

Defining the Revolutionary Totalitarian Personality: The Parallel Lives of Adolf Hitler and Fidel Castro

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Abstract

This article compares the surprisingly similar personalities and political trajectories of Adolf Hitler and Fidel Castro in order to define a specific, ‘revolutionary totalitarian’ type of personality. This is a union of authoritarian personality, revolutionary tendencies, and genuine charisma. Moreover, it can develop only in a modern context allowing the creation of an effective personality cult. Politically, its outcome is a revolutionary transformation of state and society leading to the establishment of a new system of values paralleled by the imposition of a new, totalitarian order. Ironically, the consolidation of the new regime leads to the complete dissolution of the leader’s revolutionary tendency, which is preserved only in foreign policy. There, however, it can lead to extremely serious military consequences.

Keywords

revolutionary totalitarian leaders – authoritarian personality – charismatic leadership – political psychology – Adolf Hitler – Fidel Castro

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You may pronounce us “guilty” a thousand times over, but the goddess of the eternal court of history will smile (...), for *she* will acquit us.

ADOLF HITLER, MARCH 27, 1924, *The Beer Hall Putsch trial*

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Condemn me. It does not matter. History will absolve me.

FIDEL CASTRO, OCTOBER 16, 1953, *The Moncada trial*

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1 Introduction

Despite its title, this article is not biographical or historical in nature. It only uses two historical figures in order to support the definition of a new type of personality that I claim to be most relevant to the study of the creation of totalitarian regimes. Twentieth century history was quite generous in providing such examples but an updated edition of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* would be likely to include a section on totalitarianism focusing on the comparison between the German and Soviet World War II dictators. The authoritarian personality literature uses frequently Hitler and Stalin as related case studies. Yet, the former was a genuinely charismatic leader who built a totalitarian regime from scratch. The latter was a bureaucrat who used intrigue to take control of an already existing totalitarian construct. Their regimes were similar; their personalities were not. This article makes the rather unusual choice of comparing Adolf Hitler with Fidel Castro, emphasizing their surprisingly similar personalities and political trajectories. Indeed, both men started their path to glory with failed coups. Put on trial, both expressed the conviction that history would acquit them. Both succeeded in taking power and used the opportunity to revolutionize their countries' polity and society. Enhancing their charismatic features through the use of an elaborated personality cult, they acquired a high degree of legitimacy which allowed them to create and consolidate totalitarian regimes. Domestically, they suppressed completely the political rights and civil liberties of their countrymen. Internationally, they tried to impose themselves as leading world personalities and did not hesitate to initiate risky military adventures. In constitutional terms, the resulting totalitarian

constructs were original reunions of bureaucratic structures and individualistic styles of governance.

Still, more than one reader skeptically will point to the huge differences between post-WWI Germany and Cold War Cuba. Political, social, economic, cultural, and geopolitical conditions were so dissimilar that it could be hard to make a useful comparison; Mussolini, Lenin or Mao, it might be suggested, can more usefully be compared with Hitler. In fact, the latter claim is invalidated by specific elements presented in Section 8. At a more abstract level, the generalization potential of two very similar case studies is not as high as that of examples which, while belonging to the same category, present significant differences. Contrasting two European fascist leaders such as Hitler and Mussolini or two Third World communists such as Castro and Mao – in other words, comparing individuals who acted similarly in similar circumstances – is hardly the best way to construct a universal concept. Therefore, I decided to choose precisely two leaders who succeeded in building fully-fledged totalitarian regimes under the most diverse domestic and international conditions. If highly industrialized post-imperial Weimar Republic as well as US-dominated underdeveloped Cuba witnessed the emergence of leaders of the same type, the associated theoretical construct can reasonably be assessed as universally valid.

Consequently, this article uses the examples of Hitler and Castro in order to define a specific, 'revolutionary totalitarian' type of personality as well as the associated category of political leadership. The findings of the following sections allow the definition of the revolutionary totalitarian personality as a specific type of personality characterized by the following key features. First, it represents a sub-category of the authoritarian personality. As such, it reflects a desire for security, order, power, status, structured lines of authority, a conventional set of values or outlook, a demand for unquestioning obedience, and a tendency to be hostile toward or use as scapegoats individuals of minority or nontraditional groups. Second, during the early phases of its development, it nevertheless contradicts the authoritarian obsession with stability, order, and conservatism: it favors the revolutionary transformation of the 'conditions of a nation profoundly and in its essence' (Domarus quoted by Noakes 2001: 91). It desires the adoption of a fundamentally new system of values. Moreover, the latter should be imposed on the society in the framework of a radically new socio-political order that is the result of a revolutionary process. Third, it is genuinely charismatic and therefore has the potential to influence directly and effectively the course of a revolutionary process. Fourth, within the new order, it favors the absolute power of the supreme leader and the regime's total control of the society. Fifth, once this stage is reached, the revolutionary

trend dissipates. 'Permanent revolution' can mark the political discourse while administrative and ideological changes can be operated frequently, but the fundamental features of the new totalitarian system are never questioned. In a word, the authoritarian tendency toward stability and order replaces the revolutionary approach of the earlier phases.

This brings under scrutiny the critical point of the relation between the revolutionary totalitarian personality and the socio-political context of its manifestation. Totalitarian regimes can not exist without the modern means of propaganda and control created during the first part of the twentieth century. Consequently, it is improper to speak of revolutionary totalitarian personality before that period despite the fact that individuals with similar features did certainly exist. Those features could not develop to reach their full potential and had to remain within the more traditional limits of the authoritarian personality. This means that the revolutionary totalitarian personality is intimately associated with and strongly conditioned in its development by the process of effective creation of a totalitarian regime and, more precisely, by the style of leadership – the relationship between the leader and followers – that takes form during this process. This is a malignant transformational leadership accompanied by a less important transactional dimension. It belongs clearly to the charismatic type of domination as the leader is 'identified with his actual following, both by himself and by them, in a kind of mystical or magical union' (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1965: 44) – a situation obviously related to totalitarianism's 'political religion' dimension. Yet, in order to reach such results on a national scale, the leader's genuine charisma needs to be enforced by a well organized personality cult. This is a purely bureaucratic construct which uses modern technical and organizational instruments. Consequently, this type of leadership also borders Weber's rational-legal category.

Finally, in terms of foreign policy, the revolutionary totalitarian personality 'challenges constraints' and is 'closed to information' (Hermann et al. 1996; Cottam et al. 2004: 103–4). Depending on the potential of the country, expansionistic or evangelistic leadership styles are adopted. There is a strong tendency toward aggressive foreign policy and military intervention. This parallels the revolutionary phase of the leader's domestic trajectory. A similar radical change of the dominant system of values is promoted at the international level. This should result in the imposition of a revolutionary new world order. The victory of the world revolution deserves any risk and any sacrifice, including that of an entire people.

To conclude, the revolutionary totalitarian leaders unite authoritarian personality, revolutionary tendencies, and genuine charisma in a context allowing them to take advantage of modern technical and organizational means.

They are exceptionally endowed political agitators who, due to their remarkable charisma as well as to an elaborated personality cult, succeed in initiating and leading to victory revolutionary political movements. Once in power, they transform profoundly their country and society through the creation of a totalitarian regime based on a new system of values. The consolidation of this regime, however, puts an end to the revolutionary dimension that continues to be promoted only at the international level.

The following sections provide arguments supporting the existence and detailing the features of the revolutionary totalitarian personality. Section 2 defines totalitarianism and emphasizes its 'political religion' dimension as well as the closely related key role of the totalitarian leader. Section 3 engages the literature on the psychology of political leaders. It analyzes the authoritarian personality, the foreign policy leadership styles, and Max Weber's charismatic domination in order to show that a distinction should be made between authoritarian and totalitarian leaders. Sections 4 to 6 present comparatively Hitler's and Castro's traits that further support such a distinction: revolutionary features, personality cult, and international actions. The findings are analyzed and articulated in Section 7 in order to define the key characteristics of the revolutionary totalitarian personality. The Conclusion briefly presents the perspectives on the emergence of new revolutionary totalitarian leaders.

2 Defining Totalitarianism

The totalitarian regimes created after the First World War were perceived by at least some of their contemporaries as dictatorships 'of a new and terrible kind, violent, ideologically inspired, endlessly aggressive, and possessing extraordinary new technological means to dominate their helpless subjects utterly' (Gleason 1995: 4). Unsurprisingly, political scientists created a massive body of literature analyzing this subject (see Friedrich and Brzezinski 1965; Arendt 1979; Curtis 1979; Menze 1981; Tucker 1990; Gleason 1995; Linz and Stepan 1996; Roberts 2006). The key features of totalitarian regimes were identified by Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski in their influential second edition of *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* as (1) an elaborate ideology, to which everyone is supposed to adhere, projected toward a perfect final state of mankind; (2) a single mass party typically led by one man, with a hard core of members passionately and unquestioningly dedicated to the ideology, and superior to or completely intertwined with the governmental bureaucracy; (3) a system of terror directed against demonstrable 'enemies' of the regime as well as against more or less arbitrarily selected classes of the population;

(4) a technologically conditioned, near-complete monopoly of control of all means of effective mass communication; (5) a similar monopoly of the effective use of all weapons of armed combat; and (6) a central control and direction of the entire economy (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1965: 22). Other authors preferred to subdivide these elements or added new ones. To give only one example, Élie Halévy famously spoke of 'state control of thought' (*étatisation de la pensée*) through 'the organization of enthusiasm' (Halévy 1938: 213). The list of totalitarianism's defining features was consequently enlarged to 13 variables by Michael Curtis (Curtis 1979: 7–9) and to 18 by Norman Davies (Davies 1997: 905–908). Yet, most of these successive reevaluations of the totalitarian phenomenon did not question the centrality of the six points identified by Friedrich and Brzezinski.

There is only one element that has generated considerable dispute: the system of terror in point 3. Hannah Arendt, among others, claimed that it was the systematic use of terror that fundamentally defined totalitarianism. Therefore, only Hitler's Germany and Stalin's USSR qualified as totalitarian (Arendt 1979). This radical view implicitly reduces the category of totalitarian regimes to only two case studies, an oversimplification that has not been accepted by a majority of authors. In fact, Friedrich and Brzezinski were rather flexible on their third point. Using the example of the post-Stalin Soviet regime, they stated that the system of total power survived 'since the controls remained all-permeating' (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1965: 43). In the same vein, Ernest A. Menze noted that Arendt's 'terror might be replaced by "mobilization" as the chief characteristic of totalitarianism' (Menze 1981: 173).

Castro's regime is a case in point. Unlike German Jews or Soviet *kulaks*, the members of Cuban groups and social classes designated as 'enemies' were not mass murdered. They were publicly labeled 'worms' (*gusanos*) and deprived of their property; but instead of being sent to concentration camps they were allowed to emigrate. For somebody sharing Arendt's views, such a regime could not be totalitarian. Yet, Cuba has been one of the most repressive and depriving communist systems. Opposition to Castro's policies has been swiftly and brutally dealt with (Werlau 2008: 143; 145). The Ministry of the Interior (MININT) ranks as one of the most efficient agencies of its kind in the world. It employs about 100,000 agents (Solís 2004: 42) and has at least half a million part-time informants for a population of eleven million. This 'gigantic, intricate, and sophisticated repressive apparatus' monitors and controls the citizenry, foreign visitors, and even members of the ruling elite (Werlau 2008: 151). Another repressive instrument is represented by the 'Rapid Response Brigades.' They are government-sponsored paramilitary groups of workers who respond with physical force to any civil disobedience or political protest (Solís 2004: 57;

Werlau 2008: 151). One of the Cuban mass organizations, the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, functions as a spy organization with millions of members. These committees were set up on every city block or large building in order to identify enemies of the Revolution for the state's internal security apparatus. 'Gossip became an arm of state power' (Dominguez 1993/2006: 105–6). The repression was especially brutal during the 1960s. At that time there were 60,000 political prisoners for a population of around six million. Most were serving 20-to-30-year terms, and many were doing hard labor (Solís 2004: 43). Between 1965 and 1968 over 25,000 young men were reportedly held in 'Military Units to Aid Production' that many analysts describe as concentration camps (Solís 2004: 41; Werlau 2008: 149). The number of political prisoners decreased considerably only after most of Castro's opponents became too afraid to protest or had emigrated. In other words, mass murder has been absent but the degree of repression has not been moderate enough to justify assessing the regime as simply authoritarian despite the existence of the other five features identified by Friedrich and Brzezinski. Communist Cuba belongs to the same totalitarian category as Nazi Germany.

At a deeper level of analysis, an important distinction can be made based on the fundamental criterion taken into consideration in order to define a totalitarian regime. Approaches based on outcomes focus exclusively on 'those regimes considered "completely" and "perfectly" totalitarian' (Gentile 2008: 299). Approaches emphasizing the level of intention consider that the key element is the 'constant presence of a totalitarian logic' in both the ideology and the political actions of the regime (Gentile 2004: 352–3). This latter approach, which I prefer, makes the issue of the system of terror totally irrelevant.

A final feature of totalitarianism has to be mentioned due to its close relation to the leader's role: its 'political religion' dimension (see Gentile 2004; Babík 2006; Maier 2004; Maier 2007; Maier and Schäfer 2007). Hermann Lübbe identified eight religious features of totalitarian regimes, the first being 'the redeemer role of the totalitarian "*Führer*"' (Cattaruzza 2005: 4). Emilio Gentile developed a model of totalitarianism as political religion characterized by five elements that include 'the necessity of a charismatic leader as pivot of the totalitarian state and interpreter of national consciousness' (Gentile 2000: 40). Given the centrality of the charismatic '*Führer*,' the concept of political religion cannot be ignored when dealing with the special relationship between leader and followers that legitimates the totalitarian construct.

To sum up, totalitarian regimes were a creation of the twentieth century characterized by fundamentally new features. The latter include the key role occupied by the leader of the single mass party. It is therefore logical to examine if and in what way his personality traits can be put into relation with the

characteristics of the totalitarian political system. The following section presents the research focusing on the psychology of undemocratic leaders.

3 The Psychology of Political Leaders

Historically, the study of political leaders was strongly influenced by two opposing interpretative traditions. The intentionalist approach is marked by concentrating research interest and explanations in the leader's figure, ideological options, political choices, and decisions. The structuralist (or 'functionalist') approach, on the contrary, places much emphasis on social determinants. In the first case, Nazi Germany is almost perceived as a one-man construct. In the second, Hitler can be presented as a 'weak dictator' (Dobry 2006: 157). Analysts have been trying since the 1930s to find a reasonable middle way between these two extremes. One goal was to find *when* personality counts. In 1969, Fred Greenstein argued that the personality of a leader may be especially important under four conditions: when the actor occupies a strategic location; when the situation is ambiguous or unstable; when there are no clear precedents or routine role requirements; and when spontaneous or especially effortful behavior is required. The context in which the actor is operating is very important: the impact of leader personality increases to the degree that the environment admits of restructuring (Post et al. 2003: 2; Cottam et al. 2004: 15). Similarly, in 1976 Margaret G. Hermann identified seven circumstances in which leader personality is most apt to affect foreign policy (Hermann 1976; Post et al. 2003: 2; see also Section 7).

Much attention was paid to the concept of authoritarian personality. This is a vast domain of which I can provide here only a very brief description. Moreover, I assess it only in relation with the narrow category of political leaders. In 1950, Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson, and Nevitt Sanford explored the question of whether political authoritarianism could be traced to a personality syndrome. Using a psychoanalytic approach, they argued that authoritarian personalities like Hitler were the product of authoritarian patterns of childhood upbringing and a resultant weak ego. This led to several central personality traits, including conventionalism, authoritarian aggression, high value placed on power and toughness, destructiveness and cynicism, stereotypy, and projectivity (Adorno et al. 1950: 228; Cottam et al. 2004: 23). Many aspects of the work of Adorno and his colleagues, including their measurement scale, came under heavy criticism. The debate was revitalized during the 1980s and the 1990s by Bob Altemeyer, who used a trait-based approach. His findings suggest that the authoritarian personality is unlikely to

engage in critical thinking and, when a scapegoat is selected, tends to believe that the country's problems are due entirely to it. Hitler's obsession with the 'Jewish plot' and Castro's one with 'el bloqueo' are perfect examples of this attitude. Moreover, authoritarian personalities see the world as a very dangerous place, the resulting fear driving much of their aggression (Altemeyer 1996; Cottam et al. 2004: 24–5). For the needs of this article, I will use the following working definition provided by a medical bibliographical source. It describes the authoritarian personality as

a personality pattern reflecting a desire for security, order, power, and status, with a desire for structured lines of authority, a conventional set of values or outlook, a demand for unquestioning obedience, and a tendency to be hostile toward or use as scapegoats individuals of minority or nontraditional groups (Editors of the American Heritage Dictionaries 2002).

Another element useful for this article is James M. Burns's 1978 identification of two basic types of leadership. Leadership itself is described as a relationship between the leader and followers. The former mobilizes institutional, political, psychological, and other resources in order to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of the latter. This can be done in two ways. On the one hand, there is the transactional leadership. The leader is basically exchanging one valued thing for another, such as jobs for votes. On the other hand, there is the transformational leadership. The leader and the followers raise each other to higher levels of motivation and morality. The followers feel elevated by the relationship with their leader and become more active themselves (Burns 1992: 24–6; Cottam et al. 2004: 98). Yet, under certain circumstances, the followers' higher level of motivation may have deeply negative effects such as legitimating the imposition of a brutal dictatorship. In this case, the leadership is a 'malignant' transformational one (Cottam et al. 2004: 99; see Section 7).

Section 6 will analyze the two dictators' foreign policies. Consequently, it is worth mentioning the typology proposed in 1996 by Margaret G. Hermann, Thomas Preston, and Michael Young. Using three dimensions – responsiveness to or awareness of constraints; openness to information; and motivational focus – these authors identified eight types of foreign policy leadership style for world leaders. Following this typology, both Hitler and Castro can be assessed as 'challenging constraints' and being 'closed to information.' In terms of personality they were similar. However, their respective situations were different. Hitler's style was clearly 'expansionistic:' focus of attention was on expanding leader's, government's, and state's span of control, even if this meant igniting a

world war. Castro had the same propensity, but his country lacked Germany's potential. While he got militarily involved abroad, it was clear that territorial conquest was out of question. Castro's foreign policy leadership style was therefore 'evangelistic:' focus of attention was on persuading others to join in his mission and in mobilizing others around his message (Hermann et al. 1996; Cottam et al. 2004: 103–4). He became one of the champions of the non-aligned movement while supporting effectively Latin-American and African Marxist and anti-colonial movements. Unable to become a Hitler-style conqueror, he tried to impose himself as an ideological leader of the (third) world.

Castro's and Hitler's obsession with leadership and domination was closely related to the charismatic features of their personalities. Max Weber famously identified charismatic domination as a model conceptually opposed to both traditional and rational-bureaucratic alternatives. Within this model, the leader's legitimacy depends on being chosen to fulfill some spiritual mission while being 'endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities' (Weber 1947: 358; Chemers 2001: 382–3). Such exceptional leaders emerge in times of crisis. They are able to attract an affective community of supporters, largely unconcerned with rational economic affairs (Eatwell 2006: 141). In turn, this emotional community between leader and mass allows the creation of a new, even revolutionary, configuration of socio-political relations within the society (Kallis 2006: 25–6).

Of course, Weber's charismatic domination is an ideal-type. In practice, it is always mixed with bureaucratic elements. The most visible part of this mix is represented by the personality cult. The leader's charisma is strongly enhanced by the party – and, once in power, state – propaganda apparatus. In certain cases, purely un-charismatic leaders (such as North Korea's Kim Jong-il) were able to create relatively charismatic leaderships on the exclusive basis of their effective cult of personality. Hitler and Castro were genuinely charismatic but their leaderships were nevertheless rooted in a highly bureaucratic, calculated, and often transactional perception of regime legitimacy that used the personality cult as its main instrument (Kallis 2006: 32–40). An obvious result of this mix of charismatic and rational-bureaucratic elements was the very structure of the German and Cuban totalitarian regimes. There was a dual state characterized by the coexistence and overlapping of the routine administration of what Ernst Fraenkel called a 'normative state' bound to legal procedures, and the intervention administration of a 'special measures state' that was not legally bound. Both Hitler and Castro eliminated the coordination of fragmented bureaucratic structures. In the absence of institutional possibilities for solving conflicts, the *Führer* and the *Lider Máximo* were invested with a central role as both referees and coordinators (Lepsius 2006: 186–7). This is why Adolf

Hitler and Fidel Castro were able to dominate fully the politics of their respective countries.

Karl Dietrich Bracher noted that it is difficult to deny the central role of the charismatic leader in the rise of all totalitarian systems (Bracher 1981: 19). This highlights an interesting aspect. The literature on the personality of dictators rarely, if ever, makes a distinction between authoritarian and totalitarian leaders. The latter might nevertheless share specific features. The following sections use the cases of Hitler and Castro in order to bring these features under scrutiny.

4 Revolutionary Leaders

The first and most obvious of the above mentioned features is that the two leaders transformed their respective societies in a revolutionary way. While classical definitions emphasize class and violence, a recent trend in the study of revolutions rejects the importance of these elements (see Foran 2003: 9). Consequently, this article uses the definition formulated by Jeffery Paige:

A revolution is a rapid and fundamental transformation in the categories of social life and consciousness, the metaphysical assumptions on which these categories are based, and the power relations in which they are expressed as a result of widespread popular acceptance of a utopian alternative to the current social order (Paige 2003: 24).

Hitler himself had a similar approach. In a speech delivered on March 19, 1934, he claimed that 'the victory of a party is a change of government; the victory of a world view [*Weltanschauung*] is a revolution, which transforms the conditions of a nation profoundly and in its essence' (Domarus quoted by Noakes 2001: 91). Therefore, he perceived his own actions as revolutionary *par excellence*. Many of his non-Marxist contemporaries agreed (Lucius 1934). Jeremy Noakes is only one of the recent analysts equally studying 'The Nazi Revolution' (Noakes 2001). Of course, there are authors who continue to label, for example, the Zapatistas as revolutionary because they are 'progressive' and the Talibans as counterrevolutionaries because they are 'reactionary' (Foran 2003: 15). Yet, Karen Kampwirth aptly noted that

this objection is problematic, for it often means that movements are labeled revolutionary if the analyst finds their goals palatable, or counterrevolutionary if those goals are distasteful. (...) I think we have to

identify the Taliban as revolutionary as well, no matter how repugnant we find them (Kampwirth 2003: 239).

This is also true for the Nazi movement. 'Reactionary' and 'distasteful' as it was, it nevertheless transformed the Germans' *Weltanschauung* through a major change of political regime. As such, it was a revolutionary movement (for a review of Hitler's assessment as a revolutionary see Lukacs 1998: 76–112).

Aryan Race Revolution

Certain historians portrayed Hitler as an amoral nihilist. Yet, compulsory sterilization, euthanasia, racism, and racial extermination were not the product of ignoring or rejecting ethics, but rather came from embracing a coherent – albeit pernicious – ethic that was part of a specific ideology (Weikart 2009: 2). Indeed, Hitler was 'the most radical of the radicals as exponent of an internally coherent (however repellent to us) world-view' (Kershaw 2008: 39). His ideological construct was an extreme form of social Darwinism claiming that humans were essentially unequal and thus needed not be treated equally. The 'iron logic of Nature' subjected humans to immutable biological laws. The most important one was the struggle for existence, which produced all that was good in the world. It had to continue, if degeneration and decline were to be avoided. Progress could only exist as *biological* progress, leaving aside all other moral considerations (Weikart 2009: 3–5).

Consequently, the Nazi revolution restructured the German society according to race. Horrendous programs were put in place. Compulsory abortion and sterilization was imposed by law in the case of the 'hereditarily ill.' Permission was given to castrate 'dangerous habitual criminals.' 'Asocials' were sent to the concentration camps (Geary 2000: 60). Between 1934 and 1939, sterilization affected some 0.5 per cent of the entire population of Germany. Between 1939 and 1941, about 72,000 people were euthanized (Lee 1998: 76). All these concerned 'unhealthy Aryans.' The situation of Jews and Gypsies was worse. From 1941 onwards, the 'Final Solution' led to the monstrous killing of over six million Jews in extermination camps (*Ibid.*, 74). Hitler's revolution did indeed transform the conditions of his nation 'profoundly and in its essence.' But it did so in the most sinister possible way.

Tropical Marxism

On January 4, 1959, the victorious Fidel Castro promised to establish a 'civilized, democratic system.' Free elections would take place within fifteen months (Latell 2005: 147). At that time, Castro had a rather confused political program

centered on the concept of social justice and favoring overtly the impoverished *clases populares* (Pérez-Stable 1998: 61). He had, however, a very clear goal: to change Cuba while staying indefinitely in power. He decided that the most pragmatic solution was the conversion to Marxism. This was a gradual process. The decision was perhaps taken sometime during the spring or summer of 1959, but the socialist nature of the revolution was first announced only in April 1961 while Castro declared himself a Marxist-Leninist in December 1961 (Latell 2005: 149). Over the following five decades, Castro's policies fluctuated between communist orthodoxy and heterodoxy (Balfour 1995: 76). Yet, Cuban communism has been a genuine one. Castro adopted many of the elements of Soviet orthodoxy that suited his needs and local conditions (*Ibid.*, 76) and promoted the key principle of social justice. The latter led to impressive social accomplishments, allowing the *líder máximo* to present himself as a legitimate leader who ensured the welfare of his countrymen. In political, social, and economic terms Cuba experienced a fully-fledged revolution whose undeniable architect was Fidel Castro.

5 Demigod Leaders

The Hitler Myth

As mentioned in Section 3, charismatic domination is always mixed with bureaucratic elements. The leader's charisma is strongly enhanced by propaganda efforts that take the form of a personality cult. In the German case, the genuine 'Hitler myth' could be launched only at the end of the 1920s, when Goebbels' propaganda machine became fully operational. It came to maturity after 1933, when all state resources could be employed. Thanks to modern technology, Hitler was able to make his public image omnipresent: the face staring from every billboard, every office wall and newsreel; the voice over the radio which all citizens were required to listen to (Bullock 1992: 368; 372). This allowed the construction of a heroic image and popular conception of Hitler that 'imputed grossly exaggerated and idealized characteristics to his person' (Dorpat 2002: xx). The key element was 'the rise from the depths of national degradation to the heights of national greatness: a near-miracle brought about by the unique genius of the *Führer*' (Kershaw 2008: 964). The adoring, even worshipful, response of the German people was a perfect illustration of totalitarianism's 'political religion' dimension. To use Hermann Lübbe's terminology, Hitler became a redeemer and his revolution was interpreted according to an eschatological meaning (Cattaruzza 2005: 4). The image building was so

successful that it prompted the *Führer* himself to believe in his own grandiose fictions (Dorpat 2002: xx). He not only gave his audience reassurance and hope, but also received back renewal of his confidence and confirmation of his own self-image (Bullock 1992: 357). A vicious circle for the transmission and perpetuation of irrational ideas was established in which both Hitler and the Germans contributed to and participated in creating and maintaining the myth (Dorpat 2002: xx).

The Castro Myth

In early 1959 Castro was the head of a movement of enormous popularity. At the same time, given the poor Cubans' aspirations for social and economic change, he had vast opportunities for manipulation. Displaying almost unlimited energy and delivering spellbinding speeches hours in length, the young leader fostered direct dialogue with his new followers. He listened to grievances, received petitions, and considered complaints while moving incessantly throughout the country. Castro was increasingly perceived as a messianic personality. He made full use of the extensive radio and television networks. Already in 1959 he became 'the stuff of legends and lore, the subject of books and songs, of poems and film.' He was a celebrity, a folk hero, and the hope of the hopeful (Pérez 2006: 238–43). Much of this was derived from Castro's personal appeal, but propaganda efforts were also important. Besides TV and radio, millions of photographs, posters, and billboards with his portrait were distributed. His effigy was printed on the one and ten *pesos* bills (Solís 2004: 48). His speeches were published and studied in schools and universities. A new public image was constructed by replacing negative impressions of Castro as '*pistolero*, gangland hit man, grandstander, pseudo-anarchist, and unprincipled opportunist' with the portrait of a noble, moral, and principled revolutionary (Latell 2005: 166–7). His private life simply disappeared. While – unlike Hitler – he had a large family and, allegedly, many extramarital affairs, the media was instructed not to comment on his personal doings (Eckstein 2003: 19). To the public, Castro appeared to 'have joined a strict monastic religious order founded on vows of poverty, chastity, and humility.' He was married to the revolution and that was his only consuming interest (Latell 2005: 167). This mix of genuine charisma and propaganda efforts allowed the *líder máximo* to develop and preserve a unique relationship with the masses. The 'political religion' dimension of the Cuban totalitarian regime was as important and as successful as that of the Nazi one. It generated mass loyalty, provided unifying authority, and safeguarded the integrity and autonomy of the regime (Gonzalez 1974: 169).

6 Napoleonic Leaders

Toward World War

Nazi Germany was a typical example of aggressive, militarist regime that contested overtly the international *status quo*. From the very beginning, Hitler was obsessed with challenging the international order established at Versailles. Furthermore, his ideology of *Blut und Boden* explicitly claimed 'living space' in the East. Finally, he perceived war as an effective, even attractive instrument allowing him to reach these goals. As already mentioned in Section 3, these features are specific to an 'expansionistic' style of foreign policy leadership. Leader's, government's, and state's span of control had to be expanded even if this meant igniting a world war (Cottam et al. 2004: 103–4).

Moreover, Hitler involved himself directly in the direction of military operations. Already on February 4, 1938 he announced that he would 'exercise personally the immediate command over the whole armed forces.' In December 1941 he received from the Reichstag the 'title and reality of Supreme War Lord (*Oberster Feldherr*)' (Strawson 1973: 24; 29). In spite of Hitler's total ignorance of how battles were in fact conducted, his interference, intuition, and will-power were often decisive in winning victories. At other times, the same ignorance led to catastrophic failure (*Ibid.*, 7). But most of Hitler's many errors in conduct of World War II were linked to his impulsivity, his defensive denial of reality, and other pathological traits brought about by his psychic traumas (Dorpat 2002: xii; Lewin 1984). After 1942, these serious mistakes clearly contributed to the disastrous defeats that brought the destruction of the Reich and Hitler's own suicide on April 30, 1945.

Tropical Napoleon

Castro also contested the international *status quo*. Exporting his 'anti-imperialist' revolution was part of *líder máximo's* messianic agenda (Werlau 2008: 144). Cuba's international commitments were exceptional for a country of its size and economic status. Castro sent abroad proportionally more forces than the United States at the peak of the Vietnam war (Dominguez 1993/2006: 143; 145). Half a million Cuban soldiers served in Africa, some 377,000 in Angola (Eckstein 2003: 172). Like Hitler, Castro enjoyed controlling his forces at strategic level. Furthermore, in Angola in 1987–8 he became so involved that he spent 80 percent of his time taking decisions down to platoon level-operations (Latell 2005: 209; Eckstein 2003: 172). Military victory – or what Cuban propaganda presented as such – had the same euphoric effect as in Hitler's case. Castro 'was able to think of himself as a Cold War Julius Caesar, a tropical

Napoleon' (Latell 2005: 201). He commanded world attention. His policies had to be monitored by statesmen everywhere. His people could be found throughout the globe (Dominguez 1993/2006: 146). In 1979 he reached his personal summit: due to his support for Third World liberation movements, Castro was elected president of the non-aligned movement. The event 'intoxicated [him] with visions of how he would transform the position into one of the world's most important and visible international offices' (Latell 2005: 201). It was the triumph of *líder máximo's* 'evangelistic' foreign policy leadership style: despite the modest means of his country, he had been able to persuade a large group of international actors to join in his mission and in mobilizing others around his message. Ironically, ten weeks later the USSR invaded Afghanistan, a non-aligned state. Castro had little choice and had to back the invasion. His legitimacy 'evaporated' (Latell 2005: 202). Cuban military involvement abroad ended one decade later, when Soviet support was cancelled. After thirty years, the 'unlikely "superpower" (...) had once again become just an island in the sun' (Dominguez 1993/2006: 147).

However, Castro's most controversial foreign policy action took place in an early phase of his long political career. On October 27, 1962, at the height of the Cuban missile crisis, he sent a letter to Khrushchev. Believing that an American attack against Soviet nuclear installations in Cuba was imminent, he urged the Soviet leader to deliver an atomic first strike against the United States. The Soviet ambassador, Aleksandr Alekseev wanted to avoid any misunderstanding and asked for clarifications. Castro answered unambiguously: 'without waiting to experience the treachery of the imperialists and their first strike, we should be ahead of them and erase them from the face of the earth' (Dobbs 2008: 204). To Castro's shock and despair, Khrushchev was wise enough to decide to withdraw his missiles. The Cubans had no control over the Soviet nuclear weapons already deployed in their country. Consequently, Castro could not initiate an attack resulting in a human catastrophe far beyond Hitler's imagination.

7 Analysis

Previous sections described in some detail the two leaders' revolutionary programs and actions, their charisma enhanced by an effective personality cult, and their adventurous foreign policy. These elements are used in the following sub-sections in order to define a specific type of political personality and the associated type of leadership.

Beyond Authoritarian Personality

Juan Linz stated that the difference between authoritarianism and totalitarianism is 'a distinction representing fundamental alternative conceptions of politics' (Linz 2007: 234). He nevertheless conceded that, in practical terms, a clear-cut differentiation is rather difficult (see Linz 2002: 18; 2007: 234–5). Things are simpler when the leader's personality is taken into consideration. As the following sub-sections will show, in this case the authoritarian-totalitarian continuum exists even in ideal-type terms.

Martin Drath highlighted the fact that one of the key elements which distinguish totalitarianism from authoritarianism is its intention to introduce a system of values completely different from those prevailing in society. It is the aim of totalitarianism to realize, based on these new values, a fundamentally new order. Whereas, in most cases, authoritarianism is conservative, totalitarianism is always 'emphatically revolutionary' (Martin Drath quoted in Greiffenhagen 1981: 47–8). As mentioned in Section 3, the creation of all totalitarian systems was associated with the central role of a strong leader. The latter is the main architect of the new regime's revolutionary dimension. This suggests that the founders of totalitarian regimes cannot be described fully within the rather limited framework of the authoritarian personality approach pictured in Section 3. Indeed, the focus on order, conventionalism, toughness or malevolence specific to authoritarian personality cannot be enlarged to cover the revolutionary tendency. This makes impossible the differentiation between authoritarian and totalitarian leaders. In turn, this limitation prevents the full understanding of political personalities of the type illustrated by Hitler and Castro and of the influence of such personalities on their respective states and societies. The logical conclusion is that a new type of political personality has to be introduced, one that combines the more general features of the authoritarian personality with the revolutionary totalitarian dimension.

The Revolutionary Totalitarian Personality

While this is an analytical effort to differentiate between the 'common' authoritarian personality and the totalitarian one, it is important to note that the latter category does not include *all* totalitarian leaders. Section 4 showed that Hitler and Castro were revolutionary leaders. All independent totalitarian regimes were created by this type of political men. Most second or third generation totalitarian (*i.e.* communist) leaders, however, were hardly revolutionary. Leonid Brezhnev or Kim Jong-il, for example, were profoundly conservative totalitarian dictators who did everything in their power to preserve the system inherited from their predecessors. In order to avoid any

confusion, the type of leader under scrutiny will therefore be labeled 'revolutionary totalitarian.'

At this point, it is useful to mention a previous effort to define a 'totalitarian' type of leadership. The seminal book of Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski did more than simply identify the main features of totalitarianism. One of its ambitious goals was to place totalitarian leadership in the context of – and in opposition to – Weber's three-cornered typology. The basic idea was that Weber's conception of genuine charisma implied a transcendent faith in God while leadership of this type had typically been apolitical (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1965: 41). Consequently, the emergence of the totalitarian dictator proves Weber's typology inadequate. A fourth, 'pseudo-charismatic' category of totalitarian leadership should be added that

bears certain resemblances to still another distinct type, also not adequately developed by Weber and his followers, the 'revolutionary' leader. Indeed, it may be argued that the totalitarian leader is a kind of revolutionary leader (*Ibid.* 44).

Today, the stress on the religious dimension is outdated but this does not invalidate the entire analysis. As already shown, totalitarian leaders – in fact, 'revolutionary totalitarian' ones – are indeed genuine revolutionaries. If religion is left aside, 'pseudo-charismatic' leadership (as well as the 'revolutionary' one) can be included securely in Weber's charismatic category. The revolutionary totalitarian personality, then, is associated with a specific sub-category of Weberian charismatic leadership.

I prefer to speak of a specific sub-category and not of 'regular' charismatic leadership because of the tremendous importance of the propaganda efforts that take the form of the personality cult. Of course, charismatic domination is an ideal-type. In practice, it is always mixed with bureaucratic elements. All charismatic leaders use some kind of un-charismatic means. Still, for a totalitarian leader, the importance of the personality cult is such that in extreme cases it succeeds in hiding a complete lack of charisma. As Section 5 showed, revolutionary totalitarian leaders such as Hitler and Castro are genuinely charismatic. Yet, even their considerable potential to control national audiences has to be strongly enhanced through the use of a huge propaganda apparatus that builds the personality cult. This is a key element allowing such leaders to legitimate the imposition of a totalitarian regime. Returning to Weber's typology, the revolutionary totalitarian leadership belongs clearly to the charismatic type of domination; but, due to the importance of the propaganda dimension, it also borders the rational-legal type.

Genuine charisma and effective personality cult allow revolutionary totalitarian leaders to create strongly transformative leaderships. A transactional dimension also exists. Hitler claimed to be the architect of the post-Great Depression recovery. He even promised that every German family would receive a Volkswagen car at the end of his victorious wars. Redistributive socio-economic policies and Soviet aid allowed Castro to increase visibly the Cubans' standard of living. Yet, at least during the key early phases of regime creation and consolidation, the transformative dimension was much more important than the transactional one. Each one of the two revolutionary totalitarian leaders was 'identified with his actual following, both by himself and by them, in a kind of mystical or magical union' (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1965: 44). The 'political religion' dimension, as described in Section 2, is more than obvious. The leader and the followers raised each other to higher levels of motivation. The followers felt elevated by the relationship with their leader and became more active themselves (Burns 1992: 24–6; Cottam et al. 2004: 98–9). Yet, both Hitler and Castro motivated and transformed their followers with a very clear goal: to legitimate the creation and consolidation of totalitarian regimes that completely suppressed civil rights and political liberties. Moreover, the absolute control thus acquired allowed the two leaders to adopt brutal and sometimes criminal policies that can hardly be associated with a 'higher level of morality' or with 'improving humanity,' as it would have been the case with a Gandhi-type transformative leadership (Cottam et al. 2004: 99). This means that the relation of the revolutionary totalitarian leader with his followers takes the form of a malignant transformational leadership accompanied by a less important transactional dimension.

The World Stage and its Perils

As briefly mentioned in Section 3, Margaret G. Hermann identified in 1976 seven circumstances in which leader personality is most apt to affect foreign policy (Hermann 1976; Post et al. 2003: 2). Two of them are implicitly associated with revolutionary totalitarian leaders: 'when the means of assuming power are dramatic' and 'when the head of state is charismatic.' Another one is the natural consequence of the dominant, all-controlling position this type of leader occupies within the new regime: 'when the head of state has great authority over foreign policy.' Three are more subjective in nature: 'in proportion to the general interest of the head of state in foreign policy;' 'when the external national situation is perceived to be ambiguous;' and 'in a crisis.' Both Hitler and Castro were highly interested in foreign policy; perceived their countries to be externally oppressed and/or threatened; and ignited themselves a number of crises. The final circumstance – 'when the foreign policy

organization of the nation is less developed and differentiated' – seems to have little importance due to the voluntarist style of leadership that overpasses institutional constraints. The conclusion is that the personality of the revolutionary totalitarian leader affects strongly the foreign policy of his country. This is rather logical as it represents the international reflection of the similar situation at national level. Equally unsurprising, Hitler and Castro 'challenged constraints' and were 'closed to information.' Hitler's expansionistic style was a blunt effort to project internationally his domestic absolute power. Unable to mobilize similarly impressive resources, Castro had to adopt an evangelistic foreign policy leadership style. Yet, he did his best to become a significant military actor on the international arena.

The key aspect, however, is not the interest in aggressive foreign policy and in military adventures. It is the extremely risky turn the two revolutionary totalitarian leaders decided to give, at critical moments, to their bellicose actions. Hitler conducted his war in a way that left no room for a negotiated solution. It was either total victory or total defeat, and the German people paid the price. Castro advocated a nuclear war. 'For the sake of Socialism and the Soviet Union, he had been prepared to sacrifice himself and his country' (Coltman 2003: 199). This attitude was frequently contrasted with Khrushchev's cautious one as proof of differences in age and temperament. It was more than that. The Soviet dictator was a second-generation, conservative totalitarian leader with little understanding of and interest in genuine, 1917-style revolutionary action. For his part, as a revolutionary totalitarian leader, Castro could not be alien to a certain form of revolutionary exaltation that pushed him toward extreme positions. One might die when fighting on a barricade. The revolutionary totalitarian leader fully assumes this risk. Moreover, he believes that his entire people should do the same. This is perhaps the most extreme – and dangerous – trait of the revolutionary totalitarian personality.

Precisely due to its possible or, in the case of Hitler, actual consequences, this aspect tends to be assessed in terms of ethics and political responsibility. Still, it is important to note that, from an analytical point of view, it proves the solidity of the leader's revolutionary convictions. These are not mere ruses used to gain power and abandoned after its conquest. They are fundamental features of the way of thinking of the revolutionary totalitarian leader. Domestic lack of visibility after the creation of the totalitarian regime does not imply their disappearance. The revolutionary ideas are simply transferred to the realm of foreign policy. There, they are more important to this type of leader than personal or collective survival and can make him put at risk the very existence of the totalitarian regime he struggled to build. At the same time, however, the revolutionary foreign policy is pragmatically turned into a domestic propaganda

instrument that legitimates the regime, allows the preservation of its revolutionary ideological discourse, and transforms opponents into 'foreign agents,' thus justifying harsh repressive policies.

8 Conclusion

To sum-up the findings of this article, the cases of Adolf Hitler and Fidel Castro allow the definition of the revolutionary totalitarian type of personality. This is a combination of authoritarian personality, revolutionary tendencies, and genuine charisma that can develop only in a modern context allowing the creation of an effective personality cult. Politically, its outcome is a profound revolution of state and society leading to the establishment of a new system of values paralleled by the imposition of a new, totalitarian order. Ironically, the consolidation of the new regime leads to the complete dissolution of the leader's revolutionary tendency, which is preserved only in foreign policy. There, however, it can lead to extremely serious military consequences. This helps explain why newly created totalitarian regimes quickly become *de facto* anti-revolutionary and conformist while preserving a revolutionary discourse supported mainly by their foreign policy actions. At the same time, it illuminates the conflict between these leaders' genuine revolutionary tendencies and their conservative desire for order, structured lines of authority, and conventional sets of values that characterizes the more general authoritarian personality. It is not exaggerated to claim that this conflict represents the critical feature of the revolutionary totalitarian personality. The case of Mao Zedong – briefly presented below – suggests that, at times, the pattern supported by the two case studies might be distorted by particularly strong revolutionary tendencies. Alternatively, if the latter are too weak, their effect is insignificant and the leader is just an authoritarian one. An authoritarian/revolutionary balance preserved through the shift from domestic to foreign policy, therefore, represents the outcome of the conflict under scrutiny that best describes the revolutionary totalitarian personality.

Besides Hitler and Castro, the 'century of totalitarianism' produced a reasonably large number of similar leaders. Exotic figures such as Mengistu Haile Mariam could have been chosen as examples, but – as mentioned in the Introduction – at first view Mussolini and Lenin would have provided better case studies than the Líder Máximo. They were highly charismatic individuals who led to victory the March on Rome and the October Revolution, respectively; initiated the creation of totalitarian regimes strongly marked by their personality cult; and launched foreign military adventures resulting in

Italy's invasion by the Allies in the first case and Bolsheviks' 1920 defeat at the Vistula in the second. The only problem is that neither leader succeeded in building a genuine totalitarian regime. Mussolini's rule is frequently seen as the 'Italian way to totalitarianism' which nevertheless resulted in a failed – i.e. an imperfect or incomplete form of – totalitarianism (Gentile 2004: 353). Lenin withdrew from active politics after his second stroke in December 1922, shortly after the end of the Civil War and before the Bolshevik regime could be transformed into a mature, fully-fledged totalitarian structure. This does not exclude the two from the category of revolutionary totalitarian leaders, especially if the already mentioned 'level of intention' approach (*Ibid.* 352–3) is taken into consideration. It nevertheless makes the use of their case studies less effective than those of Hitler and Castro.

A more challenging alternative is represented by Mao Zedong. Like Castro, he was a charismatic Third World revolutionary, but one belonging to a culture much less influenced by Western ideas. Yet, this did not prevent him from mirroring the familiar patterns of revolutionary totalitarian leaders. He fought and won a revolutionary civil war, which allowed him to create and rule a totalitarian regime anchored in his personality cult. Internationally, shortly after assuming power, he decided to challenge openly US imperialism by taking part in the potentially risky Korean War while he was 'particularly influential' in supporting revolutionary movements in neighboring Asian states (Breslin 1998: 157). However, two key elements differentiate him from Hitler, Castro, Mussolini or Lenin. His foreign policy evolved from overt anti-Western military engagement to peaceful non-alignment and ultimately to shaking hands with the American enemy. His domestic rule was marked, after 17 years in power, by the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, a spectacular revolution-in-the-revolution. Many geopolitical, national, intra-party, and individual factors contributed to these developments. The most important, however, might be considered Mao's genuine obsession with revolution. Unlike the aforementioned four leaders, he was not comfortable with freezing the newly built Chinese political system while completely transferring his revolutionary actions into the realm of foreign policy. Unsatisfied with the stability and routine of his own totalitarian regime, he submitted it to a revolutionary transformation. Moreover, this was a revolution explicitly meant to prevent the Soviet-style bureaucratization of communism. Externally, it could only result in Moscow's unmasked hostility that in turn caused the Peking-Washington rapprochement. This makes Mao's case more complicated than those of Hitler and Castro and explains why I did not choose him. While it is clear that the Chinese dictator belonged to the category of revolutionary totalitarian leaders, his case might be assessed as a somehow deviant one.

All these examples belong to the past. After the fall of communism, revolutionary totalitarian leaders became an endangered species. Recent developments nevertheless suggest that one region might harbor incipient totalitarian projects. In the Middle Eastern arena, the rise of religious fundamentalism creates expectations for the emergence of a new, Islamist sub-type of totalitarian constructs. If such projects do materialize, it will certainly be through the actions of a new generation of revolutionary totalitarian leaders.

The most ambitious aspect of the revolutionary totalitarian personality model presented in this article is related to the better understanding of the creation of totalitarian regimes. The well-studied authoritarian personality is associated with an obsession with stability, order, and conservatism. If the engineers of totalitarian systems are perceived and analyzed through the lens of this conservative type of personality, important features of totalitarianism – and especially its ‘revolutionary’ character – are likely to be explained on the basis of structural causes. Accepting that the totalitarian leader’s personality is of a different type, characterized by an important propensity for revolutionary change, enhances the actor-related side of the agency-structure debate associated with the creation of totalitarian regimes. In other words, leaders with different (authoritarian/totalitarian) personalities might guide the same political process toward different (authoritarian/totalitarian) outcomes. This diminishes significantly the explanatory power of structural factors. None of the previous sections explored this aspect because it requires a complex and lengthy analysis. This article has only created an instrument that future research might use. The idea that the personality of the leader might be responsible for the authoritarian or totalitarian outcome of a regime change is, I believe, challenging enough to deserve further attention.

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