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The background of the cover is a photograph of a sunset over the ocean. The sky is filled with orange and yellow clouds. In the foreground, there is a dark silhouette of a street lamp on the left, and several people are silhouetted against the horizon. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

Statist utopianism and the **Cuban socialist transition**

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Table of contents

Abstract	3
Dedication	4
Acknowledgements	5
Introduction	6
Statist utopianism	9
Methods and limitations	12
Chapter 1: Statist utopianism	13
Utopianism and statist utopianism	15
Imposing communism	17
Capitalist vestiges	20
Transcendence and suppression	22
Binary exclusivity	29
Diagnosis	33
The state and statist utopianism	35
Soviet War Communism	37
Conclusions	41
Chapter 2: Cuba's Revolutionary Offensive	42
Incentives and consciousness	43
The persuasion of force	47
Statist utopian 'great leap forward'	53
Conclusions	59
Chapter 3: Cuban state socialism	61
Pendulum bias and policy zigzags	62
Peculiarities of Cuban state socialism	70
Statist utopianism and Stalinism	75
Conclusions	81
Conclusions	83
References	87

Cover: Havana, Cuba at dusk
Photo: Jo Gorman

Abstract

This thesis argues that the nature of ‘idealism’ or ‘utopianism’ in Cuba’s post-1959 socialist transition and the peculiarities of Cuban state socialism have been inadequately conceptualised. It hypothesises that the state-centrism of Cuba’s prevailing socialist model is a hybrid of ‘statist utopianism’ and the Stalinist imprint of a post-1970 relative Sovietisation of the Cuban Revolution. Statist utopianism is conceptualised in a Marxist theoretical framework as a distinctive approach to the socialist transition: imposing a communist vision on society rather than striving for its organic realisation. Unlike 16th–19th century Utopian socialism, statist utopianism rests on proletarian state power and has a state-centric dynamic. The thesis distinguishes between ‘organic transcendence’ and statist utopian approaches to the socialist transition and identifies statist utopianism’s distinctive political psychology. The concept is grounded historically in the late 1960s Cuban and early Soviet experiences of socialist transition. Cuba’s 1968–70 Revolutionary Offensive, which nationalised the remnant urban private sector, is characterised as a statist utopian ‘great leap forward’. Continuities and convergences between a late 1960s ‘idealist’ phase and subsequent Sovietisation has been overlooked or understated, and the thesis identifies methodological weaknesses in the ‘historical pendulum’ approach to the periodisation of the Cuban Revolution. It is argued that certain conceptual identities and institutional peculiarities of the prevailing (and now receding) Cuban socialist model comprise a mutually reinforcing state-centric nexus that cannot be explained on the basis of Sovietisation alone, and that this supports the hybridisation hypothesis. The conceptualisation and application of the concept of statist utopianism casts the Cuban socialist transition and the Cuban Communist Party’s contemporary renovation project in a distinct light. ♦

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of the late Doug Lorimer

To Maria Voukelatos, the love of my life

To Chocolate, our Jack Russell terrier

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I would like to thank my supervisors, Damien Cahill and Tim Anderson, for their wisdom, guidance and patience; Maria Voukelatos and my parents David and Lee Cameron for their love, support and encouragement; and my sister Maria Cameron for her meticulous attention to detail during those frantic, late-night proofreading and layout sessions. It really was a team effort.

Introduction

The Cuban Communist Party (PCC) is undertaking what it describes as the ‘updating’ of Cuba’s socialist economic model, a formulation that stresses continuity amid potentially disorienting change. Much of what has come to symbolise Cuba’s half-century socialist commitment, such as every citizen’s entitlement to a monthly quota of state-subsidised consumer goods and nominal full employment at the cost of low labour productivity, is fading with meticulous gradualism as a new Cuban socialist model takes shape.

PCC secretary and Cuban president Raul Castro (2012) has called for a ‘prosperous and sustainable socialism’, and announced that “the theoretical conceptualisation of the Cuban economic model” is being drafted. That the PCC leadership seems in no hurry to make public such a draft suggests that reconciling different conceptions of a prosperous and sustainable socialist project may be a delicate and difficult task. As leading Cuban sociologist Juan Valdes Paz (cited in Havana Times 2013) observes, “neither [the Soviet model] nor the Cuban model have been ... subjected to a complete and thorough evaluation, as was once promised [by the PCC leadership]”.

In 2011, Havana University planning specialist Oscar Fernandez Estrada asked in a footnote:

From the traditional state socialism that characterises Cuba today, is it moving towards a more decentralised state socialism? An Asian-style [i.e. Vietnamese or Chinese] market socialism? A self-managed socialism of the Yugoslavian variety? To the so-called participatory socialism of the 21st century? There is an urgent need for a debate aimed at a consensus on the key features of the vision of the future society (Fernandez Estrada 2011: 27).

The Economic and Social Policy Guidelines adopted by the PCC’s 6th Congress in 2011 are not programmatic, but a set of general and specific objectives that embody, and on occasion address explicitly, changes in the official conception of the socialist transitional society and in the approach to that transition. The Guidelines were drafted on the basis of a massive and organised process of

public consultations open to both PCC members and non-members. While such a clarifying debate on the nature of the socialist model that is aspired to has yet to take place, the gradual opening up of new spaces for public debate (including online) and a maturing of the debate culture in recent years has intersected with the contributions of Cuban academia, which has the government's ear more so than in decades past.

Meanwhile, the Guidelines themselves foreshadow some of this programmatic vision. They point, for example, to a socialist model in which small-scale private enterprise and mid-sized state-owned but cooperatively managed agricultural, industrial and services cooperatives coexist with downsized, globally competitive state enterprises ceded relative autonomy from central planners. An overarching theme of current changes is a shift away from the state-centrism¹ embodied in Cuba's sprawling state bureaucracy; the near absolute dominance of state ownership and management of the economy; the byzantine maze of state prohibitions and bureaucratic procedures; and a pervasive, multifaceted state paternalism. In its size and reach, the Cuban state is gradually retreating—with passive resistance from much of the state bureaucracy—in step with the implementation of the Guidelines.

Despite this, it is not yet clear whether Cuban state socialism is to be reformed or dismantled and, if the latter, what kind of Cuban socialist model will supersede it. Camila Piñero Harnecker (2012: 46), from Havana University's Centre for Research on the Cuban Economy, points out that the nature of “the new Cuban model” will depend (in part) on the relative influence of different ways of conceiving of socialism. Piñero Harnecker identifies three principal currents of socialist thought in Cuba: the ‘statist’, ‘economist’ and ‘self-management’ currents. All three are influencing the PCC-led changes, and these influences are reflected in the Guidelines. Predicting which of these currents will predominate would be “mere speculation”; most likely, the emerging model will embody some combination of all three (Piñero Harnecker 2012: 46).

¹ Throughout, state-centrism refers to the hyper-statisation of social relations.

The ‘statist’ current strives to perfect Cuban state socialism. It conceives of socialism in terms of a strong state that exercises effective control over society and ensures that the basic needs of all citizens are met. The statist argue that allowing all Cuban citizens to participate directly in decision-making in the workplace and at all levels of the political system—a democratisation or ‘socialisation’² of state powers that the self-management current considers vital and long overdue—would undermine political stability and social cohesion. However, given the deficiencies of authoritarian planning, some statist view as necessary a somewhat wider scope for market relations (Piñeiro Harnecker 2012: 46–51).

The economist current conceives of socialism in terms of the development of the productive forces, which is understood to mean GDP growth. Given wealth redistribution by the state, it argues, the appropriate mix of property relations and management forms is whatever maximises overall productivity. Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping’s pragmatic maxim that ‘it doesn’t matter what colour the cat is, so long as it catches mice’ is cited approvingly by adherents of this current, who look to Vietnam and China for inspiration. Influenced by “the [globally] hegemonic neoclassical economic thought”, the economist current is the predominant one within the state and in Cuban society at large (Piñeiro Harnecker 2012: 48–9).

The self-management current strives for an alternative to both market socialism and state socialism. To this current, the socialist transition means “democratising or socialising power” (Piñeiro Harnecker 2012: 49). Were this current to be defined solely in these terms, it would encompass a broad spectrum of views, but Piñeiro Harnecker tends to conflate a paradigmatic pole with her own elaborate doctrinal views and those of her closest co-thinkers. (I will refer to this paradigmatic pole as the ‘socialisation’ pole to distinguish it from Piñeiro Harnecker’s somewhat ambiguous ‘self-management current’.) At its leftist fringe, this pole’s critiques of Cuban state socialism are so sweeping that they are barely distinguishable from anarchist critiques of Marxism.³ At its

² ‘Socialisation’ and ‘democratisation’ are used more or less interchangeably in the self-management discourse.

³ See, for example, Campos 2014.

rightist fringe, advocacy of a deepening of Cuba's socialist democracy sits uneasily with admiration for Chinese and Vietnamese market socialism.⁴

Statist utopianism

This thesis makes a theoretical contribution to the Marxist understanding of the dynamics of socialist transition and casts the Cuban socialist transition, and the PCC's contemporary 'updating' of Cuba's economic model, in a distinct light. As a Marxist critique of state socialism, it engages with the socialisation pole's diagnosis of the deficiencies of Cuba's prevailing socialist model in an original conceptual framework. My hypothesis is that Cuba's state-centrism is a hybrid of what I conceptualise in this thesis as 'statist utopianism' and the Stalinist imprint of the Cuban Revolution's partial and uneven Sovietisation during the 1970s and early 1980s. This hypothesis addresses a gap in the Spanish- and English-language literature on the Cuban socialist transition: a key constituent element of Cuban state-centrism has been inadequately conceptualised.

One of these elements, the Sovietisation legacy, is widely acknowledged and well documented. Yet references in the literature to Cuban state socialism (or to the prevailing Cuban model as 'actually existing', 'real', 'traditional' or '20th century' socialism, etc.) have overlooked, understated or inadequately conceptualised the distinctiveness of *Cuban* state socialism. I will argue that another constituent element of Cuban state-centrism, namely statist utopianism, lends Cuban *state* socialism its distinctiveness. In a December 2010 speech to Cuba's National Assembly of People's Power, Raul Castro bluntly told deputies and the nation:

[E]rroneous and unsustainable conceptions of socialism ... have been deeply rooted in broad sectors of the population over the years as a result of the excessively paternalistic, idealistic and egalitarian approach instituted by the Revolution in the interests of social justice (Castro, R 2010).

Alluding to the PCC's 1968 Revolutionary Offensive that expropriated and banned urban small businesses and self-employment, Castro said that the Cuban state had turned Vladimir Lenin's idea that the proletarian state should own the *fundamental* means of production "into an absolute, and almost all of

⁴ See for example Alzugaray Treto cited in Cameron 2011e.

the country's economic activity became state property. The steps we've taken, and will take, to broaden self-employment⁵ and make it more flexible are the fruit of profound reflection and analysis, and we can assure you that this time there'll be no turning back" (Castro, R 2010).

Here, Castro associates a paternalistic, idealistic and egalitarian approach to the socialist transition with the state-centric suppression of remnant urban private enterprise. What is this idealistic approach, and what is the nature of its association—if any—with state-centrism? My hypothesis is that the idealistic approach and the Stalinist imprint of Sovietisation coalesced, and that state-centrism is the nexus between them. If this hypothesis is supported, then Cuban state socialism is a curious hybrid of these two contrasting influences on Cuba's prevailing (and now receding) socialist model.

My research found no well-developed conceptualisation of idealism in the above sense in the scholarly literature on either the socialist transition in general or on the Cuban socialist transition. The numerous references or allusions to 'idealism' or, synonymously, 'utopianism' in the specific context of the socialist transition do not amount to such a concept. Chapter 1 is dedicated to conceptualising what I define as 'statist utopianism'. Unlike 16th–19th century Utopian socialism, *statist* utopianism rests on proletarian state power and has a state-centric dynamic.

My conceptualisation of statist utopianism is grounded in the Cuban experience of socialist transition. Drawing on Fidel Castro's and Raul Castro's reflections on the PCC's approach in the late 1960s, key facets of utopianism-as-unrealism in the socialist transition are identified. Statist utopianism is then defined as 'imposing a communist vision on society rather than striving for its realisation'. The nature of that imposition and its consequences for the socialist transition, and for the socialist model, are conceptualised in a Marxist theoretical framework. The abstract nature of much of this exposition is unavoidable: a theoretical approach is needed to drill down to the essence of statist utopianism.

⁵ In official Cuban discourse, the term *trabajo por cuenta propia*, literally 'working for oneself', is a euphemism for employment outside the state sector. It encompasses the owners of small private businesses and their employees, and cooperative members.

We then descend from these heights of abstraction to ground the concept and enrich it in the early Soviet experience of War Communism. This experience illustrates how statist utopianism arises from the nexus between circumstances, political leadership and political psychology. Statist utopianism, which has an intrinsic subjective dimension, arises from the interplay of human subjectivity and ‘objective’ possibilities and constraints: those on the socialist transition in general, and those on a given socialist transition in all of its concrete richness and contradiction. The analytical emphasis is on the Marxist political economy of statist utopianism with excursions into political psychology.

In Chapter 2, the concept of statist utopianism is applied to Cuba’s socialist transition in the late 1960s. A shift in the official attitude to material incentives in late 1966 foreshadowed the PCC’s Revolutionary Offensive, launched in early 1968, which I characterise as a statist utopian ‘great leap forward’. The historical-conceptual exposition is based on a close analysis of the official justifications for these policy shifts. I show that the Revolutionary Offensive’s suppression of the remnant urban private sector had a state-centric dynamic. This is consistent with the hypothesis.

In Chapter 3, the concept of statist utopianism is applied to the prevailing Cuban socialist model.⁶ ‘The prevailing model’ refers to that which emerged during the 1970s under the influence of Sovietisation, and which is gradually being superseded by ‘the emerging model’ under Raul Castro’s presidency. Continuities and convergences between the late 1960s ‘idealist’ and subsequent Sovietisation phases of the Cuban Revolution—phases which tend to be contrasted—have received little attention in the literature. I will argue that the influence of statist utopianism on the prevailing model has been significant, enduring and pervasive; and that two lines of evidence converge in favour of the hybridisation hypothesis. An analysis of the emerging Cuban socialist model in this light is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this thesis.

⁶ By ‘model’ I mean a relatively durable core of concepts, methods, institutions and mentalities. The notion of the model helps to distinguish between lesser and more fundamental changes: changes within a model and a change *of* model. Note that a model in this sense is a purely analytical category.

Methods and limitations

My conceptualisation of statist utopianism is grounded in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' historical materialism. The analytical method is dialectical. For example, concepts are defined in relation to their antitheses (where applicable); and the dialectical notion of a unity of opposites underpins both my conception of the socialist transitional society and what I term the principle of complementarity. I strive to combine theoretical and historical analysis so that each enriches the other. While the bulk of the conceptualisation takes place in Chapter 1, it spills over into subsequent chapters. While the theoretical-conceptual framework and analytical method are Marxist, my sources are not limited to Marxist analyses, nor to partisans or sympathisers of the Cuban Revolution. I have strived to judge scholarship on its merits.

A significant limitation of my research is that it has been based on the relevant Spanish- and English-language literature that I have been able to access. In the case of the Cuban literature, this is a small fraction of the total and may not be representative. Unfortunately, much of the relevant specialist Cuban literature is not published online and is only readily accessible in Cuba. Many of the Cuban sources cited in this thesis are referenced to my own published, original translations. These are, as far as I am aware, the only such translations. All are acknowledged as my own in the References.

This thesis is a work of conceptual synthesis, historical analysis and reinterpretation. It contributes to both the general theoretical literature on the socialist transition and to the Cuban socialist transition literature. It engages with the Cuban and wider debate on the future of Cuba's socialist project. ♦

Chapter 1: Statist utopianism

*Communism is for us not a **state of affairs** which is to be established, an **ideal** to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the **real** movement which abolishes the present state of things.*

Karl Marx, *The German ideology*⁷

This chapter establishes the theoretical-conceptual framework for the analysis of Cuba's socialist model that will be undertaken in Chapters 2 and 3. The core concept developed in this chapter is 'statist utopianism'. Statist utopianism is conceptualised as a distinctive approach to the socialist transition: *imposing a communist vision on society rather than striving for its realisation*. This chapter also discusses the consequences of this approach for the socialist transition and for the nature of the socialist model. Statist utopianism does not refer to 16th–19th century Utopian socialism, which was not state-oriented. By contrast, *statist* utopianism rests on proletarian state power.

At the heart of my conceptualisation of statist utopianism is the attitude of the proletarian state to 'capitalist vestiges': survivals of capitalism (e.g. markets, remnant private enterprise, individualism) that are anticipated to disappear in the approach to communism. Corresponding to two basic attitudes to capitalist vestiges are divergent approaches to effecting or facilitating their disappearance: 'organic transcendence' and 'suppression'. Engels' (1947 [1878]: 417) conception of the 'withering away' of the proletarian state as the conditions for its obsolescence mature is a vivid metaphor for organic transcendence. The antithetical approach is the state's suppression of capitalist vestiges in anticipation of communism.

Organic transcendence is characterised by a relatively harmonious withering away of causally related capitalist vestiges (e.g. commodified labour power and the relative scarcity that gives rise to it). Suppression 'runs ahead' of the socialist transition by suppressing 'superficial' capitalist vestiges rather than addressing the more fundamental capitalist vestiges that give rise to them. This introduces

⁷ Marx 1846 (emphasis in original).

or intensifies an incongruence of the socialist model. Suppression may be complemented by ‘constructive’ measures (e.g. a thriving state bureaucracy in place of thriving petty commerce) that compound this incongruence. Thus suppressive and constructive forms of statist utopianism are recognised.

Both the suppressive and constructive forms of statist utopianism manifest as the incongruence of a socialist model arising from a tendency to favour one pole of a duality (e.g. moral–material, planning–market) to the exclusion of the other. This ‘binary exclusivity’ gives rise to statist utopian paradoxes, such as that overzealous central planning undermines the efficacy of planning more than does a certain degree of enterprise autonomy. I will argue that statist utopianism has a state-centric dynamic: the state *absorbs* society rather than *dissolves into* society.

There are numerous references in the literature to ‘utopianism’ in the socialist transition context. I begin by situating my own concept in this literature. The rest of this chapter is an exposition of this concept. The point of departure is an analysis of Fidel Castro’s critical reflections on what he described as the PCC leadership’s idealist and utopian approach in the late 1960s. This anchors the exposition of statist utopianism in the Cuban experience of socialist transition and draws attention to the multi-faceted nature of statist utopianism. It also serves to introduce key analytical themes.

This is followed by a systematic theoretical exposition of statist utopianism grounded in a Marxist conception of the socialist transition. This conception draws on Marx’s distinction between base and superstructure and on the work of Marxist economic theorists Ernest Mandel and Charles Bettelheim, among other sources. The method of exposition is to introduce subsidiary concepts (capitalist vestiges, organic transcendence and suppression, binary exclusivity, etc.) sequentially. The concept of statist utopianism is built up from these conceptual building blocks. The analytical method is dialectical.

Treatments of ‘the subjective factor’ in the socialist transition theoretical literature seldom venture into the political psychology of Marxist leadership. Imposing a communist vision on society has intrinsic political-psychological

and moral dimensions. My conceptualisation strives for a synthesis of the political-economic and subjective dimensions of statist utopianism. Finally, the concept of statist utopianism is grounded in the early Soviet experience of War Communism, which serves as a case study in miniature. War Communism illustrates how statist utopianism arises from the interaction of circumstances, political leadership and political psychology in the socialist transition.

Utopianism and statist utopianism

The Utopian socialism of the 16th–19th centuries pursued its communist aspirations along two main paths. One approach was to establish Utopian village or urban communes in the hope that these would spread throughout society by dint of example. The other was to appeal to the ‘enlightened’ bourgeoisie to adopt contrived communist schemes or to bourgeois philanthropy to fund them. Neither of these approaches was state-oriented. Unlike social democracy, Utopian socialism did not orient to the bourgeois state’s parliamentary democracy. Unlike Marxism, it eschewed class struggle and dismissed Marx’s doctrine that the road to communism passes through the revolutionary conquest of state power. The essence of the classical Marxist critique of Utopian socialism is that Utopianism was *unrealistic*: its means could not lead to the desired communist ends (see Engels 1977 [1892]).

Marx and Engels contrasted their own doctrine with those of the Utopian socialists. Unlike contrived Utopian schemes, theirs was grounded in the “historical movement going on under our very eyes”, namely the rise of the capitalist mode of production and the unfolding of its contradictions and potentialities for social transformation (Marx and Engels 1977 [1848]: 120). Early communist doctrines were necessarily Utopian, they argued, because capitalism itself was then in its infancy. The Utopians “had to construct the elements of a new society out of their own heads, because within the old society the elements of the new were not as yet generally apparent” (Engels 1947 [1878]: 394). Born of imagination unrestrained by scientific insight, Utopian socialism was saturated with idealism, specifically an unrealistic sense of what can be achieved with appeals to enthusiasm and moral commitment.

Utopian socialism was the child of socialist humanism. It expressed the immaturity of the communist movement in the epoch of the rise of the capitalist mode of production. The rise of Marxism in the late 19th century and of socialist revolutions in the 20th shifted controversies on the realism of communist strivings to a new and higher plane: the socialist transition. The literature on what might constitute a realistic approach to the socialist transition is vast and varied. Yet despite numerous references to ‘utopianism’ (or synonymously, ‘idealism’) in the Cuban and wider socialist transition literature, no well-developed conceptualisation of utopianism-as-unrealism in this context appears to exist. If for no other reason than to avoid terminological ambiguity, Marxist political economy needs such a concept.

References to ‘utopianism’ in the socialist transition literature belong to one of two broad categories of meaning. One, echoing Marx and Engels’ critique of Utopian socialism, uses ‘utopianism’ pejoratively as a synonym—with Utopian socialist connotations—for unrealism. In this vein, Bettelheim argues that the idea of an instantaneous and complete “abolition of market relations is as utopian and dangerous as the notion of the ‘immediate abolition’ of the state” (Bettelheim and Sweezy 1971: 19). The other usage rescues ‘utopianism’ from derision and imbues it with a very different meaning. For example, in ‘Updating Cuban socialism: a utopian critique’, Luis Suarez Salazar (2014: 2) cites liberation theology theorist Franz Hinkelammert: “The essence of utopia is a critique of present conditions and the hope for a better world”. In the spirit of this epigraph, Suarez Salazar argues that:

It is possible to build a [Cuban] ‘socialist model’ that is more self-reliant, effective, efficient, economically self-sustainable, environmentally sustainable and democratic than [the prevailing model] (Suarez Salazar 2014: 2).

These two broad usages of ‘utopianism’ in the socialist transition context are equally legitimate, but incompatible. My conceptualisation of statist utopianism is fully compatible with Suarez Salazar’s conviction expressed in the passage above. My premise is that communism is not utopian (in the sense of fanciful), but a possible future for humanity. Yet my concept belongs to the first category:

utopianism-as-unrealism. Both senses of ‘utopianism’ are well represented in the Cuban academic and wider literature.

Imposing communism

From mid-1970 onwards, a recurring theme in Fidel Castro’s public discourse was what he described as the PCC leadership’s idealist and utopian approach to the socialist transition in the late 1960s. In the Main Report to the 1st PCC Congress in December 1975—addressing what the PCC leadership perceived to be its own past mistakes—he observed: “Revolutions usually have utopian periods in which their protagonists ... assume that historical goals are much nearer and that human will, wishes and intentions, towering over objective facts, can accomplish anything” (Castro, F cited in Mesa-Lago 1978: 55).

This passage captures the heady ethos of the Cuban Revolution in the 1960s, especially the late 1960s. Importantly for our conceptualisation of statist utopianism, Castro suggests that revolutions typically have utopian periods in which the Revolution does not yet know the limits of its transformative power. The contours of revolutionary realism and utopianism (unrealism) are imperceptible; only hindsight will reveal them. It appears that will, imagination and audacity can move mountains. Through the telescope of disdain for received wisdom, disdain without which the old regime might have endured, historical goals—in 1960s Cuba, that goal became communism—seem much closer than they are.

In other selected passages from his public speeches (all cited in Mesa-Lago 1978: 26–56 from various official Cuban sources), Castro expands on the theme of utopianism in the socialist transition. Here, he cautions against the attempt to *impose a communist vision*: “Some try to impose their ideas on reality rather than reality on their ideas” (August 1970). Here, he alludes to a moral dimension of that imposition (in the Cuban case) and the folly of a great leap forward: “Perhaps our major idealism has been to believe that a society which has scarcely left the shell of capitalism could enter, in one bound, into a society in which everyone would behave in an ethical and moral manner” (September 1970).

Here, Castro elaborates on the theme of imposing one's communist vision on society: "If in the pursuit of communism we idealistically go further ahead than is possible, we will have to retreat sooner or later" (May 1971). This may sound like a truism, but let us draw out its theoretical content. 'Further ahead than is possible' suggests that there are certain constraints on the unfolding of the socialist transition; it might not be rigidly constrained, but neither is it completely arbitrary. It can only *unfold*, and only at a pace that does not compromise its organic integrity. Pressing the accelerator beyond certain limits is ultimately counterproductive, because sooner or later—Castro seems to suggest here—one is compelled to retreat in order to take a real *step* forward rather than a contrived *leap* forward.

Given the constraints on the socialist transition, there is a dialectical tension between addressing the needs of the present and the needs of the future simultaneously. That tension should be recognised in theory and in practice. This is no easy task. As Castro observes: "Perhaps the most difficult task [in striving] towards communism is that of knowing how to conciliate—dialectically—the [approach] which the present requires of us with the final objective" (July 1973). Expanding on this theme, he draws attention to a paradox: that the socialist transition should be pursued "*slowly to arrive quickly*; slowly to arrive well; and slowly to be sure to arrive" [my emphasis] (December 1970). This is the most fundamental of several such paradoxes that I will refer to as 'statist utopian paradoxes'.

In the passage below, Castro alludes to another facet of what I term statist utopianism: namely, statist utopian illusions. As we shall see in relation to the Soviet experience of War Communism, these illusions can be powerfully compelling and difficult to dispel. Castro observes that when communism is pursued arbitrarily, i.e. when long-term strategic goals of the communist movement are pursued as immediate or short-term objectives of the socialist transition, then the associated progress is illusory. This gives rise to statist utopian illusions such as this: "[W]hen it might have seemed as though we were drawing nearer to communist forms of production and distribution, we were actually pulling away from the correct methods for the [prior] construction of socialism" (December 1975).

Another theme of Castro's self-critical reflections is ignorance or, to put it more kindly and fairly, youthful inexperience. At the 1st PCC Congress in 1975, he frankly acknowledged that he and other PCC leaders had been "totally ignorant about the most basic matters related to economic science and to socialist construction" (December 1975). In 1976, Raul Castro, then the deputy PCC secretary and Cuba's defence minister, recalled the Cuban leadership's disdain in the late 1960s for anything to do with money, which smacked of capitalism to them:

We taught [cadres] to look down on [state enterprise budgets and financial accounting, revenues, taxes, inter-enterprise payments, etc.] as running counter to communist morale and awareness, because in our ignorance of economic matters we viewed them as overly capitalist (cited in Mesa-Lago 1978: 36).

This brief passage merits a closer analysis. Budgets, cost accounting, revenues, taxes, etc. were all survivals from capitalism—Cuba's communists did not need to invent them—that the PCC leadership regarded as superfluous in a communist society and therefore destined to disappear in the approach to communism. They were, then, what I will define in this chapter as 'capitalist vestiges'. The attitude of the PCC leadership to these particular capitalist vestiges (all of which involved the use of money) was to view them disdainfully as 'overly capitalist'. The leadership worried that resorting to them would demoralise communists and blunt their revolutionary consciousness.

It is not that utilising such capitalist vestiges is inherently demoralising for communists; if the necessity or utility of something is understood, then its use need not be cause for demoralisation. According to Raul Castro, the problem was that *the PCC leadership*—in its 'ignorance' of economic realities—had *viewed* these capitalist vestiges as anathema and alien to the socialist transition. In Chapter 2, we will see that the PCC leadership did not keep such views to itself. In the late 1960s, it encouraged *all* Cuban communists to perceive certain capitalist vestiges in these terms. Revolutionary consciousness was associated with this perception, but it could conceivably have been associated with some alternative perception, such as that cost accounting is an indispensable tool of

socialist construction. It was question of attitudes, and this particular attitudinal problem was of the PCC leadership's own making.

These citations, selected for their illustrative value, touch on several key themes of what we will now proceed to conceptualise as statist utopianism. Fidel Castro described the PCC's approach in the late 1960s as idealist and utopian, but these labels convey nothing of the specific content of what amounts to (1) a distinctive approach *to* the socialist transition and (2) the consequences of this approach *for* that transition. Together, this approach and its consequences amount to a distinctive phenomenon *of* the socialist transition.

Capitalist vestiges

Statist utopianism is a distinctive approach to the socialist transition: imposing a communist vision on society rather than striving for its realisation. The concept also encompasses the consequences of this approach for that transition and for the nature of the socialist model. The exposition of this concept that follows is grounded in a Marxist conception of the socialist transition, the premises and assumptions of which are open to challenge. However, the reader is urged to accept them for the sake of argument. Before proceeding with this argument, I will clarify my usage in this thesis of some key Marxist terms.

'Communism' refers to a mature global post-capitalist society. It is considered axiomatic that such a society would be one of material abundance and social equality, abundance being a precondition for substantive equality (as distinct from egalitarianism). It is assumed that the conscious goal of such a society would be the nurturing of rich individualities (not wealthy individuals). Finally, it is assumed that having cultivated the nobler side of human nature—alongside the withering away of exploitative and oppressive human relations and of the competitive struggle of each against all—it would have *changed* that nature. How much is a matter of speculation, and we will refrain from speculating.

For our purposes, defining an intermediate stage between capitalism and communism is superfluous, so the nebulous term ‘socialism’ can be avoided.⁸ Where it serves clarity and the intended meaning is unambiguous, references to socialism in the cited literature will be substituted by paraphrasing or by the use of square brackets. ‘The socialist transition’ refers to the whole of the period (or process) of transition from capitalism to communism, and ‘the socialist transitional society’ to a post-capitalist society oriented towards communism. ‘The proletarian state’ is the state that arises in the proletarian revolution that overthrows the capitalist state. Other key concepts will be introduced as needed.

The socialist transitional society is an integral whole comprising three constituent elements. The first is that part of capitalism’s legacy that is conserved and developed on the basis that it is viewed (by most people) as a necessary or desirable foundation on which to build. Desirable medical advances, literacy, the internet and automated production techniques are illustrative. The second constituent element comprises possible or actual precursors of communism that emerge and develop not under capitalism, but in the socialist transitional society. Examples are planned economy (though not necessarily a command economy); the cost-free, needs-based distribution of an expanding sphere of consumer goods and services; and proletarian internationalism on the scale of nations.

The third constituent element of the socialist transitional society is that part of capitalism’s legacy *the disappearance of which in the approach to communism is anticipated*: ‘capitalist vestiges’. Note that ‘capitalist vestige’ is defined ‘subjectively’ here. What makes something a capitalist vestige is not that it will actually disappear in the approach to communism. It may or may not. Something is a capitalist vestige if its disappearance is anticipated in the sense of being regarded as likely or certain. It may also be anticipated in the sense that

⁸ Socialism as distinct from communism is variously understood to mean the lower phase of communism in Marx’s (1977 [1891]: 17) *Critique of the Gotha programme*, one or more 20th century post-capitalist societies or any post-capitalist society that officially strives towards communism. Mandel (1974: 724) notes that Joseph Stalin’s 1936 proclamation that the Soviet Union had arrived at socialism contributed to theoretical confusion and terminological ambiguity. In the Cuban context, socialism may refer to either Cuba’s post-capitalist society and official communist objective, some ill-defined intermediate stage that is aspired to or the transition between capitalism and communism.

its disappearance is strongly desired and eagerly awaited. Typical examples of capitalist vestiges are markets, individualism and the proletarian state.⁹

Pretensions to scientific objectivity notwithstanding, Marxist conceptions of communism may be an eclectic mix of the well founded, the somewhat speculative, the utopian (fanciful) and the reactionary. Somewhat speculative is the unresolved debate about whether commodity production and exchange (i.e. market relations) would or should completely disappear under communism.¹⁰ Whether it is homosexuality or homophobia that is a capitalist vestige is a matter of opinion. Some might argue that homosexuality is bourgeois decadence destined to disappear and that the party and state should discourage it;¹¹ others, myself included, would argue that this is homophobic prejudice masquerading as Marxist scientific insight.

Transcendence and suppression

There are two contrasting approaches to the disappearance of capitalist vestiges. I term them ‘organic transcendence’ and ‘suppression’. Both are bound up with, and can only be grasped in relation to, the causal connections *between* capitalist vestiges. Since both may use state coercion to effect or facilitate the disappearance of certain capitalist vestiges, these two approaches cannot be distinguished from one another on this basis. Suppression is defined in contrast to organic transcendence, so we begin by introducing the latter.

Engels’ conception of the withering away of the proletarian state as the conditions for its obsolescence mature is a vivid metaphor for organic transcendence:

⁹ The proletarian state may legitimately be considered a capitalist vestige because it emerges in a political revolution *prior* to the social revolution that abolishes capitalism: “The first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class” (Marx and Engels 1977 [1848]: 126).

¹⁰ See, for example, the late 1980s exchange between Mandel and market socialism theorist Alec Nove in *New Left Review*. Each regarded the other as utopian. Nove 1987 and Mandel 1986 are representative contributions to this debate.

¹¹ For example, the Cuban newspaper *Granma Weekly Review* (cited in Mesa-Lago 1978: 103) reported on May 9, 1971 that “residual manifestations” of homosexuality had been found among the Cuban youth.

[State interference] in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous, and then dies out of itself; the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of processes of production. The state is not ‘abolished’. *It withers away* [emphasis in original] (Engels 1947 [1878]: 417).

‘Dies out of itself’ suggests that this withering away is more or less spontaneous, an organic process that proceeds in step with progress towards communism in other spheres. The Oxford Online Dictionary (2014) includes two senses of ‘organic’ that could have been penned with Engels’ conception in mind: “Denoting or characterised by a harmonious relationship between the elements of a whole”; and “Characterised by gradual or natural development”. Here, the elements of the whole are the constituent elements of the socialist transitional society: capitalism’s durable legacy, communist precursors and capitalist vestiges. Gradualism is inherent in the notion of withering away.

In Engels’ conception, the state’s coercive powers (which constitute its essence) become superfluous in one domain of social relations after another. The state ‘dissolves into’ non-coercive institutions of social self-management, a process that depends on the conditions for this supersession maturing. One such condition is a surge in labour productivity that would allow the population as a whole to enjoy a two to three day work week. Given abundant leisure time—elusive for the vast majority under late capitalism—popular self-government could make administrative specialists (the state ‘bureaucracy’) increasingly unnecessary. Automated production is the technical basis for such a productivity leap (Mandel 1974: 675–6).

The withering away of the state depends, then, on the withering away of another capitalist vestige: the low labour productivity (from the standpoint of communism) inherited from capitalism.¹² It is also bound up with the withering away of other capitalist vestiges, above all social classes and social inequality. If the withering away of the state is dependent on the withering away of other capitalist vestiges, how can we grasp this whole chain of causality? Marx’s distinction between ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’ lies at the heart of the materialist conception of history advanced by Marx and Engels. This distinction has been

¹² This is the case globally, though perhaps not in the most industrialised societies where labour productivity is already relatively high.

variously interpreted and its validity both challenged and defended, but these controversies lie well beyond the scope of this thesis. I will simply offer my own interpretation then discuss its relevance.

For Marx, societies are structured around two kinds of social relations, those that belong to the base and the superstructure, respectively:

In the social production of their existence, people inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure (Marx 1859: 503).

The base comprises what Marx terms the ‘production relations’. Unlike the social relations embodied in institutions, production relations do not arise intentionally. They arise spontaneously in the social processes of (material and intellectual) production and distribution that underpin all human societies, and which are obligatory because people’s livelihoods depend on them. The nature of these relations—egalitarian and solidaristic, or unequal and exploitative—depends on the way in which possession (as distinct from legal ownership) of the means of production is socially distributed. In class societies, the production relations have a class dimension.

The institutional ‘superstructure’ of society arises by design on the basis of these production relations, mediated by awareness and intentionality—political, moral, religious, etc. For example, trade unions arise on the basis of certain production relations, mediated by an awareness of common interests. The law recognises property rights that uphold (other than in a social revolution) the dominant production relations; and the state, an institution of class supremacy, enforces these laws. The web of production relations is the base of society, but these relations are *in turn* conditioned by the level of development of the productive forces: the means of production plus the people who set them in motion with their knowledge, skills and labour. Marx summarises the whole conception in two sentences:

The mode of production [i.e. a major epoch in socio-economic evolution] of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not people's consciousness that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness (Marx 1859: 503).

In the two passages cited above, 'arises [from]', 'appropriate to', 'conditions' and 'determines' describe the nature of the causal relationships between the productive forces, production relations, the institutional superstructure and conscious reflections of social existence. No mechanistic correspondence is implied, only determination in the final instance.¹³ Nor does Marx suggest or imply that these arrows of causal influence are unidirectional. The base gives rise to the superstructure, but the superstructure in turn influences the base, as when bourgeois states uphold capitalist production relations (by giving them legal force) and proletarian states undermine them.

When capitalist vestiges are viewed in terms of Marx's base-superstructure distinction, their ultimate causal relationships become clear. As part of the superstructure, the state is a 'superficial' capitalist vestige. Two successively deeper ones ultimately give rise to it. One is the heterogeneity of production relations (i.e. the persistence of social classes). The other lies deeper still. The heterogeneity of production relations rests on the (inadequate from the standpoint of communism) productive forces carried over from capitalism. The *underdevelopment* of the productive forces is the deepest capitalist vestige. If, with the wave of an anarchist's magic wand, the proletarian state were to vanish, then some state would inevitably arise to fill the void. An institution of class supremacy (a state in the Marxist sense) is both necessary and inevitable for as long as there are social classes and non-trivial social inequalities.

In a passing reference to utopianism in the socialist transition, Bettelheim observes that the notion of the "abolition of market relations is as utopian and dangerous as the notion of the 'immediate abolition' of the state, and is *similar*

¹³ Economistic misinterpretations of historical materialism began in the 19th century, eliciting this clarification from Engels (1890): "According to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimately* determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. Other than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he or she transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase" [emphasis in original].

in nature” [emphasis in original] (Bettelheim and Sweezy 1971: 19). He does not advocate market socialism (“the ultimate aim is the complete elimination of market relationships”), but objects to the sudden abolition of *all* market relations: the hypothetical extreme of an arbitrary approach (Bettelheim and Sweezy 1971: 20). A contradiction (i.e. an uneasy coexistence) between plan and market is inherent in the socialist transitional society, and is the “surface effect” of “a deeper contradiction ... at the level of the production relationships and productive forces” (Bettelheim and Sweezy 1971: 18).

Generalising from Bettelheim’s argument above regarding the state and market relations, capitalist vestiges are embedded in a hierarchy of ultimate causation. In other words, some ultimately give rise to others. Organic transcendence is characterised by *the relatively harmonious withering away of causally related capitalist vestiges*. Suppression is the antithetical approach. Note that the use of state coercion to effect the disappearance of capitalist vestiges is ‘suppression’ only if it introduces or intensifies a *disharmony* (i.e. a contradiction or an incongruence) between causally related capitalist vestiges (e.g. between production relations and property relations) or more generally, an incongruence of the socialist model.

To recapitulate, capitalist vestiges are capitalist survivals that are expected to disappear in the socialist transition. Organic transcendence and suppression are contrasting modes of their disappearance; both may use state coercion to effect this disappearance. Engels’ conception of the withering away of the state is a metaphor for organic transcendence, which is characterised by the relatively harmonious withering away of causally related capitalist vestiges. Suppression is the antithetical approach, whereby state coercion introduces or intensifies a disharmony between causally related capitalist vestiges. Both approaches are bound up with, and can only be grasped in relation to, the base-superstructure distinction between more and less superficial capitalist vestiges.

We can now conceptualise statist utopianism in light of the preceding analysis. Statist utopianism is a distinctive approach to the socialist transition: imposing a communist vision on society rather than striving for its realisation. What is the methodological essence of this distinction? ‘Striving to realise’ means, I suggest,

an organic approach to the socialist transition. With regard to capitalist vestiges, the organic approach is to *facilitate* their disappearance by addressing, first and foremost, the underlying capitalist vestiges that give rise to them.

The antithetical approach is to *impose* the disappearance of capitalist vestiges by suppressing the surface effects of underlying capitalist vestiges: ‘running ahead’ of the socialist transition by imposing a communist vision. Suppression is, then, a form of statist utopianism. What are the implications of statist utopian suppression for the socialist transition? Such progress is contrived rather than organic, and may simply be illusory. It has a certain artificiality and fragility, and is likely to be pyrrhic and ephemeral.

Only certain relatively superficial capitalist vestiges are amenable to state suppression. For example, racist organisations can be prohibited, but not the racist ideas that inspire them (the state cannot reach inside people’s heads). Nor can the material basis of racist ideas—racial inequality—be banned. Other than the repeal of racially discriminatory laws, racial inequality can only be *overcome*. Likewise, in Cuba’s 1968 Revolutionary Offensive (see Chapter 2) some 58,000 urban small businesses were transformed, at the stroke of a pen, into ‘property of the people’. Yet the state could not decree the compatibility of centralised management with the atomised nature of such economic niches as restaurants, flower stands and watch repairs at the time of nationalisation (and in Cuba today). Evidently, the state’s coercive powers are potent only at the superstructural level.

Furthermore, relatively superficial capitalist vestiges (the only ones that might be amenable to state suppression) are surface effects of any underlying capitalist vestiges that give rise to them. If a surface effect is suppressed, then the underlying capitalist vestige tends to ‘resurface’ in another form; or in the same form if suppression proves unenforceable. In the latter case, suppression is merely futile. If the underlying capitalist vestige resurfaces in another form, this is an unintended consequence; and unintended consequences are seldom serendipitous. If this other form is less desirable than the one that has been suppressed, then suppression is worse than futile: it is counterproductive.

For example, if money is abolished (or rendered worthless), commodity exchange takes the primitive form of barter, a less convenient form. Both the money and barter forms are a surface effect of the underdevelopment of the productive forces that gives rise to the persistence of commodity production and exchange this side of communism: “The survival of money economy and market economy is a consequence, not a cause, of the relative shortage of consumer goods. ... By abolishing money and market economy one abolishes only the barometer, not the frost itself” (Mandel 1974: 633).

Statist utopian suppression grapples with surface phenomena rather than underlying causes. The fundamental capitalist vestige, the relatively underdeveloped productive forces, cannot be suppressed. For example, suppressing private ownership of large capitalist enterprises does not in and of itself create the material abundance that is a precondition for communism. At best, it unleashes the creativity of a workforce freed from capitalist servitude and allows existing means of production to be utilised at full capacity. The development of the productive forces is essentially *constructive* rather than suppressive.

The fact that only relatively superficial capitalist vestiges are amenable to suppression; and that underlying capitalist vestiges tend to well up in other forms (or the same form) if their surface effects are suppressed means that statist utopian suppression is contrived progress. It lacks the authenticity and solidity of organic progress, whereby relatively superficial capitalist vestiges recede more or less in harmony with the withering away of the underlying capitalist vestiges that give rise to them.

Statist utopian suppression is not the only conceivable way that the state could impose a communist vision on society. In the sphere of socialist construction, too, the state can ‘run ahead’ of the socialist transition. I term this ‘constructive’ statist utopianism. Whereas the suppressive form subdues superficial vestiges of the capitalist past, the constructive form is oriented to a strived-for communist future. Like its suppressive counterpart, constructive statist utopianism introduces or intensifies an incongruence between causally related capitalist vestiges or more generally, an incongruence of the socialist model.

Suppressive and constructive statist utopianism may be directly complementary. For example, Cuba's Revolutionary Offensive suppressed the remnant urban private sector comprising small businesses and self employment.¹⁴ From bakeries to watch repairs, the state was obliged to substitute for the indispensable economic contributions of this sector to society. Suppression had to be complemented by constructive measures, such as opening new state-owned and managed restaurants and establishing a state supply chain for every bakery in the Cuban archipelago. In terms of the socialist transition, this progress was no less contrived than the suppression it complemented. One capitalist vestige was vanquished, but another—the state 'bureaucracy'—expanded to fill the void.¹⁵

Binary exclusivity

Mayra Espina Prieto, professor at Havana University's Centre for Psychological and Sociological Research and a leading Cuban sociologist, perceives 'dichotomies' in Cuba's social policy and wider socialist development strategy. These dichotomies are a consequence of conceiving of social reality and the possibilities for state intervention in terms of 'antagonistic pairs', and from the policy choice of 'radically excluding' one term of such a pair rather than striving for their complementarity (Espina Prieto 2006: 366). She terms this approach the 'maximalist equality paradigm'. She cites, for example, the state-market duality and the Cuban tendency to emphasise the state to the exclusion of the market. These dichotomies have paradoxical effects. For example, the Cuban state's almost exclusive emphasis on egalitarian distributional homogeneity does not address the heterogeneity of social inequality and disadvantage. Paradoxically, egalitarianism can tend to reinforce rather than ameliorate social inequality. Universal access and affordability (e.g. Cuban healthcare and education at all levels) should be complemented, she argues, by targeted assistance and affirmative action (Espina Prieto 2006: 366).

¹⁴ Whether this was done out of a desire to anticipate communism (and thus whether it constitutes statist utopianism) will be taken up in Chapter 2. For now, let us assume for argument's sake that it was.

¹⁵ We will elaborate on this argument later.

Earlier in this chapter, we cited Raul Castro's critical reflection on the PCC leadership's attitude to state enterprise budgets, cost accounting, revenues, taxes, etc. The PCC leadership viewed these as capitalist vestiges; then went one attitudinal step further. It viewed these money-based methods as overly capitalist and discouraged their use (cited in Mesa-Lago 1978: 36). In spurning the use of such money-based capitalist vestiges, the PCC leadership adopted a 'dichotomous approach' (as Espina Prieto terms it) to economic management in relation to the plan–market duality. As we shall see in Chapter 2, PCC leaders also demonised material incentives, remnant urban private enterprise and other manifestations of the market (i.e. of commodity production and exchange).

Capitalist vestiges embody and symbolise the capitalist past in the present. Some have tangible and/or conceptual opposites that embody or symbolise the envisioned communist future in the present. Examples of such dualities are markets and planning, inequality and egalitarianism, economy and society, individualism and collectivism, state and non-state. Two of these dualities seem incongruous. Egalitarianism is not equality, but it may come to symbolise a commitment to equality. Likewise, the state does not actually embody a strived-for communist future if communism is conceived as a stateless society, but the state may nevertheless come to symbolise communism. Means to an end (such as egalitarianism as a means to equality or the proletarian state as a means to a stateless society) can become ends in themselves, and acquire a corresponding symbolism. There are echoes of Utopian socialism here. Utopian communes, set up as models for society to emulate, tended to become ends in themselves.

The corollary of demonising the 'capitalist' poles of such dualities is the idealisation of their opposites. 'Planning is good, more planning is better, total planning is ideal' is the attitudinal complement of an aversion to the presence of markets or their use by communists in the socialist transition. It might be assumed, for example, despite evidence to the contrary or in the absence of evidence, that planning that excludes the market must be superior to planning that uses the market (e.g. horizontal relations between state enterprises, mediated by market exchanges). Yet there are limits to rational planning. Experience has shown that "to lay down detailed and complete production targets for enterprises ... merely confronts them with insoluble tasks and

undermines the principle of the plan more than would a certain degree of freedom of action of these same enterprises” (Mandel 1974: 643).

I will refer to an aversion to the presence and use (in some cases, such as money) of capitalist vestiges and a corresponding idealisation of their tangible or symbolic opposites as ‘binary exclusivity’. This kind of black-and-white thinking starts from the premise that X is a capitalist vestige and that Y, its opposite, embodies communism. On the basis that these polarities are antithetical, it is concluded that socialist construction demands the exclusion of the ‘capitalist’ pole as far as possible, i.e. within the constraints of practicality or political realism. Exclusivity is a criterion—or even *the* criterion—of progress. The possibility that such opposites could perhaps be complementary vis-à-vis communist objectives, and that complementarity rather than exclusivity should be the guiding principle, is implicitly dismissed.

The criterion or principle of complementarity strives for the golden mean. For example, one should strive for an appropriate balance between planning and the market given the actual (rather than contrived) proximity to communism and given the historical conjuncture. The golden mean might be, for argument’s sake, 70% planning and 30% market. By contrast, the binary exclusivity approach (i.e. as little market as practicality or political realism permits) might opt for, say, 90% and 10% respectively in the given circumstances.

Here is an illustrative and pertinent example of binary exclusivity. Che Guevara viewed material incentives as capitalist vestiges and as the antithesis of moral incentives and disincentives (i.e. social approval and disapproval respectively): “[M]aterial incentives and consciousness are contradictory terms” (Guevara, C cited in Deutschmann 1997: 176). According to Guevara, the socialist transition is characterised by “society throwing off its old bonds in order to arrive quickly at the new stage”, and so: “*The tendency* must be, in our opinion, to eliminate as vigorously as possible the old categories [i.e. capitalist vestiges], including the market, money, and, therefore, the lever of material interest—or, to put it better, to eliminate the conditions for their existence” [emphasis in original] (Guevara, C cited in Deutschmann 1997: 184).

To eliminate the market, money and material incentives ‘as vigorously as possible’ requires a heavy dose of statist utopianism. To ‘eliminate the conditions for their existence’ requires the antithetical approach: organic transcendence. In the passage above, Guevara conflates these two irreconcilable approaches. His antipathy to material incentives, based on his conviction that they undermine the nurturing of a communist consciousness and morality (see Guevara, C cited in Deutschmann 1997: 177), led him down the statist utopian path of striving to eliminate these capitalist vestiges (and other closely associated ones) as rapidly as possible. Yet Guevara’s realism imposed a limit on the possible. He stressed: “[W]e do not deny the objective need for material incentives” [emphasis in original] (cited in Deutschmann 1997: 176).

Guevara’s preoccupation with morality draws attention to the moral dimension (at least in the Cuban case) of statist utopianism. Morality deals in absolutes: right and wrong. Binary exclusivity and morality have a natural affinity because both tend to polarise. Morality can guide communist strivings in essentially two different ways. The ‘moral compass’ orients to the communist horizon but does not seek to impose an ideal of communist morality on society. This approach is consistent with Leon Trotsky’s (1938) dictum that “problems of revolutionary morality are fused with problems of revolutionary strategy and tactics”.

By contrast, the ‘moral stricture’ approach is to impose an ideal of communist morality on society. Appeals to conscience are complemented by a resort to state coercion to bend economic and other social relations to conformity with notions of communist morality. Cuba’s late 1960s statist utopian ‘great leap forward’ was imbued with intense moralism; indeed, the suppression of capitalist vestiges was posed in moral terms (see Chapter 2). ‘The moral economy of a revolutionary society’ is the apt title of a sympathetic 1969 eyewitness account of the Cuban Revolution by US sociologist Joseph Kahl (see Kahl 1969).

Enrique Ubieta Gomez, a Cuban Marxist intellectual, perceives two sides to the political personality of Jose Marti, the late 19th century Cuban poet, journalist, revolutionary leader and national hero. Marti’s intellectual and ‘spiritual’ influence on the Cuban Revolution arguably rivals that of Marx, Engels and

Lenin. Ubieta (cited in Cameron 2011d) makes “a conceptual differentiation between the ‘must be’ and ‘can be’ of Marti”.

[The ‘must be’ of Marti] ignores reality in all of its facets—the visible, the factual, and the possible, the latent—to cling to an ideal that is not confirmed in practice, and to *artificially adjust reality to the model*; the [‘can be’ of Marti] starts from the existence of different possibilities latent in society, all of them real though not completely manifest, and from the certainty that [their] realisation ... can and must be impelled in a conscious way [my emphasis] (Ubieta cited in Cameron 2011d).

Marti’s ‘must be’ and ‘can be’ may transcend his personality and the late 19th century. Transposed to the socialist transition, his ‘must be’ would be the statist utopian impulse to ‘artificially adjust reality’ to, for example, some notion of communist morality; his ‘can be’ would be an organic approach to the socialist transition. One might be torn between these divergent inclinations, between one’s statist utopian impulses and a grounded revolutionary realism.

To recapitulate, we have conceptualised two complementary forms of statist utopianism: suppressive and constructive. Both introduce or intensify an incongruence between causally related capitalist vestiges, such as by emphasising planning to the exclusion of the market. By contrast, the organic transcendence approach strives for the complementarity of such dualities vis-à-vis communist goals, given (1) the proximity (actual rather than contrived) to communism; and (2) conjunctural necessities. Binary exclusivity and a ‘moral stricture’ approach to communist morality are mutually conducive; and the revolutionary psyche may struggle to reconcile utopian and realist inclinations.

Diagnosis

How might the combined influence of suppressive and constructive statist utopianism be diagnosed in a socialist model? On the basis of the conceptualisation of statist utopianism thus far, we would expect them to manifest as incongruences of the model arising from binary exclusivity. Binary exclusivity is a certain attitude to capitalist vestiges and their tangible or symbolic opposites: the tendency to emphasise one pole of a duality (such as planning–market) to the exclusion of the other *in anticipation of communism*.

(Importantly, a socialist model may be incoherent for other reasons. For example, circumstantial necessity may compel it. If so, this is not statist utopianism. It must be shown that the incongruence of the model arises from the imposition of a communist vision on society).

Binary exclusivity tends, in thought and in practice, to the exclusion of one pole of some capitalist/communist duality. If such exclusionary desires come up against practical limits, then pushing against these limits repeatedly might be expected to give rise to characteristic policy zigzags between the assertion of a cherished exclusionary principle—e.g. that there should be no private enterprise on any scale—and the resort to a reluctant pragmatism. It is not the absence of the ‘capitalist’ pole of the duality that is diagnostic of statist utopianism but the drive to minimise, marginalise and demonise this pole.

One of Espina Prieto’s observations (cited on page 29) is that what she terms the ‘maximalist equality paradigm’ has led to a paradox in Cuba: egalitarianism perpetuates rather than ameliorates social inequality by treating unequal people as if they were equals.¹⁶ There is a mismatch here between means and ends. The more unequal a society, the less egalitarianism reduces inequality. Ironically, egalitarianism has the most egalitarian outcomes in a society that is already relatively egalitarian—i.e. a society which has little need for egalitarianism.

Such paradoxes are ‘statist utopian paradoxes’ if arise from binary exclusivity. As noted on page 18, the overarching such paradox is that, as Fidel Castro (cited in Mesa-Lago 1978: 26) observed in hindsight, the socialist transition should be pursued “slowly to arrive quickly”. In terms of statist utopianism, ‘going slowly’ means an organic approach to the socialist transition, i.e. an approach guided by the principle of complementarity rather than binary exclusivity. As noted on page 28, Mandel draws attention to another such paradox by pointing out that excessively detailed planning is counterproductive: *less* planning may be more effective planning (Mandel 1974: 643). Such paradoxes exemplify the incongruence of the socialist model that binary exclusivity may give rise to.

¹⁶ For example, at the time of writing, high-income Cuban households are still entitled to the same state-subsidised food rations as low-income households. In effect, the latter are subsidising the former thanks to egalitarianism.

To recapitulate, the combined influences of suppressive and constructive statist utopianism may be diagnosed in a socialist model if it can be shown that it is binary exclusivity that has given rise to the observed incongruence of the model. Statist utopian paradoxes exemplify such incongruence.

The state and statist utopianism

What are the implications of statist utopianism for the socialist transition and the nature of the socialist model? As argued earlier in this chapter, statist utopian progress towards communism is contrived and fragile, and is likely to be pyrrhic and ephemeral. It may simply be illusory, as when an underlying capitalist vestige ‘resurfaces’ in a less desirable form; or when binary exclusivity gives rise to such paradoxical absurdities as overzealous planning that undermines the effectiveness of planning itself—i.e. when planning becomes an end in itself. The contrived or illusory nature of statist utopian progress is the key implication of statist utopianism for the socialist transition.

We now turn to its implications for the nature of the socialist model. Statist utopianism is defined as imposing a communist vision on society rather than striving for its realisation. Striving for its realisation means an organic approach: addressing first and foremost the underlying capitalist vestiges that give rise to others. This approach is conducive to a relatively harmonious withering away of causally related capitalist vestiges—*among them the state itself*. In the organic transcendence approach, the state withers away in step with the underlying capitalist vestiges that give rise to it. By contrast, statist utopianism delays, decelerates or reverses the withering away of the proletarian state. A conceptual-methodological chasm opens up between organic transcendence (i.e. actual progress towards communism) and statist utopianism (i.e. contrived progress). *The chasm between real and contrived progress is bridged by the state*, i.e. by state institutions and the state’s coercive reach.

Consider statist utopian suppression. To suppress a capitalist vestige (such as market relations in agriculture) the state must either prohibit or curtail it. Such efforts are only effective to the degree that laws and regulations are enforceable. Only the state can enforce its own laws, and enforcement requires a coercive

apparatus: inspectors, police, courts, prisons, etc. The state's coercive apparatus might initially be capable of absorbing its new, statist utopian duties, but only up to a point. If statist utopian suppression is allowed to take its course, then at some point the state's coercive apparatus will need substantial reinforcement. Consider what it might require, for example, to enforce a ban on 200,000 peasants selling their farm surpluses to anyone other than some state entity. If such a ban proves difficult or impossible to enforce due to the corruption of the inspectors, then the state can either retreat or send in inspectors to inspect the inspectors, and so on. Suppression has its own institutional logic.

Constructive statist utopianism adds another institutional dimension to the state's bridging role: a burgeoning state bureaucracy. To the degree that the state is obliged to *substitute for* the socially indispensable functions of suppressed capitalist vestiges, the state apparatus effectively absorbs them. In the organic transcendence approach, some of these functions (such as money as a convenient means of exchange) wither away, or rather the state *facilitates* their withering away by addressing the underlying capitalist vestiges that give rise to them. Other such functions, such as a remnant private sector's ownership of local bakeries, are 'socialised' organically rather than artificially by decree.¹⁷

Statist utopianism interposes the state's laws and institutions into the widening chasm between withering away and statist utopian suppression. This bridging role underscores the contrived nature of statist utopianism: superficial capitalist vestiges are vanquished, but another—the state—rushes in (or creeps outwards) to fill the void. In effect, one capitalist vestige absorbs others. Engels envisioned the withering away of the proletarian state as the conditions for its obsolescence matured. Society and state would merge as the state 'dissolved into' society. By contrast, statist utopianism brings about a contrived merging of state and society. The state absorbs, rather than dissolves into, society.

To Trotsky (1991 [1937]: 92), the degree of the state's dissolution into society "is the best index of the depth and efficacy of the socialist construction". The demands of enforcement mean that statist utopian suppression tends in the

¹⁷ For example, a first step might be to facilitate a flourishing of cooperatively owned and/or managed small and medium-sized economic entities.

opposite direction. Constructive statist utopianism compounds this tendency. Thus both forms of statist utopianism tend towards the hyper-statisation of social relations (state-centrism) or—in institutional terms—the growth of the state’s coercive and administrative apparatuses. There is thus an intrinsic connection between statist utopianism and bureaucratisation.

Soviet War Communism

The Soviet experience of War Communism (mid-1918 to early 1921) illustrates some key themes of the conceptualisation of statist utopianism in this chapter. Drawing on this experience puts my concept to the test and empirically grounds and enriches it in the earliest historical expression of this phenomenon. We conclude this chapter with a case study in miniature: Soviet War Communism.

As noted earlier in this chapter, statist utopianism (imposing a communist vision on society) is not the only conceivable motivation for the state suppression of capitalist vestiges. An incongruence between causally related capitalist vestiges might arise or be intensified because compelling circumstances force the hand of the party-state leadership. Soviet War Communism is illustrative. Mandel notes that the programme of the first Bolshevik government did not envisage the immediate expropriation of all large-scale capitalist enterprises—only the progressive nationalisation of the key monopoly-controlled sectors and other transitional measures that would not have amounted to a post-capitalist economy.

The wholesale nationalisation of large-scale industry, the suppression of commodity production and exchange and state planning of all economic activity were obligatory responses to the civil war, foreign military intervention and other compelling factors (Mandel 1974: 549). Economic historian Moshe Lewin (1975: 76) regards this as the consensus view: “It is generally accepted among researchers that the great wave of nationalisations did not begin until the outbreak of the Civil War in June 1918, and that this course was not intended”.

The sharp turn to what become known as War Communism was an exceedingly pragmatic response to dire circumstances.¹⁸

Nevertheless, it came to be viewed in the course of events, by Bolshevik leaders themselves among others, as something entirely different: a communist ‘great leap forward’. The Bolshevik leadership hoped to make a virtue of dire necessity and “gradually ... arrive at genuine communism” via War Communism (Trotsky 1991 [1937]: 20). With Lenin’s endorsement, the text of the 1919 Communist Party draft programme called for “the most rapid carrying out of the most radical measures preparing the abolition of money” (cited in Nove 1989: 56).¹⁹ War-induced hyperinflation stoked communist desires to make a leap into a moneyless economy. Statist utopian illusions flourished:

As money lost all value, private trade was declared illegal and the nationalisation of practically all industrial enterprises was undertaken, voices came to be raised among the communists that that they were even now in the process of establishing a true [communist] economy. ... Money, markets, buying and selling, these characteristics of capitalism would swiftly vanish (Nove 1989: 56).

These statist utopian illusions had a theoretical reflection:

[Communist Party leader and theoretician Nicolai Bukharin and his co-thinkers had] a Utopian and optimistic set of ideas concerning a leap into [communism], which would seem to have little to do with the reality of hunger and cold. Measures that made sense, if at all, only in terms of the emergency and disruption [of the Civil War] came to be regarded as good in themselves (Nove 1989: 56).

Production declined precipitously under War Communism, not only because of the ravages of war, “but also because of the quenching of the stimulus of personal interest among the producers” (Trotsky 1991 [1937]: 20). The Soviet government dispatched detachments of armed workers to requisition grain from

¹⁸ Trotsky (1991 [1937]: 20) gives a more nuanced account, commenting in passing that “in its original conception [War Communism] pursued broader aims”. He does not substantiate this view.

¹⁹ Money could conceivably be abolished, but “so long as the problem of distribution remains dominated by the relative shortage of consumer goods, money continues to be the most efficient device for carrying out this distribution” (Mandel 1974: 568).

the peasants, who saw “little sense in producing farm surpluses that would be taken from them by requisition squad” (Nove 1989: 52). In 1920, the output of large-scale industry was 13% and steel production a mere 4% of their 1913 levels (Mandel 1974: 550). There were 2.6 million workers in 1917 and only 1.2 million in 1920 (Nove 1989: 57). The collapse of the productive forces brought the country and the Soviet government to “the very edge of the abyss” (Trotsky 1991 [1937]: 20).

War Communism’s statist utopian illusions had a distinctive political psychology rooted in what Lewin (1975: 77) describes as “the strains and agonies of the Civil War”. The conditions under which a majority of the Bolsheviks were “led to believe that the war economy measures ... offered a shortcut to [communism] that had been dubbed a childish ‘leftist’ dream a short while before” were the “interplay of action imposed by the contingencies of war and the combination of the psychological needs of leaders and followers alike engaged in the battle for survival, which only the hope for ‘utopia’ can provide” (Lewin 1975: 77). These statist utopian illusions coalesced around “a set of vague notions about communism” that “had never been thought out seriously and which Marx deliberately left obscure” (Lewin 1975: 77).

Trotsky (1991 [1937]: 20) draws attention to the fluid international context in which these false hopes and expectations were aroused: “The utopian hopes of the epoch of War Communism were subsequently subjected to a cruel, and in many respects just, criticism. The theoretical mistake of the ruling party [is explicable only in light of] the expectation of an early victory of the revolution in the West”. Had the socialist revolution taken hold in Germany, an industrialised country, the Soviet Union could have counted on its solidarity (Trotsky 1991 [1937]: 20). In that scenario, War Communism as a bridge to communism would still have been a statist utopian illusion, but a somewhat lesser illusion.

If War Communism was not initially motivated by statist utopian illusions, a statist utopian tinge is evident in the extremism of certain measures that were hardly justified by the war effort. By the end of 1920, “even tiny enterprises were [being] nationalised” (Lewin 1975: 77). An August 1920 census identified more than 37,000 nationalised enterprises, over 5,000 of which employed only one

worker: “Many of these ‘enterprises’ were, apparently, windmills! This illustrates the fantastic extremes to which nationalisation was pushed ... despite the clear impracticability of such action” (Nove 1989: 60).

The statist utopian de-commodification of society peaked in late 1920, as the Civil War was drawing to a close on the decisive fronts. The most radical measures “were undoubtedly deeply influenced by the [statist utopian] ideology which was so widespread among the party” during War Communism (Nove 1989: 55). Nove (1989: 55) cites Soviet scholar A. Venediktov’s striking observation that some of the most extreme measures were taken *after* the final victory of the Red Army in the Civil War.

Opposition to a timely retreat from War Communism, and the fact that the Bolshevik party leadership did not immediately recognise the need for a more organic approach to the socialist transition—an approach embodied in the New Economic Policy that emerged by degrees from March 1921—imbued War Communism as a whole with statist utopianism as the Civil War drew to a close. Analytically then, statist utopianism is a context-dependent moving target. Changing circumstances (such as emergency measures that are no longer justified) may invest *the same policy* with statist utopian content. Today’s revolutionary realism may be tomorrow’s statist utopianism.

War Communism illustrates how statist utopianism arises from the nexus between circumstances, inexperience, ideology and political psychology in the socialist transition. The dire exigencies of the Communist war effort compelled a radical suppression of such capitalist vestiges as private ownership of the means of production and market relations. This gave rise to compelling statist utopian illusions. In turn, these illusions inspired statist utopian suppression at the margins, such as the nationalisation of windmills. Pre-Civil War Bolshevik notions of a more organic approach to the socialist transition evaporated amid the rigours of war. Making a communist virtue of necessity was rationalised and theorised by Bolshevik leaders. The importance of symbolism (as in the collapse of the rouble being viewed by some as a sign of serendipitous progress towards a moneyless, communist society) is highlighted. The inexperience of the political leadership also comes to the fore as a decisive factor.

Conclusions

Marxist political economy lacks a well-developed concept of utopianism-as-unrealism in the specific context of the socialist transition. Statist utopianism is conceptualised as a distinctive approach to that transition: imposing a communist vision on society rather than striving for its realisation. The essence of this imposition is explicable in theoretical terms with reference to Marx's base-superstructure distinction and Engels' conception of the withering away of the proletarian state. Two contrasting attitudes to capitalist vestiges—binary exclusivity and complementarity—correspond to antithetical approaches to the socialist transition: organic transcendence and statist utopianism.

The organic transcendence approach seeks to address, first and foremost, the underlying capitalist vestiges that give rise to others. This approach is conducive to a relatively harmonious withering away of causally related capitalist vestiges, among them the state. Statist utopianism is associated with binary exclusivity: antipathy towards certain capitalist vestiges and a corresponding idealisation of their tangible or symbolic communist opposites. One pole of a duality (such as planning—markets) tends to be emphasised to the exclusion of the other. This introduces or intensifies an incongruence between causally related capitalist vestiges or more generally, an incongruence of the socialist model.

Statist utopian progress is contrived and fragile (or simply illusory), and is likely to be pyrrhic and ephemeral. This contrasts with the authenticity and solidity of organic progress towards communism. In the organic approach, the state withers away in step with the underlying capitalist vestiges that give rise to it. By contrast, statist utopianism has a state-centric dynamic: the state tends to 'absorb' rather than 'dissolve into' society. There is thus an intrinsic connection between statist utopianism and bureaucratisation. Statist utopianism has intrinsic subjective dimensions, among them a distinctive political psychology. Statist utopianism arises from the interplay of strivings for communism and 'objective' possibilities and constraints on the socialist transition. ♦

Chapter 2: Cuba's Revolutionary Offensive

[T]he state is everything, the corner store manager is the state, the one who steals a little of the [rationed, state-subsidised] goods from you and sells them to you on the black market; the baker who steals the flour and then the bread is worthless, etc.

Alfredo Guevara, Cuban intellectual, 2011²⁰

In this chapter, the concept of statist utopianism developed in Chapter 1 will be applied to a fleeting yet highly distinctive phase of Cuba's post-1959 socialist transition. It opened in late 1966 with a shift in the official attitude to material incentives (i.e. supplementary remuneration tied to output, productivity or performance). It closed in mid-1970 after an all-out sugar harvest mobilisation failed to reach the target of 10 million tons of cane. In the PCC's Revolutionary Offensive launched in March 1968, the remnant urban private sector comprising small businesses and self-employment was suppressed.

I will show that the Revolutionary Offensive was a statist utopian 'great leap forward': a political-ideological crusade to suppress capitalist vestiges. Unlike Soviet War Communism (military necessity tinged with statist utopianism), a statist utopian 'great leap forward'²¹ is statist utopianism in its purest form—the closest approximation to its Weberian ideal type. This purity sharpens the contrast between statist utopianism and an organic approach to the socialist transition. In the late 1960s, statist utopianism arguably reached its zenith in Cuba and left a lasting imprint on Cuba's socialist model.

From striving for the complementarity of material incentives and moral incentives (i.e. social approval or disapproval), the PCC leadership's approach shifted to binary exclusivity: an aversion to certain capitalist vestiges and an idealisation of their communist opposites. This had a moral dimension. Material incentives were systematically withdrawn in favour of moral incentives to foster a communist personality and morality. This was both an end in itself and a

²⁰ Cited in Cameron 2011c.

²¹ We will retain the scare quotes because such progress towards communism is contrived or illusory.

means (it was hoped) to rapidly industrialise. Suppressing the urban private sector allowed this incentives policy to be applied more consistently. Three capitalist vestiges were targeted: material incentives, residual private enterprise and associated individualism. I will show that Cuba's statist utopian 'great leap forward' had a state-centric dynamic. This will lay the groundwork for the analysis of Cuban state socialism in Chapter 3.

The line of argument is framed historically in a close analysis of selected passages from three of Fidel Castro's speeches.²² Inconsistencies in these speeches, some subtle and others glaring, are interpreted in the theoretical-conceptual framework established in Chapter 1. This historical analysis is then further developed thematically. Besides Castro's authoritative and revealing speeches, I draw on a variety of Cuban and other sources, in particular the prodigious historical analysis of the Cuban economy by Pittsburgh University's Carmelo Mesa-Lago, a self-described Keynesian. I will deal briefly with two possible objections to my conclusion that Cuba's Revolutionary Offensive was statist utopian and not (as was War Communism) a forced move.

Incentives and consciousness

A shift in the official attitude towards material incentives in late 1966 foreshadowed the Revolutionary Offensive. This ideological shift is captured by juxtaposing two passages from keynote speeches by Fidel Castro in July 1965 and September 1966 respectively. Castro, who enjoyed immense personal authority, was by far the most influential leader of the Cuban Revolution. He was prime minister, first secretary of the PCC from its founding in October 1965 and commander in chief of the armed forces.

In July 1965, Castro presided over the inaugural awards ceremony in which some 5,000 *macheteros* (manual cane cutters) were recognised for their outstanding contributions to the sugar harvest. Each had chosen a prize from among those on offer: holidays abroad, refrigerators, motorcycles, etc. Castro referred to these as moral prizes because the social recognition they conferred is "much more valuable than the material prize they are going to receive". While

²² See Castro, F 1965, 1966 and 1968a.

acknowledging that consumer goods would no doubt be well received by the workers and their families, he stressed their symbolic significance as tokens of social gratitude: “That material prize is an expression of this moral recognition. The people ... offer them a small sacrifice made by the nation to express ... their appreciation” (Castro, F 1965).²³

Somewhat less symbolically, Castro suggested that the awards programme be extended to allow recipients to accumulate points towards higher retirement pensions. He announced that in the 1966 harvest, in addition to 100 overseas holidays with up to two family members, 1,250 motorcycles with sidecars, 1,750 refrigerators and 2,000 family holidays at Cuba’s Varadero beach, new prizes would include 100 cars and 100 purpose-built houses (Castro, F 1965).

Sugar was the basis of the Cuban economy, Castro said, so it was “logical that we offer incentives in those jobs which benefit us the most”. Until the harvest could be mechanised, it was also “one of the hardest jobs”. It was only fair, then, that “those who work the most receive the most”. He stressed that every effort must be made to discourage selfishness. He noted approvingly that while 500 overseas holidays had been offered to outstanding *macheteros*, only 80 had chosen this option despite it being the most valuable prize. Only the recipient was eligible for a holiday, and most chose prizes that would benefit not only themselves but also their families. Nevertheless:

It would be absurd for us to expect that these men who earn their daily bread cutting cane [would] make a maximum effort [if we were to start] telling them that they should do this as a duty without being interested in whether they are going to earn more or less. This would be idealistic (Castro, F 1965).

Fourteen months later, in September 1966, Castro returned to the theme of moral and material incentives. Citing as an example the managers of state-owned enterprises enticing workers away from other such enterprises with the inducement of higher wages, he commented:

²³ To avoid repetition, citations of Fidel Castro’s speeches in this chapter refer to the paragraph as a whole.

[W]hoever wants to resolve problems by appealing to individual egoism, by appealing to individual effort to resolve their problems, forgetting about society ... would be acting in a reactionary manner. They would be conspiring ... against the possibility of forging in the people a truly socialist, truly communist, consciousness (Castro, F 1966).

The juxtaposition of these two passages draws attention to the shift in attitude. In the first, Castro implies that material incentives *cannot be renounced* because a sense of social duty does not motivate all citizens—only a socially aware and committed minority—to contribute their labour to society to the best of their ability. Though far from being an explicit appeal to individual material self-interest, this was nonetheless a tacit endorsement of, and thus an implicit appeal to, individual effort for personal material gain that also benefits society. In the second passage, Castro implies that individual material self-interest and the class interests of working people cannot be reconciled through the use of material incentives. Appeals to individual material self-interest, such as one state enterprise offering higher wages than another, *cannot be permitted* because they undermine communist consciousness.²⁴

The 1965 sugar harvest awards were neither material nor moral incentives as such, but a combination of the two. Unlike such purely symbolic moral incentives as medals, ribbons and certificates that confer social recognition, durable consumer goods such as housing satisfy material needs and desires. However, the social recognition attached to these prizes meant that they were not only material incentives to productivity, but also moral incentives to exemplarity. Having internalised a devotion to the communist cause, a committed minority might feel sufficiently motivated by appeals to conscience and the prospect of social recognition (or disapproval) to strive for an exemplary social contribution—without the added inducement of fraternal competitions for consumer goods and holidays. Yet since they and their dependents have material needs that must be satisfied, there is no reason to assume that they would (or should) be unmoved in the face of such material inducements.

²⁴ In the context of the Cuban Revolution the Spanish noun *conciencia*, usually translated as (social) consciousness, is better understood as “an amalgam of consciousness, conscience, conscientiousness and commitment” (Kahl 1969: 30, 31). Throughout, I will use the term ‘consciousness’ in this many-sided sense.

Those less committed to the cause might be motivated more by the material inducements than the prospect of social recognition. Nevertheless, in striving to win a prize and (if they do so) basking in the appreciation it confers, their identification with the communist cause and its solidarity ethic is likely to be enhanced rather than harmed. This approach could potentially appeal to a broad spectrum of social motivation—not only those receptive to appeals to conscience. It assumed that while material and moral incentives are different in kind, they can be complementary if appropriately combined. In the case of the 1965 sugar harvest awards, that complementarity was expressed in the moral-material dualism of the prizes themselves: material rewards that conferred pro-communist social recognition.

By late 1966, that assumption had given way to the official view that material incentives should be rapidly and systematically withdrawn in order to spur the emergence of a communist personality and morality. The main report to the Twelfth Congress of Cuba's PCC-led trade union confederation, the CTC, held in late August 1966, stressed the need to forge a communist New Human Being²⁵ and “harshly attacked the line of thinking that favor[ed] materialistic formulas” (Mesa-Lago 1972: 68). Castro's closing speech to the CTC Congress reaffirmed this line, and announced that the inaugural PCC congress, scheduled for 1967, would resolve the incentives question (Mesa-Lago 1972: 68). The PCC congress was delayed until 1975, but the new line was nonetheless implemented.

The socialist emulation plan drawn up by the PCC and the CTC in the wake of the 1966 CTC Congress “eliminated every kind of material reward” (Mesa-Lago 1972: 68). In December 1966, Carlos Rafael Rodriguez—a PCC Central Committee member and the secretary of the pro-Soviet Popular Socialist Party prior to its absorption into the PCC-in-formation—commented that while the PCC line was to give “absolute preference” to moral incentives, there was not unanimity among the Cuban leadership regarding this approach (Mesa-Lago 1972: 69). Throughout 1967, there was “a gradual elimination of those material incentives that still remained in the system of production” (Mesa-Lago 1972: 69). Consumer goods and holidays were withdrawn from socialist emulation

²⁵ This is a gender-neutral rendering. The Spanish *el Hombre Nuevo* is usually translated as ‘the New Man’.

campaigns in the sugar harvest; a trial was initiated in an important cement factory to wind back incentive payments for the overfulfillment of work norms, with a view to their elimination; state farm workers were deprived of their small subsistence plots; and “the planning system was centralised even more, eliminating all traces of self-financing in [state] enterprises” (Mesa-Lago 1972: 69).

Agriculture was not exempt. At the end of 1967, the National Association of Small Farmers agreed to end the sale of farm and dairy produce on the open market in favour of sales to state agencies at fixed prices. In January 1968, Castro announced that some 90% of peasant farmers in the Havana Green Belt, a ring of farmland surrounding the Cuban capital, had withdrawn from commercial distribution. Between 1967 and 1969, some 12,000 private farms were sold to the state (Mesa-Lago 1972: 70).

The persuasion of force

Castro announced the Revolutionary Offensive in a March 13, 1968 speech. He began by appealing to radicalism: “If we can reproach this Revolution for anything ... [it is] for not having been sufficiently radical”. There remained a privileged stratum that lived off the labour of others. Citing a detailed PCC investigative report, he accused the urban small business and self-employed sector of profiteering, black marketeering, operating illegally, cultivating antisocial clientele, employer parasitism (owners that did not contribute any labour to their businesses), poor service and hygiene, taking children out of school and ideological disloyalty to the Revolution, as in the “bad revolutionary attitude of both [bar] owners and employees”. Havana’s 955 bars were “making money hand over fist”. The PCC report recommended that they be taken over by the state or closed down (Castro, F 1968a).

Of 2,056 small business owners in Havana, the highest incidence (95%) of those “not participating in the Revolution” was to be found among the proprietors of fried food stands. On the basis of their *non-participation* in the PCC-led mass organisations—not participation in subversive activities—Castro described these

vendors as “counterrevolutionaries”.²⁶ In the San Jose district of what is today Mayabeque Province, where the corresponding non-participation rate was 81%, all 18 vendors from whom data was collected were classified as “antisocial and amoral elements”. The PCC report, Castro said, urged a “gradual suppression” of these micro-enterprises and an “absolute prohibition” on the establishment of new ones. This approach would not be limited to bars and fried food stands. The Damoclean swords of expropriation and suppression would hang over the entire urban private sector:

In a clear and decisive manner we must say that we intend to eliminate all manifestations of private business. ... [T]here will be no future in this nation for private business, the self-employed, private industry (Castro, F 1968a).

Castro claimed that “capitalism” (i.e. small-scale private enterprise in the interstices of Cuba’s state-dominated, *post-capitalist* economy) was “trying to crop up again everywhere” in the guise of both legal and illicit private enterprises, appearing alongside inadequacies in the state sector’s provision of goods and services. Some 37% of small private businesses in Havana had been established after the 1959 revolution. He further claimed that: “Whoever says that capitalism has been discouraged is lying. Capitalism has to be uprooted!” He announced a threefold approach: the state sector would offer more and better goods and services, there would be a crackdown on the black market and the urban private sector would be suppressed (Castro, F 1968a).

Self-employment, Castro claimed, was a form of exploitation of workers by the self-employed, who paid nothing for free social services. The self-employed should “pay for the hospital, the school, let them pay for everything”. This rhetorical allusion to taxation is the sole reference in Castro’s speech to possible alternatives to expropriation and prohibition—such as taxation, regulation, the enforcement of service and hygiene standards, facilitating the emergence of cooperatively owned and/or managed enterprises, etc. Turning to the theme of selfishness and solidarity, Castro declared:

²⁶ This characterisation was based on self-reported attitudes: “The greatest percentage of those who were not participating in the [R]evolution was among the owners of fried food stands, where out of 51 individuals who reported the information, 39 of them, 95.1 percent, were counterrevolutionaries” (Castro, F 1968a).

We simply cannot encourage or even permit selfish attitudes in a person unless we want them to follow their instincts of selfishness and individuality... The concept of communism and socialism, the concept of a superior society entails a person free of such attitudes, someone who has risen above these attitudes (Castro, F 1968a).

Let us take a parenthetic magnifying glass to this passage. Castro says here that a communist society is one in which people are free of selfish attitudes, and that one becomes free of them by rising above them. To rise above something one must struggle to subdue it. The individual *frees herself* from her own selfish attitudes (with the help of the society that is changing around her). That freedom is ultimately won or lost in the conscience and cannot be imposed from without.²⁷ Snatching away the livelihood of the shopkeeper is more likely to arouse bitterness than solidarity in the dispossessed; it is the force of persuasion, not the persuasion of force, that nurtures the solidarity ethic. Che Guevara (cited in Deutschmann 1997: 201) aptly observes: “On the one side, society acts through direct and indirect education; on the other, the individual submits to a conscious process of self-education”. Yet Castro also says—in the same passage cited above—that selfish attitudes cannot even be permitted, which means they must be *suppressed*. Note that Castro conflates individuality and individualism (selfishness).²⁸

Moral and material incentives had been debated in terms of Marxist theory and methods, Castro said, but it was actually “a far deeper matter” concerning morality: “We do not want a communist man or woman to be moulded by stimulating their greed, their individualism”. This was not only a matter of principle, but also a pragmatic necessity. Given a legacy of colonial and neocolonial plunder, “the last centavo” must be invested productively, not spent on “superfluous things”. Should cash be handed out as incentives “even if nothing can be bought with it?” The Revolution could not match the material inducements of imperialist societies such as the US, with an average income “six

²⁷ Nor can selfishness be mechanistically inferred from social being in the individual case: a politically backward worker may harbour more selfishness than an enlightened petit-bourgeois; and individuals may ‘rise above’ their class origins and dedicate their lives to the proletarian cause. Fidel Castro, the son of a landowner, is a case in point.

²⁸ This conflation is not an artefact of translation. The official Spanish transcript of Castro’s speech (see Castro, F 1968c) confirms that the English translation cited here is accurate in this regard.

or seven times” that of Cuba. It should try to close that developmental chasm by other means (Castro, F 1968a).

Under the headings ‘The objectives of the Revolutionary Offensive’ and ‘Nation’s private sector now almost completely nationalized’, the April 7, 1968 edition of *Granma Weekly Review* (cited in Mesa-Lago 1969: 203, 215), a PCC publication, reported that 55,636 urban small businesses had been expropriated by government decree. Members of the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution, mostly home-based women, had been appointed the new managers of the two thirds of expropriated enterprises that continued to operate. Former owners could opt to remain as employees of their confiscated businesses or accept other state-sector job offers (Mesa-Lago 1969: 203).

Granma (cited in Mesa-Lago 1969: 203) reported that 31% of expropriated enterprises were food retailers such as corner stores, butcher shops, fish shops and fruit and vegetable stands. Another 26% were service entities such as barber shops, boarding houses, laundrettes, shoe repair shops and automotive workshops; 21% were bars, restaurants and the like; and 17% were retail businesses selling such merchandise as books, shoes, clothing, furniture, flowers, tobacco, hardware and electrical appliances. The remaining 5% were small artisanal and manufacturing enterprises. Under ‘We are socialists’ in the same edition, *Granma* (cited in Mesa-Lago 1969: 204, 215) noted with approval that “Cuba has thus become the socialist country with the highest percentage of state-owned property”.

In 1969, Mesa-Lago (1969: 203) observed: “With the recession of the nationalisation tide, the only private [enterprise] that remains is concentrated in the agricultural sector, where 200,000 small farmers still own 30% of the arable land”. His tabulation, based on data from official Cuban sources, is reproduced as Table 1 (collectivisation here is synonymous with state ownership).

Table 1: The collectivisation process in Cuba

Economic sectors	Percentage collectivised		
	1962	1964	1968
Agriculture	37	70	70
Industry	85	95	100
Construction	80	98	100
Transportation	92	95	100
Retail trade	52	75	100
Wholesale and foreign trade	100	100	100
Banking	100	100	100
Education	100	100	100

Source: Mesa-Lago 1969: 204

The Cuban sources for Mesa-Lago’s tabulation are inaccessible, and it is not clear whether these percentages refer to the number of entities, the number of employees or some other measure. The 70% of the agricultural sector in state hands in 1964–8 is consistent with Mesa-Lago’s observation cited above that in 1969, 30% of agricultural land belonged to peasant farmers. Nevertheless, 100% state ownership is unambiguous and, assuming the accuracy of the data, outside of agriculture the private sector had been expropriated and prohibited to within one percent of totality in key sectors.

Let us retrace our steps. In mid-1965, Fidel Castro (1965) said that material incentives (their implicit appeal to individual self-interest notwithstanding) could not be renounced, because to do so would be “idealistic” and unjust. Echoing Marx’s (1977 [1891]) Critique of the Gotha Programme,²⁹ he said that

²⁹ Marx distinguishes between socialist transitional and communist approaches to distribution. For the duration of the socialist transition, social inequality arising from unequal individual labour contributions must be upheld, because entitlement “can never be higher than the economic structure of society”. From the ‘total social product’, Marx makes various deductions, among them “that which is intended for the common satisfaction of needs, such as schools, health services, etc. From the outset, this part ... grows in proportion as the new society develops”. Another deduction is made for “those unable to work, etc.” His principle ‘to each according to their work’ during the transition applies, then, only to remuneration, the importance of which diminishes in step with the expanding sphere of cost-free, needs-based distribution of consumer goods and services (Marx 1977 [1891]: 17).

such incentives were necessary to ensure that “those who work the most receive the most” (Castro, F 1965). In late 1966, official ideology shifted against material incentives on the basis that they promote individualism. During 1967, such incentives began to be systematically withdrawn. In early 1968, the Revolutionary Offensive was launched as “a [social] movement directed toward eradicating selfishness and all remaining manifestations of individualism” (Mesa-Lago 1972: 71).

In 1965, Castro had sought to imbue material incentives (and remuneration in general) with a socialist transitional moral-ideological content. Remuneration should be viewed not solely as callous cash payment³⁰—a calculated transaction between buyers and sellers of commodified labour power—but as something else besides: *the material embodiment of society’s recognition of the fulfilment of a social duty*. By acting on this perception, the individual could begin to free themselves from individualism by cultivating other, nobler work motivations. In late 1966, however, Castro denounced all appeals to individual self-interest as reactionary. The withdrawal of material incentives was effected through the Cuban state’s near monopoly on ownership and management of productive property.

That monopoly was consolidated in the Revolutionary Offensive’s expropriations and prohibitions, which allowed the PCC’s line on incentives to be applied more consistently. The profit motive that reigned in the private sector was an analogue of material incentives in the state sector. With what moral authority could the PCC persuade the working class to relinquish material incentives if the petit-bourgeoisie and self-employment were allowed to continue to exist, and even thrive? Raul Castro, then defence minister and deputy PCC secretary, made this connection explicit in a speech on May Day in 1968: “To say that the [urban petit-bourgeoisie] lived better because they were influenced by material incentives is true. And, for that very reason we reject material incentives. We don’t want a [petit-bourgeois individualist] mentality for our people” (cited in Mesa-Lago 1969: 210).

³⁰ In the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels (1977 [1848]: 111) observe that under capitalism, there is “no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous ‘cash payment’”.

Statist utopian ‘great leap forward’

The Revolutionary Offensive was a statist utopian ‘great leap forward’: a political-ideological crusade to suppress capitalist vestiges. It almost completely suppressed remnant non-agricultural private enterprise in a Third World society that had barely emerged from capitalism. This contrasted sharply with an organic approach to the socialist transition.

At the dawn of the socialist transition, the proletarian state progressively expropriates large capitalist enterprises. “Large-scale capitalist production creates the preconditions for socialising [ownership of] and consciously planning the economy” (Mandel 1974: 646). When this wave of expropriation reaches a tipping point, capitalism is superseded by a post-capitalist economy and society, and remnant private enterprise on any scale becomes, arguably, a capitalist vestige. Up to a certain point, further expropriations, proceeding from large to somewhat smaller enterprises, bring property relations into greater harmony—by abolishing *private* ownership—with the *social* character of the labour process. It is this ‘objective socialisation of labour’ (see Mandel 1986: 5) that makes private ownership anachronistic.

Beyond a certain point, further expropriations begin to have the opposite effect. They *impose* the proletarian state property form (at best, a transitional form of communist social property) on myriad small and tiny economic entities. This introduces, rather than resolves, an incongruence between the productive forces and relations embodied in scarcely socialised labour and the corresponding property relations. Insofar as expropriation (and associated state coercion) tends to harmonise production and property relations, it serves an organic approach. Insofar as expropriation introduces or intensifies an incongruence between these basis and superstructural social relations, expropriation constitutes the suppression of a superficial capitalist vestige: private ownership.³¹ This illustrates the distinction between these two approaches.

³¹ Such an incongruence can arise or be intensified through inertia. The fact that circumstances change and state policies do not change accordingly may lend an approach to the socialist transition a suppressive character. In Chapter 1, it was argued that Soviet War Communism is a striking example of such circumstantial suppression.

Note that the state, in its zeal for expropriation, could pass from organic transcendence to suppression without the party-state leadership even being aware of it, because these approaches are not sharply delineated at the crossover point. Only if its own expropriation momentum carries the state further does the distinction between them become glaring. The elasticity of the base-superstructure correspondence (there is no mechanistic correspondence) makes suppression possible, and relatively innocuous up to a point; the limits of this elasticity give rise to the implications of statist utopian suppression for the socialist transition and for the socialist model (see Chapter 1).

A case could be made that the PCC's drift into statist utopian suppression in the economic sphere preceded the Revolutionary Offensive by several years. As early as 1964, further incursions into private ownership may have had a utopian tinge. Omar Everleny Perez (cited in Hernandez et al 2008: 102), chair of Havana University's Centre for Research on the Cuban Economy, observes that 'socialism' became equated with statism: "We really fell into this confusion in 1964–5 in continuing with the process of nationalisations". In other words, nationalisation acquired a self-perpetuating dynamic and became an end in itself.

Cuba's statist utopian 'great leap forward' targeted three relatively superficial capitalist vestiges: material incentives, remnant private enterprise and their associated individualism. The shift in official ideology and policy regarding the use of material incentives, between mid-1965 and late 1966, was a shift from *complementarity* (material incentives and moral incentives can be complementary vis-à-vis the twin goals of productivity and consciousness) to *binary exclusivity* (being antithetical, material and moral incentives are mutually exclusive, so material incentives must be systematically withdrawn). The state suppression of remnant urban private enterprise extended the reach of this logic and applied the new incentives policy more consistently.

There was a moral dimension to this binary exclusivity. The persistence of material incentives and the urban private sector was posed in terms of communist morality. A society free of selfishness became a moral stricture that society must be made to conform to, rather than a moral compass that orients to

the communist horizon. Through the distorting lens of this moral stricture, ‘counterrevolutionary’ applied not only to participants in counterrevolutionary *activities* but also, absurdly, to *non*-participants in the official mass organisations; capitalism was not the social domination of capital based on state power and capitalist property, but the mere existence of private enterprise on the smallest of scales; individualism and individuality seemed identical; selfish attitudes could be banished by decree; and the self-employed, who do not employ anyone, were supposedly an exploiting class.³²

The Revolutionary Offensive was a moral as well as an ideological crusade. Its moral intensity was expressed in such measures as the closure of all bars and nightclubs and the prohibitions on men sporting long hair or beards (Fidel Castro’s notwithstanding) and on women and girls wearing mini-skirts (Mesa-Lago 1969: 210, 212). In posing a litany of grievances against the urban private sector in existential terms (the existence or non-existence of small-scale private enterprise), a concrete question of communist strategy and tactics, in a post-capitalist society that had barely emerged from capitalism, was dissolved into the ahistorical abstraction of a timeless communist morality.

What distinguished the Cuban approach, Fidel Castro claimed in July 1968, was that “every step forward *of the productive forces* must be accompanied by an advance in ... consciousness” [my emphasis]. This gives the withering away of the fundamental capitalist vestige, the underdevelopment of the productive forces, the leading edge in this dialectic. Yet the Revolutionary Offensive proceeded as if *consciousness* were the leading edge: it ‘moralised’ economic relations in order to foster the desired consciousness. In turn, this would (it was hoped) catalyse rapid industrialisation. At odds with the above citation, Castro expressed this inversion in the same speech: “Communism certainly cannot be established ... unless abundant riches are created, but in our judgement the [way forward] is not to create awareness with money or riches, but to create riches with awareness” (Castro, F 1968b).

³² The self-employed may not pay their fair share for free or subsidised social services, but that is another question. It could have been addressed through taxation.

In the late 1960s, the PCC leadership imagined that these twin transformations of the economy and consciousness would be telescoped into a very short time frame. Veteran Cuban economist Joaquin Infante Ugarte (cited in Cameron 2010), a contemporary of Che Guevara, recalls: “In 1967, when we stopped cost accounting [in state enterprises] and ignored many economic laws, we thought we were going to have the New Human Being. Yet human beings with small letters must be [materially] incentivised to work. We forgot about the socialist law of distribution”. Infante Ugarte alludes here to Marx’s socialist transition remuneration principle, ‘to each according to their work’.

It seemed to the PCC leadership that the root cause of the attitudes and conduct documented in the PCC report cited by Castro in his March 13, 1968 speech was the profit-seeking acquisitiveness of the petit-bourgeoisie (Castro F, 1968a). This, together with its atomised and precarious class existence and its intermediate social position vis-à-vis the dispossessed bourgeoisie, engenders a characteristic individualism. Dispossess the shopkeeper and (it was assumed) the mentality engendered by their livelihood would cease to be reproduced; it would persist solely as the psychological residue of a vanquished class. Education, ideology and emulation would dispel it from the Cuban psyche.

That assumption turned out to be mistaken. The individualistic mentality persisted in the guise of indifferent or corrupt administrators of small and tiny state-owned economic entities. Cuban Economic Law Society president Narciso Cobo Roura (cited in Acanda Gonzalez et al 2007: 138) observes that the Cuban baker who sells flour on the black market “disposes of the [state-owned] bakery’s resources ... *as if he were its owner*” [my emphasis]. The state is then obliged to “send in an inspector, then find another inspector to watch over the first inspector, and so on until you end up with a bureaucracy” (Lesnik cited in Cameron 2011a). An April 9, 2010 *Granma* letter to the editor opined: “Following their nationalisation by the Cuban state in 1968, small businesses and retail trade were converted, little by little, into a source of illicit profit, theft from the state, inefficiency and maltreatment. This is not a recent phenomenon” (Paez del Amo 2009).

Everlery Perez (cited in Hernandez et al 2008: 102, 106) points out that state ownership and management did not make the proprietors of Cuba's bars any more pro-Revolution. Juan Triana Cordovi, also from Havana University's Centre for Research on the Cuban Economy, draws attention to a statist utopian paradox: excessive statisation weakens, rather than strengthens, the state's grip on the economy: "We nationalised everything, statised everything down to the shoeshiners, and we imposed a burden on the state that it was never able to bear" (Triana Cordovi 2013). Burdened with the management of small and tiny enterprises, the state was unable to concentrate its efforts on the decisive sectors of the national economy.

Binary exclusivity tends to come up against real-world constraints (see Chapter 1). Even at the climax of Cuba's statist utopian 'great leap forward', the gigantic 1970 sugar harvest mobilisation, material incentives were not entirely dispensed with. Professional *macheteros* "received higher, guaranteed annual wage rates" (Malloy 1974: 40). Nor did the 1968 wave of expropriations spill over into peasant agriculture. Political realism stopped them at the farm gate. Four factors likely contributed to the PCC's pragmatism in this regard: the role of the peasantry in the 1959 revolution; the Agrarian Reform Laws that gave peasants legal title to the land they farmed, thus consolidating their support for the Revolution; Fidel Castro's pre-Revolution pledge that peasants would never be forcibly expropriated; and the disproportionate contribution of peasant farming to Cuban agricultural production and food security.

In closing the 1966 CTC Congress, Fidel Castro (1966) commented: "Under socialism, or rather under communism, it is said that the state should disappear. The state is conceived as a coercive force. Engels said that the government of people would be replaced by the administration of things. That is the society we want to arrive at". Ironically, then, as the state's administrative apparatus occupied myriad economic niches vacated by the 1968 suppression of the urban private sector, it became monopolistic and nearly all-pervasive in the economic sphere. Meanwhile, its coercive reach extended to trying to suppress any trace of private enterprise from re-emerging.

In 2011, outspoken Cuban intellectual Alfredo Guevara, the founder of Cuba's film institute and a PCC member, pointed out that the Cuban Revolution faced the task of dismantling "this huge [state] apparatus which has seized society":

[T]he state is everything, the corner store manager is the state, the one who steals a little of the [rationed, state-subsidised] goods from you and sells them to you on the black market; the baker who steals the flour and then the bread is worthless, etc. (Guevara, A cited in Cameron 2011c).

The state-centric dynamic of the Revolutionary Offensive was not confined to property relations. Party and state functions merged (Diaz Vazquez 2011: 124). State enterprises lost all vestiges of autonomy, drawing all their funds from and surrendering all their earnings to state coffers (Bernardo 1974: 196). Cuba was far from communism, yet trade unions "practically disappeared" from 1966 on the basis that there would be no need for them under communism (Morales Garza 2008: 96; see also Hernandez and Mesa-Lago 1974). As society was 'moralised', it was also militarised (Malloy 1974: 41). *Granma* (cited in Mesa-Lago 1969: 205) reported on April 14, 1968 that preparations for a "war economy" were underway in Oriente Province, with "troops of workers" to be sent to the "production front".

It might be objected that perhaps dire circumstances forced the hand of the PCC leadership (as was the case with the Soviet leadership's adoption of War Communism). If so, then neither the withdrawal of material incentives nor the 1968 expropriations can be attributed largely to statist utopianism. As noted earlier, Fidel Castro (1968a) claimed that as well as being a matter of principle, Cuba could not afford material incentives and economic development simultaneously. This is not credible and appears to be a post-hoc rationalisation of the consciousness-morality argument.

It is undeniable that investment had to be prioritised, and indeed it was. State investments as a percentage of gross material product increased, according to official statistics, from 16.4% in 1962 to 22.8% in 1966, 27.4% in 1967 and 31% in 1968 (Brundenius 1989: 119). The PCC could have opted to maintain this ratio at 1967 levels and redirect the savings from foregone investments to

material incentives—such as those that had been withdrawn—or to reallocate funds from elsewhere for this purpose. Zeitlin (1970: 11) observed that in 1969, and unlike in 1962, “the present austerity, say government leaders, is *planned*. It is the result of the extraordinary and unprecedented rate of investment, 31% per cent of the Gross Material Product ... and of the use of scarce foreign exchange to buy capital goods rather than consumer goods” [my emphasis]. If it was planned, then it could have been avoided.

Was national security or political stability the real reason for the suppression of the urban private sector? In his March 13, 1968 speech, Castro accused many in the private sector of having apolitical or counterrevolutionary *attitudes* (Castro, F 1968a). The PCC investigative report that Castro cited from would have seized on any evidence of widespread involvement in or sponsorship of counterrevolutionary *activities* to make the case for expropriation, and Castro would have drawn attention to this. It would stretch plausibility to breaking point to suggest that bar owners, florists, shoeshiners, hot-dog stand proprietors and the like were a threat to political stability. The ease with which the Revolutionary Offensive suppressed the entire sector almost overnight reveals a relationship of forces overwhelmingly in favour of the PCC and the state. Far from being a sign of political weakness, it would appear to be a sign of strength.

Finally, as noted on page 46, the PCC leadership was divided over the systematic withdrawal of material incentives in favour of moral incentives. While Castro’s view at the time and that of the majority of the leadership prevailed, a minority advocated a different approach—echoes, behind closed doors, of the mid-1960s ‘Great Debate’ (see Yaffe 2009: 46-59) on moral and material incentives and economic management in Cuba’s socialist transition. That the PCC leadership was divided over its incentives policy lends weight to the conclusion that the Revolutionary Offensive was not a forced move dictated by dire circumstances, as was War Communism. A different approach was possible.

Conclusions

The Revolutionary Offensive was a statist utopian ‘great leap forward’. A shift in the official attitude to material incentives in late 1966 foreshadowed the 1968

suppression of the remnant urban private sector. My subsidiary concept of binary exclusivity helps to explain this shift in terms of statist utopianism. It was a shift from complementarity (material incentives and moral incentives can be complementary vis-à-vis the twin goals of productivity and consciousness) to binary exclusivity (being antithetical, material and moral incentives are mutually exclusive so material incentives must be systematically withdrawn). Inconsistencies in the official rationale for the withdrawal of material incentives and for the suppression of remnant urban private enterprise draw attention to the distorting effects of viewing society through a lens of binary exclusivity.

From a moral compass orienting to the communist horizon, morality became a stricture that society must be made to conform to. The suppression of the urban private sector had a state-centric dynamic: in the wake of the Revolutionary Offensive's expropriations and prohibitions, the dominance of state ownership and management of the economy was near-absolute. Unlike War Communism, the Revolutionary Offensive was not obligatory.♦

Chapter 3: Cuban state socialism

The [late 2010] authorisation of the hiring of labour and with it, explicit official recognition of the existence of pockets of private capitalist property—at least on the scale of the micro-enterprise—is one of the most significant conceptual transformations of the past 50 years.

Fernandez Estrada, Cuban planning specialist, 2011³³

Chapter 1 was dedicated to conceptualising statist utopianism as a distinctive approach to the socialist transition: imposing a communist vision on society rather than striving for its realisation. In Chapter 2, this conceptualisation was applied to an analysis of a fleeting yet highly distinctive phase of Cuba's socialist transition in the late 1960s. In this chapter, I apply the concept of statist utopianism to an analysis of the prevailing Cuban socialist model.

By 'model' I mean a relatively durable core of concepts, methods, institutions and mentalities. The notion of the model draws attention to the distinction between less and more fundamental changes: changes *within* a model and a change *of* model. A model in this sense is not an ideological construct, but an analytical category. The 'prevailing model' refers to that which emerged during the 1970s under the influence of a partial and uneven Sovietisation of the Cuban Revolution. (While it is beyond the scope of this thesis, the prevailing model could be compared and contrasted with what is arguably a new Cuban socialist model that has been emerging since 2008 under Raul Castro's presidency.)

It is hypothesised that Cuba's pervasive (and now receding) state-centrism is a hybrid of statist utopianism and the Stalinist imprint of Sovietisation. That Cuba underwent a relative Sovietisation during the 1970s and early 1980s is well-established in the literature (see for example Mesa-Lago 1978: 10-29; Diaz Vasquez 2011). Also well-established is the state-centric nature of Stalinism (see for example Lewin 1974: 97-124) and its "deep affinity" (Lewin 1974: 98) with War Communism, in that both were characterised by an "exclusive statism" that "still remains at the core of the Soviet conception of socialism" (Lewin 1974: 95).

³³ Fernandez Estrada 2011: 8.

A small yet important strand of the Cuban studies literature concerns the conceptualisation of the Cuban Revolution's historical continuities and discontinuities. Cuba's late 1960s 'idealism' and subsequent Sovietisation are usually contrasted; continuities and convergences have received little attention and have been inadequately conceptualised. In critiquing the methodology and one of the conclusions of Mesa-Lago and Jorge Perez-Lopez's pro-market/anti-market 'pendulum' periodisation, I draw attention to a striking continuity between the 1966–70 and 1971–85 phases: the collectivisation trend, which is consistent with the hypothesis. This serves to link the historical analysis in Chapter 2 to the characterisation of Cuba's prevailing socialist model here.

The analysis of the prevailing model draws on the work of two leading Cuban Marxist sociologists, Espina Prieto (introduced on page 29) and Juan Valdes Paz. Both belong to the socialisation pole of Cuban socialist thought identified in the Introduction (see page 8). Espina Prieto associates Cuba's prevailing model with five conceptual identities: the market and capitalism; equality and homogeneity; pursuit of social policy objectives, and voluntaristic subordination of 'the economy' to social policy; nationalisation and socialisation; and the state and society. Valdes Paz observes that in some respects, Cuban state socialism is a hyper-statised outlier in comparison to other state socialisms.

I show that Espina Prieto's five conceptual identities of the prevailing model are explicable conceptually in terms of statist utopianism; all predate Cuba's post-1970 Sovietisation; and all are associated historically with Cuba's late 1960s statist utopianism. Some of these identities—such as equating nationalisation with socialisation—are characteristic of both statist utopianism and Stalinism. Three other convergences (there may well be others) are also identified.

Pendulum bias and policy zigzags

The Cuban Revolution's historical continuities and discontinuities have given rise to a succession of relatively distinct phases (late 1966 to mid-1970 is arguably one such phase). The 'periodisation' literature, a minor strand of the Cuban studies literature, strives to conceptualise these phases. In his historical overview of themes and trends in the Cuban studies literature penned outside of

Cuba, Antoni Kapcia (2008: 643) observes that historical analyses of the Cuban Revolution have tended to stress either its continuities or discontinuities. One analytical pole perceives “an almost whimsical zigzag path from phase to phase”; the other pole sees “continuities between otherwise bewildering phases, usually explaining these deeper and structural continuities in terms of ideology or political culture” (Kapcia 2008: 644).

Kapcia (2008: 637) credits Mesa-Lago’s pioneering periodisation in *Cuba in the 1970s: pragmatism and institutionalization* (1978) with influencing subsequent scholarship by establishing a template for other periodisations: it “reinforced the tendency to see the whole trajectory as essentially chaotic and changeable”. Mesa-Lago has since updated his periodisation on numerous occasions, most recently in *Cuba under Raul Castro: assessing the reforms* (2013), co-authored with Perez-Lopez. Mesa-Lago and Perez-Lopez view major and minor phases of the Cuban Revolution from 1959 to today as corresponding to the swings of a Cuban historical pendulum towards and away from the market.

One such pendulum swing occurred in mid-1970, when Cuba’s late 1960s statist utopian ‘great leap forward’ came to an abrupt end after the failure of an all-out sugar harvest mobilisation to reach the ambitious target of 10 million tons of cane. The PCC’s hopes for rapid industrialisation, and the Cuban Revolution’s reputation, had been pinned on exceeding this target. From mid-1970, Fidel Castro acknowledged what he described as the PCC leadership’s idealistic and utopian approach in the late 1960s. (The conceptualisation of statist utopianism in Chapter 1 was grounded in some of the lessons Castro drew from this experience). On July 26, 1973, Castro stressed:

We are in the socialist stage of the Revolution, in which, due to the material realities and the level of culture and awareness in a society that has just emerged from capitalist society, the form of distribution that corresponds [to this stage] is the one outlined by Marx in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*: from each according to their capacity, to each according to their work! (cited in Roca 1977: 106).

Accordingly, the PCC line on material incentives essentially reverted to the pre-1966 position analysed in Chapter 2 and exemplified by the 1965 sugar harvest awards. Castro described this approach in the following terms:

Together with moral incentives, we must also use material incentives, without abusing either one, because the former would lead us to idealism, while the latter would lead to individual selfishness. We must act in such a way that economic incentives will not become people's exclusive motivation, nor moral incentives serve to have some live off the work of the rest (cited in Roca 1977: 106).

With this attitudinal and corresponding policy shift, it was recognised—as Castro had recognised in his 1965 sugar harvest awards speech cited in Chapter 2—that material incentives could play a positive role in ensuring that those who contribute more to society receive more from society in return. It will be recalled that it was a shift in the official attitude towards material incentives in late 1966 that foreshadowed the Revolutionary Offensive launched in 1968, the institutional core of which was the suppression of the remnant urban private sector comprising small businesses and self-employment.

Importantly however, the early 1970s retreat from statist utopianism embodied in the PCC's renewed emphasis on material incentives (as a complement to moral incentives), and in other policy shifts, did not extend to lifting or easing the 1968 ban on urban small businesses and self-employment. Thus the core of the Revolutionary Offensive's institutional legacy remained intact. In 1976, the ban on urban private enterprise other than self-employment was enshrined in Article 14 of the Constitution, which prohibits exploitation in the Marxist sense: one person employing another (Fernandez Estrada 2011: 8).

This inconsistency in the PCC's retreat from the 'idealism' of the late 1960s has received scant attention in the literature. An example of this analytical deficit is Sergio Roca's widely cited paper 'Cuban economic policy in the 1970s: the trodden paths'. Roca's (1977: 87) thesis is that Cuba abandoned "the moral economy" of the late 1960s. The first of his seven pillars of Cuba's moral economy is the suppression of the urban private sector (Roca 1977: 88). Curiously, the fact that this pillar of the Revolutionary Offensive stood tall as others were demolished does not rate a mention. His account, which is based on the official narrative of the abandonment of 'idealism', misses the significance of what *did not* change in the early 1970s.

Likewise, when the Revolutionary Offensive expropriated and banned the urban private sector, Mesa-Lago analysed this discontinuity. While correctly pointing out that it was the continuation of an existing nationalisation trend, his 1969 paper ‘Ideological radicalization and economic policy in Cuba’ gave due weight to the expropriations as the core element of the wider Offensive (as did Roca in enumerating his seven pillars of Cuba’s ‘moral economy’). Yet in *Cuba in the 1970s: pragmatism and institutionalization*—Mesa-Lago’s 187-page exposition of his thesis that the pendulum swung towards market-oriented pragmatism under Sovietisation from 1971—the *continuity* of the prohibition on urban small businesses and (until 1978) self-employment is mentioned (Mesa-Lago 1978: 93) only incidentally and in passing.

This omission is repeated by Mesa-Lago and Perez-Lopez in their periodisation in *Cuba under Raul Castro: assessing the reforms* (2013). The co-authors identify eight pendulum swings “toward or away from the market” since 1959. Swings away from the market they term ‘idealist’; swings towards they term ‘pragmatist’. During each swing cycle, “there were changes—often contradictory—with respect to eleven policy areas” (Mesa-Lago and Perez-Lopez 2013: 3). Top of their list of policy areas is ‘collectivisation of the means of production’. (They do not define such ‘collectivisation’, but it is synonymous in with state acquisition by expropriation or voluntary relinquishment). Collectivisation is characteristic of idealist cycles; de-collectivisation is characteristic of pragmatist cycles (Mesa-Lago and Perez-Lopez 2013: 1–3).

Mesa-Lago and Perez-Lopez (2013: 9) claim that during the 1971–85 pragmatist cycle that coincided with Sovietisation, the PCC leadership “essentially reversed its earlier idealist policies and initiated a timid journey towards the market”. Their next sentence begins with a tacit acknowledgement that this judgement is in fact too sweeping: “While there was *an expansion of state-controlled cooperatives and a gradual absorption of private farms into cooperatives*” [my emphasis]—i.e. not a policy reversal, nor a shift towards the market—“a number of measures contrary to collectivisation were implemented” (Mesa-Lago and Perez-Lopez 2013: 9).

The measures cited are the relaxation of state bans on agricultural ‘free’ markets and on peasants hiring farm labourers; private plots on state farms; citizens building and exchanging their own homes; foreign direct investment; and self-employment (Mesa-Lago and Perez-Lopez 2013: 10). None of this amounts to de-collectivisation (i.e. privatisation). In their haste to fit facts to their schema, they forget that homes are not means of production; private plots on state farms are still owned by the state; self-employment does not necessarily entail privatisation and did not in Cuba at the time; nor does foreign investment, allowing farmers to sell some of their produce at market prices or the hiring of farm labourers by peasants amount to de-collectivisation.

Contrary to Mesa-Lago and Perez-Lopez’s claim, the collectivisation trend that they place at the top of their list of eleven policy areas was *secular rather than cyclical* from 1959–89, i.e. during four of their eight pendulum swing cycles. According to data from Cuba’s National Statistics Office, “the quantitative expansion of the state sector occurred *throughout* three decades, reaching its high point in 1989 when it employed some 95% of the Cuban labour force” [my emphasis] (Fernandez Estrada 2011: 7).

Between 1966 and 1985, i.e. from the beginning of Mesa-Lago and Perez-Lopez’s late 1960s idealist cycle to the end of their post-1970 pragmatist cycle, the sole qualitative change with regard to collectivisation was the 1968 suppression of the urban private sector. The collectivisation pendulum did not swing back the other way during the 1970s and 1980s. Apart from a very limited opening to self-employment in 1978, the 1968 prohibitions remained intact. This is an inexplicable—and far from trivial—anomaly for the market pendulum schema. The PCC’s swing away from ‘idealism’ from mid-1970, combined with the heightened influence of the Soviet Union’s relative pro-market pragmatism, should have rolled back the 1968 suppression of the urban private sector and its legacy: state ownership and management of almost the entire economy.

That the core of the Revolutionary Offensive’s institutional legacy endured intact until 1978, when there was a very limited opening to self employment, casts a shadow of doubt over the dominant narrative that the PCC leadership abandoned ‘idealism’ during the 1970s. In stressing the striking discontinuities

between the 1966–70 and 1971–85 phases of the Cuban Revolution, a fundamental continuity between Cuba’s statist utopian ‘great leap forward’ and subsequent Sovietisation has not received the attention it merits.

Mesa-Lago and Perez-Lopez (2013: 24) summarise their analysis as follows: “For more than five decades, socialist Cuba’s policies followed a recurring pattern of idealist and pragmatist cycles, successively moving away from or toward the market”. They attribute these cycles to the clash between idealist impulses and the consequences of giving them free reign. During idealistic cycles, such as from 1966–70, ambitious goals (e.g. harvesting 10 million tons of sugar in 1970; creating a New Human Being) are not achieved. This has adverse economic and social consequences that pose a threat to political stability. A new, pro-market cycle results in moderately improved economic performance and living standards, but at the cost of adverse social consequences such as higher unemployment and rising inequality. This gives rise to a new idealist cycle, “thus perpetuating a policy seesaw” (Mesa-Lago and Perez-Lopez 2013: 2).

While the pendulum schema has a beguiling simplicity, it does formalise a certain bias. At any historical inflection point, discontinuities overshadow continuities. This is what allows us to identify inflection points and demarcate phases. Historical continuities are not intrinsically any less important than discontinuities, but the latter tend to attract more attention because change stands out against a backdrop of continuity. It is the *swings* of the pendulum (i.e. changes of vector, such as towards rather than away from the market) that define the phases of a pendulum periodisation; yet continuities from one phase to the next may be just as analytically significant. I term this built-in emphasis on change over continuity ‘pendulum bias’.

While analyses of the Cuban Revolution that employ the historical pendulum analogy explicitly are uncommon,³⁴ an unjustified emphasis on discontinuities over continuities is more widespread in the literature (as illustrated by Roca’s unbalanced account cited above). Mesa-Lago and Perez-Lopez’s pendulum analysis suffers from two methodological weaknesses. Firstly, pendulum bias

³⁴ Another is what Helen Yaffe terms the Guevarist pendulum. Yaffe perceives a Cuban historical pendulum swinging towards and away from Che Guevara’s political-economic thought. See Yaffe 2009: 262–70.

leads them to exaggerate the depth of the 1971–85 pro-market cycle. Such cycles are associated, they claim, with de-collectivisation; yet they fail to recognise the secular collectivisation trend from 1968–89. Secondly, they reduce ‘idealism’ (i.e. statist utopianism) and Sovietisation (i.e. the assimilation of Stalinism), both of which are irreducibly complex phenomena, to the one-dimensionality of pro- and anti-market trends. Evidently, this market reductionism is misleading.

In the conceptual framework of this thesis, a reasonable interpretation of the secular collectivisation trend would be that the Revolutionary Offensive’s core institutional legacy, the near absolute dominance of state ownership and management of the economy, was compatible with Sovietisation because statist utopianism and Stalinism are both state-centric. The suppression of the urban private sector was incorporated into Cuba’s Soviet-inspired Economic Planning and Management System (known by its Spanish acronym SDPE). The SDPE, which was introduced incrementally between 1976 and 1985, was based on state ownership of the means of production (Diaz Vasquez 2011: 125).

The absorption of the core institutional legacy of Cuba’s statist utopian ‘great leap forward’ into the creeping Sovietisation of the 1970s and early 1980s is consistent with the hybridisation hypothesis. Evidently, statist utopianism and Sovietisation each contributed to the state-centrism of the prevailing Cuban socialist model, which emerged during this period. The legacy of the ‘great leap forward’ contributed to the peculiarity of the prevailing model: as Diaz Vasquez (2011: 125) points out, Cuba’s near-absolute dominance of state ownership and management of the economy has had no parallel since War Communism.

In statist utopian terms, Mesa-Lago and Perez-Lopez’s pro- and anti-market policy see-saw could be reinterpreted (at least for the period 1966-89) as the alternating assertion of binary exclusivity followed by the resort to a reluctant pragmatism (see page 34). When the 1968 ban on self-employment was relaxed slightly in 1978, many Cubans found the idea that socialist citizens could work for themselves rather than for the state to be morally dubious and difficult to accept (Triana Cordovi 2014). In 1986, the PCC’s 3rd Congress launched the ‘Rectification’ campaign, during which self-employment was once again suppressed; it was deemed unnecessary because the state would assume its

functions (Mesa-Lago and Perez-Lopez 2013: 12). In 1992–3, Fidel Castro warned that the Cuban Revolution “would continue to expand state ownership of the means of production, nationalising even the remaining small farms” (Mesa-Lago and Perez-Lopez 2013: 15).

There are occasional suggestions or implications in the academic and other literature that 1968 (i.e. the Revolutionary Offensive), not 1970-1 (i.e. the onset of Sovietisation), was the more significant historical turning point. For example, Fernandez Estrada (2011: 6) comments in passing that what he terms Cuba’s model of economic functioning³⁵ “has undergone some modifications over the past 50 years, although in a general sense it has retained up to now many of the fundamental principles adopted since 1968”. He does not say which of these principles date(s) back to 1968, but elsewhere in the same source he observes:

The [late 2010] authorisation of the hiring of labour and with it, explicit official recognition of the existence of pockets of private capitalist property—at least on the scale of the micro-enterprise—is one of the most significant conceptual transformations of the past 50 years (Fernandez Estrada 2011: 8).

In a similar vein, veteran Cuban journalist Luis Sexto makes this provocative allusion to the 1968 Revolutionary Offensive:

Cuban society now resumes its progress toward socialism, interrupted in 1968 when the perception took hold that, in one leap, socialism would be a certainty, even hastening that other purely theoretical, even unimaginable society called communism. In other words, the perfect society (Sexto 2011).

By ‘unimaginable’, Sexto does not seem to suggest here that communism cannot be imagined. It was a communist vision that inspired Cuba’s statist utopian ‘great leap forward’. Such imaginings, starting with the 16th century Utopian socialists, have animated communist strivings for centuries. Indeed, without daring to dream a little, the lesser goal of ‘socialism’ that (according to Sexto) Cuba now resumes its progress towards might lose its way—just as too much dreaming led it astray in the late 1960s. Sexto’s point here is that from 1968,

³⁵ Defined as “the integral expression of the fundamental principles of organisation and movement of the national economy within the framework of a definite socio-economic system” (Fernandez Estrada 2011: 4).

and for four decades thereafter, the Cuban Revolution's strivings for communism were imbued with a dogmatic certainty and perfectionism.

Peculiarities of Cuban state socialism

As noted in the Introduction, one constituent element of Cuba's pervasive (and now receding) state-centrism—the legacy of the Cuban Revolution's partial and uneven Sovietisation during the 1970s and early 1980s—is widely acknowledged and well-documented in the literature. In academic and wider discourse, Cuba's prevailing model is often dubbed 'state', 'actually existing', 'real', 'traditional' or '20th century' socialism, all of which have Soviet bloc connotations. 'State socialism', while less evocative and more descriptive than these other terms, still conveys the impression that Cuban *state* socialism was cast in the Soviet mould.

Espina Prieto perceives a nodal web (rather than a hierarchy) of six clusters of problems of Cuba's socialist transition. She summarises the first of these nodes as the “hyper-statisation of social relations, [excessive] centralisation and verticalism,³⁶ paternalism-authoritarianism [and] distributive homogeneity” that (see page 29) does not adequately address either the diversity of needs or the heterogeneity of inequality (Espina Prieto 2009: 166). These and most of the other problems she identifies are not fundamentally a consequence of Cuba's post-Soviet 'Special Period'—a deep, prolonged crisis of Cuba's socialist transition from which the Cuban Revolution has yet to fully emerge—nor of the market-based palliatives adopted since the early 1990s:

They gestated earlier and are associated with *the choice of a conception of socialism* that erroneously identifies the socialisation of property with nationalisation, the market with capitalism, equality with homogeneity, the social purpose of the economy with its voluntaristic subordination to social ends, and the state with society [my emphasis] (Espina Prieto 2009: 168).

³⁶ In this context, the Spanish *verticalismo* refers to the Cuban Revolution's culture of deference, whereby elected representatives and administrators feel, or in fact are, unable to make non-trivial decisions (and perhaps even trivial ones) without consulting their superiors, and so on up the political-administrative chain of command until it reaches, for example, a government minister. Such 'waiting for orders from above' contributes to Cuba's hyper-centralised decision-making and to state-centrism.

They are problems, then, of the prevailing socialist model, which predates the Special Period: it emerged during the 1970s under the influence of Sovietisation. Espina Prieto associates the above set of five conceptual identities with the prevailing model. When and why did these conceptual identities take hold in Cuba? Espina Prieto does not elaborate here, but it is striking that all five may be associated conceptually with the phenomenon of statist utopianism.

The subsidiary concept of binary exclusivity was introduced in Chapter 1. Binary exclusivity arises from an antipathy to the presence and (in some cases) use of capitalist vestiges and a corresponding idealisation of their tangible or symbolic communist opposites. It manifests as the tendency, in thought or in practice, to emphasise one pole of some duality (e.g. planning-markets) to the exclusion of the other. For example, the state is merely a symbolic antithesis of the market, because communism is conceived as a stateless society; planning is a tangible antithesis, since communism would be based on planning rather than markets.

One conceptual identity of the prevailing model identified by Espina Prieto is equating capitalism with the market. Political scientist Rafael Hernandez, editor of the Cuban journal *Temas*, perceives an “old mindset” in Cuba that “sees the emergence of capitalism in every expression of the market and in every segment of small-scale private property” (cited in Cameron 2011f). An April 9, 2010 letter to the editor of the PCC daily, *Granma*, by one F. Hernandez Gonzalez illustrates this viewpoint: “To privatise even the most insignificant branch of our economy would lead to the renunciation of socialism” (cited in Cameron 2011h). This is a binary exclusive conception of the socialist transitional society in relation to the market. What is the origin of this ‘old mindset’ in Cuba?

The genesis of this mentality was not the post-1970 Sovietisation, but the 1968 Revolutionary Offensive. Fidel Castro’s rationale (see page 48) for suppressing the remnant urban private sector conflates ‘the market’—in the guise of small private businesses and self-employment—with capitalism (see Chapter 2). This perception that capitalism is embodied in mere vestiges of private enterprise in a state-dominated, post-capitalist economy and society is symbolism induced by an aversion to private enterprise. Post-1968, whenever the state slightly eased the ban on small-scale private enterprise, “we [Cuban communists] had a way of

coping with the changes that involved stigmatising the emergence of these new [economic] actors and new spaces for the market” (Hernandez cited in Cameron 2011f). The re-emergence of these suppressed capitalist vestiges was stigmatised because the socialist transitional society “was defined in absolute terms as *state-centric socialism*” [my emphasis] (Hernandez cited in Cameron 2011f).

As acknowledged in Chapter 1, my subsidiary concept of ‘binary exclusivity’ is inspired by Espina Prieto’s observation that a ‘maximalist equality paradigm’ has given rise to ‘dichotomies’ in Cuba’s social policy. These dichotomies are a consequence of conceiving of social reality in terms of ‘antagonistic pairs’ and of ‘radically excluding’ one term of the duality, rather than striving for their possible complementarity. The tendency to emphasise the state to the exclusion of the market is one example she cites (Espina Prieto 2006: 366).

Another conceptual element of the prevailing model that Espina Prieto draws our attention to is *the identification of social equality with homogeneity*. The homogeneity referred to here is distributive, i.e. the egalitarian distribution of consumer goods and equal access to social services. Equality and egalitarianism are not in fact identical, but egalitarianism may come to symbolise the state’s commitment to equality. This symbolism introduces a conceptual confusion if inequality’s symbolic antithesis—distributive egalitarianism—is confused with its real antithesis, namely equality. In treating unequal individuals (or unequal labour contributions) equally, such egalitarianism is unjust from the standpoint of the socialist transition (see page 34 and the footnote to page 51). The egalitarian ethos embodied in Espina Prieto’s maximum equality paradigm flourished in late 1960s Cuba: withdrawing material incentives and suppressing the urban private sector were aimed at creating an egalitarian society.

A third conceptual identity of the prevailing socialist model is *equating the social purpose of the economy with its voluntaristic subordination to social ends*. This too is a case of binary exclusivity: here ‘the economy’ is the capitalist pole, ‘the social’ the communist pole. It is also a case of opposites being alike. Neoclassical economics subordinates social rationality to economic rationality (that of capitalist profitability). Statist utopianism merely reverses the terms of this subordination. Whereas neoclassical doctrine tends to view ‘the economic’

in isolation from ‘the social’, statist utopianism tends to view ‘the social’ in isolation from ‘the economic’. The PCC’s late 1960s drive to moralise Cuba’s domestic economic relations illustrates this subordination.

This ‘Marxist’ reductionism (the mirror image of Neoclassical reductionism) assumes or hopes that if social objectives are prioritised and economic relations are politicised, then the economy will prosper. Since it sees no necessary tension between the economic and social goals of the socialist transition, the former tend to be subsumed under the latter (e.g. fostering a communist New Human Being). In turn, this tends towards the hyper-politicisation of the state’s role in the economy. Valdes Paz (2007) sees “a highly centralised and bureaucratised state” as characteristic of generic state socialism, together with the dominance of “political institutions, actors and political strategies” over economic institutions, actors and strategies. Indeed:

Cuban state socialism would seem to be an outlier in this respect: planning, and a [central] plan, that are highly politicised; [an] economic system with less of a presence and weight of market relations and, given this, more bureaucratic mediations; the absolute priority of public goods and thus of social policy; a highly statised economy; [and] a politically legitimised underconsumption (Valdes Paz 2007).

Note that Valdes Paz regards Cuba’s ‘highly statised economy’ as state-centric *in comparison to* other state socialisms that emerged during the 20th century. We shall return to these observations of Valdes Paz shortly.

According to Espina Prieto, a fourth conceptual identity of Cuba’s prevailing socialist model is *the identification of the state with society*. This conceptual identity, like the other three we have examined so far, is explicable in terms of statist utopianism. The corollary of communist antipathy to market relations and remnant private enterprise is a corresponding idealisation of their symbolic communist antithesis: the proletarian state. Accordingly, that state and statised social relations may come to symbolise distance from capitalism and proximity to communism. Such symbolism is illusory if a means to an end (the proletarian state as a bridge to communism) has become an end in itself (the state’s absorption *of* society as it imposes a communist vision *on* society).

Statist utopianism blurs the perceptual distinction between state and society by hyper-statising social relations. The more the state ‘absorbs’ society the more society and state appear to merge—a contrived rather than organic merging. Ideology aside, the perception of state/society identity is a conscious reflection of the social reality of the state’s growing omnipresence. By statising the urban remnants of private enterprise, the 1968 Revolutionary Offensive consolidated the material basis for state/society perceptual identity. Despite this, no few Cuban Marxists are keenly aware of the distinction between state and society. Outspoken Cuban intellectual and PCC member Alfredo Guevara told a gathering of students in 2011: “The [Cuban] state is all-pervasive, especially the bureaucratic state apparatus” (Guevara, A cited in Cameron 2011b).

Recall the striking juxtaposition of *Granma* headings from the April 7, 1968 edition: ‘Nation’s private sector now almost completely nationalised’, and ‘We are socialists’ (cited in Mesa-Lago 1969: 203). The first heading can be read in two ways: 1) the private sector has been ‘almost completely’ suppressed; and 2) statisation of the means of production is ‘almost complete’. One cannot applaud the first without applauding the second. Idealisation of the state’s ‘absorption’ of society is the flip side of an antipathy towards private enterprise.

Let us retrace our steps. Espina Prieto perceives five conceptual identities associated with Cuba’s prevailing socialist model. We have analysed four so far: the market and capitalism identity; the equality and egalitarianism identity; equating the pursuit of social policy objectives with voluntaristic subordination of economic policy to social policy; and the state and society identity. We have shown that all are associated conceptually with statist utopianism; all predate Cuba’s post-1970 Sovietisation; and all four are associated historically with Cuba’s late 1960s statist utopian ‘great leap forward’. Two conceptual threads run through the preceding analysis: binary exclusivity and state-centrism.

These four conceptual identities, and the institutional peculiarities of Cuban state socialism identified by Valdez Paz in the indented citation above, are mutually reinforcing and thus tightly bound in the manner of a Gordian knot. Let us now briefly explore this state-centric conceptual and institutional nexus.

The market/capitalism identity sees the emergence of capitalism in any opening to private enterprise and markets, however trivial it may be in comparison to the overwhelming dominance of the Cuban state with regard to ownership and management of the economy. Likewise, the equality/homogeneity identity regards distributive egalitarianism as symbolic of the Cuban state's commitment to equality. Ensuring that, for example, every Cuban citizen receives their monthly quota of rationed, state-subsidised beans demands a dedicated state supply chain, a dense network of state-run rationed goods stores and a sizeable state administrative apparatus...and inspectors to inspect the inspectors.

Subordination of 'the economy' to social policy objectives is also state-centric. It demands, as Valdes Paz (2007) points out, "planning, and a [central] plan, that are highly politicised" and "an economic system with less of a presence and weight of market relations and, given this, more bureaucratic mediations". In state socialism comparative terms, Cuba is a hyper-statised outlier in this regard, as well as in "the absolute priority ... of social policy; a highly statised economy; [and] a politically legitimised underconsumption" (Valdes Paz 2007).

Politically legitimised underconsumption allows the Cuban state to concentrate society's economic surplus in its hands for the purpose of (among other things) distributive homogeneity. In turn, distributive homogeneity requires a highly centralised and politicised administrative planning apparatus. This goes some way to explaining what Espina Prieto perceives as Cuba's "[excessive] centralisation" and "paternalism-authoritarianism" (Espina Prieto 2009: 166). The citizen's dependence on the state's distributive egalitarianism (and on the state more generally) fosters a paternalistic relationship between the citizen and the state, a relationship that is by nature authoritarian. Finally, the state/society identity is self-evidently state-centric. It is a meta-identity that encompasses the other three of Espina Prieto's conceptual identities that we have analysed so far.

Statist utopianism and Stalinism

As noted in Chapter 2, the Cuban state's incursions into private ownership of the means of production may have acquired a statist utopian tinge as early as 1964. These and further incursions acquired an enduring ideological symbolism:

“it was thought—and it is still thought—that *socialism is statisation*. We really fell into this confusion in 1964–5 in continuing with the process of nationalisations” [my emphasis] (Everleny Perez cited in Hernandez et al 2008: 102). Behind the mid to late 1960s expropriation momentum there was, then, a state-centric conception (‘socialism is statisation’) of the socialist transitional society. In the next and last wave of Cuban expropriations, the Revolutionary Offensive, this conception was imbued with a binary exclusive moralism.

The ‘socialism is statisation’ identity dissolves the vital conceptual distinction between nationalisation and socialisation.³⁷ This brings us to the fifth and last of Espina Prieto’s conceptual identities of Cuba’s prevailing socialist model: the *identification of nationalisation with socialisation*. This is perhaps the most striking and fundamental conceptual convergence between statist utopianism and Stalinism. It both reflects and reinforces their respective state-centrisms.

Trotsky (1991 [1937]) pointed out that state property was the foundation of the ruling Soviet bureaucracy’s despotic power and institutionalised privileges. He regarded the state’s “dissolution” into society to be “the best index” of progress towards communism (Trotsky 1991 [1937]: 92). In his critique of Stalinism, Trotsky also drew attention to the conceptual distinction between state and social property and to their Stalinist conflation. Echoing Engels’ conception of the withering away of the proletarian state in the socialist transition, he argued that:

State property becomes the property of ‘the whole people’ only to the degree that social privilege and differentiation disappear, and therewith the necessity of the state. In other words: state property is converted into [social] property in proportion as it ceases to be state property (Trotsky 1991 [1937]: 201).

Trotsky’s theoretical point had a political purpose, being directed against the Stalinist glorification of the Soviet state and state property. Given that Stalinist regimes are based on the ruling bureaucracy’s administration of state property, it is hardly surprising that Soviet and Eastern European Stalinist regimes relegated the beginning of the withering away of the state to some remote future

³⁷ Socialisation is discussed briefly in the Introduction (see page 8) in relation to paradigmatic poles of contemporary socialist thought in Cuba.

that had nothing to do with the present or the foreseeable future.³⁸ Stalinist doctrine may not have contradicted Engels in this regard, but the states that elaborated this doctrine showed no signs of even beginning to wither away.

The socialisation of *Cuban* state property imposes itself on the 21st century agenda of Cuban Marxists “because actually existing socialism has been a state-centric model that identified the elimination of capitalist private property with the statisation of property, and social property with state property”; and furthermore: “In regarding the statisation of some property as equivalent to its possession by the whole of society, *the state* is identified with *the whole of society*” [emphasis in original] (Acanda Gonzalez et al 2007: 137). Cuban socialisation advocates urge the solution of this decades-old Cuban problem, which is posed rather sharply by Cuban philosopher Jose Ramon Fabelo Corzo:

If I’m not able to decide what is produced, nor to what end, nor participate in management, in planning, and much of the time what I earn is not related to what I do, what sense of ownership am I going to have, am I going to extract this out of pure ideology? Sometimes yes, but not in the majority of cases (Fabelo Corzo cited in Cameron 2011g).

To Valdes Paz, democratisation (i.e. the socialisation of powers) cannot be confined to Cuba’s economic sphere. He asks rhetorically in relation to contemporary Cuba: “Is a participatory economy conceivable in a highly centralised, authoritarian, bureaucratised political system with a low level of political participation?” (Valdes Paz 2007). Citing Spanish philosopher Francisco Fernandez Buey, he suggests it is easier to define socialism by what it is *not*. However, “the Marxist conception of socialism as a transition towards self-government and self-management” seems valid: citizens participate fully when they participate in decision-making, he argues (Valdes Paz 2007).

The Cuban Revolution and participation are synonymous. However, as Rafael Hernandez aptly observes:

³⁸ An intriguing parallel can be drawn here between Stalinism and social democracy. Social democracy idealised the *capitalist* state and its parliamentary democracy, creating an artificial divide between its ‘maximum’ and ‘minimum’ programmes—theoretical cover for its pursuit of the (highly dubious) reformist road to socialism.

[I]t is in terms of consultation and mobilisation that this model that is changing has been most participatory; it has been much less so in relation to facilitating involvement in decision-making and in control over the implementation of political decisions from below [i.e. at the grassroots] (Hernandez 2013: 2).

This participatory deficit predates the post-1970 Sovietisation. Mesa-Lago notes that in 1968–70, several foreign Marxist scholars visited Cuba, most of them at Fidel Castro’s invitation. Though supportive of the Revolution, all urged “a more democratic, participatory type of socialism” (Mesa-Lago 1978: 63). One of them, the US sociologist Maurice Zeitlin, reported that unlike in the Soviet Union, the wage gap between Cuban production workers and clerical, administrative and technical personnel was minimal; and that as far as he could ascertain, Cuba’s top leaders lived simply (Zeitlin 1970: 11). While talk of the New Human Being was tinged with “Spanish overstatement, self-flattery and romanticism”, the commitment to this vision was real (Zeitlin 1970: 77).

With its egalitarian ethos, contempt for bureaucratic privilege and enthusiasm for nurturing a communist New Human Being, the Cuban Revolution in the late 1960s was in most respects a stark contrast to Stalinism. However, that contrast was minimal with regard to public debate and participation in decision-making:

Despite their experimentalism and originality in many areas, the Cuban revolutionaries have so far done little to establish institutions to guarantee that competing points of view can be heard within the revolutionary socialist consensus; that meaningful alternatives are debated; [and] that policies are initiated, as well as implemented by the citizenry at large (Zeitlin 1970: 74).

The Cuban Revolution’s mass circulation press has not been renowned for spirited debate or investigative zeal, though this is beginning to change. This reputation also predates Sovietisation. In 1969, Kahl (1969: 36) observed that there were “no channels for publishing openly critical arguments. The newspapers and magazines are monotonous reiterations of the official view”. By contrast, in the mid-1960s there had been an open controversy on material and moral incentives and economic management in Cuba. In early 1967, all of the specialist publications that had housed this lively yet respectful debate were

closed down on the basis that “due to the lack of ideological maturity, it was not possible to discuss publicly the problems of the nation” (Mesa-Lago 1972: 69).

A possible clue to this curious convergence with Stalinism at the height of the PCC leadership’s explicit rejection of Soviet orthodoxy lies in Kahl’s reflections on Cuban youth. He was delighted to find that most “display a joy, a comradeship, a combination of a deep belief and an honest and playful sense of humor about it that is truly refreshing” (Kahl 1969: 37). Yet he also noted a dogmatic streak in the political psychology of the youth cadres he met: “Cuban youthful militants have the security of conviction and the narrowness that goes with it. They are building utopia, and it completely absorbs their energies” (Kahl 1969: 37). Dogmatism might be the inevitable result, he suggested, of a “militant belief in the vision of utopia. True believers of any creed lose objectivity and curiosity. They know the answers in advance” (Kahl 1969: 37).

Evidently, Cuba’s statist utopian ‘great leap forward’ demanded militant conviction more than doubt, debate or critical thought. The die had been cast, and debate would get in the way of doing what had to be done. Despite this utopian dogmatism and in contrast to it, Cuba’s communists seemed “proud of the fact that their Marxism-Leninism is pragmatic; they will try anything that might work” (Kahl 1969: 36). Fidel Castro (cited in Mesa-Lago 1972: 68) complained in late 1966 that he was accused of being “a heretic of Marxism-Leninism” because he disagreed with Soviet dogma. The ethos of the Cuban Revolution in the late 1960s was, then, a curious amalgam of exuberant experimentalism and irreverence for received wisdom, blended with an equally youthful utopian dogmatism associated with Castro’s charismatic leadership.

The dogmatic element may arise from binary exclusivity, which lends itself to a certain speculative circularity. For example, an implicit assumption of Fidel Castro’s rationale for the suppression Cuba’s remnant urban private sector was that state ownership and management are inherently superior: it was assumed that the state takeover would resolve the perceived problems of this sector. The supposed superiority of state ownership and management *at the scale of small and tiny entities* did not need to be demonstrated in practice; through the dogmatic lens of a communist moral stricture, it was deducible from Marx’s

vision of a classless society. This deductive rationalism is strikingly convergent (in substance if not in style) on Stalinist ‘Marxist-Leninist’ dogmatism. It may be contrasted to the ‘principled pragmatism’ of an organic approach.

To recapitulate, it may be case that as early as 1964, well before the onset of Cuba’s post-1970 Sovietisation, the ‘socialism is statism’ conception took hold. This conception, entrenched in the Revolutionary Offensive, dissolves the conceptual distinction between nationalisation and socialisation. In this respect, Cuba’s late 1960s statist utopianism was compatible with and convergent on Stalinism—consistent with the hybridisation hypothesis. What I term Cuba’s socialisation pole of socialist thought perceives a participatory deficit with respect to decision-making. It urges a socialisation, i.e. a decentralisation and democratisation, of state power and property. The participatory deficit, Cuba’s notoriously dull press officialism (now gradually receding) and a certain utopian dogmatism all took hold prior to Sovietisation, yet are convergent on Stalinism and thus likely points of hybridisation between the latter and statist utopianism. This too is consistent with the hybridisation hypothesis.

The ‘socialism is statism’ conception of the socialist transition idealises the post-capitalist state. However, Stalinism and statist utopianism do so for quite different reasons, and their respective ideal type states are qualitatively distinct. In light of Trotsky’s seminal critique of Stalinism, the Stalinist regime idealises *its* state because bureaucratic hyper-statism is the institutional pillar of its privileges and social domination. The Stalinist state is essentially inegalitarian, insofar as it upholds bureaucratic privileges. Popular participation in such states is formalised, ritualised and regimented, and the Stalinist social order is propped up by a vast and pervasive coercive apparatus. Figuratively speaking, the Stalinist state is the omnipresent police officer and party-state bureaucrat.

By contrast, if Cuba’s late 1960s ‘great leap forward’ is a typical expression of a revolutionary society giving free reign to its statist utopianism impulses, then the ideal type of the statist utopian *state* is egalitarian and anti-bureaucratic. It is based on political consciousness, mass mobilisation and mass participation in carrying out the initiatives of a charismatic leadership. Statist utopianism idealises this state because it is the means by which a compelling communist

vision is imposed on society; and the state acquires a corresponding symbolism. *This* state is the omnipresent moral guardian of an austere egalitarianism.

I leave it to the reader to ponder to what degree, and in what proportion, Cuba's prevailing socialist model embodies a hybrid of these two ideal state types. My own judgement is that hybridisation was considerable; and that the statist utopian type has always predominated in the state-centrism of this model. The evidence and arguments in favour of this judgement are beyond the scope of this thesis, in which Cuba's post-1970 Sovietisation has necessarily remained in the analytical background so that statist utopianism's contribution to state-centrism could come to the fore. This could be a fruitful avenue for further research.

Conclusions

Continuities and convergences between Cuba's late 1960s 'idealist' phase and its subsequent partial and uneven Sovietisation have been understated, overlooked or inadequately conceptualised in the periodisation literature and in other historical accounts. Dominant narratives regarding the PCC's abandonment of 'idealism' in favour of Soviet pro-market pragmatism during the 1970s and early 1980s fail to account for the persistence of the 1968 bans on small businesses and (for the most part) self-employment. Two methodological weaknesses in Mesa-Lago and Perez-Lopez's pro- and anti-market 'historical pendulum' analysis were identified: market reductionism and what I term pendulum bias.

Five conceptual identities of the prevailing model are explicable conceptually in terms of statist utopianism; all predate the onset of Sovietisation; and all are associated historically with Cuba's late 1960s statist utopianism. State-centrism is the nexus between these conceptual identities and certain institutional peculiarities of the prevailing model. This suggests that statist utopianism's contribution to state-centrism has been significant, pervasive and enduring.

Two lines of evidence examined in this chapter converge in support of the hybridisation hypothesis. Firstly, the secular collectivisation trend from 1966-89 and the absorption into Cuba's Soviet-inspired SDPE of the core institutional legacy of Cuba's late 1960s statist utopian 'great leap forward' are best explained

as a merging of that legacy with Sovietisation. In some respects, the state-centrism of statist utopianism and that of Stalinism are quite compatible and complementary, despite the contrasts between these distinctive phenomena. Secondly, certain conceptual identities and institutional peculiarities of the prevailing model comprise a tightly bound state-centric nexus that cannot be explained on the basis of Sovietisation alone—and which therefore seems to be a peculiar hybrid of statist utopianism and the Stalinist imprint of Sovietisation. ♦

Conclusions

This thesis has argued that the nature of 'idealism' or 'utopianism' in Cuba's post-1959 socialist transition, and the peculiarity of Cuban state socialism, have been inadequately conceptualised. This was found to be a special case of a larger conceptual deficit in the Spanish- and English-language literature: there is no well-developed concept of utopianism-as-idealism in the specific context of the socialist transition. The thesis developed the concept of statist utopianism as a distinctive approach to the socialist transition: imposing a communist vision on society rather than striving for its realisation. The essence of that imposition was explained in theoretical terms by drawing on Marx and Engels' historical materialism and on Engels' conception of the withering away of the proletarian state. It was argued that two contrasting attitudes to capitalist vestiges correspond to antithetical approaches to the socialist transition: organic transcendence and statist utopianism.

Organic transcendence is associated with openness to the possibility that capitalist vestiges and their tangible or symbolic communist antitheses may be complementary vis-à-vis communist goals. Statist utopianism is associated with binary exclusivity, namely antipathy towards certain capitalist vestiges and a corresponding idealisation of their tangible or symbolic communist antitheses. Accordingly, one pole of a duality (such as planning-markets) tends to be emphasised to the exclusion of the other. Such one-sidedness introduces or intensifies an incongruence between causally related capitalist vestiges or more generally, an incongruence of the socialist model. This may manifest as statist utopian paradoxes, such as that excessively detailed planning undermines the effectiveness of planning itself. As a result, statist utopian progress is contrived and fragile, and is likely to be pyrrhic and ephemeral. This contrasts with the authenticity and solidity of organic progress towards communism.

The thesis developed the argument that statist utopianism has a state-centric dynamic: the state tends to 'absorb' rather than 'dissolve into' society. To the degree that the state is obliged to substitute for the socially indispensable functions of suppressed capitalist vestiges, the size and coercive reach of the

state apparatus expand and the state is entrenched in society. Consequently, statist utopianism is conducive to bureaucratisation.

As well as its political-economic dimensions, statist utopianism has intrinsic subjective dimensions, among them a distinctive utopian political psychology that may be expressed in statist utopian illusions and associated voluntarism, dogmatism and moralism. Statist utopianism arises from the interplay of strivings for communism and 'objective' possibilities and constraints on the socialist transition. As doctrine and praxis, statist utopianism is immature radicalism (rather than mature radicalism).

The core and subsidiary concepts developed in this thesis were used to re-interpret, in a way that has not previously been attempted, the socialist transition in Cuba. The PCC's 1968–70 Revolutionary Offensive was a statist utopian 'great leap forward', i.e. a political-ideological crusade to suppress capitalist vestiges. A shift in the official attitude towards and policies regarding material incentives in late 1966 foreshadowed the 1968 suppression of the remnant urban private sector comprising small businesses and self-employment. My subsidiary concept of binary exclusivity helped to explain this shift in terms of statist utopianism. Inconsistencies in the official rationale for the Revolutionary Offensive's suppression of private enterprise drew attention to the distorting effects of viewing society through a lens of binary exclusivity and moral stricture. From a moral compass orienting to the communist horizon, morality became a stricture to be imposed on society. The systematic withdrawal of material incentives from late 1966 and the suppression of remnant urban private enterprise were an attempt to mould Cuba's domestic economic relations in conformity to prevailing notions of communist morality.

Cuba's statist utopian 'great leap forward' targeted three relatively superficial capitalist vestiges: material incentives, remnant private enterprise and their associated individualism. The latter was not uprooted by statist utopian suppression, and merely expressed itself in other forms. Formally, the tens of thousands of small and tiny enterprises nationalised in the Revolutionary Offensive were public property and served the public. In reality, anecdotal evidence suggests that many—perhaps most—have operated as quasi-private

businesses that steal from the state to resell on the black market. Statist utopian suppression introduced an incongruence between state ownership and management, on the one hand, and the atomised nature of these economic niches and the negligible degree of socialisation of their labour processes. Statisation of the economic niches vacated by the suppressed private sector and the state's efforts to suppress the re-emergence of petty private enterprise gave rise to the perception, and the reality, of the state's approach to omnipresence.

The thesis hypothesised that the pervasive (and now receding) state-centrism of Cuba's prevailing socialist model is a hybrid of statist utopianism and the Stalinist legacy of a partial and uneven Sovietisation process during the 1970s and early 1980s. State-centric continuities between Cuba's late 1960s statist utopianism and subsequent Sovietisation have been understated, overlooked or insufficiently conceptualised. Dominant narratives regarding the PCC's abandonment of 'idealism' in favour of Soviet pro-market pragmatism during the 1970s and early 1980s fail to account for the persistence of the 1968 bans on small businesses and (for the most part) self-employment. Two methodological weaknesses in a representative 'historical pendulum' analysis of Cuban economic policy were identified: market reductionism and pendulum bias.

Drawing on the scholarship of two leading Cuban sociologists, the thesis argued that a cluster of conceptual identities of Cuba's prevailing socialist model are explicable conceptually in terms of statist utopianism; that all predate the onset of Sovietisation; and that all are associated historically with Cuba's late 1960s statist utopian 'great leap forward'. These identities underpin the model insofar as the model has been shaped by conceptions of the socialist transitional society and by corresponding approaches to the socialist transition. It was argued that state-centrism is the nexus between these conceptual elements of the model and certain institutional peculiarities of Cuban state socialism. This suggests that that statist utopianism's contribution to the state-centrism of the prevailing model has been significant, pervasive and enduring.

Two lines of evidence examined in the thesis were found to converge in support of the hybridisation hypothesis. The secular collectivisation trend from 1966-89 and Sovietisation's absorption of the core institutional legacy of late 1960s

statist utopianism are best explained in terms of a merging of statist utopianism and the Stalinist imprint. It was concluded that in some respects, the state-centrism of statist utopianism and that of Stalinism are compatible and complementary, despite the contrasts between these two distinctive phenomena of post-capitalist societies. Furthermore, it was concluded that certain conceptual identities and institutional peculiarities of the prevailing socialist model comprise a mutually reinforcing state-centric nexus that cannot be explained on the basis of Sovietisation alone, and which therefore seems to be a peculiar hybrid of statist utopianism and the Stalinist imprint of Sovietisation.

The concept of statist utopianism developed in this thesis makes a theoretical contribution to the Marxist understanding of the dynamics of socialist transition. It casts the Cuban socialist transition, and the PCC's post-2008 renovation project, in a distinct light. Applying this novel conceptual framework to an analysis of the emerging Cuban model was beyond the scope of this thesis. The thesis makes a modest contribution to the contemporary Cuban and wider debate on the past, present and future of Cuba's socialist project. ♦

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Note: References marked with an asterisk (*) are unpublished translations from the Spanish by Marcel Cameron.

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