



# Universiteit Leiden

## The legitimation of the Cuban Revolution

Marilisa Ceccato (S1892606)

MA International Relations – International Studies (MAIS)

[m.ceccato@umail.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:m.ceccato@umail.leidenuniv.nl) / [marilisa.ceccato@gmail.com](mailto:marilisa.ceccato@gmail.com)

Supervisor: Prof dr. Isabelle Duyvesteyn

Word count: 15262

## Table of contents

1. Theories of legitimacy.....	3
2. Approaches to the study of legitimacy.....	5
3. Legitimation and illegitimacy .....	6
4. Legitimacy and non-state actors .....	8
5. Legitimation and the Cuban Revolution.....	12
6. Research Methods and Theoretical Framework.....	15
7. Legitimation through history.....	17
a. History of rural guerrilla.....	17
b. Link to Martí.....	17
8. The urban guerrilla .....	18
9. Batista’s strategy.....	20
10. Legitimation by comparison with the official army and Batista’s government .....	20
a. Relations with peasants.....	20
b. ‘Humanitarianism’ .....	21
11. Legitimation through official manifestos .....	22
a. The Moncada trial defense: ‘History will absolve me’ .....	22
b. The Manifiesto of the Sierra Maestra (MSM).....	25
12. Legitimation through the media.....	26
a. Foreign interviews .....	26
b. Radio Rebelde .....	26
13. Legitimation through official speeches.....	28
14. Change in discourse over time .....	28
15. Conclusion.....	32
a. Did the presence of charismatic and visible leaders aid the legitimating process? .....	34
b. Did the narrative of a common enemy increase the cohesion of the revolutionary groups and help foster internal legitimation?.....	35
c. By analyzing the ethno-religious background of the Sierra Maestra fighters, Farber suggests that they were bound to be more attracted to national-populist discourse, rather than communist ideology. ....	36
Limitations of the work and challenges for future research: .....	36

Bibliography.....	38
Primary sources .....	38
Secondary sources .....	38

The working definition of the concept of “legitimacy” is that “[l]egitimacy is a much contested concept. Much of the empirically-oriented political science literature on the issue builds on Weber’s classic definition, which emphasized that legitimacy was based on the belief of the followers, subjects, or citizens that an authority is morally valid or rightful”<sup>1</sup>. I posit that legitimacy is very context-dependent. What is accepted as legitimate in a case, therefore, may not reach the same acceptance in a different place or time. Moreover, legitimacy is the final result of a process. Therefore, legitimacy is an ascribed attribute, while legitimation is the process of ascribing. Finally, as Zelditch suggests, a “large part of the literature on legitimacy is normative”<sup>2</sup>, while the goal of this work is to be descriptive.

“Legitimacy is and can only be the result of an interactive political process between rulers and ruled. These complex processes of legitimation culminating in the (non-)attribution of legitimacy comprise both the bottom-up attribution of legitimacy by social constituencies and the top-down cultivation of legitimacy by rulers.”<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, in order to analyse legitimacy there is the need of a bottom-up analysis, which is proven to be extremely difficult in authoritarian regimes. To day, Cuba is still very secretive and selective about the information accessible from the outside. In contrast, legitimation is easier to spot even in closed regimes and, most importantly, it does not imply success. There can be legitimation attempts that do not lead to the actual achievement of legitimacy. It is for all these reasons that I decided to use the concept of legitimation in my analysis. However, it is still important to analyse the concept of legitimacy, along with legitimation.

## 1. Theories of legitimacy

The analysis of the concept of legitimacy is very old. Zelditch<sup>4</sup> dates it back to Thucydides. In the literature is frequently found an equation between longevity of a regime and legitimacy.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hoffmann, B. (2011, December). Legitimacy and Efficiency of Political Systems The International Dimensions of Authoritarian Legitimation: The Impact of Regime Evolution . *GIGA (German Institute of Global and Area Studies) Research Programme* (182), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Zelditch, M. j. (2001). Theories of Legitimacy. In T. a. Jost, *The Psychology of Legitimacy* (pp. 33-53). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 33

<sup>3</sup> Gronau, J., Schmidkte, H., & Biegoń, D. (September 3-6, 2014). ECPR General Conference. *The quest for legitimacy in world politics - international institutions' legitimation strategies* (pp. 1-47). Glasgow: University of Bremen Collaborative Research Centre 597, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Zelditch, M. j. (2001). Theories of Legitimacy. In T. a. Jost, *The Psychology of Legitimacy* (pp. 33-53). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

However, this is problematic<sup>5</sup>. Longevity could indeed be a product of legitimacy, but these two terms are not equivalent because longevity is a function of time, while legitimacy is a function of a social structure. Most of the previous research focuses on the moment legitimacy lacks, therefore linking it to the stability of governments or political stability. Machiavelli is probably the first thinker that posits that political stability is tightly linked to acceptance from the people, which is dependent on legitimacy. Therefore, legitimacy is of paramount importance to political stability, because it produces acceptance and consent to be ruled. “The problem of any kind of polity, therefore, is to find a basis of loyalty that is voluntary but not purely instrumental; that does not depend only on rational self-interest or purely on personal preferences.”<sup>6</sup>

There are various theories of legitimacy. Consensus theory is probably best set out by Parsons<sup>7</sup> and it implies that: the acceptance of a social order is voluntary; consent is based on a belief in norms and values; there are shared beliefs and norms between rulers and the ruled; it is consensus that makes norms and values ‘right’, therefore ‘legitimate’; and, finally, a social or political order is stable if and only if it is legitimate. Consent is, therefore, perceived as a function of legitimacy, which is thought to be based either on consensus or public interest, or a combination of both. Lipset<sup>8</sup> posits that anything instrumental to attaining a group’s goal is legitimate if there is consensus about the group’s goal. Legitimacy is still seen as an attribute of stability. However, Lipset introduces the concept of ineffectiveness, which is seen as a force of delegitimation, hence destabilization in the long run.

The first and main exponent of conflict theory is Machiavelli. Conflict theorists understand the fundamental nature of any action to be instrumental; moreover, the real interests of the rulers and the ruled are in conflict; and it is power that makes the rules binding. However, pure power is not enough to make a rule ‘right’; ideology, myths and rituals are all necessary to legitimate rules, by masking the real interests of the ruler to the ruled. Thus, the use by rulers of legitimating myths is purely strategic. Finally, legitimacy is seen as a prerequisite of any social order, because, in the long run, pure power alone is unstable.

Marx’s theory of the dominant ideology touches legitimacy only indirectly. It states that the ruling class controls the means of mental production, and has therefore the power to create the ruling ideas of any given epoch, which will coincide with the ideas of the ruling class. “The

---

<sup>5</sup> Horowitz, I. L. (1992) Revolution, longevity and legitimacy in communist states

<sup>6</sup> Zelditch, M. j. (2001). Theories of Legitimacy. In T. a. Jost, *The Psychology of Legitimacy* (pp. 33-53). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.37

<sup>7</sup> Parsons, T. (1969). *Politics and Social Structure*. New York: Free Press.

<sup>8</sup> Lipset, S. M. (1959). Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy. *The American Political Science Review*, 53(1), 69-105.

function of these ideas is to conceal conflict of the real interests of the classes. Acceptance of these ideas by the ruled is a prerequisite of the stability of a social formation such as capitalism.”<sup>9</sup> There is therefore a conflict between real interests and ‘false consciousness’. Conflict theory posits that are real interests that drive the behavior of people. This means that it is power and not consent that makes the rule and is the consciousness of this conflict between interests that lights up revolutions.

Weber distinguishes between three sources of legitimacy: rational-legal, traditional, and charismatic. He posits that legitimation processes are collective rather than individual, and that consensus is both one of its prerequisites and one of its outcomes. His innovative concept of self-legitimation of rulers adds an inward-looking aspect to legitimation. Self-legitimation means that the rulers try to legitimate themselves claiming a special status or quality, a noble lineage, some source of prestige that elevates them from the rest of the population. Endogenous legitimation includes both the claims and the concrete actions that are taken to cultivate those claims. In this sense, therefore, legitimation is a means of convincing subjects of the ‘specialness’ of leaders.

## 2. Approaches to the study of legitimacy

There are three principal approaches to the study of legitimacy: the normative approach<sup>10</sup>, which assesses legitimacy as a quality of government; the empirical or historical approach<sup>11</sup>, which studies popular attitudes and support for rulers as the basis for analysis and prediction of regime stability; and a combination of the two<sup>12</sup>. A fourth approach builds on Weber’s elements of self-legitimation.

The normative approach<sup>13</sup> treats legitimacy as a characteristic of successful regimes in which there is a transfer of consent from subjects to rulers. Moreover, rulers are perceived as agents rather than actors, because the sources of their legitimacy are perceived as external to themselves.

The empirical or historical approach uses the term legitimacy to depict a regime which is supported by its subjects. Democracy is perceived as the most reliable way to express and study

---

<sup>9</sup> Zelditch, M. j. (2001). Theories of Legitimacy. In T. a. Jost, *The Psychology of Legitimacy* (pp. 33-53). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.37 .

<sup>10</sup> Connolly, W. (1984). *Legitimacy and the State* (Oxford, Blackwell).

<sup>11</sup> Zelditch, M. j. (2001). Theories of Legitimacy. In T. a. Jost, *The Psychology of Legitimacy* (pp. 33-53). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>12</sup> Beetham, D. (2013). *The Legitimation of Power* (London, Macmillan).

<sup>13</sup> Connolly, W. (1984). *Legitimacy and the State* (Oxford, Blackwell).

public support. This approach, however, is flawed in a number of ways: the argument is circular, deducing consent from obedience, and obedience from consent; legitimacy is conceived as a synonym of support; moreover, it has been argued that if a regime is described as legitimate only because its subjects believe it to be legitimate, this empties the term of any moral content that some commenters believe it ought to have<sup>14</sup>.

Yet, to separate legitimacy from other reasons of support is extremely complicated<sup>15</sup>. Actors both in the national and international arenas might have various motivations for supporting an armed group. Support does not necessarily entail belief in the legitimacy of the group or their cause either; it could be the result of purely tactical or geo-political considerations, or the outcome of fear and threats. On the other hand, the achievement of legitimacy does not automatically lead to active involvement. Active support is bound to many variables, among which concrete opportunities and personal ties to group members. Therefore, there needs to be an analytical distinction between legitimacy and support, which is a more extensive category.

For an empirical study to be accurate, however, there is the need to acknowledge that political values as well as legitimacy are various and context-dependent. And while most political scientists believe that democracy is the most legitimate form of government, a vast portion of the world today is not democratic, suggesting that other political forms employ different modes of legitimation that end up being more or less effective.

### 3. Legitimation and illegitimacy

The study of legitimation as self-referential starts off from Weber's work. It posits that legitimation is actively sought by rulers and that the principal consumers are the governmental elites. What this approach puts forward is that what characterizes government is the activity of legitimation, rather than the possession of the ascribed quality of legitimacy. Moreover, legitimation processes are understood as dependent on the formal and substantive character of the particular regime<sup>16</sup>.

---

<sup>14</sup> Barker, R. (2001). *Legitimizing Identities: The Self-Presentations of Rulers and Subjects*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>15</sup> Schlichte, K. and Schneckener, U., (2016, February). Armed Groups and the Politics of Legitimacy. *Civil Wars*, 17(4), 409-424.

<sup>16</sup> Barker, R. (2001). *Legitimizing Identities: The Self-Presentations of Rulers and Subjects*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

In his research, Schoon<sup>17</sup> states that legitimacy is a problematic term, because it is context-dependent. However, he finds that the conditions for political illegitimacy (the absence of rule by consent of the governed<sup>18</sup>) represent a wider phenomenon that transcends local contexts<sup>19</sup>. However, conditions of illegitimacy are not necessarily the opposite of the conditions of legitimacy<sup>20</sup>. Generally, there is a wider consensus on what is to be condemned as wrong, instead of what is to be regarded as right. Legitimacy is, therefore, seen as an individual exercise, while illegitimacy is experienced and assessed at a collective level<sup>21</sup>. However, some commentators have pointed out that “the legitimacy of armed actors is a function of the illegitimate violence exerted by the opponent”<sup>22</sup>, therefore linking the illegitimacy of an actor to an increase of legitimacy to its opponent.

Schoon defines the “legitimacy of state-sanctioned violence as the perception among the civilian population in the area of conflict that violence sanctioned by the state is right or appropriate, relative to known alternatives.”<sup>23</sup> This definition is important because it takes into account the agents of legitimacy, which is the civilian population in the area of conflict. Moreover, it emphasizes the relative nature of legitimacy. This implies that legitimacy is not an absolute value, but it is rather shaped both by the degree to which the violence can be justified and by the available alternatives. Relativity is also connected to the concept of proportionality, with the consensus that some degree of violence may be necessary to achieve a given outcome, but a higher amount of violence would not be considered legitimated<sup>24</sup>.

After analyzing thirty cases of insurgencies, Schoon<sup>25</sup> finds that two elements were present

---

<sup>17</sup> Schoon, E. (2014). The Asymmetry of Legitimacy: Analyzing the Legitimation of Violence in 30 Cases of Insurgent Revolution. *Social Forces*, 93(2), 779-802.

<sup>18</sup> Horowitz, I. (1992). Revolution, longevity and legitimacy in communist states. *Studies In Comparative International Development*, 27(1), 61-75.

<sup>19</sup> Schoon, E. (2014). The Asymmetry of Legitimacy: Analyzing the Legitimation of Violence in 30 Cases of Insurgent Revolution. *Social Forces*, 93(2), p.780.

<sup>20</sup> McWilliams, W. (1971). “On Political Illegitimacy.” In *The Democratic Soul: A Wilson Carey McWilliams Reader*, edited by W. C. McWilliams, P. J. Deneen, S. J. McWilliams, 240–64. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.

<sup>21</sup> McWilliams, W. (1971), p. 246.

<sup>22</sup> Schlichte, K. and Schneckener, U., (2016, February). Armed Groups and the Politics of Legitimacy. *Civil Wars*, 17(4), 409-424.

<sup>23</sup> Schoon, E. (2014). The Asymmetry of Legitimacy: Analyzing the Legitimation of Violence in 30 Cases of Insurgent Revolution. *Social Forces*, 93(2), p. 794.

<sup>24</sup> Gardam, J. (1993). “Proportionality and Force in International Law.” *American Journal of International Law* 87(3), 391–413.

<sup>25</sup> Schoon, E. (2014). The Asymmetry of Legitimacy: Analyzing the Legitimation of Violence in 30 Cases of Insurgent Revolution. *Social Forces*, 93(2), 779-802.

in all of his case studies: a lack of governmental legitimacy and the absence of efforts to maintain positive relations with the civilian population in the area of conflict. Moreover, his research shows that there is indeed an asymmetry between legitimacy and illegitimacy, with legitimacy more contingent on context and outcome, while illegitimacy rooted in the immediate realities of the perpetrators and their actions.

Ample research has shown that perceptions of legitimacy are shaped by social systems and shared beliefs<sup>26</sup>. However, while standards for legitimacy are shared at a collective level, evaluations against those standards are contingent on the ones making evaluations.

#### 4. Legitimacy and non-state actors

But is it feasible to apply the same definition of legitimacy that is used in the study of governments to non-state actors? The answer to this question is not straightforward. As Arjona<sup>27</sup> suggests, there are cases in which rebel groups establish a form of governance over the territories they control, and in this case it might be possible. But at the same time, being non-state actors less (or non) institutionalized, this exercise might be complicated.

According to Schlichte and Schneckener<sup>28</sup>, violent non-state actors need to address the politics of legitimacy in three different ways for different purposes: first of all, they need to present their use of violence as legitimate; second, they need to gain legitimacy for moral and material support; finally, they need to be able to simultaneously address several audiences, both domestically and internationally.

With respect to the legitimation of violent means, the most common claims regard the defensive use of violence; protection or liberation of communities from oppression; reaction to injustices; self-determination; the defense of autonomy. It is not uncommon to find these claims connected to larger and often international geo-political discourses<sup>29</sup>. The creation of mystic figures of heroes and martyrs of the struggle is a further source of legitimation that is directly connected to forms of what Weber called 'charismatic leadership'. This discourse fits in the broader narrative of

---

<sup>26</sup> Schoon, E. (2014). The Asymmetry of Legitimacy: Analyzing the Legitimation of Violence in 30 Cases of Insurgent Revolution. *Social Forces*, 93(2), 779-802.

<sup>27</sup> Arjona, A., Kasfir, N., Mampilly, Z., (2015). *Rebel Governance in Civil War*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>28</sup> Schlichte, K. and Schneckener, U., (2016). Armed Groups and the Politics of Legitimacy. *Civil Wars*, 17(4), 409-424.

<sup>29</sup> Schlichte, K. and Schneckener, U., (2016)

an epic struggle<sup>30</sup>. Moreover, typical patterns can be encountered also in the justification for the internal use of violence. This means that when the violence is not indiscriminate, rebel leaders usually try to legitimate it portraying purged members as traitors and defectors menacing the group's coherence and unity either collaborating with the enemy, or undermining the leader's status. Discriminate in-group violence has also been used to discipline members and to secure their compliance<sup>31</sup>.

However, the use of violence has a dual effect on legitimacy. On one hand, violence is a powerful means of communication that conveys power and resolution not just to the enemy, but to a wider audience. This might attract active and passive supporters, and will likely boost the attention and coverage the group gets both from the press and the political arena, which will in turn boost its legitimacy. On the other hand, violence can lead to a loss of legitimacy, especially if it is indiscriminate and is exerted over a long period of time<sup>32</sup>. A massive increase in violence against civilians or a strong, decisive response from either the state or other non-state actors would undermine the credibility of the leadership both internally and externally, leading to a decrease in support and legitimacy, which could open a perilous circle. Less legitimacy could lead to more (internal and external) violence, which will in turn lead to a further loss of legitimacy, and so on. In order to try to avoid this, many non-state armed groups employ more or less formal rules of engagement in particular with regard to the civilian population. Some groups do even have a system of sanctions for transgressors. Some commenters believe that these claims and the development of an internal mechanism of violence control is part of the legitimation strategy of these groups<sup>33</sup>.

Furthermore, there are various possible sources of legitimacy. What is important to point out is that legitimation is not exclusively directed outwards, but also inwards. Internal legitimation is just as crucial as the external one. Legitimizing narratives also have the role of fostering a specific self-image that the group wants to spread, one that is frequently mystified in order to give more importance to the group. Armed groups can be seen as political actors that construct narratives to bolster their legitimacy claims<sup>34</sup>.

Legitimation is a multi-faceted process. This means that armed groups have to (and most of the time do) rely on various sources of legitimacy simultaneously. This might derive from the fact

---

<sup>30</sup> Podder, S. (2013, March). Non-State Armed Groups and Stability: Reconsidering Legitimacy and Inclusion. *Contemporary Security Policy*, 34(1), 16-39.

<sup>31</sup> Schlichte, K. and Schneckener, U., (2016). Armed Groups and the Politics of Legitimacy. *Civil Wars*, 17(4), 409-424.

<sup>32</sup> Mampilly, Z. (2011) *Rebel Rulers. Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life during War* (Ithaca, Ny: Cornell University Press) pp.53–55.

<sup>33</sup> Schlichte, K. and Schneckener, U., (2016). Armed Groups and the Politics of Legitimacy. *Civil Wars*, 17(4), 409-424.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

that they usually operate outside of the legal arena and that, unlike state-actors, they cannot rely on the legitimacy provided by elections or systems of representation<sup>35</sup>.

In a consistent number of groups, traditional belief is a precious source of legitimacy<sup>36</sup>. This means that leaders have an intrinsic legitimacy when descendants from aristocratic or other prominent families. Likewise, legitimacy will derive from professional or military accomplishments and the status derived from such experiences. It is worth mentioning that heritage as well as accomplishments can be falsified or invented to serve the need of status and legitimation<sup>37</sup>.

Schlichte and Schneckener suggest distinguishing between symbolic and performance-centered sources of legitimacy. Symbolic sources are linked with the narrative put forward by the group, while the latter category refers to the actual behavior and performance of armed groups.

Regarding symbolic sources of legitimacy, rebel claims might be rooted in “communal myth–symbol complexes and in popular belief systems, traditions and cultures. Arguments and claims are to some extent embedded in a local sociocultural setting; however, they also represent a specific reading of this setting. In this way, these linkages between armed groups’ claims and local cultures are deliberately chosen and constructed, but they cannot simply be manufactured or instrumentalized by the leadership or intellectual figures of armed groups.”<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, another type of claim might be based on the socio-economic and political aspirations of a specific sector of the local community<sup>39</sup>. Using this strategy, rebel leaders take on the grievances of the population and make them relevant and heard. Doing so, they link themselves to those communities, present themselves as their voice, and claim to act on their behalf. They see themselves as frontrunners for the legitimate demands of those communities and claim that their violent actions are necessary to raise consciousness and to mobilize wider support. Frequently, such claims are linked to broader, international ideologies.

Furthermore, another source of legitimacy derives directly from the (constructed/perceived) threat of the enemy. The non-state group may claim that its purpose is to liberate or protect a threatened community. The more brutal and inhuman the enemy is portrayed, the most solidarity the group will receive and the most likely for its violence to be seen as justified and necessary<sup>40</sup>.

---

<sup>35</sup> Schlichte, K. and Schneckener, U., (2016). Armed Groups and the Politics of Legitimacy. *Civil Wars*, 17(4), 409-424.

<sup>36</sup> Arjona, A., Kasfir, N., Mampilly, Z. (2015). *Rebel Governance in Civil War*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>37</sup> Schlichte, K. and Schneckener, U., (2016). Armed Groups and the Politics of Legitimacy. *Civil Wars*, 17(4), 409-424.

<sup>38</sup> Schlichte, K. and Schneckener, U., (2016), p.417.

<sup>39</sup> Arjona, A., Kasfir, N., Mampilly, Z. (2015). *Rebel Governance in Civil War*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>40</sup> Schlichte, K. and Schneckener, U., (2016, February). Armed Groups and the Politics of Legitimacy. *Civil Wars*, 17(4), 409-424.

Performance-centered politics of legitimacy<sup>41</sup>: charismatic leadership is of paramount importance, together with the charisma of the warrior group's elite. In this sense, the exercise of violence is instrumental as a way of communication in itself; fighters might earn the respect of some factions of the audience for their willingness to sacrifice themselves for a greater cause; legitimacy can also be achieved through personal loyalties, often in patrimonial forms; a further source of legitimacy is the 'delivery-based legitimization'<sup>42</sup>, which poses that legitimacy can be gained through the delivery of basic services to the followers and the population. Where forms of rebel governance are in place, this could include more sophisticated services like taxation and some form of jurisdiction. Internal institutionalization or the implement of formal procedures furthers the legitimacy of the group because, among other things, it makes it move away (at least formally) from forms of patrimonialism.

Usually, armed groups tend to employ both types of sources in order to gain the widest legitimacy possible. However, symbolic sources tend to be more effective in the formation period of the group, while in the longer term concrete successes become more relevant.

What makes legitimation additionally complicated is the fact that armed groups can and need to address their legitimacy claims to at least three different arenas<sup>43</sup>: the segments of the population that are most likely to be active supporters of the struggle; local or national audiences; and the international arena, which includes states, international organizations, NGOs, and the media. The first two arenas are of the utmost importance in every stage of the life of an armed group, because most sources of legitimacy come directly from local audiences, and most claims of armed groups are framed in a way to represent local constituencies. However, the international level is just as important, especially in the case when armed groups turn into mainstream political parties, or look for foreign support. In this context, non-state actors try to address foreign public opinion and actors that might be sympathetic to their cause. They do this by aligning themselves with international politics norms and trends both through their actions and their narrative<sup>44</sup>. Another way some armed groups have tried to gain the support of the public opinion and the international community is to pledge to adhere to international humanitarian law<sup>45</sup> (for example, groups such as the Namibian SWAPO and the Palestinian PLO have pledged to respect the Geneva Convention).

---

<sup>41</sup> Schlichte, K. and Schneckener, U., (2016). Armed Groups and the Politics of Legitimacy. *Civil Wars*, 17(4), 409-424.

<sup>42</sup> Giustozzi, A., (2012). *Empires of Mud. Wars and Warlords in Afghanistan* (London: Hurst 2012) in Schlichte and Schneckener.

<sup>43</sup> Schlichte, K. and Schneckener, U., (2016). Armed Groups and the Politics of Legitimacy. *Civil Wars*, 17(4), 409-424.

<sup>44</sup> Schlichte, K. and Schneckener, U., (2016).

<sup>45</sup> Arjona, A., Kasfir, N., Mampilly, Z. (2015). *Rebel Governance in Civil War*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

However, the international arena can have positive effects on the internal legitimacy of a given group even if its response to it is negative. The imposition of sanctions, in fact, is in itself a form of recognizing the importance of that group.

External recognition, however, may have a double effect on internal cohesion and legitimacy. On the one hand, the armed group is strong of the acceptance of representativeness of the population's claims. On the other hand, this doubles the expectations that have to be met by the group, that needs to live up to both standards, which are likely to be to some extent in conflict. Moreover, when external recognition is tied to a demand of moderation, this could weaken the group's internal cohesion and lead to the creation of breakaway radical factions. Furthermore, excessive reliance on foreign support may cause a loss of legitimacy because the group might be accused of being steered by foreign powers<sup>46</sup>.

Legitimacy in itself is not enough to lead to success, but it is believed to be of crucial importance to gain power and, according to Weber, is the “decisive element in turning mere power into political authority.”<sup>47</sup> Generally speaking, legitimacy is about the making of claims and the conditions under which such claims are accepted. The activity of legitimation, therefore, is observable in the making of claims by a government or by rebel leaders. Then, legitimacy is the belief in the justification of a political actor (being it a state or an armed group) and its activities. “Legitimacy is thus a descriptive concept about normative judgements, but it is not itself a normative concept.”<sup>48</sup>

## 5. Legitimation and the Cuban Revolution

Despite the thorough study of the Cuban Revolution over the last fifty years, there is still room for new research; particularly research that tries to combine literature both pro and against the regime. Most of the prominent literature about the Cuban Revolution looks at it just from one point of view, and tends to understand the outcome as sort of the lesser of two evils, as a forced choice between the de-facto dictatorship of Batista, and the revolutionaries' promises<sup>49</sup>.

*Ex post facto*, there has been a mystification of the most prominent figures of the

---

<sup>46</sup> Schlichte, K. and Schneckener, U., (2016, February). Armed Groups and the Politics of Legitimacy. *Civil Wars*, 17(4), 409-424.

<sup>47</sup> Schlichte, K. and Schneckener, U., (2016). p. 411.

<sup>48</sup> Schlichte, K. and Schneckener, U., (2016). p. 416.

<sup>49</sup> (AlRoy, 1967); (DeFronzo, 1994); (Dominguez, 1993); (Farber, 2006); (Kapcia, 2014); (Whitehead L., 2016).

Revolution<sup>50</sup>, both in Western and non-Western thought, and this has led to emphasis on analysis that to some extent present a simplistic understanding of the 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement (M-26-7) and its aftermath. In order to demystify Cuban history, the research broadens the horizons through the means of an extensive literature research, especially to include primary sources, where possible.

To grasp a fuller understanding of the process of legitimation that the M-26-7 went through, I will analyse their image and (self-)portrayal through the different means of communication, and by comparison to Batista's rule. Central to the analysis will be the two main policy manifestos of the Cuban Revolution: the Moncada trial speech ('History will absolve me'), and the Manifesto of the Sierra Maestra (MSM). This because these papers resulted in being the programmatic basis for both the Revolution and the early government, and helped establish the figure of Fidel Castro as a viable alternative to Batista and as the leader of the armed struggle.

Moreover, an anticipated outcome is to find out if the fact that there were charismatic and visible leaders of the rebellion (most notably the Castro brothers, Che Guevara, and Camilo Cienfuegos) helped it or not. I focus my analysis on the figure of Fidel Castro and his speeches, since he ended up being the most influential rebel leader and would later impose his regime, and has governed Cuba for decades until his official retirement in 2006.

The Cuban Revolution has been frequently explained as a response to foreign interference (real or perceived) in national affairs: in the article *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, DeFronzo<sup>51</sup> argues that the United States' support of Batista's government helped boost the legitimacy of the rebels' claim to act in the name of national interests and sovereignty. Batista was depicted as a cruel dictator at the mercy of foreign powers, leading a corrupted government that did not represent the Cuban population. In this context, the revolutionaries managed to present themselves as the guardians of Cuban values and history.

A comparison of the Batista and Castro regimes could give some insight into their different fate and the legitimacy of Castro and the Cuban Revolution<sup>52</sup>. Whitehead finds that despite the similar way in which the two came to power (with a power struggle that lead to a regime change) and their repressive and personalist rule, the two regimes differed in their strategy for building legitimacy. Batista was actively supported by the US and this foreign interference delegitimized his

---

<sup>50</sup> (Dominguez, 1993); (Farber, 2006); (Kapcia, 2014); (Marquez-Sterling, 2009); (del Aguila, 1999)

<sup>51</sup> DeFronzo, J. (1994). *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*. *Journal of World History*, 5(1), 156-158.

<sup>52</sup> Whitehead, L. (2016). The 'puzzle' of autocratic resilience/regime collapse: the case of Cuba. *Third World Quarterly*, 37(9), 1666-1682.

rule, while the open opposition of the US to Castro helped foster internal legitimacy, reinforcing the idea of '*patria o muerte*' ('homeland or death') and of a highly ideological domestic revolution in defiance of external powers. In general, it is believed that the existence of a credible external threat, identified in US interventionism, was vital in the creation of internal legitimation<sup>53</sup>. Moreover, Castro's Cuba did alternate and combine national sovereignty and communist ideology as sources of legitimacy<sup>54</sup>, creating a rather complex and durable legitimation.

Another way in which legitimacy of the Cuban Revolution has been explained is through an ethno-religious analysis of the background of the Sierra Maestra fighters. Farber finds out that among them there were "a significant number of first-generation Cubans, the children of Spanish immigrants"<sup>55</sup>, and in general mainly white people from the middle class, the ones who were attracted by the Cuban populist discourse, therefore separating the legitimacy of the Revolution from communist ideology, and instead explaining it through nationalism and populism.

While most of these explanations can work separately, I believe that an approach that treats those as different aspects of the same phenomenon has the best explicative potential. Therefore, my research will have a multidisciplinary approach and will try to combine different explanations from distinct disciplines and theoretic approaches, to understand the phenomenon in a cohesive way.

---

<sup>53</sup> (Dominguez, 1993); (Farber, 2006); (Lopez, 2002)

<sup>54</sup> Whitehead, L. (2016). The 'puzzle' of autocratic resilience/regime collapse: the case of Cuba. *Third World Quarterly*, 37(9), 1666-1682.

<sup>55</sup> Farber, S. (2006). *The origins of the Cuban Revolution reconsidered*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press., p.50.

## 6. Research Methods and Theoretical Framework

This research will employ two main research methods. First, I will employ a process tracing method, looking for the causal factors that made the Revolution and its victory possible and the legitimation methods connected to it.

The second method that will be applied is the use of discourse analysis to understand Cuban propaganda, its message, and its reception from both the population and foreigners. The aim of looking at propaganda is to analyse the message. This will lead to a comparative study between different time periods in order to discover if the legitimation strategy changed over time and if it did, if it changed accordingly with other major political or historical events.

There are different possible legitimation strategies that draw from different legitimising sources. This thesis is set to differentiate the legitimation processes that were in play during the Cuban Revolution and, in particular, around the figure of Fidel Castro, the sources they stemmed from, and their target. The main theoretical framework that will be employed is Weber's work on the sources of legitimacy. In this context, his theory of endogenous legitimation will be central, because it takes into account the different possible target audiences and the need to differentiate the legitimation strategies accordingly.

Endogenous legitimation refers to "an action or series of actions – speeches, writing, ritual, display – whereby people justify to themselves or others the actions they are taking and the identities they are expressing or claiming"<sup>56</sup>. What is important of this theory is the notion that rulers often need to justify their power to themselves, that there are different audiences the leaders are trying to convince, and, therefore, that there need to be different legitimation strategies for different audiences.

However, in order to be comprehensive, endogenous legitimation needs to be combined with the study of mass-legitimation. I argue that mass-legitimation is connected with self-legitimation, since this is oftentimes used as a tool of self-promotion, self-integration, and self-exemplification<sup>57</sup>.

---

<sup>56</sup> Barker, R. (2001). *Legitimizing Identities: The Self-Presentations of Rulers and Subjects*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 163-164.

<sup>57</sup> Jones, E., & Pittman, T. (1982). Toward a General Theory of Strategic Self-Presentation. In J. Suls, *Psychological Perspectives on the Self* (Vol. 1, pp. 231-262). Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

This means that the actors that employ the legitimation processes strive to possess a moral authority and to get their audience to identify with them.

Gronau, Schmidkte and Biegoń define legitimation strategies as “goal-oriented activities employed to establish and maintain a reliable basis of diffuse support for a political regime by its social constituencies”<sup>58</sup> and distinguish between substantive and communicative strategies. Substantive strategies involve institutional change, while the communicative ones employ communication instruments such as speeches and manifestos, and can be carried out by and through a plethora of actors, such as political leaders and the media.

In the case of the Cuban Revolution, the legitimation strategy implemented was of a communicative nature. I argue that in that period there was an active and conscious search for legitimation from the different souls of the armed struggle, and will analyse the strategies implemented by Fidel Castro and the 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement (M-26-7).

I will divide the numerous processes of legitimation based on the different means they employ and audiences they plan to reach and influence, and analyse the different sources of the legitimation processes. These can be divided into national-historical, authoritative-normative, and by comparison. The national-historical sources include references to Martí, Maceo, the War of Independence, the Constitution. The authoritative-normative sources include arguments such as the ousting of an illegitimate rule, the elimination of imperialist influence, and themes such as democracy, *coup d'état*, human rights, foreign invasion, imperialism, illegality, the Constitution. References to the Constitution are, therefore, both historical and normative. The third source of legitimation is by comparison, alternatively with Batista and his army, and with other souls of the Revolution.

---

<sup>58</sup> Gronau, J., Schmidkte, H., & Biegoń, D. (September 3-6, 2014). ECPR General Conference. *The quest for legitimacy in world politics - international institutions' legitimation strategies* (pp. 1-47). Glasgow: University of Bremen Collaborative Research Centre 597, p.12

## 7. Legitimation through history

### a. History of rural guerrilla

Rural guerrilla in Cuba had a respected tradition. It dated back to the nineteenth century struggle for independence from Spain. Castro associated himself and his struggle with the War of Independence led by Antonio Maceo and José Martí's ideas<sup>59</sup>. He claimed that the Revolution was derived from that struggle and intended to complete it and achieve the objectives that the war could not achieve or that were lost under Batista's dictatorship. Moreover, the link with the fighters for independence, who had become Cuban heroes, was a strong source of legitimacy and helped present the Sierra guerrillas as idealized fighters fighting to complete the independence struggle and to restore constitutional freedoms that were undermined by Batista's coup<sup>60</sup>.

### b. Link to Martí

Castro's frequent use and references to Martí's image and thought granted him legitimacy<sup>61</sup>. José Martí was widely acknowledged as the 'Apostle of Cuban Independence', the mind behind the colonial revolution against Spain.

The similarities in their lives helped cement this parallel between the two figures. Both men were arrested for treason and had to go in exile. From exile, both of them planned and carried out an invasion of Cuba. Moreover, the M-26-7 was founded on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martí's birth. However, the parallel with the War of Independence did not stop with the figure of Martí. Castro carried out a rural guerrilla campaign in the Oriente Province, in the same area where Maceo fought a similar campaign in the late nineteenth century.

Martí was a national hero and as that, he was not tightly linked to a specific political party, but was revered by all sectors of the political spectrum and the population as a whole. Identification with such a widely respected figure gave a boost to Castro's legitimacy, enabling him to claim a

---

<sup>59</sup> Miller, N. (2003). The Absolution of History: Uses of the Past in Castro's Cuba. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38(1), 147-162.

<sup>60</sup> Raths, D. (1984). *Urban and Rural Guerrilla Warfare: The Cuban Model*. Austin: Stephen F. Austin State University.

<sup>61</sup> Rice, D. (1992). *The Rhetorical Uses of the Authorizing Figure: Fidel Castro and José Martí*. New York: Praeger

link between the Revolution and the heroes of Cuban independence<sup>62</sup>. Martí was, therefore, a sort of justificatory agent for the rebels' actions<sup>63</sup>, and a unifier one. Martí was a symbol of nationalist struggle and of the inevitability of the Revolution<sup>64</sup>.

## 8. The urban guerrilla

While Castro and his group waged a rural guerrilla war in the mountains of the Sierra Maestra, in the eastern part of Cuba, they were not the only insurrectionist group. Several groups opted for a different setting and conducted an urban guerrilla, trying to mobilize the population of the cities to take part in the revolutionary struggle. The most important of these groups were the *Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil* (DRE), and the urban branch of the M-26-7, and were present in the biggest cities. Both guerrilla strategies aimed at mobilizing the masses, in particular the youth, against the Batista regime, but while Castro's M-26-7 target was a military victory from the countryside, the urban groups expected the urban population to rise against the dictatorship. This difference in strategy often caused disagreement between the two souls of the struggle<sup>65</sup>, with Castro publicly distancing himself and his guerrillas from some of the urban stances and actions.

The strategy of urban groups was aimed at wearing out Batista's credibility and at showing his impotence against revolutionary violence. To achieve these results, the fighters often planted bombs in symbolic but relatively safe places not with the intent to kill, but to cause damage to installations and facilities such as the power line or the telephone lines, to highlight the weakness and impotence of the army and government in their respect. By interrupting the daily operations in the city, they intended to show their relative position of power and discredit the government's stance that the rebellion was under control<sup>66</sup>. However, the large use of bombs and explosives made it easy for the government to label them as terrorists.

The *Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil's* strategy to overthrow Batista was a strictly

---

<sup>62</sup> Kice, B. (2008, December). From the Mountains to the Podium: The Rhetoric of Fidel Castro. Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College.

<sup>63</sup> Rice, D. (1992). *The Rhetorical Uses of the Authorizing Figure: Fidel Castro and José Martí*. New York: Praeger.

<sup>64</sup> Miller, N. (2003). The Absolution of History: Uses of the Past in Castro's Cuba. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38(1), 147-162.

<sup>65</sup> Kice, B. (2008, December). From the Mountains to the Podium: The Rhetoric of Fidel Castro. Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College.

<sup>66</sup> DePalma, A. (2006). *The man who invented Fidel: Castro, Cuba, and Herbert L. Matthews of the New York Times*. New York: PublicAffairs.

military one, their objective was the assassination of Batista (*golpe arriba*), which they thought would make the regime collapse, and the subsequent hold of free, democratic elections. On March 13, 1957, the DRE carried out an assault of the presidential palace in Havana. Simultaneously, their leader José Antonio Echevarría announced on the radio the death of Batista. However, the assault failed and resulted in the death of most of the leaders of the DRE, including Echevarría. The failure of the plan, the subsequent death of many of the assailants, and the wrong announcement regarding Batista's death highly reduced the group's credibility. Castro used this defeat to criticize and condemn their strategy, referring to it as a useless bloodshed<sup>67</sup>.

The other soul of the urban guerrilla fight, the urban branch of the M-26-7, applied a very different strategy. Their objective was not the assassination of the dictator, but rather to provoke a popular uprising against the regime<sup>68</sup>. To reach this objective, on April 9, 1958, led by the leader Faustino Pérez, they instigated a general strike in the major Cuban cities to mobilize the people. However, the strike failed, with the result of undermining the legitimacy of urban leaders.

Moreover, Batista's strategy to target the urban resistance first favored Castro's position in the revolutionary elite. Because of their high visibility and widespread label as terrorists, they diverted the attention and energy of the army away from the guerrillas hiding in the mountains. The repression of the army resulted in the capture or death of many combatants and some of the leaders, most notably Frank País, leader of the underground M-26-7 in Santiago and critic of Castro.

Therefore, the failure of some high-profile actions from the urban groups and the deaths of the most prominent revolutionary leaders helped to establish Fidel Castro as the most important and visible leader of the Revolution, and to grant him and his strategy more legitimacy, compared to the obvious failure of urban strategy. Moreover, in the aftermath of the failure of urban guerrilla plans, the M-26-7 started carrying out more attacks not only in the mountains, but also in sugar fields and in cities, to capitalize the temporary power vacuum with visible actions.

In this context, Castro and the rural guerrilla (called *sierra*) increased their relative legitimacy in the eyes of the Cuban people by means of comparison with the urban branches (called *llano*) and their failures. By highlighting their defeats and errors, Castro managed to position himself as a real and strong alternative to the suicide missions that were carried out in the city.

---

<sup>67</sup> Escalona, R. (1992). *The Tiger and the Children: Fidel Castro and the Judgment of History*. Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, p. 99-100.

<sup>68</sup> Escalona, R. (1992). p. 106.

While the *llano* fighters were considered terrorists, Castro and his fighters were increasingly seen as romanticized figures, unselfishly fighting for freedom.

## 9. Batista's strategy

Batista's strategy at the beginning of the Revolution was to use Castro's threat to crack down on existing internal opposition to the regime. His military response to the landing of the Granma and the following days was not extremely decisive. With the threat of Castro leading a guerrilla group against his regime, Batista had the pretext to purge internal political opposition<sup>69</sup>.

Moreover, in the war against guerrilla Batista decided to start by eradicating the urban fighters. The strategy proved relatively successful, with the death of many leaders, which ended favoring Castro's plea as main revolutionary leader.

Furthermore, in an attempt to isolate the Sierra fighters and to make military operations smoother, in the summer of 1957 several families living in the Sierra Maestra were forcibly moved and placed in relocations camps. This helped foster the reputation of the brutality of Batista's army, alienating the support of the people.

## 10. Legitimation by comparison with the official army and Batista's government

### a. Relations with peasants

Peasants of the Sierra Maestra were considered as natural allies by the rural guerrillas. This was partly due to ideological beliefs, and partly because peasants were enduring the poorest living conditions in Cuba. In 1953 85% of peasants did not own the land they worked, but rented it<sup>70</sup>. Moreover, the literacy rate was extremely low, and they did not have access to good medical care.

For these reasons, the M-26-7 believed that the Sierra Maestra peasants would be sympathetic to their cause. In the early months after the Granma landing, peasant aid, or at least, passivism, was crucial for the survival of the rebels<sup>71</sup>. But it was only after Batista's army started forcibly relocating and interrogating families and villages that peasant support became more active.

---

<sup>69</sup> Raths, D. (1984). *Urban and Rural Guerrilla Warfare: The Cuban Model*. Austin: Stephen F. Austin State University.

<sup>70</sup> Kapcia, A. (2014). *Leadership in the Cuban Revolution: The unseen story*. London: Zed Books Ltd

<sup>71</sup> Raths, D. (1984). *Urban and Rural Guerrilla Warfare: The Cuban Model*. Austin: Stephen F. Austin State University.

However, even if a reasonable number of peasants joined the rebel forces, the command roles remained filled by educated, middle-class people<sup>72</sup>.

Therefore, the involvement of peasants in the Revolution served more a political agenda than a military one<sup>73</sup>. Having the support of the people living in the Sierra Maestra helped foster the human image of the Sierra fighters, in contrast to Batista's army.

#### b. 'Humanitarianism'

Throughout the Revolution, the rural guerrillas were able to create and maintain a 'humanitarian' image, at least in comparison with the official army. Since cooperation with peasants was vital for guerrillas, they posed themselves as benefactors, always paying for the supplies they took from stores and peasants, despite a persisting lack of funds<sup>74</sup>. Moreover, as Taber reports, once the guerrillas settled in the Sierra Maestra, they established a "revolutionary government with a code of law, which could be looked to as a stabilizing force in an area long neglected by the Havana government."<sup>75</sup> Stealing, rape and betrayal were severely punished, oftentimes even with death. Finally, rebels often provided the rural population with medical aid and organized schools.

There are different account regarding the treatment of prisoners. While some authors stress the summary shooting of captured soldiers<sup>76</sup>, others choose to highlight the examples of humane treatment and medical care given to them. Most probably, both versions are partially right, but the official version of Castro and *Radio Rebelde* was the latter one, and helped the rebels gain a human image. During Matthews' interview, Castro stated that "We are killing many, but when we take prisoners they are never shot. We question them, talk kindly to them, take their arms and equipment, and then set them free"<sup>77</sup>.

In another article, Matthews wrote what was the shared sentiment amongst many in Cuba, in which he highlights the harsh comparison between Castro's and Batista's treatment of prisoners. "This is the sort of conduct that has helped to win for Señor Castro so extraordinary a place in the hearts and minds of Cubans and has caused the Government's accusations of criminality and

---

<sup>72</sup> (Raths 1984); (Farber 2006).

<sup>73</sup> AlRoy, G. C. (1967). The Peasantry in the Cuban Revolution. *The Review of Politics*, 29(1), 87-99.

<sup>74</sup> Matthews, H. (1957, February 24). Cuban Rebel Is Visited in Hideout. *The New York Times*, p.1.

<sup>75</sup> Taber, R. (1965). *The War of the Flea: A Study of Guerrilla Warfare Theory and Practise*. New York: Lyle Stuart, p. 40.

<sup>76</sup> Marquez-Sterling, M. (2009). *Cuba 1952-1959: The True Story of Castro's Rise to Power*. Wintergreen: Kleiopatria Digital Press.

<sup>77</sup> Matthews, H. (1957, February 24). Cuban Rebel Is Visited in Hideout. *The New York Times*, p.1.

communism to be ridiculed”<sup>78</sup>. A series of highly visible actions helped cement Castro’s ‘humanitarian’ image, the most notable being the release of several wounded soldiers to the Cuban Red Cross in July 1958<sup>79</sup> to allow them to get access to medical care.

## 11. Legitimation through official manifestos

### a. The Moncada trial defense: ‘History will absolve me’<sup>80</sup>

On July 26, 1953 Fidel Castro and a small number of followers carried out an attack of the Moncada military Barracks in Santiago de Cuba to seize weapons to aliment an armed insurrection against the regime of Batista. Although from a military point of view the attack could be considered futile, with almost all participants being killed or captured, including Castro himself, it helped establish Castro’s image as a courageous citizen willing to stand up to a corrupt government that attained power through illegitimate means, and to present him as a leader of the Revolution<sup>81</sup>. Moreover, the Moncada attack is widely accepted as the start of the Cuban Revolution.

During the trial that followed, Fidel Castro, representing himself, delivered a speech that would soon become the program of the revolutionary strategy, turning Castro in a symbol of the rebellion. He used his defense plea to denounce the injustices of the Batista regime and presented the objectives that the insurgents wanted to achieve: the ousting of the corrupted Batista regime, and the implement of ample social reforms under a revolutionary government<sup>82</sup>.

The speech itself did not act as a defense plea; rather, it acted as a declaration of principles. It did not have the objective of asking for mercy, on the contrary, Castro took upon himself the responsibility of the planning and carrying out of the attack, and used the speech to denounce the unconstitutionality of the Batista regime. He pointed out the unconstitutional moves of the regime since its seize of power on March 10, 1952: the reinstatement of the death penalty for treason, the disbandment of opposing political parties, the increased difficulty for people to take part in the

---

<sup>78</sup> Matthews, H. (1957, June 9). Castro Rebels Gain In Face of Offensive By the Cuban Army. *The New York Times*, p. 1.

<sup>79</sup> ICRC. (2005, July 12). *The ICRC since 1945: Cuba, the revolution and its immediate aftermath* . Retrieved June 18, 2017, from ICRC - International Committee of the Red Cross.

<sup>80</sup> Castro, F. (2007). *La Historia me Absolverá*. Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales.

<sup>81</sup> Rice, D. (1992). *The Rhetorical Uses of the Authorizing Figure: Fidel Castro and José Martí*. New York: Praeger

<sup>82</sup> Castro, F. (2007). *La Historia me Absolverá*. Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales.

political sphere. In this context, a typical defense would have been trivial, because of the corruption of the whole judicial system<sup>83</sup>.

In a process of distancing himself from Batista, Castro stated that the principles of the Revolution were based on the writings of José Martí, Eduardo Chibás, and the 1940 Constitution (symbols of positive change in Cuba), appealing to a nationalist feeling. However, the reforms he proposed were socialist in nature (and therefore at the time mostly considered as radical): the change of ownership of land from landowners to the small farmers that were renting it; the redistribution of land to poor peasant families; a steep reduction of rent prices.

Moreover, Castro used the speech to distance himself from Batista and other dictators, more than to present his program for the Revolution and the future of Cuba<sup>84</sup>. In this way, he managed to adopt two separate sources of legitimation: nationalism and socialism. Furthermore, nationalism in 20<sup>th</sup> century Cuba was usually paired with anti-imperialistic feelings, both for the still recent struggle for independence from Spain, and for the (perceived) involvement of the USA in national matters during the Batista regime. Batista was indeed supported by the United States, but Cubans also resented the hordes of American tourists that flew to Cuba to visit its casinos and brothels, which were owned by the Cuban mafia, the regime, or American companies. Therefore, despite a growth in Cuban economy was registered in the '50s, the lives of ordinary Cubans had not changed or had even worsened, in a country rich in natural resources, but seriously under-industrialized.

Furthermore, in his speech Castro stressed the illegitimacy of Batista's regime, since it came to power with a *coup d'état* and not through the planned democratic elections, which he would have lost. Additionally, the steep reduction in constitutional liberties was another of the main sources of Batista's illegitimacy. With the reinstatement of a stricter crime of treason, Castro argued that even discussing politics could be punished. Moreover, the purposely vague phrasing of treason as an act 'military' in nature meant that the police could be arbitrary in the administration of justice<sup>85</sup>. Finally, in the 'treason' area fell also strikes. This limitation of the right to strike for Castro was the culmination of Batista's aggression against basic freedoms. Additionally, giving an interpretation of

---

<sup>83</sup> Kice, B. (2008). *From the Mountains to the Podium: The Rhetoric of Fidel Castro*. Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College.

<sup>84</sup> Kice, B. (2008).

<sup>85</sup> Castro, F. (2007). *La Historia me Absolverá*. Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales.

recent history that blamed Batista for most of Cuba's problems helped to unite different insurgent forces against a common enemy<sup>86</sup>.

As Kice<sup>87</sup> suggests, the 'History will absolve me' speech heavily relied on epideictic rhetoric, which is a form of rhetoric that centers around either praise or blame of a current situation<sup>88</sup>. Castro framed the present in binary terms through negation, constructing a clear distance between himself and Batista. What emerged from the speech was that Castro was not Batista, nor another corrupt Cuban politician, he was different, and wanted to bring freedom back to Cuba.

Therefore, the central ideas that emerged from the 'History will absolve me' speech were twofold: Castro was not Batista, but was rather inspired by constitutional values and the heroes of Cuban independence; and the main objective of his group and the Revolution was to improve living conditions for ordinary Cubans, and they were willing to risk their lives to achieve it. The combination of these two infused a new legitimacy to Castro's figure, who became a hero of the rebellion for the people. However, his rather radical ideas prevented him from gaining the support of mainstream political parties and other insurgent groups.

Instead, Cubans took to the streets demanding Castro's release, which happened a few months later. With the assault of the Moncada Barracks, Castro took upon himself the role of leader of what was beginning to be called the 'Generation of the Centenary', because of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martí's birth in 1853, providing them a direct link to the independence war and its legitimacy. For many, Castro and the M-26-7 were continuing Martí's struggle for freedom<sup>89</sup>.

What is extremely interesting about this speech is that it employs all three sources of legitimation that this thesis is taking into account: national-historic (in the link with the War of Independence), normative (in the illegitimacy of Batista's rule), and by comparison. It may be for this intrinsic complexity that 'History will absolve me' turned into the main political framework for the Revolution.

---

<sup>86</sup> Rice, D. (1992). *The Rhetorical Uses of the Authorizing Figure: Fidel Castro and José Martí*. New York: Praeger

<sup>87</sup> Kice, B. (2008). *From the Mountains to the Podium: The Rhetoric of Fidel Castro*. Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College.

<sup>88</sup> Kice, B. (2008), p. 17.

<sup>89</sup> Rice, D. (1992). *The Rhetorical Uses of the Authorizing Figure: Fidel Castro and José Martí*. New York: Praeger

## b. The Manifesto of the Sierra Maestra (MSM)<sup>90</sup>

In June 1957 five opposition leaders (Millo Ochoa and Carlos Márquez Sterling from the Ortodoxo Party, José Pardo Llada of the *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario*, Porfiro Pendás of *Defensa de la Constitución*, and Amalio Fiallo of *Movimiento de Liberación*) published what was known as the ‘Manifesto of the Five’, a call for unity that advocated for a return to the 1940 Constitution, the end of violence, and free elections. The manifesto stated that peace was a responsibility of both the government and the citizens, and that a political solution was to be found, starting with Batista stepping down<sup>91</sup>.

Castro responded to the ‘Manifesto of the Five’ with the ‘Manifesto of the Sierra Maestra’, on July 12, 1957. The manifesto was signed by Fidel, together with Raúl Chibás, an important leader of the Ortodoxo Party, and Felipe Pazos, economist and head of the National Bank of Cuba. Chibás and Pazos were well respected individuals, and, therefore, made the manifesto and Castro’s position more legitimate.

The MSM urged all Cubans to support the revolutionary struggle against Batista, called for his immediate resignation, and for free elections. However, it was stated that the rebels would support elections only after the stepping down of Batista, because only in that case elections could really be free and fair. Moreover, the MSM clearly stated that the Revolution would continue until Batista or any other military junta would be in power and depriving Cubans from their constitutional rights. Therefore, the Manifesto of the Sierra Maestra promised a return to the 1940 Constitution.

Furthermore, the manifesto laid out proposed social reforms that would primarily benefit and protect the people living in rural areas, the first supporters of Castro’s M-26-7. These were less radical than those of the Moncada trial speech, and included agrarian reforms and a campaign against illiteracy<sup>92</sup>.

In this case Castro used the authoritative legitimacy stemming from Chibás and Pazos to legitimize himself. Their reputation infused a whole new level of credibility to the manifesto’s provisions and gave it more political respectability. Moreover, the use of more moderate provisions

---

<sup>90</sup> Castro, F., Chibás, R., & Pazos, F. (n.d.). *Sierra Maestra Manifesto (July 12, 1957)*. Retrieved June 18, 2017, from Latinamerican Studies: <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/cuban-rebels/manifesto.htm>

<sup>91</sup> La solución está en las urnas, afirman 5 ptdos. de oposición. (1967, June 11). *Diario de la Marina*, 136, p. 1.

<sup>92</sup> Raths, D. (1984). *Urban and Rural Guerrilla Warfare: The Cuban Model*. Austin: Stephen F. Austin State University.

than those of the 'History will absolve me' pamphlet helped the new manifesto reach a broader public.

## 12. Legitimation through the media

### a. Foreign interviews

Following the disastrous Granma landing, Castro and the other survivors went into hiding in the mountains to regroup and rebuild their force. The lack of high-profile or visible actions by the group in the immediate aftermath spread the rumor of Castro's death. When the rumor arrived to Castro himself, he understood that he had to come out of hiding and let everyone know that he was alive and fighting. However, the media and press in Cuba were under a total censorship regarding Castro and the Revolution and were only allowed to report news that came from the regime. For this reason, he decided to contact the foreign press. American press, in the specific, in a sort of re-enactment of what José Martí did in 1895, during the War of Independence<sup>93</sup>.

The first journalist to reach Castro in the Sierra Maestra was Herbert Matthews, a correspondent for The New York Times. Before leaving for Cuba, Matthews had described the Granma landing as "a recent invasion by terrorists"<sup>94</sup>. However, once he met Fidel and the other rebels, he was persuaded by their arguments and described Castro as a "flaming symbol of this opposition to the regime," and being a man "of courage and of remarkable qualities of leadership"<sup>95</sup>. In his article, Matthews went beyond the interview and described the living conditions and the perils the guerrilla had to endure, turning them into idealized heroes fighting for freedom. "Before Matthews showed up, Castro was a man, a rebel, a hero. What Matthews did was invent Fidel as an idea, a conception that could remain elusive, always changing, unknowable, unfathomable, and therefore, in the end, undefeatable"<sup>96</sup>, he was a symbol of hope in a time of repression.

### b. Radio Rebelde

The use of radio broadcast through *Radio Rebelde* proved to be a powerful means of propaganda.

---

<sup>93</sup> Kice, B. (2008). *From the Mountains to the Podium: The Rhetoric of Fidel Castro*. Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College.

<sup>94</sup> DePalma, A. (2006). *The man who invented Fidel: Castro, Cuba, and Herbert L. Matthews of the New York Times*. New York: PublicAffairs, p. 31.

<sup>95</sup> Matthews, H. (1957, February 24). Cuban Rebel Is Visited in Hideout. *The New York Times*, p. 1.

<sup>96</sup> DePalma, A. (2006). *The man who invented Fidel: Castro, Cuba, and Herbert L. Matthews of the New York Times*. New York: PublicAffairs, p. 28.

The rebels would broadcast account of fights with the official army (frequently exaggerating their victories), speeches and thoughts of the leaders, commemorative speeches for fallen comrades, accounts of their work in favor of the local peasantry, like educational and health facilities, spreading the image of a powerful and yet humanitarian guerrilla campaign.

During the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the institution of *Radio Rebelde*, Castro commented, “Radio Rebelde truly became our means of mass communication, to talk to the people, and it became a much listened to station. It was crucial for disseminating military information and played a key role throughout the war”<sup>97</sup>.

The access to a radio broadcast highly increased Castro’s group’s visibility and the material that was broadcasted had a legitimating purpose. On the other hand, the urban fighters could not afford to be equivalently exposed, because of the fact that they had to hide from Batista’s police. This difference in visibility made the division between the two groups even more profound. While Castro could defend the actions of his men and highlight their victories, urban leaders did not have that option and this resulted in a degree of alienation from the people, who did not always understand the end behind some of their actions and were instead bombarded by Batista’s propaganda and accounts of his victories on the urban front.

*Radio Rebelde* was intelligently used to reach wider constituencies and to promote M-26-7 ideas and propaganda, to make the people relate to the struggle and make them feel part of it. Moreover, thanks to the monopoly of unofficial medias, Castro could present himself as the main revolutionary figure and the rural guerrilla as the strategy most likely to succeed<sup>98</sup>. Thanks to the accounts of battles on *Radio Rebelde*, it started to spread the idea that a rural guerrilla could actually defeat a conventional army, and more people joined the rebels in their efforts.

The image created through Matthews’ and later Robert Taber’s accounts of the Sierra fighters spread not only in the United States, but also in Cuba<sup>99</sup>, supported by the reports from *Radio Rebelde*. Segments of Batista’s army began surrendering, fostering popular support for Castro, as the defections were interpreted as a synonym of the legitimacy of the M-26-7<sup>100</sup>.

---

<sup>97</sup>Radio Rebelde. (n.d.). *About us*. Retrieved June 18, 2017, from Radio Rebelde: <http://www.radiorebelde.cu/english/about-us/>

<sup>98</sup> Kice, B. (2008). *From the Mountains to the Podium: The Rhetoric of Fidel Castro*. Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College.

<sup>99</sup> Teel, L. (2015). *Reporting the Cuban Revolution: How Castro Manipulated American Journalists*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

<sup>100</sup> Kice, B. (2008). *From the Mountains to the Podium: The Rhetoric of Fidel Castro*. Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College.

### 13. Legitimation through official speeches

A common strategy that Castro employed throughout all his most important speeches is the strategy of identification through division. He clearly separates ‘the Revolution’ from an enemy, which has changed through time, adapting to the new stages of the Revolution. The Revolution is, therefore, used to create a shared, new Cuban identity that encompasses everybody, including Castro himself. In this way, Castro creates a sense of collectiveness and closeness that makes it easier for people to sympathize with his fight and gives him legitimacy through contrast with the illegitimacy of the enemy<sup>101</sup>.

In a speech titled “What is a Real Democracy”, delivered on the 26th of July 1959, Castro presents his idea of democracy and, quoting Lincoln, states that democracy is the “government of the people, by the people, for the people”<sup>102</sup>. To answer those who criticized Cuba for a lack of democracy, Castro states that “democracy is the fulfillment of the will of the people”<sup>103</sup>, and since it was the people who demanded him to take the power, Cuba was a democracy. Moreover, he claimed that the millions of people that regularly participated in his rallies were a form of direct democracy<sup>104</sup>.

### 14. Change in discourse over time

The Moncada trial defense was printed and became the political manifesto of the M-26-7. However, its content was deemed too extreme by some other revolutionary groups and the Moncada attackers were branded as terrorists and extremists. To gain a larger following and to be able to impose himself as the sole leader of the revolutionary forces, in 1957 Castro wrote the Manifesto of the Sierra Maestra, a less radical pamphlet that had the desired effect of rallying more support both from the population and other groups. With the Caracas Pact (20 July 1958), Castro imposed himself as the *de facto* leader of the Revolution, managing to impose his candidate (Manuel

---

<sup>101</sup> Kice, B. (2008). *From the Mountains to the Podium: The Rhetoric of Fidel Castro*. Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College.

<sup>102</sup> Castro, F. (1959, July 26). *DISCURSO PRONUNCIADO POR EL COMANDANTE FIDEL CASTRO RUZ, PRIMER MINISTRO DEL GOBIERNO REVOLUCIONARIO, EN LA CONCENTRACION CAMPESINA, EFECTUADA EL 26 DE JULIO DE 1959*. Retrieved from Cuba.cu: <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1959/esp/f260759e.html>

<sup>103</sup> Castro, F. (1959, July 26).

<sup>104</sup> Guerra, L. (2012). *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959-1971*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, p. 38.

Urrutia) as the official candidate for the provisional presidency after the ousting of Batista.

Despite the rather radical provisions of 'History will absolve me', the image of the guerrillas was one of fighters driven by egalitarian and democratic ideologies, social justice, and the tangible political goal to overthrow Batista and establish fairer conditions for all Cubans<sup>105</sup>. The ousting of Batista was presented as the solution to all of Cuba's problems. However, as previously mentioned, Castro rarely stated specific goals for after Batista's ousting, choosing to concentrate on common ideas and goals that encompassed different political agendas.

Aside from the 'History will absolve me' speech, which was mainly an indictment of the past, Castro was purposely vague in his speeches and manifestos, trying to mobilize as broad a following as possible by citing mainly widely supported themes, such as the restoration of democracy and freedoms, and social justice. The fact that 'History will absolve me' endured as the central programmatic paper during the whole Revolution means that legitimacy was achieved through the exploitation and manipulation of history, rather than ideology<sup>106</sup>. Moreover, being Cuba a predominantly agricultural nation, Castro's attack to the exploitation of peasants by big landowners was not seen only as a socialist theme, but also as a nationalist issue. In fact, high percentages of fertile Cuban lands were owned by foreigners<sup>107</sup>, preventing industrial diversification and the strengthening of Cuban economy.

Once Castro came to power his speeches continued highlighting the crucial importance of popular support, and turned it into a sort of Greek direct democracy. Moreover, with his speeches Castro created a narrative of common struggle against the shared enemy that was Batista, and later the United States, therefore neglecting internal rivalries and disunity, promoting a new interpretation of the Revolution that stressed the morality and necessity of the struggle for national sovereignty and against corruption and abuse<sup>108</sup>.

The first measures to be implemented had a high symbolic meaning and were mainly nationalist and populist in nature: to distance the new government from the recent past, Castro nationalized many US-owned industries, the casinos and brothels were closed, and military barracks

---

<sup>105</sup> Taber, R. (1965). *The War of the Flea: A Study of Guerrilla Warfare Theory and Practise*. New York: Lyle Stuart.

<sup>106</sup> Miller, N. (2003). The Absolution of History: Uses of the Past in Castro's Cuba. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38(1), 147-162.

<sup>107</sup> DePalma, A. (2006). *The man who invented Fidel: Castro, Cuba, and Herbert L. Matthews of the New York Times*. New York: PublicAffairs.

<sup>108</sup> Guerra, L. (2012). *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959-1971*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

converted into schools. These measures were highly political and were devised to reclaim national sovereignty and to clear Cuba from US influence.

The revolutionary trials against segments of the army played a public role too. While these were heavily criticized by the USA, they met with the (apparent) widespread support of the Cuban population. In fact, Castro repeatedly asked the public if they supported the trials and was met with an overwhelming positive response<sup>109</sup>. The trials were mainly summary and consisted of the testimony of the tortures suffered by common people. Most of the accused were found guilty and sentenced to execution.

Furthermore, the role of history as a driving force of the Revolution was reaffirmed through policies of retribution and restoration. The government carried out policies of confiscation of goods belonging to the accused or that were misappropriated during the previous dictatorship. The army and the political parties that supported Batista's rule were dissolved, and Batista's loyalists were purged from the public administration, with many leaving the country, alongside many industrialists, preoccupied with the redistribution and nationalization policies the government had started implementing. All of these actions were taken in the name of the people against any remaining manifestation of Batista's rule. History was assigned a double role: all of Cuba's problems, such as poor living conditions and illiteracy, were presented as a result of imperialist exploitation and the illegitimate rule of Batista. On the other hand, history was a crucial element for the legitimation of the Revolution: it provided evidence of the long-standing tradition of resistance to exploitation and tyranny from the Cuban population<sup>110</sup>, justifying the use of force in its illustrious precedents. Therefore, the actions of the Cuban government in its early days were "anti-capitalist in orientation and rhetoric but not Marxist in methodology. Its determinism [was] moral rather than economic; its emphasis on action rather than theory."<sup>111</sup>

Aside from small changes in terminology and media aimed at captivating different audiences, the core of the legitimation strategy did not undergo any substantial variation in the different stages of the Revolution and the early government. Central to it were national-historical and populist issues, together with anti-imperialistic sentiments that stemmed directly from them. Even if it is true that there were socialist and communist drives to the Revolution, the exceptional political and

---

<sup>109</sup> Miller, N. (2003). The Absolution of History: Uses of the Past in Castro's Cuba. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38(1), 147-162.

<sup>110</sup> Miller, N. (2003).

<sup>111</sup> Miller, N. (2003), p. 148.

historical reality of the 1950s Cuba made it possible for them to be read as national-populistic by big portions of the population. In fact, the narrative of national liberation from foreign oppression was at the same time synonym of an anti-imperialist sentiment, and of the continuation of the War of Independence and its search for national sovereignty. In the same way, the agrarian reform and policy of redistribution were both part of a socialist agenda, and the result of reclaiming what was misappropriated by the Batista's dictatorship. The same double explication could be applied to the policies of nationalization and literacy, among others.

## 15. Conclusion

This thesis was concerned with the legitimation strategies of non-state actors and analysed the Cuban Revolution as a case study. The work was divided into paragraphs, each analyzing a different source of legitimation strategy, or a different means of communication that was used to reach the target audience.

Referring back to the literature, Schlichte and Schneckener put forward three separate legitimation processes that violent non-state actors need to implement: first, they need to present their violent means as legitimate; furthermore, they need legitimation to gain a following and moral and material support; finally, they need to address their claims simultaneously to different audiences, both nationally and internationally.

Regarding the legitimation of violence, the most common claims concern its defensive use; the protection of oppressed communities; a reaction to injustice; self-determination. In the case of the Cuban Revolution, these claims were often combined, resulting in a complex and profound legitimation strategy. The insurgents claimed to be fighting in favour of the oppressed Cuban population, which was subject to random violence by the police and army, misappropriations, mistrials, limitation of liberties, and other forms of injustice. Additionally, being the Batista government heavily sponsored by the United States, the rebels could claim to act in the name of self-determination and freedom.

Moreover, a further source of legitimation is Weber's 'charismatic leadership', that entails the mystification or martyrdom of the most prominent figures of the struggle. The creation of heroes ready to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the greater good helps depict an idealized, invincible epic struggle. Since the Moncada trial, Fidel Castro emerged as a young and charismatic idealist, image that was confirmed by the interviews with foreign journalists, first of all the one by Matthews, in which the guerrillas were depicted as idealized and selfless fighters for freedom against a repressive regime. As DePalma<sup>112</sup> points out, Matthews transformed Fidel into an invincible idea, changing his perception both in Cuba and abroad.

Furthermore, legitimation processes are directed both outwards and inwards, and multiple legitimation strategies might be implemented at once. Two broad categories of sources of legitimation can be distinguished: symbolic and performance-centered. Symbolic sources are those stemming from the narrative put forward by the group, while performance-centered legitimating

---

<sup>112</sup> DePalma, A. (2006). *The man who invented Fidel: Castro, Cuba, and Herbert L. Matthews of the New York Times*. New York: PublicAffairs.

strategies are linked to its behavior and performance, both in relation with the adversary army and, perhaps most importantly, with the local population.

Traditional belief provides a crucial source of legitimacy in a number of armed groups. Through the link to heroic figures of the past, armed leaders possess intrinsic legitimacy as their heirs. On the same note, professional or military status grants a similar legitimacy. Fidel Castro repeatedly linked himself and his movement to the figure of José Martí and other heroes of the War of Independence against Spain. Claiming a parallel between these two causes, Castro granted himself the residual legitimacy of that struggle, while also adding nationalist and anti-imperialist themes to the legitimation strategy.

Moreover, a common symbolic strategy is to claim to represent the local population, taking on their grievances, and make them relevant. In this way, armed groups claim to act on the behalf of the population and in their interest. Finally, the threat of an enemy is a powerful source of legitimation. In this context, violence is legitimated as a means to defend the local population. The more corrupt and brutal the enemy, the more solidarity and acceptance the group will receive. In Cuba, the revolutionaries did claim to fight for the whole Cuban population, against the corrupted and repressive regime of Batista. Their goal was to gain better living conditions and to bring back freedom to a country with a troubled recent history.

Finally, performance-centered sources of legitimation include ‘charismatic leadership’, patrimonial and personal loyalties, and ‘delivery-based legitimization’, which entails a legitimation strategy based on the delivery of services to the fighters and local population. Throughout the Revolution, the M-26-7 strove to maintain a ‘humanitarian’ image, in comparison with the brutality of Batista’s army. This helped foster popular support in favour of the revolutionaries. The 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement was able to establish a revolutionary government in the Sierra Maestra, providing a code of law, basic medic services and schools to the local population. Through their fair treatment of peasants, the insurgents gained legitimacy, particularly in comparison to the cruelty employed by the regular army.

The analysis of the first political manifesto of the Revolution, the ‘History will absolve me’, is central to the analysis, because of its iconic nature and complex use of legitimating sources. Conventionally, the Cuban Revolution is agreed to have started on July 26, 1953, day in which a small number of armed students carried out an attack to the Moncada military Barrack, led by Fidel Castro. Aside from the practical objective of seizing weapons to arm the insurgency, the attack carried a profound symbolic meaning, and the attackers began to be known as the ‘Generation of the Centenary’, being 1953 the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of José Martí’s birth. ‘History will absolve me’ was mainly a denounce of the injustices perpetrated by the illegitimate and repressive regime of

Batista, and a declaration of principles of the insurgency. Castro advocated for the overthrow of the current government, and the implement of social reforms. During this speech, Castro combines all three of the sources of legitimation strategy analyzed in this thesis. He uses comparison to achieve legitimacy through a dissociation from Batista and other dictators. Moreover, the continue reference to the writings of Martí, Chibás, and the Constitution, are examples of national-historical sources of legitimation. Normative sources were implemented when Castro stressed the illegitimate way Batista came to power, and his intentional progressive limitation of constitutional liberties in the island.

Therefore, during the Cuban Revolution and in its immediate aftermath, the 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement and its leader Fidel Castro implemented a complex and multi-faceted legitimation strategy. The main elements of this strategy can be divided into national-historic, authoritative-normative sources, and through comparison. Different strategies were implemented to reach different audiences, oftentimes combining sources of legitimation to reach the broader constituency possible. Through a smart use of the media and the technology that was available, the guerrillas were able to spread their vision and legitimating narrative, providing some counterweight to the reports that were printed in the newspapers, galvanizing ample sectors of the population and demoralizing the official army, which soon started to defect. However, what all those three legitimation strategies had in common was the notion that the Revolution was for the people's sake, to free them from an oppressive government, and to increase their standard of living. It was the popular aspect of the Revolution that made the separate strategies cohesive and successful.

**a. Did the presence of charismatic and visible leaders aid the legitimating process?**

During the Moncada trial, Fidel Castro proved to be well versed in rhetoric, and proposed himself as a new, charismatic leader of the Revolution. The text of his defense plea was printed as a pamphlet and spread among the population, which rallied to ask his release, a testimony of his power of persuasion.

Moreover, a deciding factor in the success of the Revolution and the triumph of the M-26-7 in particular was the high visibility that Castro enjoyed from 1957 onwards. Thanks to the relative safety from Batista's army provided by the Sierra Maestra, Castro had the opportunity to expose himself to the media more than other rebel leaders. His charisma helped him turn Matthews into a supporter of the guerrillas, even if he was a proclaimed skeptic before adventuring in the Sierra Maestra. In the same way, through the Radio Rebelde broadcasts, Castro and other prominent

members of the M-26-7 spread their ideas and values, making people feel closer to their struggle and helping to cement the image of guerrillas as mystical, selfless fighters.

b. Did the narrative of a common enemy increase the cohesion of the revolutionary groups and help foster internal legitimation?

From an early stage, through the strategy of legitimation by comparison, Castro dissociated himself and his fighters from Batista and his army. This distance was repeatedly reaffirmed both through speeches and actions. One of the main themes that emerged from the 'History will absolve me' speech was that Castro was not Batista or any other dictator. Moreover, all of the problems and under-development of Cuba were blamed on Batista's rule. Through the years, Batista and his overthrow served the role of unifier of the separate armed groups and created cohesion of intention among insurgents, mainstream political parties, and large segments of the population. The depiction of Batista as the common enemy was successful also thanks to a steep fall of his perceived legitimacy. His purges of political opposition costed him political support, while the brutality with which his army handled the repression of insurgents and intellectuals through means of indiscriminate violence, widely employing torture, imprisonment, and forced relocation, alienated ample sectors of the population. At the same time, the Sierra fighters were broadcasting reports of the services they provided to the rural population, such as schools, medical care and a judicial system, and strove to spread a 'humanitarian' image of their treatment of prisoners. This comparison between brutality and mercy helped foster the idea of Batista as illegitimate in the eyes of the population.

Furthermore, in the figure of Batista was also condensed the anti-imperialist feeling that was still present among Cubans. This was possible because of different reasons: first of all, Batista had the open support of the American government which, during the first stages of the Revolution, provided him with arms and intelligence support; moreover, he encouraged foreign investment and tourism, which diverted funds from the majority of the population to the regime and the Cuban mafia; finally, with the limitation of constitutional liberties that followed Batista's *coup d'état*, he was accused of undermining the successes of the War of Independence, reviving the anti-imperialist and nationalist feelings that drove that struggle.

Therefore, the overthrow of Batista was the fulcrum of any programmatic document. In this context, the insurgents positioned themselves as the guardians of Cuban values, history, and people.

- c. By analysing the ethno-religious background of the Sierra Maestra fighters, Farber suggests that they were bound to be more attracted to national-populist discourse, rather than communist ideology.

While I did not study the ethno-religious background of the fighters and supporters of the Revolution, the results of the analysis pointed out that one of the main sources of legitimation was national-historical and that it had populist connotations. From the sources and discourses I analyzed, communist ideology did not appear to be the main source of legitimation, but it was rather a combination of national-historical and normative claims. To determine if this was a conscious choice to present the Revolution as more moderate, or if national concerns were the real driving forces of the Revolution, and the choice of building a communist state was made in a later stage, was not an aim of the thesis, and has, therefore, not been analyzed. However, this might be the starting point for further research.

#### Limitations of the work and challenges for future research:

A challenge that one encounters when researching an authoritarian regime is that the information available may be corrupted or partial. In the case of Cuba, the Batista dictatorship was closely followed by another authoritarian government that still persists, perpetuating the difficulty of finding complete and reliable information. The analysis of legitimacy further complicates the challenge, since in authoritarian regimes preference falsification is a common practice. However, being legitimation strategies, rather than legitimacy, the focus of the analysis, reduces the problem of preference falsification. Therefore, this thesis tried to combine various explanations based on different legitimation theories to get a picture as complete and inclusive as possible. This approach could be the basis for further research.

The aim of this thesis was to be descriptive and to depict the legitimation strategies in the most objective way possible. However, for reasons of time and space constraint, the analysis focuses only on legitimation strategies implemented by the 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement and Fidel Castro and what was deemed relevant to the three sources of legitimation I laid out. Therefore, there has been a skimming of the available documents and discourses produced during the Cuban Revolution, to serve the scope of the thesis. This means that the findings of the thesis are relevant only to the explanation of the (self-)legitimation strategies implemented by the M-26-7, which are not necessarily coincident with the strategies of the Cuban Revolution as a whole, or of other insurgent groups. However, this choice was made taking into account the central role played by Fidel Castro

as Prime Minister, and in light of the endurance of the regime, whose official narrative depicts the M-26-7 as the main responsible for the overthrow of Batista and the triumph of the Revolution.

## Bibliography

### Primary sources

- Castro, F. (1959, July 26). *DISCURSO PRONUNCIADO POR EL COMANDANTE FIDEL CASTRO RUZ, PRIMER MINISTRO DEL GOBIERNO REVOLUCIONARIO, EN LA CONCENTRACION CAMPESINA, EFECTUADA EL 26 DE JULIO DE 1959*. Retrieved from Cuba.cu: <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1959/esp/f260759e.html>;  
(2007). *La Historia me Absolverá*. Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales.
- Castro, F., Chibás, R., & Pazos, F. (n.d.). *Sierra Maestra Manifesto (July 12, 1957)*. Retrieved June 18, 2017, from Latinamerican Studies: <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/cuban-rebels/manifesto.htm>
- La solución está en las urnas, afirman 5 ptdos. de oposición. (1967, June 11). *Diario de la Marina*, 136, p. 1.
- Matthews, H. (1957, February 24). Cuban Rebel Is Visited in Hideout. *The New York Times*, p. 1;  
(1957, June 9). Castro Rebels Gain In Face of Offensive By the Cuban Army. *The New York Times*, p. 1.

### Secondary sources

- AlRoy, G. C. (1967). The Peasantry in the Cuban Revolution. *The Review of Politics*, 29(1), 87-99.
- Amaro, N. a. (1972). Una Sociología del Exilio: situación y perspectivas de los grupos cubanos en EEUU. *Aportes*, 7-24.
- Ameringer, C. D. (1985). The Auténtico Party and the Political Opposition in Cuba, 1952-57. *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 65(2), 327-351.
- Arjona, A. K. (2015). *Rebel Governance in Civil War*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Barker, R. (2001). *Legitimizing Identities: The Self-Presentations of Rulers and Subjects*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- DeFronzo, J. (1994). Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements. *Journal of World History*, 5(1), 156-158.

- del Aguila, J. (1999). Reflections on a Non-transition in Cuba: Comments on Elites. *Cuba in Transition. Papers and Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Meeting*, 9. Coral Gables, Florida.
- DePalma, A. (2006). *The man who invented Fidel: Castro, Cuba, and Herbert L. Matthews of the New York Times*. New York: PublicAffairs.
- Dominguez, J. I. (1993). The secret of Castro's staying in power. *Foreign Affairs*, 72(2), 97-107.
- Escalona, R. (1992). *The Tiger and the Children: Fidel Castro and the Judgment of History* . Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge.
- Farber, S. (2006). *The origins of the Cuban Revolution reconsidered*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Golab, A. (2015). ¿Una revolución sin violencia? Representación de la violencia en los primeros discursos de Fidel Castro. In M. Carrera Garrido, & M. Pietrak, *Violencia y discurso en el mundo hispánico: género, cotidianidad y poder* (pp. 189-201). Sevilla: Padilla Libros.
- Gronau, J., Schmidkte, H., & Biegoñ, D. (September 3-6, 2014). ECPR General Conference. *The quest for legitimacy in world politics - international institutions' legitimation strategies* (pp. 1-47). Glasgow: University of Bremen Collaborative Research Centre 597.
- Guerra, L. (2012). *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959-1971*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Hawkins, D. (2001, Jul.). Democratization Theory and Nontransitions: Insights from Cuba. *Comparative Politics*, 33(4), 441-461.
- Hoffmann, B. (2011, December). Legitimacy and Efficiency of Political Systems The International Dimensions of Authoritarian Legitimation: The Impact of Regime Evolution . *GIGA (German Institute of Global and Area Studies) Research Programme*(182).
- Horowitz, I. (1992). Revolution, longevity and legitimacy in communist states. *Studies In Comparative International Development*, 27(1), 61-75.
- ICRC. (2005, July 12). *The ICRC since 1945: Cuba, the revolution and its immediate aftermath* . Retrieved June 18, 2017, from ICRC - International Committee of the Red Cross.
- Jones , E., & Pittman, T. (1982). Toward a General Theory of Strategic Self-Presentation. In J. Suls, *Psychological Perspectives on the Self* (Vol. 1, pp. 231-262). Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Jost, J. a. (2001). *The Psychology of Legitimacy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kapcia, A. (2014). *Leadership in the Cuban Revolution: the unseen story*. London: Zed Books Ltd.
- Kice, B. (2008, December). From the Mountains to the Podium: The Rhetoric of Fidel Castro. Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College.

- Latin American Studies*. (n.d.). Retrieved from The Cuban Revolution Attack on the Presidential Palace (March 13, 1957): <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/palace-attack.htm>
- Levi, M. S. (2009, November). Conceptualizing Legitimacy, Measuring Legitimizing Beliefs. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 53(3), 345-375.
- Lispet, S. M. (1959). Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy. *The American Political Science Review*, 53(1), 69-105.
- Lopez, J. J. (2002). *Democracy Delayed: The Case of Castro's Cuba*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Marquez-Sterling, M. (2009). *Cuba 1952-1959: The True Story of Castro's Rise to Power*. Wintergreen: Kleiopatria Digital Press.
- Mesa-Lago, C. (2009). *Cuba after the Cold War*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh.
- Miller, N. (2003). The Absolution of History: Uses of the Past in Castro's Cuba. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38(1), 147-162.
- Parsons, T. (1969). *Politics and Social Structure*. New York: Free Press.
- Pedraza-Bailey, S. (1985). Cuba's Exiles: Portrait of a Refugee Migration. *The International Migration Review*, 19(1), 4-34.
- Pérez, L. A. (1980). In the Service of the Revolution: Two Decades of Cuban Historiography 1959-1979. *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 60(1), 79-89.
- Podder, S. (2013, March). Non-State Armed Groups and Stability: Reconsidering Legitimacy and Inclusion. *Contemporary Security Policy*, 34(1), 16-39.
- Private Truths, Public Lies The Social Consequences of Preference Falsification*. (n.d.). Retrieved from Harvard University Press: <http://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674707580>
- Raths, D. (1984). *Urban and Rural Guerrilla Warfare: The Cuban Model*. Austin: Stephen F. Austin State University.
- Rebelde, R. (n.d.). *About us*. Retrieved June 18, 2017, from Radio Rebelde: <http://www.radiorebelde.cu/english/about-us/>
- Rice, D. (1992). *The Rhetorical Uses of the Authorizing Figure: Fidel Castro and José Martí*. New York: Praeger.
- Saxonberg, S. (2013). *Transitions and Non-Transitions from Communism: Regime Survival in China, Cuba, North Korea, and Vietnam*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schlichte, K. a. (2016, February). Armed Groups and the Politics of Legitimacy. *Civil Wars*, 17(4), 409-424.

- Schoon, E. (2014). The Asymmetry of Legitimacy: Analyzing the Legitimation of Violence in 30 Cases of Insurgent Revolution. *Social Forces*, 93(2), 779-802.
- Schulz, D. E. (1993). Can Castro Survive? *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 35(1), 89-117.
- Taber, R. (1965). *The War of the Flea: A Study of Guerrilla Warfare Theory and Practice*. New York: Lyle Stuart.
- Teel, L. (2015). *Reporting the Cuban Revolution: How Castro Manipulated American Journalists*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Tyler, T. (2006, February). Psychological Perspectives on Legitimacy and Legitimation. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 375-400.
- Whitehead, H. (2006). Cuban Exceptionalism Revisited. *GIGA (German Institute of Global and Area Studies) Research Unit: Institute for Ibero-American Studies*.
- Whitehead, L. (2016). The 'puzzle' of autocratic resilience/regime collapse: the case of Cuba. *Third World Quarterly*, 37(9), 1666-1682.
- Zelditch, M. jr (2001). Theories of Legitimacy. In T. a. Jost, *The Psychology of Legitimacy* (pp. 33-53). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.