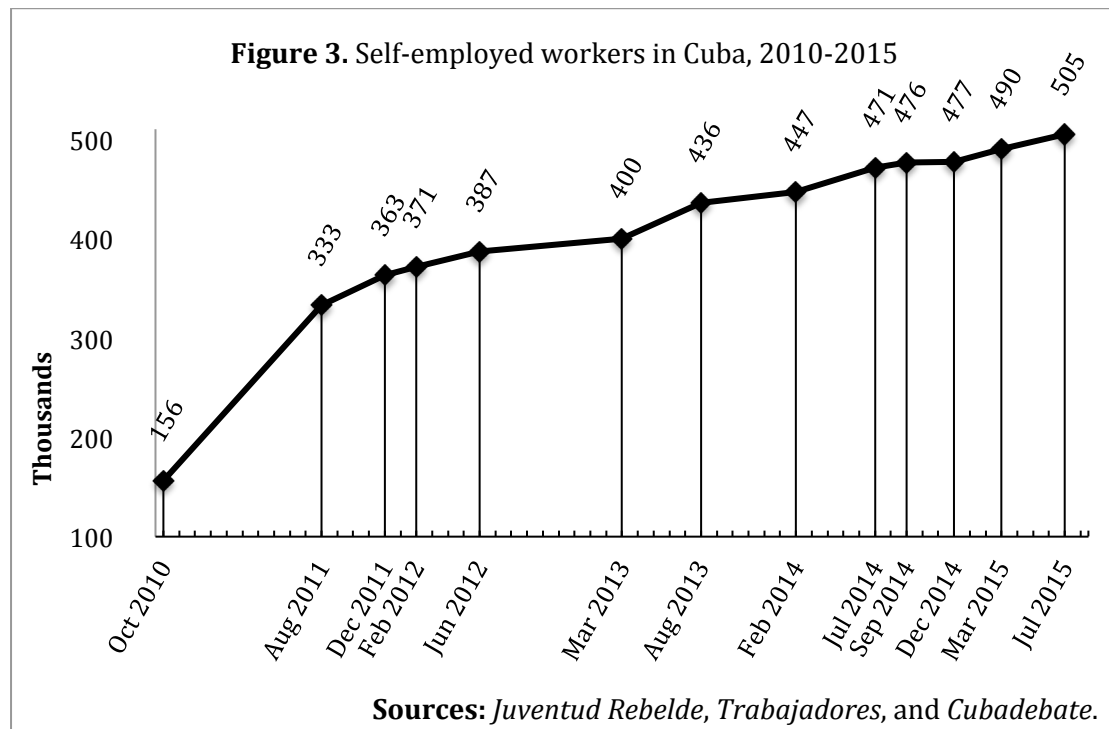
[T]he state's antagonistic legal framework creates an ideological environment where entrepreneurship, even when legal, is still not considered legitimate. (Henken 2008, 175)

Although Henken sufficiently demonstrates that Cuban laws effectively deteriorate the ideological environment of the self-employed, I would rather invert the causality here. Thus, my argument is that the legal framework is not the origin of the ideological adversity, but the other way around. It was the reluctance of the regime to legitimise this private activity what explained the legal animosity towards them. As it was hostility against "piranhas" (i.e. a legitimate hostility) while it lasted it effectively worsened an already harsh ideological climate for the self-employed.

Therefore, when Raúl Castro legitimised self-employment in August 2010 as a valid "alternative" for Cubans – as discussed in the first section of this chapter – its size now followed not an erratic but a stable pattern, even within a non-capitalist set of laws. Starting in 2008, the number of licences for self-employment did not ever pull back as in the past. Moreover, as shown below in Figure 3, it consistently grew after Raúl's watershed of late 2010 – when he announced the labour restructuring plans.

In October 2010, the new ideological attitude of the regime towards the self-employed was ratified when the *Granma* positively included their economic activity within a strategy aimed to "increase levels of productivity and efficiency", explicitly

rejecting and departing from “those conceptions that condemned the self-employment almost to extinction and stigmatised those who decided to join it, legally, in the 1990s decade” (Martínez Hernández 2010, np). In other words, at that point, Cuba had finally granted legitimacy to the owners of small restaurants and cafés, repair workshops, shoemakers, taxi drivers, bed and breakfasts catering foreign tourists, *et cetera*.



If in 1994-2010 the size of self-employment roughly fluctuated between 110,000 and 170,000, by the end of 2011 it had more than doubled its size in comparison with October 2010, from 156,000 to 363,000. This historical increase occurred within a new regulatory system and tax regime approved in October 2010 (Consejo de Estado 2010, MTSS 2010a), which was “dramatic and sweeping when compared to the policies implemented between 1996 and 2006” (Ritter and Henken 2014, 127). In causal terms, the legal innovation was a consequence of the new ideological climate set in motion by Raúl’s leadership, further validated in the Sixth Party Congress.

In 2010, after praising self-employment as “another alternative of employment” in August – again, an alternative now as valid as any other, not the “piranha” option –

and when the call for the Sixth Party Congress had already been made, Raúl closed the year elaborating the “necessary change of mind” he pursued:

[W]e have arrived at the conclusion that self-employment is one more alternative for working-age citizens, aimed at increasing the supply of goods and services to the population, which could rid the State of those tasks so that it could focus on what is truly decisive, what the Party and the Government should do is, first and foremost, facilitate their work rather than generate stigmas and prejudices against them, much less demonize them. Therefore it is fundamental that we modify the existing negative approach that quite a few of us have towards this form of private job. (R. Castro 2010e)

At the same time, Raúl reassured the pre-eminence of socialist (state-led) productive units and hence of the secondary status of self-employment, which in any case was now portrayed as a junior partner rather than a parasitic companion:

When defining the features that ought to characterize the building of a new society, the classics of Marxist-Leninism – particularly Lenin- stated, among other things, that the State, on behalf of all the people, should keep the ownership over all the basic production means. (R. Castro 2010e)

As this intervention was made in the middle of the grassroots discussion of the *Lineamientos*, it can be interpreted as aiming to encourage Cubans to push the debate towards the new ideological boundaries proposed by the leadership. And if there were doubts on the leadership’s break with CPE orthodoxy, Raúl insisted:

The steps we have been taking and shall take towards broadening and relaxing self-employment are the result of profound meditations and analysis and we can assure you this time there will be no going back. (R. Castro 2010e)

Moreover, Raúl warned that the self-employed workers would not only be considered legitimate, but their interests would be fully integrated into the regime:

Cuba’s Workers’ Central and its respective national trade unions are currently studying the forms and methods to organize the provision of assistance to this [self-employed] labour force [...]. We should defend their interests – I repeat – we should defend their interests, just as we do with any other citizen [...].(R. Castro 2010e)

After this speech, Cuba basically experienced the repetition of the pattern summarised in the triad: 1) praise of the market-based subject, 2) reassurance of socialist ideology, and 3) corporatist co-option of the market-based subject. Hence this three-step sequence of conversion of a former intruder into a friend was visible in other interventions of Raúl Castro after this seminal speech of December 2010.

It goes without saying that, later, self-employment would be a key topic in the debates of the Sixth Party Congress. In the opening speech of that event, as further confirmation to the delegates of where the ideological boundaries ought to be displaced, Raúl praised self-employment, again, as “an alternative endorsed by the current legislation” that deserved “the support, assistance and protection of the officials at all levels” (R. Castro 2011a). Then, again, he reassured them that this was not at odds with socialist economic strategy:

The growth of the non-public sector of the economy, far from an alleged privatization of the social property as some theoreticians would have us believe, is to become an active element facilitating the construction of socialism in Cuba since it will allow the State to focus on raising the efficiency of the basic means of production, which are the property of the entire people, while relieving itself from the management of those activities that are not strategic for the country. (R. Castro 2011a)

Following the Congress, the participation structures of the Party started to act upon the new ideological turn. On the eve of the Party Conference of January 2012, the *Granma* stated that the CTC had already affiliated 80% of the self-employed to existing trade unions, according to their branch of industry. For that news story, *Granma* reporter Febles Hernández (2012) interviewed CTC chief and Politburo member Salvador Valdés Mesa, whom confirmed that the self-employed workers were now seen as any other worker, ergo subject to corporatist representation:

We represent on an equal basis, either state or non-state, all the workers of the country, with the mission of organising them, assist their job training, and elevate their political and economic culture. (Valdés Mesa quoted by Febles Hernández 2012, 4)

Certainly, co-option would not be free of contradictions. Ironically, it was a self-employed, communist militant, delegate from Havana to the PCC Conference, whom

expressed the unfriendliest opinion about self-employment transmitted on Cuban TV as part of the coverage of the event. He made such an intervention in the PCC's Commission of Ideological Policy, in which he supported the engagement proposed by the leadership, though not as part of acceptance, but rather as pest control:

I remember when the Party in the municipality had meetings with militant self-employed workers around twice a year. This has been lost but has to be recovered because there are men earning 500 or 600 pesos daily, sometimes more [...], hence their way of thinking changes. The enemy is waiting for us to have an internal problem arisen here, so we have to strengthen the political work with the self-employed. (Broadcasted by TVC 2012)

In other words, the *Fidelista* piranha vision was not yet totally buried in the PCC; however, it was now the *Raulista* anti-stigma vision that had the upper hand.

Cuban market socialism:

The Cuban market socialist ideology emerged as a consequence of an evolution of the *upgrade-of-the-model* notion into a *prosperous-and-sustainable-socialism* one.

Both the Congress and Conference of the PCC had paved the way to further diversification of non-state actors. In July 2012, Raúl announced the experimental approval of some urban co-ops and the expansion of transferals of small state shops to its workers via leasing agreements, now turned self-employed. In response to this, the regime repeated the formula of *befriending*, *praising*, and *co-option*. Firstly, to scale down ideological fears, Raúl again made a socialist defence of his reforms:

[These decisions] would allow the state to free itself from the administration of a group of products and services of secondary character so as to focus on improving the management of the fundamental means of production that will retain the condition of socialist state enterprise, which as expressed in the Guideline n. 2, is the main form of the national economy. (R. Castro 2012a)

One year later Raúl would insist that the creation of “non-agricultural co-operatives” and the expansion of self-employment was aiming to “free the state from non-fundamental productive activities and services in order to focus in the long-term

development program” (R. Castro 2013c). Then at the 20th Congress of the CTC, Raúl combined the praise for non-state actors with the need to co-opt them:

[I]t has been promoted the growth of forms of non-state management in our economy, the workers of which earn considerably superior incomes to those of the state (either bureaucratic or business) sector. This reality, which does not surprise anybody, cannot lead us to stigmatise the self-employed and co-op workers, whom most of them have joined the union movement, obey the rules and fulfil their fiscal obligations. [...] CTC’s work is more complex in light of a growing non-state sector of the economy, where the methods and style traditionally applied in the state sector are not applicable. (R. Castro 2014b)

The quotation above contains a new element: the acceptance of rising inequalities in Cuba’s economic strategy, an issue no longer treated as a tactic retreat but as a non-strategic inconvenience. At this point, the then three-year-old *upgrade-of-the-economic-model* notion had already been entwined with an ideological newborn: the *prosperous-and-sustainable-socialism* notion. The latter’s birth was on December 2012 (R. Castro 2012c), but it was more clearly shaped two months later:

The Party Congress has defined the path to update the Cuban economic model and achieve a prosperous and sustainable socialist society – a less egalitarian but fairer society. (R. Castro 2013b)

Now the goal was *prosperity*, with inequality being a side effect not to become an obstacle to *updating* the economic model – an ideological break with the old ascetic politics of the Cuban elite since Che’s times (Farber 2015). To be sure, Raúl had justified the retreat of “egalitarianism” since the Sixth Party Congress invoking the principle of socialist distribution: “From each in accordance with his ability and to each in accordance with his labour” (R. Castro 2011a). On that occasion, the principle was used to argue that the better off should be out of the ration book system. At other times, its mention was a recognition that majority’s wages were meagre (R. Castro 2007c), which could be alleviated with payment by results (Castro 2009c, 2014b).

Although Raúl’s (self) criticism in these policy fields makes sense, his suggestion that the rise of *new rich* has complied with socialist principles is dubious. Setting aside the known case of people receiving remittances from relatives in the US (an unfair

though arguably unavoidable source of hard currency), the case of those abusing their political connections is yet to be explored – in other words, corruption.

For example, the restaurant “La Divina Pastora”, next to the well-known Havana’s tourist attraction *Morro Castle*, originally a FAR company, was closed and its staff fired only to be later re-opened as a “co-operative” owned by its so-called administrator (Celaya 2013, np, Frank and Valdés 2014, np). The new owner appears to be a friend of Gen. Guillermo García Frías (Padrón 2015, np). Of course, the extent of *spontaneous privatisation* of state assets disguised as co-op conversion is a perturbing matter for future consideration. In this sense, a Cuban academic has already alerted that the new co-ops’ legislation issued in November 2012 (Consejo de Estado 2012b, Consejo de Ministros 2012) has suppressed the democratic potential of the members’ General Assembly because its President is legally treated as if s/he was “a supreme figure” – perhaps “an extrapolation of the leadership’s schemes of the state sector” (Mesa Tejeda 2014, 238).

In July 2013, the seven-month-old *prosperous-and-sustainable-socialism* notion gained more ground when it was fully articulated within the whole ideological framework advanced by the presidency of Raúl Castro up to that point. The journey away from CPE orthodoxy had finally turned into a travel towards market socialism:

[T]he implementation of the *Lineamientos...* approved by the Sixth Congress... [is] the main task of all of us, because on its success hinges the preservation and development of socialism in Cuba. A prosperous and sustainable socialism that ratifies the social property of the fundamental means of production and, at the same time, acknowledges the role of other, non-state, forms of management; it reaffirms planning as an indispensable tool in directing the economy, without denying the existence of the market. (R. Castro 2013c)

The market had been pardoned, but not yet capitalism. The rise of self-employment was not the return of the bourgeoisie – i.e. a class of large proprietors of means of production, as opposed to small businesses. In this sense, it is revealing that the PCC did not create a specific body to co-opt the self-employed – let us imagine a branch of small businesses within the Chamber of Commerce or at least a union of the self-employed within the CTC. Instead, the CTC scattered the newly affiliated self-

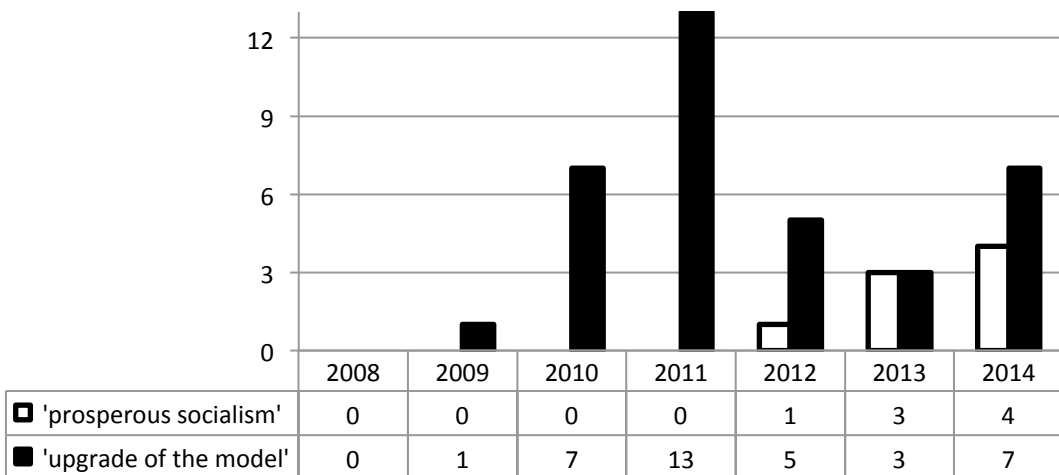
employed in existing trade unions as if to underplay their specificity in a message of the kind “you are not a little ‘businessman’ so do not dream of becoming bourgeois; you are just a distinct type of ‘worker’, so join your peers in their Union.”

However, it is clear that times had changed. Private economic activity never had this size during the Revolution, the quality of which is clearer if self-employment is disaggregated into the three different actors actually involved in it: 1) self-employed workers *per se*, 2) owners of small businesses, 3) private workers. The last two categories imply an interesting relation: it legally refers to a self-employed worker hiring an/other self-employed worker/s. After debates among Cuban labour lawyers, which converged in the need of legally recognise private workers (e.g. Ferriol Molina 2013), the new Cuban Labour Code discussed in the 20th CTC Congress included the rights of “hired workers”, whom can also be employed by co-ops (ANPP 2014a).

Raúl had explained on December 2013 why the prosperous and sustainable socialism would be “fairer” in spite of being “less egalitarian”: the new model will “definitely report more benefits to all Cubans” (R. Castro 2013a). Then during the 20th CTC Congress, Raúl reassured that this socialism would still be based “on the property of all people of the fundamental means of production”; therefore, “the state enterprise is and will be the main form in the national economy” (R. Castro 2014b).

Figure 4 attempts to summarise the ideological vicissitudes of Cuba in Raúl Castro’s time in office. In hindsight, the 2006-2008 period was a preparation stage of what would come next. Once Raúl was firmly in power, he championed the need to ‘update’ the economy with increasing confidence from 2009 until 2011, when his revolt reached its climax at the Sixth Party Congress. After this turning point, market socialism started to emerge and be acted upon; e.g. the relation of the PCC with the economy was redefined in the Conference. After this, when the dust settled, the project adopted a self-confident goal: prosperity was essential for socialist sustainability. *In toto*, the market is no longer the enemy, but a junior partner of central planning.

Figure 4. Keywords of cautious market reform in Cuba, 2008-2014



Sources: Own elaboration based on the analysis of all Raúl Castro's speeches in Cuba (N=42) with NVivo software. It was counted the number of total appearances by year of two notions: 'actualización del modelo económico cubano' and 'socialismo próspero y sostenible'.

As part of this, the autonomy of the state enterprises advanced gradually. In 2011, the *Lineamientos* had already advised “the separation of the state and the entrepreneurial functions” (PCC 2011b, guideline 6), which meant the increase of decision-making power of the managers and more financial autonomy of the companies (PCC 2011b, guidelines 8, 11, 121). As part of this, the 2012 Party Conference would ratify the retreat of the PCC from the economy, as discussed in the previous section. Then, a step further was given when new legislation was issued in April 2014, which stipulated that the expenditures of the state enterprises will be financed “based on the contributions of their enterprises and will be charged to their costs” (Consejo de Ministros 2014, art. 57). For example, the investment funds will come from internally generated profits (MFP 2014, art. 26-7, 35-6). Overall, the threat of bankruptcy looming state companies became real, while the decision-making power of the managers increased.

Then the latest structural reform introduced by Raúl Castro in 2014 was a new Foreign Investment Law (ANPP 2014b), whose most noteworthy innovation was the official reinsertion of FDI in Cuba’s development strategy within a less restrictive framework (Feinberg 2014a). In order to attract potential investors, the annual International Havana Fair held in November 2014 focused in the “Portfolio of

Opportunities for Foreign Investment” (MINCEX 2014), as opposed to the traditional focus on trade promotion. That Portfolio was a 168-page document, translated into eight foreign languages, which summarised the economic situation of Cuba and specified the projects in different sectors of the economy open to foreign partners. At the same time, it keeps restrictions on FDI – i.e. the state has ruled out privatisations and will give preference for capital from diverse countries.

Feinberg has persuasively assessed the politics behind the Portfolio:

With its contradictory combinations of frank analysis and attractive offerings and its demanding requirements and multiple barriers – [the Portfolio] opens an unusually transparent window into the on-going struggles within the Cuban elites: among those that wish to power ahead and integrate their economy into global capital and trading markets, those that adhere to the revolution’s founding statist nationalism and those that seek a middle road of carefully controlled change. (Feinberg 2014b, np)

Whether these tensions are apparent or real is, of course, open to speculation. However, Feinberg’s interpretation equally captures the sum of political forces in Cuba, which has resulted in a middle solution: neither orthodox CPE nor capitalist *shock therapy*, but market socialism – an attempted compromise between orthodoxy and change, between the plan and the market. Such ideological tensions are at the heart of Cuban market socialism. Whether this equilibrium is stable in the long term, is something to ponder in future research.

Summary

The Sixth Party Congress of April 2011 was the turning point of Raúl’s presidency. When it ended, the ideological relaxation of CPE orthodoxy had turned into the regime’s official policy – a socialist market model had been sketched in a Party text: the *Lineamientos*. As for the leadership, the new Politburo marked the culmination of the overhaul led by Raúl at the top. In the next period, the new type of leadership would be ratified while the new type of ideology would start to crystallize.

Together, in this and the previous chapter, I have covered the process of change in the two key variables of this study: the *leadership* and the *ideology* of the Cuban

regime. In total, I identified two political transformations in the period 2006-2014: a) from charismatic to collegial leadership, and b) from CPE to market-socialist ideology. As I have detailed, this time-span covers Raúl's temporary presidency in 2006-8, his first official term in 2008-13, and part of his last term (2013-18).

The Cuban polity was still anti-capitalist, although the space for market actors and mechanisms had been included; also, it was still a post-totalitarian single-party system, although the FAR-PCC coalition had replaced the role of Fidel's charisma. If the leadership and ideology had changed, what type of regime had thus emerged? How such a political outcome looks when compared to the other communist survivors? These are the questions addressed in the next chapter.

7. Political characterisation

In the preceding chapters, I discussed how the *leadership* and *ideology* of the Cuban regime have changed in 2006-2014, during the presidency of Raúl Castro.

As I have been at pains to demonstrate, such changes can be defined as follows:

- from charismatic to collegial leadership; and
- from CPE orthodoxy to market-socialist ideology.

Now in this chapter I will discuss the relationship between both variations and their combined effect in the development of the Cuban regime within the same timeframe. A key claim of this thesis is that the rise of market-socialist ideology is at a substantial extent an effect of the decline of charismatic authority.

I will explain this relation by re-assessing Raúl Castro's revolt and victory through the lenses of regime-type development. As a result of this analysis, I will propose that Cuba has shifted from a *charismatic early post-totalitarian* regime to a *mature post-totalitarian* one. From the comparative perspective of the communist survivors, this characterisation means that the Cuban case has moved closer to the regimes of China and Vietnam and further away from that of North Korea.

The first part of this chapter deals with a diachronic examination of the process of political change experienced by the Cuban regime in 2006-2014. Then in the second part I will further develop the regime-type characterisation advanced in this chapter by looking at one collateral symptom: the emergence of an incipient *political liberalisation*. I aim to explain it as an effect of the regime's re-equilibration of legitimacy I will have proposed.

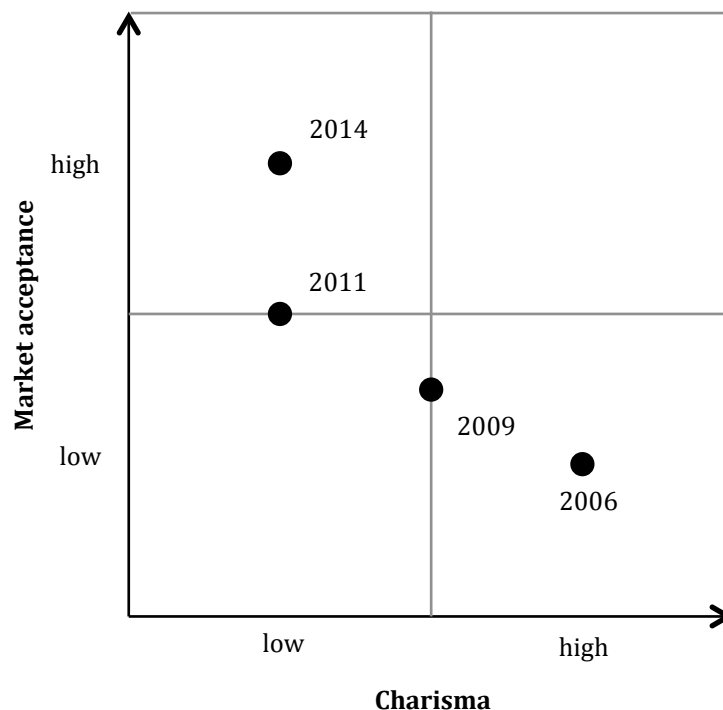
7.1 Regime-type development

Here I have divided the timing of the process of leadership's and ideological change in three stages: 1) preparation (2006-2009), 2) metamorphosis (2010-2011), and 3) consolidation (2012-2014). As can be inferred from the language I am using to tackle timing, it presupposes the passage from equilibrium "A" to "B" via a period of

struggle and rapid change (2006 to 2014 via the 2011 Sixth Congress). However, the speed and extent of leadership and ideological change differed from each other; i.e. the qualitative turn occurred first in the leadership than in the ruling ideology.

Figure 5 contains a schematic representation of the process in selected years. In 2006, the starting point, Fidel’s charismatic leadership was still in power or (when he fell ill) it was expected that he would soon return to office. Also, the last cycle of idealist economic policy was still there, as well as the *Battle of Ideas*.

Figure 5. Leadership and Ideology in Cuba, 2006-2014



Source: own elaboration.

By 2009, a different picture started to emerge. Raúl Castro, already the new President of Cuba, discarded a charismatic succession. On the one hand, he discontinued the title of *Commander-in-Chief* when taking over; on the other, he dismantled Fidel’s personal staff, the *Grupo de Apoyo*. Also, after suggesting the need of “structural and conceptual changes” in the economy, Raúl had organised by then two public discussions on the subject, which encouraged him to conclude that the Cuban economic model needed an “update”. Collegiality and cautious market

reform had not yet been planted, but the charismatic leadership had just been uprooted and orthodox CPE was moving towards the same direction.

2011 was the year of Raúl's key political offensive. The Sixth Party Congress was the turning point of his presidency, where not only did he introduce term limits (which turned the head of state into a *primus inter pares*), but also got the approval of the *Lineamientos* (which amounted to the ideological sketch of market socialism). Collegiality had been set up and orthodox CPE had become an outdated ideology.

Raúl Castro entrenched the pragmatic cycle of economic policy unleashed during his presidency in various ways. One of them was the promotion of like-minded FAR policy makers to the top, notably Marino Murillo: the point man for economic reform. Raúl's designation of a minister in charge of updating socialism stands in contrast to Fidel's appointment of a minister to lead the *Battle of Ideas* – hence further confirming that the rise of Murillo-like technocrats was a sign of a new ideological environment when compared to the last idealist cycle of economic policy that, according to Mesa-Lago (2012), Cuba experienced from 2003 until 2006.

By 2014, the new type of leadership had been ratified and the new type of ideology had gained ruling status. Raúl had already confirmed that he would step down in 2018, and his potential successor, Miguel Díaz-Canel, was for the first time a non-*histórico*. As for the *Lineamientos*, they had been translated into structural reforms, including the expansion of non-state actors for the sake of a 'prosperous' socialism.

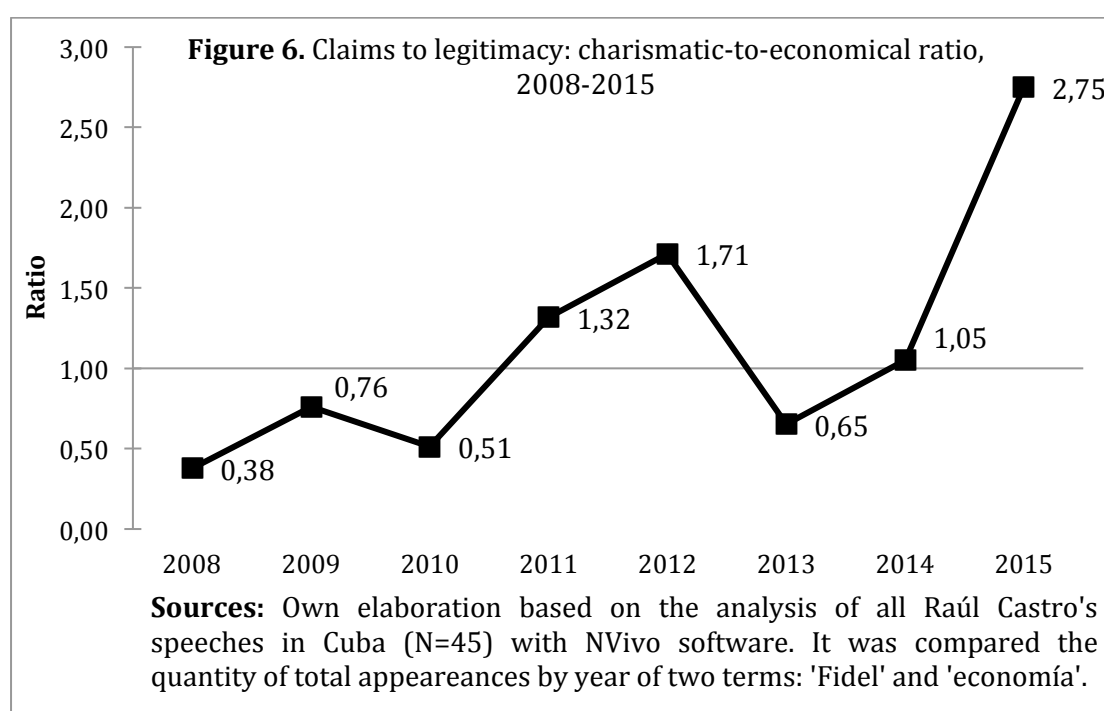
However, what is the relationship between the two changes analysed here?

A claim of this study is that the process of ideological change was an effect of the process of succession in the leadership *because* the dissipation of charismatic legitimacy could propel economic performance as a compensatory source. This causal link was theorised in chapter 3; now I will discuss some substantiating data.

Re-equilibration of legitimacy:

All Raúl's speeches in Cuba are both transmitted on national TV and reproduced next day in *Granma* and/or *Juventud Rebelde*. Such speeches do not only intend to help

Cubans make sense of political developments in the country, they are also the public face of the regime’s political moves. As “the mode of exercising authority” is conditioned by “the kind of legitimacy which is claimed” (Weber 1978a, 213), it is not an insignificant political development when such claims vary in any regime. In the case of Cuba under Raúl Castro, there has occurred a variation in the legitimation strategy of the regime – a process indicated, albeit indirectly, by Figure 6. I took all Raúl Castro’s speeches delivered in Cuba since 2008 and coded them according to key concepts that stand for one or another legitimation strategy – “Fidel” for charismatic, and “economía” (economy, in English) for performance-based. Then I disaggregated this data by year and compared their relative incidence.



When the ratio shown in Figure 6 is below 1, it means that in that single year, ‘Fidel’ was mentioned more times than the ‘economy’ considering all Raúl’s speeches. Using this index, it can be argued that before the Sixth Party Congress (2011), charismatic claims prevailed over economic-based ones, while the opposite was true afterwards – indeed, in 2008 “Fidel” was mentioned 45 times and the “economy” 17 times, while in 2015 the numbers changed to 4 and 11, respectively. The exception to this trend was 2013, when Raúl’s presidency was renewed for five more (and final) years and the 60th anniversary of the attack to the Moncada barracks on the

26th of July was commemorated. In this latter event, which marks the beginning of the Cuban revolution, Raúl praised in his speech the legacy of his brother Fidel, mentioning him on twelve occasions (from a total of twenty-three that year).

Chapters 5 and 6, indeed, already show how Raúl Castro first reformed the leadership before embarking on the economic reform. What is also revealing is that this shift in political concerns was accompanied by a decline in public discourse of the persona of Fidel Castro as a token of the legitimacy of state policies. Thus, if Raúl asked the National Assembly permission to consult everything with Fidel when the former was elected for his presidential period, in his re-election five years later he reminded the National Assembly that the constitution stipulated that state authority emanated from the 'people' (R. Castro 2008c, 2013b). If in 2008 Raúl felt the need to rely on Fidel's charismatic authority to legitimise his rule, in 2013 he sought the same effect through different means, namely the emphasis on the legality of his rule. In fact, in the former speech Raúl mentioned Fidel seventeen times, far more than the five times he was mentioned in the latter speech. By 2013, performance – i.e. the 'updating' of the economic model – was already the kernel of Raúl's legitimacy.

To be sure, I do not claim that Figure 6 is the key evidence of this thesis, let alone a conclusive test. Saldaña has argued that in qualitative research one "can never conclusively 'prove' something; we can, at best, convincingly suggest" (2011, 135). In this sense, this graphic illustration only aims to persuade the reader that leader's speeches bear discursive footprints left by the change in the political salience of the succession question vis-à-vis the economic reform across time. Therefore, although such a political process can only be obliquely gazed through Figure 6, the pattern displayed within it may help to supplement and clarify the argument advanced in this thesis – i.e. that the leaders of the Cuban regime have changed the manner in which they explain to the population why they think they deserve to be in power, initially stressing the endorsement of the regime's founder, then claiming that they will provide economic results. Such a change is what I have defined, in analytic terms, as a shift from charismatic to performance-based legitimacy.

Although the intensification of the political concerns on the economy – when compared to concerns on the succession question – points to a re-equilibration of the *centre of gravity* of the regime’s legitimacy, such an approach is not without limitations. There is an obvious deficiency: the analysis that leads to Figure 6 is an analysis of the speeches of only one person, even if that person is the head of the Cuban party-state. However, it is still relevant to appreciate changes in how a post-totalitarian leader chooses to talk about his political decisions to both the elite and the lay public. But perhaps the main limitation is that this approach does not tell us anything about how Cubans have perceived Raúl’s efforts to overhaul the regime. Although the legitimacy lenses are focused on the regime’s posture rather than on the subjects’ reaction to it, it would still be revealing to know whether the regime’s leaders have succeeded in convincing ordinary Cubans about their *right* to rule.

In sum, the pattern discussed in this section about the content of Raúl’s speeches can at best suggest, rather than ‘prove’, that the decline of charismatic legitimacy was compensated through the rise of market socialism. In consequence, it is still necessary to explain the political process/es that can account for that outcome.

Post-totalitarian normalisation and maturation:

From a regime-type perspective, Cuba in 2006-2014 may be said to have changed from a *charismatic early post-totalitarian* regime to a *maturing post-totalitarian* one. However, this total change can be analytically divided into two distinct processes:

1. from a ‘charismatic’ to a ‘typical’ *early post-totalitarian* regime; and,
2. from the latter equilibrium to a *maturing early post-totalitarian* regime.

Although both processes were empirically intertwined and coetaneous to some extent, each represents a different link in a causal chain.

This first process is mostly related to the change in the type of *leadership*.

As already discussed, Raúl Castro’s answer to the succession problem after Fidel relinquished the presidency was the introduction of collegiality, as the approval of term-limits along with the dismantling of the *Grupo de Apoyo* caucus attest. Thus,

the typically totalitarian (charismatic) leadership was superseded and a typically post-totalitarian (collegial) one was put in its stead. In other words, the charismatic early post-totalitarian regime lost its messianic (i.e. totalitarian) remainder and moved towards an early post-totalitarian equilibrium proper. This political accommodation may be well understood as one of post-totalitarian *normalisation* of the Cuban regime – i.e. the end of its hybridity.

As Fidel's charisma had been an old source of legitimacy, its dissipation created a political deficit for the Cuban regime. As early as 2009, Hoffmann had sensed the predicament of legitimacy's restitution that sooner or later would be confronted:

In the short run, the successor government can claim legitimacy based on the formal succession; in the medium term, however, it will have to seek new sources of support and legitimacy of its own. Economic performance will be crucial, and Raúl's calls for economic reforms – however limited their implementation has been so far – seem to signal that the new leadership is very much aware of this. (Hoffmann 2009, 243)

This argument can be taken a bit further. As the next generation of leaders – expected to take over in 2018 – will not have the same legitimacy of the *founding fathers* of communist Cuba, let alone Fidel Castro, the upcoming biological end of the other revolutionary veterans in power increased the difficulty to the problem of revamping the legitimacy of the regime. Hence Raúl Castro's challenge has not only been to make his presidency stand on solid ground, but also to do so in a manner such that the new equilibrium of the political system endures after he leaves.

In other words, the revolutionary veterans – still the 'inner circle' of the leadership – have showed a strong interest in the survival of the system they devoted their life to. This biographical feature of the elite is perhaps what ultimately explains the rejection of capitalist restoration within Raúl's economic reform. Of course, it is yet to be seen how long this political limit will survive the "históricos" if it does.

The second process (maturation) is related to the change in the type of *ideology*.

The new post-totalitarian equilibrium then rapidly evolved from the *early* towards the *late* stage, in which the regime was now fully confronted with its economic

failures. Raúl responded this problem with another switch: he gave up the *freezing* path he inherited from Fidel (his last 'idealist' cycle) and adopted a *maturing* direction. Raúl explicitly admitted that the economic focus of the Sixth Party Congress expressed the bet of the 'inner circle' for the survival of communism:

The Sixth Party Congress should be, as a fact of life, the last to be attended by most of us who belong to the Revolution's historical generation. The time we have left is short, the task that lies ahead of us is gigantic, and [...] I think we have the obligation of taking advantage of the power of our moral authority among the people to trace out the route to be followed and resolve some other important problems. [...] [W]e strongly believe that we have the elemental duty to rectify the mistakes that we have made all along these five decades during which we have been building socialism in Cuba. (R. Castro 2010e)

This quote also reveals the extent to which the generational succession was linked to the problem of political survival. Thus, the "moral authority" of the revolutionary veterans was being used to make Cuba stand on more solid ground after Fidel's charisma was lost. It was perceived as necessary "to trace out the route to be followed", which the Congress did by approving the economic *Lineamientos* that turned the initial relaxation of CPE orthodoxy into nascent market socialism.

Later, when the 2012 Party Conference ended – with the new types of leadership and ideology now clearly flourishing – Raúl assessed the new political situation: "the route has been traced" (R. Castro 2012b). Indeed, it had.

Here the perspective of legitimacy helps to understand why the economic reform was necessary in the first place. It was necessary "to reach some sort of social contract with the population in order to induce it to 'pragmatically accept' that *given certain external and internal constraints, the regime is performing reasonably well*" (Saxonberg 2013, 18). In other words, the turn to a performance-based legitimacy had been completed. Thus, as a result of the Sixth Party Congress, Cuba definitely adopted a *maturing* path, as opposed to a *freezing* one of CPE entrenchment.

However, the manner in which Cuba's *maturing* path has been pursued differs from Saxonberg's scheme for there was no abandonment of socialist ideology, let alone a restoration of capitalism (e.g. proper large-scale privatisations of means of

production). Conversely, Cuba underwent an ideological renewal (an 'update' in Raúl's words) in order to reconcile the socialist claims of the regime with economic performance (via the market), now turned into a key source of legitimacy.

7.2 Liberalisation as a collateral symptom

Here it is relevant the distinction made by Linz and Stepan between *liberalisation* and *democratisation* in non-democratic environments. Liberalisation "may entail a mix of policy and social changes", such as (among others) "the introduction of legal safeguards for individuals" – as some of the policies that will be reviewed in this section –, while democratisation "entails liberalisation but is a wider and more specifically political concept. Democratisation requires open contestation over the right to win control of the government". Thus, "it is obvious that there can be liberalisation without democratisation" (Linz and Stepan 1996, 3).

Cuba under Raúl Castro has also seen a degree of socio-political liberalisation – defined loosely as the relaxation of previous government restrictions. Concerning this subject, Farber (2015, np) has pointed out that Cuba has experienced "a significant degree of social liberalization (for example, in terms of religion and emigration)." On a similar vein, Dilla (2014, np) has noted that, in contrast to the past, the contemporary Cuban regime "does not demand the souls of its subjects, but only their obedience". From a regime-type perspective both developments fit the definition of a post-totalitarian rule reached "by choice", namely a maturing path where *pluralism* relatively expands and *mobilisation* only aims "to achieve a minimum degree of conformity and compliance" while "the leading role of the official party is still sacrosanct" (Linz and Stepan 1996, 42, 44-5, 293-4).

The symptoms I will scrutinise are those belonging to the process of eliminating "irrational prohibitions" for Cubans, which is how Raúl Castro has referred to them. Such political changes are four: 1) the freedom to buy hard-currency goods and services previously entitled to foreigners only; 2) the authorisation to buy and sell houses and cars; 3) religious tolerance; and, 4) flexible migratory rules.

1. DVD's, hotels, mobiles

It is almost obvious to infer that when the first public consultation took place in late 2007, a common complaint of Cubans was the issue of prohibitions. In the speech that Raúl Castro devoted to the consultation, he precisely addressed this:

We agree with those who have alerted about the excess of prohibitions and legal measures that make more damage than good. We could say that most of them were just and correct in their time, but not a few of them have been overcome by life and behind each incorrect prohibition, there are a good number of illegalities. (R. Castro 2007b)

In this enunciation the notion is explicit that some prohibitions (those causing “more damage than good”) have become obsolete – they “have been overcome by life”. On that occasion, however, Raúl also tried to keep moderate expectations on the possible pace of change: “All of us would like to go more quickly, but this is not always possible” (R. Castro 2007b). By then, Fidel Castro was still on a temporary leave of office; and Raúl, temporarily on board. At least that was the official script.

A reasonable guess is that the full transfer of power to Raúl was already being prepared behind the scenes for when this actually happened in February 2008, the new government seemed to have pushed a button that activated a reformist impetus that had been nurtured with care. In other words, looking back in hindsight on the first public consultation, it is clear that such a process both increased the political leverage of the case for reform while it also paved the way for it.

The new President of Cuba quickly went back to “the excess of prohibitions and regulations” in his inaugural speech: “in the next weeks we will start to eliminate the easiest ones” (R. Castro 2008c). But again, he warned this would be a slow process: “The suppression of other regulations will take more time” (ibid.). Cubans did not have to wait too much to see what the first concrete measures were.

In early March 2008, the regime lifted the ban on DVD and computer sales. Then at the end of the month Cubans were authorised to book rooms in hotels, buy mobile phone services, and also rent cars (Frank 2013, 114-5).

2. Cars and houses

On the eve of the Sixth Party Congress, during the third public consultation – the one that debated the *Lineamientos* – the issue of prohibitions would re-emerge. Raúl Castro actually acknowledged that “many of the statements made then [in the first public consultation] are being repeated now during the discussion of the *Lineamientos*” (R. Castro 2010d). In particular, he would tackle the issue of cars and houses in his December 2010 speech – i.e. in the middle of the pre-Congress debate:

One can arrive at a life-tested conclusion: irrational prohibitions lead to violations and that in turn leads to corruption and impunity. That is why I believe that people are right [...] in their concerns over the mind-boggling procedures associated with housing and the buying and selling of cars among individuals, just to mention two examples that are currently under study for an orderly solution. [...] So if I have a little car, a jalopy or whatever, an “almendrón”, as it is commonly called here, and that car is mine, I have the right to sell it to whomever I want. (R. Castro 2010d)

These “irrational prohibitions”, as Raúl called them, would be lifted after the Sixth Party Congress. The *Lineamientos* approved by the 2011 Congress included the call to authorise the buy and sell of cars and houses (PCC 2011b, guidelines 286, 297). Then in September the new car legislation was approved (Consejo de Ministros 2011a), and the houses’ would come in November (Consejo de Estado 2011).

3. Religion

A new relationship between the Cuban state and the Catholic Church started to emerge in 2010. In March that year opposition member Orlando Zapata died on a hunger strike in jail, which sparked international condemnation and a renewed attention to the public protests of the *Ladies in White* – a group led by most of the wives and female relatives of 75 dissidents jailed in the “Black Spring” of 2003.

However, the crisis this had created to the government of Raúl Castro came to an end in July 2010. In a deal brokered by the Catholic Church, 52 political prisoners were released by the Cuban state – they had been offered asylum in Spain, and all but 13 accepted. By April 2011, a total of 115 former prisoners had arrived in Spain (Frank 2013, 204).

Later, in the opening speech of the Sixth Party Congress, Raúl would address religious tolerance. It was necessary, according to him, “to continue eradicating any prejudice that prevents bringing all Cubans together, like brothers and sisters, [...] be them [God] believers or not” (R. Castro 2011a). As Raúl then made reference to the “lengthy talks with Cardinal Jaime Ortega” which concluded in the prisoners’ deal with the Spanish government, it was obvious that this friendly gesture towards Catholicism was in gratitude for the prisoners’ deal of the previous year.

In August 2011, in what seemed an opportunity to further the goodwill towards the Catholic Church, Raúl made public the rehabilitation of a Catholic militant of the PCC. On that occasion, he denounced the “injustice”, which according to him was based on “obsolete concepts [...] still rooted in the mentality of leaders at all levels” (Castro 2011c). However, the climax of the new relation was March 2012, when Pope Benedict XVI visited Cuba and offered public masses in Havana and Santiago.

The Catholic Church was granted several concessions in 2011-2012, including the opening of the cultural centre Félix Varela – one of the few spots of critical public debate – and the authorisation to publish magazines and a national procession of the Lady of Charity. These were “discretionary rights concessions – that in any democratic society would exist as normal and well-defined rights”, as Farber (2012, 124) has put it. At the same time, the Church now enjoys a new position that has enabled it to spread its usual ideas against abortion or homosexuality (Farber 2012, 131-32).

Setting aside the interests that the Cuban state and the Catholic Church may have in harbouring a good relationship, the by-product of religious tolerance is real.

4. Migration

The changes in migratory policy had been mentioned by Raúl Castro to Cardinal Ortega in 2010 during their private talks that ended up in the prisoners’ deal (Frank 2013, 204). But he would only address this subject in public after the Sixth Party Congress. In this sense, one may speculate that this issue had also been raised in the pre-Congress debate, as it is difficult to imagine otherwise – any foreigner that

travelled to Cuba and spoke to local people before the new migratory legislation came into effect in 2013 almost as a rule heard complaints about it.

Raúl Castro finally addressed the migratory prohibitions in August 2011:

As part of the measures being considered in the reduction of prohibitions and rules issued in other moments of the revolutionary process in legitimate defence [...] that later endured unnecessarily, I take this opportunity to inform the deputies and the citizens that we are working towards the updating of migratory policy. (R. Castro 2011c)

The new legislation was approved in October 2012 (Consejo de Estado 2012a) and came into effect in January 2013. Nevertheless, although the new rules reduced and made less expensive the bureaucratic hurdles to leave and visit Cuba, “the reform leaves standing – does not even touch it – the authoritarian principle that Cuban society does not have an inalienable right to free passage” (Dilla 2012, 80). Cubans living abroad still need permission to visit Cuba, while those living on the Island can still be denied foreign travel. This migratory arrangement is enforced by the state to encourage an acceptable political behaviour of its subjects (Dilla 2012, 75-77).

However, from a less pessimistic view, one must accept that despite the fact that the new migratory policy does not restore the unconditional right of free passage it has indeed become more flexible.

What can account for the relative *liberalisation*?

It is this not surprising that the four liberalising symptoms I have summarised here were introduced only after Raúl became the definitive new President in February 2008. Furthermore, three of them fully emerged after the Sixth Party Congress, when the post-totalitarian normalisation was turning into a maturing path. By then, the increase of economic-based legitimacy allowed the regime to get by without “irrational prohibitions”. In any case, the single-party rule is still *sacrosanct*.

Here the perspective of legitimacy’s re-equilibration helps to explain the relative liberalisation. In light of the new role of economic performance in Cuban politics, certain past restrictions now appear obsolete by virtue of their lack of contribution

to the new claims to legitimacy of the regime. In conclusion, setting aside the relaxation of rules for non-state actors, there are additional political symptoms that confirm the maturing path of the Cuban regime during the presidency of Raúl Castro.

Summary

In this chapter I demonstrated that the change experienced by the Cuban regime in the period 2006-2014 can be adequately understood as a transition from a charismatic post-totalitarian character to a maturing post-totalitarian one. This meant that the charismatic legitimacy of Fidel Castro had been compensated with a turn to a performance-based legitimacy – as explained by Raul Castro himself and verified in the qualitative content of his speeches during his presidency. Such a political process explains why the decline of the charismatic leadership was accompanied by the adoption of a market-socialist ideology.

The rise of a performance-based legitimacy in Cuba has also been accompanied by correlated phenomena consistent with the diagnosis of the regime as undergoing a maturing post-totalitarian transition. Such is the case of the relative liberalisation that Cuba has also lived during the presidency of Raúl Castro. Although he has ruled out any change on the status of the single-party rule, the space of some individual freedoms has increased – an unambiguous symptom of post-totalitarian maturation.

8. Conclusions

The question of this thesis was how and why has the Cuban regime changed during the presidency of Raúl Castro? In chapter 1 I thus elaborated this question and explained how I collected relevant data. Then, in order to provide a Marxist conceptual ground floor, in chapter 2, I defined the polity that emerged in Cuba after the 1959 revolution as a non-capitalist totalitarianism. Then in chapter 3, drawing from the literature of communist survival, I theorised the causal mechanism that could have provoked a *maturing* post-totalitarian path in Cuba after 2006. Chapter 4 offered a concise historical background of the decades of communist rule under Fidel Castro. Then chapters 5 and 6, for their part, offered a diachronic analysis of the presidency of Raúl Castro for the period 2006-2014. Finally, in chapter 7, I explained why the evidence of the chapters 5 and 6 confirmed a *maturing* path.

I would like to conclude this thesis by outlining first the main argument developed throughout this work, and how/why they are a contribution to knowledge; and second by sketching some ideas on the implications of the changes in Cuba during the presidency of Raúl Castro for radical politics and the US connection.

8.1 Arguments and contribution

As far as I know, this thesis is the most exhaustive study to date on the Cuban regime under Raúl Castro. This is not to say that I am the only one who has analysed contemporary Cuba, though. To be sure, scholars in many fields have addressed this important topic. Within economic analysis, scholars such as Mesa Lago (2012), Pérez Villanueva et al. (2013), and Henken and Ritter (2014) have all explored the economic changes shaping Cuba. Within political analysis, meanwhile, scholars such as Hoffmann (2009), Mujal-León (2011), and Kapcia (2014) have focused on the specific vicissitudes within the elite that have shaped the new leadership.

However, none of these works has addressed the interconnection between the economic and political changes. Despite much excellent work on themes such as assessing the economic reform and the succession question, scholars examining the

transformations of the Cuban polity have not yet fully explained the intimate link between the above-mentioned spheres, which is what I aimed to do in this thesis.

The main contribution of this thesis is thus analytical, i.e. how to explain or make sense of the presidency of Raúl Castro and what this means for Cuban communism. In short, I argued that the current market socialism is a product of charismatic decline because the former emerged to fix the legitimacy crisis opened by the latter. In addition to this insight, the characterisation of the Cuban case offered here has some conceptual implications for the literatures I mixed in the analytical framework of this thesis: 'non-Soviet-like' Marxism and Political Science – I added the 'post-totalitarian' regime-type into the former literature, and the 'market-socialist' approach into the latter. On the one hand, how shall Marxists face the actuality of post-totalitarian rule in Cuba? On the other, what does market socialism tell us about the theory of communist survival? In what follows, I will restate my main argument before discussing its contribution to *transitology* and the Marxist tradition.

1. Cuban communism

The central argument of this thesis is that in the period 2006-2014, Cuba experienced a regime change. In other words, in the Cuban non-transition from communist rule, the form of government has exhibited an important variation. When measured against the post-totalitarian regime type, Cuba can be said to have changed from a *charismatic* post-totalitarianism to a *maturing* one. The basic argument behind this conceptualisation can be summarised in two processes.

The first process started when Fidel Castro stepped down in July 2006. From then on, the political legitimacy provided by his charismatic leadership suffered a blow. Using Weber's terms, the "succession problem" fully emerged. This, of course, does not mean that Cuba since the 1959 revolution relied solely on Fidel's persona. However, the sudden absence of an old source of legitimacy created the need to rebalance the claims to legitimacy of a regime interested in its self-preservation.

The second process thus refers to the response to the problems created by the first process. Raúl Castro's solution to the "succession problem" – again, using Weber's

terms – was to replace the charismatic claims to legitimacy by legal-rational ones. However, in a regime where socialist ideology had been seriously undermined by the failures of the CPE model, stressing the legality of the succession was not enough. Hence Raúl took a step further and promised to improve the standards of living.

The emergence of a *maturing post-totalitarian regime* in Cuba was thus the result of a turn to performance-based legitimacy in substitution of charismatic claims. Hence the regime sought a new “pragmatic acceptance” from its subjects, a situation that Saxonberg defined as part of the “late” post-totalitarian stage in the following terms:

The communist regimes lose their grand-future oriented beliefs and instead promise improves living standards. Consequently they try to reach some sort of social contract with the population in order to induce it to “pragmatically accept” that *given certain external and internal constraints, the regime is performing reasonably well.* (Saxonberg 2013, 18)

Using Saxonberg’s terms, if a regime acts upon this performance-based promise, it is *maturing*, but if it sticks to the (failed) CPE model, is said to be *freezing*. In this perspective, Cuba under Raúl Castro *matured* – in response to the loss of *charisma*.

To prove all the above-mentioned process, I first had to demonstrate that the leadership was no longer charismatic and that the ideology of the regime had been revised according to the new economic objectives. As I discussed throughout chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis, it can be said that *collegiality* replaced *charisma* in the leadership and that *market socialism* replaced *CPE* at the level of ideology.

Collegiality is a form of collective arrangement, in which all of the members of the collegial body are equals. The new leadership is collegial insofar as there are now term limits in top posts, and the title of *Commander-in-Chief* – the Fidel’s long-held title – has been discontinued. Collegiality is anti-charismatic because it tries “to prevent the rise of monocratic power” (Weber 1978a, 277). However, this does not exclude the possibility that a collegial body possess a *primus inter pares*, a member who is the first among equals, as Raúl currently is. Another proof of the new type of leadership in Cuba is the fact that it is expected that the top posts in the Politburo and the Council of State currently hold by the *revolutionary veterans* – the Castro’s

'inner circle' – are filled by leaders of the main legal-rational pillars of the Cuban regime: the Communist Party of Cuba and the Revolutionary Armed Forces.

Market socialism is “an attempt to reconcile the advantages of the market as a system of exchange with social ownership of the means of production” (in Calhoun 2002, 294). The current economic doctrine of the Cuban regime was approved in the Sixth Party Congress of 2011. The first bullet point approved by that meeting specified that “planning will take the market into account, influencing upon it and considering its characteristics” (PCC 2011b, guideline 1). It is true that 'market socialism' is not the official term used in Cuba, but neither is 'collegiality'. To define the regime's ideology as I do, simply means that Cuba is still non-capitalist, but the market subjects are no longer stigmatised as they were before 2006. Raúl's call to 'update' the economic model in order to achieve a 'prosperous' socialism can thus be read as a market-socialist victory over the *old* and *impoverishing* CPE doctrine.

I also demonstrated that the change in the type of leadership and ideology of the Cuban regime was caused by the re-equilibration in its claims to legitimacy. Ergo, I also demonstrate that such a re-equilibration had indeed taken place. Here I think is enough to remind the reader that this discussion is detailed in chapter 7. The substantiation of these processes brought me back to the theoretical framework, according to which Cuba had experienced a regime change in the period 2006-2014.

2. Post-totalitarian literature

Linz (2001) had explained that in his work with Stepan (1996), they limited “to distinguishing post-totalitarian regimes from both authoritarian regimes and the previous totalitarian regime. We did not enter into a detailed analysis of the change from totalitarianism to post-totalitarianism, although we did point to different paths and degrees of change” (Linz 2000, 6). Saxonberg (2013), for his part, added a detailed framework to explain such a change and the rationale behind the different post-totalitarian paths. To be fair, his analysis of survival of communist rule supposed a breakthrough in my doctoral studies – I read his book almost right away after being published and decided to turn my thesis into a contribution to a path he

had opened. In doing so, however, I reapplied his theory to the Cuban case in order to rectify a characterization that I sensed was contradicted by reality.

Thus, I have discarded and sought to replace Saxonberg's explanation of Cuban post-totalitarian evolution. For him, Cuba since the late 1980s has been a *freezing* post-totalitarian regime that in the 1990s mixed sultanic elements – i.e. Fidel Castro had become a dynastic leader like Kim Il Sung in North Korea. For Saxonberg, this definition was valid as far as 2013. This thesis, however, refutes this characterization and offers the alternative above-mentioned account of contemporary Cuba.

Besides, my characterization of Cuba under Raúl Castro poses a challenge to the theory of communist survival, according to which the communist regimes can only stick to CPE or surrender to capitalism (Saxonberg 2013, 28, 272). In this sense, Cuba's maturing path in a manner that introduces the market but sticks to non-capitalist property relations is a conceptual contribution. However, to be more precise, the maturing alternative embodied in the market-socialist approach is registered but not theorised by Saxonberg. It is implied in his work in the characterisation of 1970s Yugoslavia as a *maturing post-totalitarian* regime (Saxonberg 2013, 113) – precisely the case that was the paradigm of *real* market socialism at the time. For Montias (1970, 121), only two market-socialist cases had existed: the Yugoslavian, and the *New Economic Policy* in the Soviet Union after the civil war with Lenin still in charge. (Just to avoid confusion, I would not define Lenin's Soviet Union as maturing post-totalitarian for this regime was not totalitarian yet.) In this sense, I think that the idea that market mechanisms can operate within non-capitalist settings and actually work hand in hand with socialist planning and property relations deserves to be underscored within the literature dealing with the analysis of communist systems (survivors or not).

3. Non-Soviet-like literature

In this latter regard, I also think that the Cuban rediscovery of market-socialist solutions has implications for the 'non-Soviet-like' Marxist tradition. One points to

the need to reassess the role of the market in socialist thought. The other points to the relevance of ‘non-Soviet-like’ Marxist critique in a context like the Cuban one.

The fact that Soviet-style CPE was the communist economic policy *par excellence* through the 20th century has created the notion that socialists cannot offer anything but CPE. However, Marx’s call for the socialisation of the means of production did not have to be only understood, let alone materialised as a monopoly of the state, not to mention one led by a single party. Even Lenin, as early as 1918, proposed that co-operatives needed to play a key role in the new Soviet state – even more later in the middle of the market-friendly *New Economic Policy* (e.g. Lenin 1918, 1923). In short, the ‘market’ is not a notion at odds with communist ideas. Furthermore, for Trotsky it is the ‘market’ (along with ‘democracy’) that Stalin’s CPE gravely lacked:

[T]hree systems must be subjected to a brief analysis: (1) special state departments, that is, the hierarchical system of *plan commissions*, in the centre and locally; (2) *trade*, as a system of market regulation; (3) *Soviet democracy*, as a system for the living regulation by the masses of the structure of the economy. If a universal mind existed, [...] such a mind, of course, could a priori draw up a faultless and exhaustive economic plan, beginning with the number of acres of wheat down to the last button for a vest. The bureaucracy often imagines that just such a mind is at its disposal; that is why it so easily frees itself from the control of the market and of Soviet democracy. (Trotsky 1932, np)

In other words, Cuba’s non-capitalist rediscovery of the market shall not deserve the political opposition of radicals. Otherwise, radicals end up lamenting the revision of CPE orthodoxy, which time and again failed in different countries. Far from this, the opposition must be located in the field of democracy and the single-party.

Trotsky had long argued that if a workers’ revolt did not succeed in democratically renewing the really existing socialism, then a capitalist restoration led by the bureaucracy would follow. This tension remained unsolved in the transitions to post-totalitarian rule because a key claim to legitimacy of these elites was based on the idea that they embodied the utopia after capitalism. This situation is what Saxonberg (2013, 17) has explained by the role of “ideological legitimacy” in the early post-totalitarian stage. From a Marxist view, Žižek has explained the paradox of Stalinist regimes defending some socialist ideas by reference to “the radical ambiguity of

Stalinist ideology which, even at its most 'totalitarian', still exudes an emancipatory potential” because these regimes anyway “provided the spectators with new ethical standards by which reality was to be measured” (Žižek 2002, 131-32).

In this sense, Saxonberg is right in his claim that once the ideological legitimacy is lost, the capitalist restoration is just a matter of time, either due to the collapse of communist rule or to prevent the collapse itself. In any of these cases, the elite was unwilling to defend a *status quo* they no longer believed in. And this brings us back to Trotsky’s basic argument: in the absence of a workers’ revolt that democratises communist rule, capitalist restoration by top bureaucrats is an actual danger.

8.2 Practical implications and potential scenarios

In this final section I will outline how the findings of this thesis may 1) inform radical political practice, and 2) relate to the new US-Cuba relations.

1. The challenge of socialist democrats

To define Cuba as a *maturing post-totalitarian* regime has two major implications for the ‘non-Soviet-like’ perspective outlined in the introduction and chapter 2. On the one hand, such a definition implies to acknowledge that market socialism is an anti-capitalist progress compared to the previous CPE orthodoxy; on the other, it means that in the absence of democracy, market socialism can degenerate into capitalist restoration – the dilemma described by Trotsky. If the second scenario prevails, the line that still separates Cuba from China and Vietnam will thus be erased.

In this sense, Raúl Castro’s reforms have increased the scope of market mechanisms without democratic controls. As discussed in chapter 6, the Cuban researcher Mesa Tejeda (2014) has demonstrated that the co-ops legislation undermines the democratic potential of this form of property. At the same time, the rise of decision-making power of the managers in the context of financial autonomy of state companies is not countered by workplace democratic arrangements. In the case of co-ops legislation at least the notion of ‘democracy’ is mentioned once (Consejo de Estado 2012b, art. 4), whereas that notion is never mentioned in the new company

legislation... which otherwise provides a list of the 106 “faculties” of the managing directors (Consejo de Ministros 2014, art. 65).

Here the contrast between a socialist democratic approach and a liberal democratic one deserved to be mentioned. The latter celebrates Raúl’s reform but not because it proves the capacity of non-capitalist economies to adopt the market, but because it sees it as a transitory stage before the return to capitalist normalcy.

Thus, López-Levy (2011, 15) sees Raúl’s reforms as “a step towards the goal of promoting a stable, peaceful and gradual transition to a more open political and economic system in a democratic Cuba.” However, what does a “more open” economic system means? The answer is in López-Levy’s advice to US foreign policy:

The optimal antecedent to promoting democratization in the medium term is by supporting market-oriented economic reform today. A peaceful and gradual transition to democracy in Cuba in the mid-term depends as much on economic reform as on the emergence of an independent and globally-connected middle class. (López-Levy 2011, 16)

As if following the advice, indeed the US government, as part of the normalisation of relations with Cuba that started in December 2014, has defined as one of its policy goals “to empower the nascent Cuban private sector” (White House 2015). Thus, in the liberal democratic view, democratisation and capitalist restoration in Cuba are like two sides of the same coin. In consequence, this approach is silent about the anti-democracy implied in the current reform, then even less interested in the substantial dose of anti-democracy required to install a capitalist democracy.

The socialist democratic vision may start by restating a key concept: “From Ancient Greece, we have a name for the intrusion of the excluded into the socio-political space: democracy” (Žižek 2009b, 55). While the liberal democratic approach seeks to engage the eventual *winner*s of the reform, the socialist democratic one seeks to avoid the formation of *loser*s. The former seeks the formation of the bourgeoisie while the latter wants to avoid the formation of the proletariat. The task is to act pre-emptively and oppose the top-down politics in favour of bottom-up practices. Although the case for a non-capitalist democratic regime has not been elaborated in

this thesis – such was not the purpose of this work – such is the perspective that I think can better articulate the opposition to the prospect of capitalist restoration.

In this sense, it is not enough, as Piñeiro Harnecker (2013, 2014) does, to limit the agenda of democratisation to the workplace level (in co-ops, state companies, etc.). For her, the task is to expand self-management and ultimately make it the main form of economic administration, thus making Cuba's market socialism less authoritarian and closer to the Yugoslav model. However, a socialist democratic position must deal with the issue of the party-state in Cuba, otherwise the self-management proposal is incomplete and lacking strategic vision, as Farber has explained:

An unfortunate byproduct of the emphasis on local self-management has been a relative lack of attention to the elephant in the room: the all-controlling, all-encompassing, undemocratic one-party state. Discussions of self-management have tended to ignore the necessity for planning at the national level and the fact that the CCP will inevitably dominate that planning unless its political monopoly is abolished. The Yugoslavian experience of the last century shows that authentic self-management at the local level can only function when there is economic planning that is national in scope, but does not neglect democratic workplace participation. Decisions concerning vital questions such as accumulation and consumption, wages, taxes, and social services affect the whole society and significantly limit what can be decided in each work center — new structures are needed to facilitate exchange between them. (Farber 2014b, np)

The struggle for political liberties and independent unions is thus a central element. At this stage, however, Cuban post-totalitarianism blocks all independent grassroots democracy, which entails the risk of making the current market socialism just a mere transitory stage in the road to Party-led capitalism, as in China and Vietnam.

2. Final note: on US-Cuba relations:

Although my research has since the outset been focused on internal political changes in Cuba, it has been inevitable during these years to receive questions about the role of the US in shaping internal events. Of course I do not neglect the importance of US aggression both in the economic embargo/blockade dimension and as a source of national/anti-imperialist legitimacy. However, just to restate the obvious, while the old basic contours of US-Cuba relations had not changed in the

period 2006-2014, the Cuban regime had. Thus, it could not be attributed any causal effect to the US foreign policy in shaping internal events on the island. This is not to say that Raúl Castro's government ignored the US in their calculations; it simply means that the US 'variable' remained constant and thus lacked explanatory power. Hence, the changes going on in Cuba could be better explained by internal factors.

However, US-Cuba relations started to normalise on last December 2014. And after this, me and the few others PhD colleagues writing a thesis on contemporary Cuba have now been asked how such an event proves or disproves our work. The first thing to note is that this diplomatic turn says more about a change in US foreign policy towards Cuba than the other way around. Moreover, this diplomatic breakthrough is a Cuban victory over US imperialism. Farber has summarised why:

First, because it acknowledges that the imperial power of the US was not able to coerce the imposition of its socio-economic and political system, handing a victory for the principle of national self-determination. (Farber 2014a)

While the goal of Barack Obama's government is still to stir a transition to liberal-democratic rule, the US will now pursue this goal through an engagement strategy rather than by trying to isolate the Cuban state (Badella 2015). In the past, Cuba had sabotaged the US detente attempts (Whitehead 2007), which points to the main change in Cuba's attitude. Raúl Castro's government is aware of the ultimate goal of US policy but is willing to accept the challenge and normalise relations. The latter point was made explicit at the opening of the Cuban embassy in Washington last July 2015 by Cuba's foreign minister Bruno Rodríguez:

To insist in the attainment of obsolete and unjust goals, only hoping for a mere change in the methods to achieve them will not legitimize them or favor the national interest of the United States or its citizens. However, should that be the case, we would be ready to face the challenge.(Rodríguez 2015)

This said, how the new US-Cuba relations look under the light of the regime change I have characterised in this thesis? This question brings me back to a point I made in the introduction. The *maturing post-totalitarian* regime was born in Cuba in reaction to the succession problem sparked by the stepping down of the charismatic leader,

Fidel. Thus, performance-based legitimacy took over charisma. However, other elements of legitimacy remained constant: *nationalism* and the *conquistas*. While Raúl has overhauled the *conquistas*, the central elements (free education and health care) remain. In the case of *nationalism*, it has the double dimension of anti-imperialism and claims of continuity with the independence Cuban movements of the 19th century. As US foreign policy for the first time deals with Cuba in a non-colonial manner, the Cuban regime's rationale for curtailing political liberties as a necessity to face the (real or perceived) siege of an imperial power is weakened.

As the new US-Cuba relation undermines the claims to legitimacy of what Cubans call "the internal embargo", the case for political liberalisation faces more favourable conditions. In other words, activists and independent journalist alike have on their side a persuasive question: if the US is no longer positioned as *the* threat, why we still face harassment? As a result, the political weight on economic performance as a central element of legitimacy has increased, thus making the possibility of reversing the *maturing* path less likely. The regime can basically say: *we guarantee the conquistas and the feasibility of a prosperous socialism*. To summarise, the economic reforms are likely to endure as well as the prospects for socio-political liberalisation.

Liberalisation, however, does not lead to democratisation, although it may facilitate it. As this prospect has to do with the future, Raúl Castro has located the legitimacy of the regime not in the past – the 1959 epopee of the revolutionary veterans – but in the promise of socialist "prosperity and sustainability". The gap that may emerge between promise and reality will most probably shape the controversies within what Geoffray (2015) calls the "emerging contentious space" in Cuba – an embryonic public sphere that surfaced in the post-Fidel liberalisation. Certainly, it is and it will be in the interest of the critical socialist pole within that space to counter the voices for capitalist reform with the case for the democratic market-socialist alternative.

Appendix: Chronology of Cuban politics (2006-2014)

The following chronology does not seek to be comprehensive, but simply indicative. Its purpose is to arbitrarily list some key events focused (mainly, but not exclusively) on two processes: 1) change in leadership, and 2) economic reform. References on each event have been given in the body of the thesis where appropriate.

* * *

August 2006: Fidel Castro resigns as commander in chief of the armed forces, president of the Council of State and Ministers, and first secretary of the Communist Party, and provisionally transfers these positions to his brother Raúl Castro.

October 2006: *Juventud Rebelde* reveals that Raúl has set up an academic team to study socialist property relations as part of the search of a new economic model.

December 2006: Raúl conducts a survey among Party members on what the most pressing popular concerns were – economics topped the results.

January 2007: Raúl asks the Party cadre on economic commissions (municipal and provincial) and on enterprises to debate and submit proposals to improve economic performance without leading to bigger budgets.

July 2007: In his first major speech to Cubans, Raúl criticises how the country is economically run and suggests the need of “structural and conceptual changes”.

September 2007: Around 800,000 Communist Party members and a similar number of Young Communists are asked to discuss Raúl’s July speech.

October-December 2007: 1st public discussion on the Cuban economy takes place.

February 2008: Fidel Castro declines to the potential nomination for the Presidency by the National Assembly, hence leading Raúl Castro to formally (no longer provisionally) take over as President of the Council of State and Ministers.

March 2008: Cubans are allowed to buy computers and DVD players, rent cars and book rooms in hotels. Also, they are offered mobile phone services for the first time.

July 2008: In his 26th July speech, Raúl lessens expectations by acknowledging the negative impact on the Cuban economy caused by the global economic slowdown.

August-September 2008: Hurricanes Gustav and Ike cause 10 billion USD damages.

October 2008: Leasing program of idle land to private farmers and co-ops begins.

January 2009: Barack Obama takes office as President of the United States, leading to a relative improvement of US-Cuba relations that will last almost a year.

March 2009: Raúl reshapes the top leadership, dismissing leading officials like Carlos Lage and Felipe Pérez Roque, along with ten other ministers seen as Fidel-appointed successors. FAR officers close to Raúl and rising provincial Party cadre take over.

April 2009: The recently revamped Council of Ministers approves an austerity plan that takes into account the effects of the 2008 global financial crisis.

June 2009: The Economy and Planning Ministry draws a plan to reform the Cuban socialist economy, which will turn out to be a predecessor of the 2010 *Lineamientos*.

August 2009: - Raúl's speech at the National Assembly opens 2nd public discussion on the economy. He also announces the creation of a Comptroller General office to face corruption, and implies the next will be his last Party Congress.

September 2009: Closure of workplace lunchrooms begins.

October 2009: *Granma* calls the Cubans "pigeons" that walk with the "mouths open" as the state gives them "everything".

December 2009: Detention of Alan Gross, a US agent who was illegally entering Internet transmission equipment to Cuba. US-Cuba relations deteriorate.

February 2010: On a speech to top officials, Murillo (Economy Minister) attacked the "paternalistic" policies and advocated a state's retreat from small economic activity.

March 2010: Opposition member Orlando Zapata dies on a hunger strike, causing international condemnation and renewed attention to the *Ladies in White*.

April 2010: Cuban barbershops are handed over by the state to the barbers, through leasing arrangements – a preview of the major state’s retreat to come.

July 2010: 52 political prisoners are released by the Cuban government, in a deal brokered by the Catholic Church in which all but 13 accepted asylum in Spain. By April 2011, a total of 115 former prisoners will have arrived to Spain.

July-August 2010: Fidel Castro appears in public again, on TV, several times, speaking about international issues – an oblique endorsement of Raúl internal policies.

September 2010: CTC announces the government will lay off 500,000 employees over six months, and another 500,000 thereafter; also, the non-state sector is announced to be expanded in order to absorb the workforce made available by the state.

November 2010: Raúl announces the 6th PCC Congress in an event attended by Hugo Chávez. Raúl warns the Congress will discuss one single subject: the economy.

December 2010: The document that will guide the Party Congress, the “Guidelines on Economic and Social Policy”, is discussed by the grassroots during the next three months – hence becoming the 3rd public discussion on the economy.

January 2011: A long expected telecomm fibre-optic cable arrives from Venezuela – however, it will start working until 2013.

February 2011: A meeting of an “expanded” Council of Ministers scraps the six-month deadline of 500,000 layoffs in favour of an open-ended approach.

March 2011: Fidel resigns retrospectively as First Secretary of the Party, his last leadership post.

April 2011: The 6th PCC Congress takes place. This meeting approves the final version of the *Guidelines* and elects new Party leadership. In the closing speech of the event, Raúl proposes limits in top posts to a maximum of two five-year terms.

October-November 2011: Legalisation of car market, house market, and lifting of restrictions on internal migration from the provinces to the capital.

November 2011: Abolition of Sugar Ministry in favour of a state-company, as part of a broader move away from CPE and towards entities independent from ministries.

December 2011: Farmers are authorised to directly sell their produce to the tourist sector. Besides, the non-state sector (both rural and urban) is offered banking services, loans included. The general public can also apply for loans for house repair.

December 2011: *Granma* announces that in the coming year over 2,000 workshops will be leased to workers, which will then become self-employed. The model is based on the barbershops'. In 2013, other 1,000 similar workshops will adopt the system.

April 2012: The 1st PCC Conference discusses the adaptation of the Party to the rise of the non-state sector, and approves the term limits on top leadership positions.

July 2012: On a speech to the National Assembly, Murillo announces more land-rights to farmers and foretells state companies will follow the sugar-sector model.

December 2012: Urban co-ops are approved, and UBPCs (quasi co-ops) are granted the same rights as private (rural) co-ops and small farmers except land-ownership.

January 2013: Approval of Tax Code on private transactions, non-state social security contributions, and on state and non-state sales.

January 2013: There are lifted major restrictions on international travel to/from Cuba to both nationals living abroad or at homeland.

September 2013: Launch of new Port of Mariel, a joint project with Brazilian capital including an industrial park, intends to attract major FDI and international sea trade.

October 2013: *Granma* discloses a plan to achieve currency unification, which would bring an end to the dual currency introduced during the 1990s “special period”.

March 2014: Approval of a (friendlier yet restrictive) new Foreign Investment Law.

March 2014: Currency unification takes another step with a roadmap for companies.

April 2014: New degree of independence of state companies is approved and it is publicly acknowledged that a New Company Law will be released on 2015.

June 2014: A new Labour Code that covers the non-state sector for the first time comes into effect. A consultation that started in workplaces in July 2013 led to a draft on December that year, which guided the 20th CTC Congress on February 2014.

June 2014: On a speech to the Council of Ministers, Murillo explains that retail services will be non-state managed (either co-op or self-employed) “as a rule”.

November 2014: A document specifying the areas of the Cuban economy with “opportunities” for foreign investors is officially released on FIHAV 2014.

December 2014: Raúl Castro in Havana and Barack Obama in Washington simultaneously announce a prisoner swap (Alan Gross and an unknown spy in exchange for the remaining Cuban Five) and a “normalisation” of US-Cuba relations – both sides thank the intermediation of Pope Francis and the government of Canada.

February 2015: The Seventh Party Congress is scheduled for April 2016. It is expected that the revolutionary veterans step down from the Politburo, paving the way for a new generation of leaders, hence to a fully-fledged post-Castro Cuba.

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