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Totalitarian and Authoritarian Dictators: A Comparison of Fidel Castro and Alfredo Stroessner

PAUL C. SONDROL

Personal dictators remain a key feature of contemporary regimes termed 'authoritarian' or 'totalitarian', particularly in their early consolidating phases. But there is still disagreement over the seemingly ideological, polemical and indiscriminate use of the term totalitarian dictatorship as an analytic concept and tool to guide foreign policy formulation.¹ Jeane Kirkpatrick elevated the taxonomy to a vociferous level of debate with a 1979 *Commentary* article. Entitled 'Dictatorships and Double Standards', the work raised anew semantic hairsplitting concerning the qualitative differences between all previous tyrannies and those bearing organisational similarities with the Nazi, Fascist or Stalinist prototypes.²

Some have sought to do away with the totalitarian construct as merely a product of the Cold War. Others argue against the comparability of right- and left-wing regimes. Still others argue that totalitarianism is a concept applicable only to the epoch between Mussolini's assumption of power in 1922 and Stalin's death in 1953.³ More seriously, Kirkpatrick's thesis implied the immutable nature of totalitarianism, an assertion belied by recent events in Eastern Europe. Despite the general validity of some of these objections, and even if one harbours doubts about the universal explanatory power of this schema, I suggest that the totalitarian/authoritarian dichotomy remains a powerful and effective tool to highlight and compare distinctive features of Castro's Cuba and Stroessner's Paraguay.⁴

¹ See Robert C. Tucker, 'The Dictator and Totalitarianism', *World Politics*, vol. 17, no. 4 (1965), pp. 555–82. For a review of the scholarly debate concerning the concept of totalitarianism, see Carl J. Friedrich et al., *Totalitarianism in Perspective* (New York, 1969).

² Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, *Dictatorships and Double Standards* (New York, 1982).

³ See Karl Dietrich Bracher, 'The Disputed Concept of Totalitarianism', in Ernest A. Menze (ed.), *Totalitarianism Reconsidered* (Port Washington, NY, 1981), pp. 11–34.

⁴ My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for reminding the author of this caveat. The article was revised with these and other comments in mind.

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Table 1. *Characteristics of authoritarian and totalitarian dictators*

	Totalitarian	Authoritarian
Charisma	High	Low
Role conception		
Leader as individual	No	Yes
Leader as function	Yes	No
Ends of power		
Public	Yes	No
Private	No	Yes
Corruption	Low	High
Official ideology	Yes	No
Limited pluralism	No	Yes
Legitimacy	Relatively high	Relatively low

The intensely personal element of leadership common to both forms of autocracy differs. Key dichotomies between authoritarian and totalitarian dictators centre around three foci shaping the subsequent discussion. (1) Unlike their bland and generally unpopular authoritarian brethren, totalitarian dictators develop a charismatic 'mystique' and a mass-based, pseudo-democratic interdependence with their followers via the conscious manipulation of a prophetic image. (2) Concomitant role conceptions differentiate totalitarians from authoritarians. Authoritarians view themselves as individual beings, largely content to control and maintain the status quo. Totalitarian self-conceptions are typically teleological. The tyrant is less a person than an indispensable 'function' to guide and reshape the universe. (3) Consequently, the utilisation of power for personal aggrandisement is more evident among authoritarians than totalitarians. Lacking the binding appeal of ideology, authoritarians support their rule by a mixture of instilling fear and granting rewards to loyal collaborators, engendering a kleptocracy. Table 1 highlights these differences.

In Latin America, Fidel Castro of Cuba and Alfredo Stroessner of Paraguay represent cases reflecting the similarities and differences of the totalitarian/authoritarian taxonomy. In Cuba and Paraguay, the dictatorship is/was extremely personalist. Both Castro and Stroessner totally dominated their respective regimes for over thirty years, becoming by the early 1980s the longest-ruling leaders in the Western hemisphere. In both regimes a single mass-based party structure penetrated civil society, buckling it to the regime. Beyond those similarities, however, Castro and Stroessner diverge almost completely, occupying polar extremes both in ideological orientation and in their role conceptions concerning the ends of political power.

This paper analyses and explicates the diametrics of the totalitarian and authoritarian dictatorship via comparison of Castro and Stroessner. Examining how closely Castro and Stroessner approximate the prototypical models helps to determine the utility of these intellectual constructs and whether it is justified for scholars indiscriminately to label Castro totalitarian and Stroessner authoritarian.

The study shows that Castro is quintessentially totalitarian in his charismatic appeal, utopian functional role and public, transformative utilisation of power. Stroessner remained at base an authoritarian dictator, lacking ideological vision and employing tyrannical power for essentially private ends. Yet, a proto-totalitarian atmosphere pervaded his dictatorship, including a mass base and totalist 'impulse' to penetrate the military and bring other organisations under his personal control. Moreover, both dictators share a common, Latin American *caudillo* heritage buttressing their power, conceptually absent from the larger, general taxonomy. A conclusion summarises these findings and argues for retention but re-evaluation of the totalitarian construct.

Totalitarian and authoritarian dictators

The nature of dictatorship informs a long history of scholarship. Plato, training Syracuse's young tyrant Dionysius II in philosopher-kingship, describes in his *Statesman* the ideal lawless utopia where the pre-eminent ruler, in unfettered flexibility, adapts the art of dictation to changing circumstances. The statesman must be absolute, argues Plato, for only he perceives the just society and necessary social transformations to achieve that end. Plato's visionary satrapy is identified by some as a forerunner of the totalitarian leadership doctrines of the twentieth century.⁵

Aristotle's *Politics* reflects Plato's tremendous influence. But Plato's mythical statesman concentrated on public ends: ideal rule for the common good. Aristotle's tyrant (the unteachable Dionysius, again) ruled for essentially selfish purposes: to extract as much as possible for personal gratification. This 'perversion' of just government expresses the oldest and most corrupt form of non-democracy: authoritarian dictatorship.⁶

Niccolo Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes extended Aristotle's authoritarian construct while Jean Jacques Rousseau refined Plato's ideal state, anticipating the pseudo-democratic nature of modern totalitarianism. *The Prince* expressed Machiavelli's blueprint for the autocratic seizure and maintenance of power. Hobbes' *Leviathan* argued for the absolute authority of state over citizenry to guarantee security in a 'brutish' world. Rousseau's *The Social Contract* argued that the 'general will' and

⁵ See Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies: The Age of Plato*, vol. 1 (Princeton, 1945).

⁶ Aristotle, *Politics*, Book V, 9 (London, 1941).

infallibility of the collective people legitimised government. Modern totalitarians justify their dictatorships as a reflection of this *volonté générale* that only the dictator truly discerns.⁷

Classic totalitarian and authoritarian precursors intersect in Max Weber's pioneering analysis of 'charismatic' leadership. Charisma (the gift of grace) is heaven-sent, irrational, emotive and popular. Weberian charisma consists in a leader's apparent possession of superhuman qualities; a messianic vision and role in determining the course of human events. Charisma also implies a close personal union between inspirational leader and willing followers, legitimising rulership. The leader bears the collective will of the people. Tenure is not dependent upon the superficiality of elections; rather, the leader is 'elected' from on high.⁸

Dictators such as Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin defined themselves in terms of prophetic, personal qualities elevating them beyond the rank and file. Their dictatorships created a mystical bond with the masses, merging authority with control and representation into a leadership principle (*Führerprinzip*) and absolutist regime (*Führerstat*). The unique mission and transcendental qualities of these totalitarians were functional requisites to their ideological imperatives demanding the wholesale destruction, restructuring and expansion of state and society, domestically and internationally. Totalitarians thus appear to possess what Hannah Arendt calls a 'truer reality' than the flawed perceptions of mere mortal men, justifying breakthrough measures to achieve some fated destiny.⁹

As evidenced by Hitler, Stalin, Mao and Castro, totalitarians, unlike authoritarians, envision not only a transformed domestic society, but also an expanded national influence on the world's stage. A symbiotic relationship looms between the totalitarian's demand for constant agitation, enthusiasm and unanimity and a confrontational foreign policy posture towards an external enemy: the pursuit of a great and noble aim and the need to vanquish the enemy totally are required to maintain the system in a permanent state of mobilisation, to deflect internal socio-political tensions, and thus repeatedly re-equilibrate the system. Few authoritarians are imbued with such a self-appointed global role – often taking on messianic dimensions – as the totalitarian, who invariably embarks on an expansionist, internationalist course.¹⁰

⁷ Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* (New York, 1952); Thomas Hobbes, *The Leviathan*, in George C. Christie (ed.), *Jurisprudence* (St Paul, 1973), pp. 297–357; Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (New York, 1954). See also J. L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (New York, 1966).

⁸ H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York, 1958), pp. 246–9.

⁹ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, 1951), pp. 33–75.

¹⁰ The author gratefully acknowledges a second anonymous reviewer who suggested analysing the characteristic totalitarian internationalist posture.

Moreover, while pressing for increasing politicisation, integration, conscientisation and conversion, totalitarians concomitantly attempt to reduce, desocialise, detach or destroy commitment to other foci of allegiance, such as the Church, guild, region or family in order to narrow diversity of thought and opinion. Harmony in the political sphere is to derive solely from the messianic leader. As the personification of the state, party and people and the embodiment of their interests and aspirations, charisma is institutionalised.¹¹

Charisma defines the functions the totalitarian fulfils in the political system. This dictator is the 'moving spirit' of the totalist state.¹² Arendt conveys the sense of centrality and unsurpassed concentration of power in the leader's hands:

In the center of the movement, as the motor that swings it into motion, sits the Leader... [within] an aura of impenetrable mystery which corresponds to his 'intangible preponderance'.¹³

As the subsequent analysis of Castro illustrates, the totalitarian functions to unify and personify the movement. The leader's indispensability emanates from his uni-personal command and assumption of blanket responsibility, justifying all measures to accomplish revolutionary, historic, possibly even apocalyptic change. Lower functionaries are thus relieved of responsibility for drastic actions taken to destroy the *ancien régime* and usher in the new order.¹⁴

The myth of complete unity between dictator and masses exists to effect total societal restructuring, not simply personal goals. The totalitarian fulfils certain needs of the system, but he is not sustaining personal, private-regarding aggrandisements. Ideological dedication to utopian futures substitutes for mere materialistic concerns. Whatever the psychological motivations, the empirical goals of totalitarians are decidedly public, not private.

Expanding and updating the original Weberian formulation, the charisma so often ascribed to totalitarian dictators is a combination of prophetic vision and magnetism, but also includes the politics, ideological persuasion, mass propaganda and terror by which the dictator establishes a one-man tyranny. Not anticipated by Weber is the chiliastic vision, democratic veneer and particularly the modern technological sophistica-

¹¹ Leonard Schapiro, *Totalitarianism* (New York, 1972), p. 22.

¹² Sigmund Neumann, *The Permanent Revolution: The Total State in the World at War* (New York, 1942), p. 43.

¹³ Arendt, *Origins*, p. 361.

¹⁴ For the psychology of subordinate behaviour under totalitarianism, see Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York, 1963). See also Stanley Milgram, 'Obedience to Authority', *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, vol. 67, no. 4 (1963), pp. 371-8.

tion of totalitarianism. Together, these components make totalitarian dictatorship a *sui generis* form of autocracy outside the scope of classic conceptualisation. Friedrich and Brzezinski note the inadequacy of Weber's, or any other traditional typologies, in distinguishing this form of leader from previous satraps. 'There is no particular reason for inventing a weird term to designate this type of leadership, other than to say that it is "totalitarian".'¹⁵

Dictatorial behaviour emanates in large part from role expectations. The position assumed carries certain objectives and performance demands. Totalitarian dictators seek a 'passion for unanimity' – the ideal of conflictlessness and the total politicisation and participation of all in society. More than just an autocrat depriving people of rights and perpetuating his rule, the totalitarian is a creative, revolutionary force, attempting to refashion man and culture, working 'in the amorphous raw material of history itself' as the ideocrat Ivanov asserts in Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*.¹⁶

Authoritarians normally labour under no such prophetic illusions. Possessing no desire for the total mobilisation and restructuring of society or the creation of a 'new man', they sense their own limitations, the intractable nature of social relationships and the non-malleability of culture. Authoritarians are less concerned about those disaffected, as long as they do not challenge the regime. Dictators of this ilk boast no agenda to penetrate and change the thoughts and values of peoples; they settle for political control. Shakespeare's King Henry V captured the authoritarian's view, saying, 'Every subject's duty is to the king; but every subject's soul is his own.'¹⁷

The totalitarian despises, intends to obliterate and replace the moribund old order; a Burkean revulsion for the excesses of radicals and revolutions permeates the authoritarian milieu. Order and the veneration of tradition prevail.¹⁸ Power, tempered by custom, conventions, understandings and the more pluralist nature of society, constrains these leaders.

Totalitarian dictators view opposition, even neutrality, as treason. Stroessner exhibited a marked intolerance for mere absence of opposition, but stopped short of Castro's addiction to unity. True totalitarians possess millennial aims that demand all be anointed in the exclusive claim to the truth, compelling men to compete for degrees of dedication, for levels of devotion. By contrast, authoritarians generally view obedience as the absence of overt resistance. A certain amount of token opposition (as

¹⁵ Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1965), p. 44.

¹⁶ Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (New York, 1941), p. 82.

¹⁷ William Shakespeare, *King Henry V* (Cambridge, MA, 1954), p. 100.

¹⁸ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (New York, 1966).

existed under Stroessner) may even be allowed to channel off discontent and create a democratic facade. 'Limited pluralism' – tolerated patterns of semi-opposition not controlled by the regime, that exist and even criticise without fundamentally challenging the dictator – is absent from true totalitarian dictatorship. While certain authoritarian regimes may practice terrorism on a totalitarian scale in the attempt to instil fear in the public at large (the Argentine military of the late 1970s), no attempt is made to refashion social relations nor emasculate all autonomous groups except those created by the State.¹⁹

Limited pluralism reflects the circumscribed goals of authoritarians. Dictators like Stroessner strive to command and avoid challenges to their rule, not to transform social reality. Bereft of utopian goals requiring a mobilised and penetrated polity, true authoritarians (unlike Stroessner) do not seek mass approbation; they rely on fear rather than involvement and are satisfied with acquiescence or apathy. Ideological commitment to a visionary future informs larger tasks for totalitarians such as Castro. They not only command and manage, but strive to organise consent, to develop a broad consensus and inspire the polity to engage in societal upheaval by state-directed action.

A final area of differentiation concerns the ends of non-democratic rule and the corruption of the dictator. Corruption represents a type of private-regarding behaviour exploiting public political authority for essentially private material motivation and advantage.²⁰ As Lord Acton recognised, no absolutist regime can be immune from this type of graft. Regarding the dictator, however, a qualitative difference exists. Power utilised for essentially private ends is endemic in authoritarian dictatorship. Lacking the constraining ideological goals and roles which normatively bind totalitarians, Stroessners, Somozas and Trujillos treat the national patrimony essentially as a huge private domain. Lacking a prophetic vision, authoritarian support is based not on a shared ideology, but on a vaguer 'mentality' or secular spoils system engendered by interests created by the dictator's rule.

Personal aggrandisement distinguishes authoritarians. Stalin's, Hitler's Mao's or Castro's dictatorship was/is not directed to the personal enrichment of the dictator, his family or cronies. These leaders could never have sustained their prophetic charisma, or the admiration and loyalty of their people (including intellectuals and foreigners), had they not based their rule on higher, impersonal principles and objectives than simply lining their own pockets. Totalitarians may fuse the public and

¹⁹ See Juan Linz, 'An Authoritarian Regime: Spain', in E. Allardt and Y. Littunen (eds.), *Cleavages, Ideologies, and Party Systems* (Helsinki, 1964), pp. 291–341.

²⁰ Stephen D. Morris, 'Corruption and the Mexican Political System', *Corruption and Reform*, no. 2 (Dordrecht, Netherlands, 1987), pp. 3–15.

private in their zeal for ideological objectives, but a boundary exists between the public treasury and the private wealth of the ruler. Increasingly that wall is breached as one moves along the spectrum in the authoritarian direction.²¹

Charisma, role and corruption, then, distinguish totalitarians and authoritarians. Totalitarians are visionaries, destined to direct and embody the will of the mobilised masses towards the millennium. As agents of history, they are motivated and legitimised by a far higher calling than personal greed. Authoritarians harbour no such illusions about either themselves or the malleability of man, values or society. No ideological vision of a utopian future informs their role. They function to perpetuate power, maintain order, enrich themselves and buy the loyalty of their coterie concomitant to a more pluralist environment. Distinctions between totalitarian and authoritarian dictators categorise non-democratic leadership types intelligibly. This framework bears directly on the subsequent analysis.

Fidel Castro – totalitarian dictator

Fidel Castro is the totalitarian dictator of communist Cuba. Overwhelming governmental power encroaches upon virtually every aspect of Cuban life. No autonomous groups or non-regulated ‘counter-revolutionary’ forms of behaviour exist independent of Castro. After more than thirty years, he remains not only the inspirational *líder máximo* (maximum leader), guiding the transformation of people and culture in Cuba, but also the messianic *comandante*, exhorting the constant anti-imperialist struggle (*lucha*) for a revolutionary brave new world via Cuba’s internationalist foreign policy in Africa and Asia.²² In Castro, stark absolutism is cast in mystical terms:

²¹ Juan J. Linz, ‘Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes’, in Fred Greenstein and Nelson Polsby (eds.), *Handbook of Political Science*, vol. 3 (Reading, Mass., 1975), pp. 260–2. A clear exception is Romanian Nicolae Ceausescu, whose overthrow and execution on 25 December 1989 revealed a palatial life-style. However, Ceausescu’s megalomania and prophetic delusions – more than mere greed – prompted his plundering. Also, the Eastern European regimes had totalitarianism imposed upon them. Unlike Castro, Hitler, Mussolini or Mao, Ceausescu or East Germany’s Erik Honecker did not achieve supreme power by leading their own revolution, but rather through Soviet-sponsored intra-party competition. See Mary Ellen Fischer, ‘Idol or Leader? The Origins and Future of the Ceausescu Cult’, in Daniel N. Nelson (ed.), *Romania in the 1980s* (Boulder, 1981), pp. 117–41.

²² For Castro’s symbiosis of the totalitarian regime’s domestic needs (militancy, agitation) and its confrontational, expansionist foreign policy, see Richard Fagen, ‘Mass Mobilization in Cuba: The Symbolism of Struggle’, *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 20, no. 2 (1966), p. 267. More current and detailed is Jorge I. Domínguez, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989).

[Castro] remains the ideologue, the guerrilla leader, the founder, the heroic leader who defied not only foes (Batista and the United States) but also friends (the Soviet Union). He... is the inspirational source of political mobilization and support. Marxist–Leninism and the [Communist Party] are painted in his own colors... Only in Nazi Germany has the personal element accounted for so much.²³

Castro is the dominant force creating and amalgamating the political regime with a mobilised Cuban civil society. When the totalitarian template of prophetic charisma, function, and dictatorship for impersonal purposes is laid over Castro, the match is almost perfect. Additionally, Castro's totalitarian dictatorship superimposes a deeper, Latin American *caudillo* heritage.

The centrality of Castro to Cuban totalitarianism rests largely in his charismatic leadership and embodiment of the Revolution. During the long struggle against the Batista dictatorship, Castro remained the undisputed guerrilla leader, ideologue and *caudillo*. He led the bloody attack on the Moncada barracks that launched the Revolution in 1953. Castro's trial speech 'History Will Absolve Me' became the creation myth for the regime – the moral imperative crystallising the reasons for rebellion – and remains the fundamental, venerated and legendary scripture of the Revolution. Castro co-founded the 26th of July Movement, the main opposition to Batista during the insurgency. He commanded the *Granma* expedition from Mexico and the rebel army it spawned that fought the guerrilla war and ultimately took power. Finally, Castro imposed, nurtured and guided the Marxist–Leninist framework on the revolutionary political system he stood above.²⁴

Castro's charisma and personal interrelationship with Cuba's masses reflects the totalitarian mystique. The messianic quality is a pillar of regime legitimation. Richard Fagan argues that Castro's followers see him as blessed, protected and acting in concert with larger historical forces not always visible to more ordinary men. Accordingly, Castro alone retains the right to determine the 'correct' direction of the Revolution.²⁵ Jorge Domínguez sees Castro's spellbinding 'History Will Absolve Me' speech as a clear articulation of totalitarian messianism. Castro depends not upon superficial elections; he is 'elected' by an historical, supernatural force and authority. Castro both commands and represents; the leader is not a 'sovereign' imposing himself upon followers. Rather, it is Castro who follows the people and history:

²³ Roy Macridis, *Modern Political Regimes* (Boston, 1986), p. 209.

²⁴ Fidel Castro, *Revolutionary Struggle 1947–1958: Selected Works of Fidel Castro*, edited by Roland E. Bonachea and Nelson P. Valdés (Cambridge, MA, 1972).

²⁵ Richard Fagan, 'Charismatic Authority and the Leadership of Fidel Castro', *Western Political Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 2 (1965), pp. 275–84.

History-as-god elects the revolutionary leader to act with and for his followers... The cause, the idea, history incarnate in the people elects the leader to serve, to implement, and hence to rule: the essence of charismatic legitimation.²⁶

Castro functions as an essential instrument of the totalitarian movement in Cuba. Attachment to Castro and the mass following he generates substitute for political and party organisation. Castro's absolutism during the early years of revolutionary Cuba provided the substance and sustenance of the new order. During the critical formative decade of the 1960s, few permanent stable institutions – even as basic as the political party – emerged. Consequently, revolutionary ideology and legitimacy blurred with the persona of Castro.²⁷

Castro's personality cult permeates the regime. Although declaring himself a Marxist–Leninist in December of 1961, the ideology of socialist Cuba quickly bore the unique stamp of Castro. *Fidelismo*, argued revolutionary ideologue Che Guevara, formed something distinct from Marxist–Leninism. While the latter stresses historical determinism and a vanguard party organisation, *fidelismo* is non-specific, anti-organisational and undogmatic; a 'revolution without blueprint' retaining the highly personalised leadership of Castro via the 'close dialectical unity which exists between the individual [Castro] and the masses'.²⁸

Theodore Draper views 'Castroism' as representing a particular cross-fertilisation, blending Latin America's personalist and revolutionary tradition and Europe's socialist tradition. Draper interprets Castro as a novel, Latin American socialist *caudillo*, needing to justify power ideologically. 'Castroism is a leader in search of a movement, a movement in search of power, and power in search of an ideology.'²⁹

This analysis strikes a responsive chord amongst Latin Americanists. While Castro possesses charisma, vision, ideology, rhetorical gifts and intellect, these 'totalitarian' qualities are necessary but not sufficient factors to explain his iron grip over Cuban political life for a third of a

²⁶ Jorge I. Domínguez, *Cuba: Order and Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), pp. 197–8.

²⁷ William M. LeoGrande, 'Party Development in Revolutionary Cuba', *Journal of InterAmerican Studies and World Affairs*, vol. 21, no. 4 (1979), pp. 457–80.

²⁸ Ernesto Che Guevara, *Man and Socialism in Cuba* (Havana, 1967), p. 17. For expanded analysis of *fidelismo* see, among others, Régis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution* (New York, 1967); and Edward González, *Cuba Under Castro: The Limits of Charisma* (Boston, 1974), pp. 146–67. González perhaps best explains this blending of personalism and ideology into *fidelismo*, comparing it to Stalinism where party and state institutions were subordinate to the fiat of the dictator. By this definition, *fidelismo* appears little different from the *führerstat* of Germany.

²⁹ Theodore Draper, *Castroism: Theory and Practice* (New York, 1965), pp. 48–9. An additional perspective that probes Castro's mindset is a Rand Corporation study by Edward González and David Ronfeldt, *Castro, Cuba, and the World* (Santa Monica, CA, 1986).

century. Like all Latin American strong-men, Castro benefits from a *caudillo* tradition: 'the union of personalism and violence for the conquest of power'.³⁰ This heritage augments personal autocratic power and imbues the region with the 'spirit of *caudillaje*... an ethos which grants individual deference and respect on the basis of taking and holding public power'.³¹

As Castro's precursor, the *caudillo* was a political buccaneer whose personal power was the notable characteristic. *Caudillos* such as Argentina's Juan Manuel de Rosas whom Domingo Faustino Sarmiento castigates indirectly in *Facundo*, or Paraguay's José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia, fictionalised in the Roa Bastos novel *Yo El Supremo*, supported their rule by *machismo* and leadership qualities, not theoretical and abstract *de jure* powers.³² The *caudillo* possessed and exhibited an extraordinary charismatic virility, moral authority and penchant for the naked exercise of power.

The Venezuelan *pensador* Laureano Vallenilla Lanz, describes the *caudillo* as a 'democratic caesar', whose authority is founded on the unconscious suggestion of the masses. Vallenilla Lanz was not analysing totalitarianism, nor Castro, when he cast the democratic caesar as the personification of the people, the ideals of society, always representing the collective will of the masses, yet the similarities are striking. The caesar's (Castro's) moral and political authority transcends law, constitution, political party or principle. He is 'democracy personified... the nation-made man. In him are synthesised... democracy and autocracy.'³³

The tradition of political power as personal identifies the leader with the state and defines the role of charismatic dictators like Castro. As the maximum leader, Castro fulfils a psychic functional requirement in Cuban society, still permeated by the hispanic traditions of *caudillaje*. Castro embodies in his own attractive and legendary mannerisms – bravado, machismo, a superb intellect, hidalgo generosity – those inner qualities that Cubans themselves feel and would like to manifest, were they only able to do so.³⁴

³⁰ Robert Gilmore, *Caudillism and Militarism in Venezuela* (Athens, Ohio, 1964), p. 47. See also William S. Stokes, 'Violence as a Power Factor in Latin American Politics', *Western Political Quarterly*, vol. 5 (1952), pp. 445–68.

³¹ Glen Caudill Dealy, *The Public Man* (Amherst, 1977), p. 33. *Caudillaje* typifies a style of life oriented to the values of public leadership. The word itself may be translated as the domination of a *caudillo*.

³² Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo: Civilización y Barbarie* (Buenos Aires, 1959); Augusto Roa Bastos, *Yo El Supremo* (New York, 1986).

³³ Laureano Vallenilla Lanz, *Cesarismo Democrático* (Caracas, 1961), p. 207. Translation by author.

³⁴ See the more general analysis by Eric Wolf and James C. Hansen, 'Caudillo Politics: A Structural Analysis', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1957), pp. 168–79.

Castro's personality cult is congruent with the totalitarian model, but also derives from a more general Hispanic *caudillo* tradition. Unique Cuban/Latin American aspects supporting Castro's dictatorship are variables conceptually absent from the larger, general totalitarian taxonomy formulated by Friedrich, Linz and elaborated by Kirkpatrick.³⁵

Castro's totalitarianism also manifests itself in a vision concerning the ends of total power. Rampant private privilege under Fulgencio Batista and Castro's ideological orthodoxy regarding the redistributive public purposes of revolutionary government combine to imbue him with a rigid revulsion to materialism, graft and corruption. Material incentive is anathema to Castro's core revolutionary ideals and laissez faire decentralisation threatens his political control over the economy. Continual railings against 'evil money', personal enrichment, exhortations regarding improbity and appeals to the 'higher values' of revolutionary consciousness (*conciencia*), sacrifice and discipline particularly distinguish Castro from other hemispheric despots. The characteristic totalitarian utopianism is evident in his public orations:

Perhaps our greatest idealism lies in having believed that a society that had barely begun to live in a world that for thousands of years had lived under the law of 'an eye for an eye...', the law of egoism, the law of deceit and the law of exploitation could, all of a sudden, be turned into a society in which everybody behaved in an ethical, moral way.³⁶

Castro remains personally immune to the proverbial corruption affecting autocrats long in power. As head of state, he enjoys a degree of luxury and privilege, yet on a modest scale compared with many Latin American presidents, and even Communist leaders elsewhere. Far from ascetic in his taste for good scotch whisky or his once-famous penchant for cigars, Castro seems, however, to have no interest in the more base accoutrements of power, such as fancy clothes, philandering liaisons, or wealth. The Sierra Maestra legend informs Castro's habitual wearing of the olive-green uniform and guerrilla beard, perpetuating the spartan *guerrillero* image. His female companion of thirty years' standing, Celia Sánchez, died of cancer in 1980. Castro's revolutionary élan demands that he remain above reproach, and no personal scandal has ever besmirched this reputation.

Castro also demands rectitude from other public officials. While old-style theft of public funds or bribery occasionally occurs, unscrupulous public officials are automatically branded enemies of the state and

³⁵ Friedrich and Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship*; Linz, 'Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes'; Kirkpatrick, 'Reflections on Totalitarianism', in *Dictatorships and Double Standards*, pp. 96-138.

³⁶ Fidel Castro, *Granma Weekly Review* (20 Sept. 1979).

socialism. Apostasy is punished severely, with public confession, disgrace, and stiff prison sentences. The mid-1989 drug-smuggling scandal, trial and execution of one of the nation's most decorated military officers, General Arnaldo Ochoa, along with four other high-ranking officers, illustrates this and subsequent points.³⁷

Periodic moral rectification campaigns and persecution of officials for corruption also serve other ends. First, Castro's rhetoric accompanying anti-corruption campaigns pre-empts public debate or scrutiny of fundamental regime flaws, allowing him to mobilise support and escape system-level accountability by blaming 'scapegoats' for an inability to attain revolutionary goals. Second, episodic purges against high officials like Ochoa pulverise opposition or nascent 'limited pluralism' (actual, potential and imagined) while still in embryonic form; thus re-establishing totalitarian elite cohesion.³⁸ Finally, the ceremonial 'uprooting of the evil in society' helps rejuvenate popular faith in the moral integrity of Castro's regime, reinforcing faith in the egalitarian goals of the Revolution.³⁹ Scarcities and privations mount in Cuba as Castro continues to appeal to moral incentives. But his commitment to probity and demands that all share in the ideals and burdens of the Revolution helps sustain affective supports (diffuse, generalised attachments) even while instrumental supports (specific, utilitarian considerations) wane.⁴⁰

Fidel Castro's rule conforms to the syndromatic features of totalitarian dictatorship superimposed over a deeper, Latin American *caudillo* heritage. Castro remains the charismatic leader; he functions as the indispensable prophet and ideologue guiding Cuba towards a socialist utopia, and utilises his dictatorship for impersonal purposes. Corruption has dwindled from pre-revolutionary days. When it appears, it is used as a diversion from structural flaws, including the dysfunctionality of Castro's centralisation of power.

Alfredo Stroessner – authoritarian dictatorship and proto-totalitarianism

General Alfredo Stroessner's long rule and precipitous fall provides an apparent textbook case for conventional perceptions of the quintessential authoritarian dictator: a soldier in mufti, corrupt, repressive, standing for nothing more than personal aggrandisement, anti-Communist and

³⁷ For transcripts of the show trial, see *Vindicación de Cuba* (Havana, 1989).

³⁸ For an analysis of this aspect in the Ochoa episode, see the commentary in the *New York Times Review of Books*, 'Fidel and Religion', 7 Dec. 1989.

³⁹ Morris, 'Corruption', pp. 3–15.

⁴⁰ Domínguez, *Cuba*, pp. 229–33; also Tad Szulc, *Fidel: A Critical Portrait* (New York, 1986), p. 81. The terms 'affective' and 'instrumental' supports come from David Easton, 'A Reassessment of the Concept of Political Support', *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 5 (1975), pp. 435–57.

eventually overthrown. But, while stereotypes abound, Stroessner's has largely remained a forgotten dictatorship in comparison with other, better-known hemispheric despots, such as Castro. The dearth of serious study stems from Paraguay's geographic isolation, lack of great power investment or Cold War considerations and Stroessner's own low profile. Stroessner, if discussed at all, is usually dismissed out-of-hand by ill-informed and inaccurate generalisations.

A closer examination, utilising the rubric of (1) charisma; (2) role; and (3) corruption, reveals important similarities and contrasts with both Castro and the totalitarian/authoritarian taxonomy. While his regime was at base an authoritarian personalist (not military) dictatorship, a totalitarian 'impulse' pervaded Stroessner's rule, including a militant, mass-based party apparatus and a penetrated, politicised armed forces.

Stroessner's longevity had little to do with personal charisma. He was never a prophetic leader proselytising utopian futures. In personal demeanour, Stroessner is described as a 'taciturn man...heavy and ponderous in his movements'.⁴¹ In contrast to spellbinding orators such as Castro, Stroessner was given to rather pedantic patriotic banalities and boring recitations of his regime's economic improvements.

Yet Stroessner appeared to be relatively popular. Interviews with Paraguayans, the general impression gained from field research, and corroboration by other scholars and US intelligence officers support the view that Stroessner relied on a base of popular support buttressed by a disciplined mass party.⁴²

Few twentieth-century dictators last a third of a century relying on hamfisted repression alone. Paraguayan acceptance of Stroessner stemmed from the nation's political culture, Stroessner's own manipulation of Paraguayan values, and his control over the three mainstays of his regime: the Colorado Party, the military and corruption.

No nation in Latin America has a more firmly rooted authoritarian legacy than Paraguay. Throughout its history, the political culture approximates Samuel Huntington's 'praetorian society', characterised by the weakness of effective political institutions, lack of consensus among groups concerning legitimate methods of resolving conflicts and a continual involvement of the military in government.⁴³ Spanish colonial rule was mixed with ideological thought control perpetrated by the early

⁴¹ Richard Bourne, *Political Leaders of Latin America* (New York, 1970), p. 101.

⁴² Interviews with, among others, Adriano Irralla Burgos, Director, Oficina de Estudios Paraguayos, Universidad Católica, Asunción, 5 June 1988; these conclusions confirmed in interview with Jack Martin, Political Officer, US Embassy, Asunción, 7 June 1988 and conversation with Paraguayan specialist Paul H. Lewis, Asunción, 12 June 1988.

⁴³ Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, 1968), pp. 192–263.

Jesuits who established a system of *reducciones*, regulating every aspect of daily life for a century among the native Guaraní Indians in the 1600s. Sterile despotism continued after independence by the dictatorships of Dr José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia (1814–40), Antonio López (1841–62) and Francisco Solana López (1862–70). Francia set the early tone. Emerging from the wars of independence in the 1810s determined to break the resistance of the upper classes and refashion Paraguay into a unique and autonomous nation, Francia created a hermit police state by sealing off the borders:

... there was a totalitarian atmosphere about the [Francia] regime that was more oppressive than the brutal but chaotic *caudillo* governments elsewhere in South America ... spies and informers were ubiquitous ... terror was systematic.⁴⁴

Continuing with the two López', a tradition of extremely repressive dictatorship was ingrained into the national consciousness. These *caudillos* ruled during the formative generations of Paraguay's history, perpetuating a traditional intolerance to opposition and dissent, political repression, exaggerated adulation of strongman leadership and political monism. Involvement in two of the bloodiest wars (the Triple Alliance, 1865–70 and the Chaco, 1932–5) in the continent's history enhanced the position of the armed forces as major political actors and national saviours, fostering a history of martial intervention in politics.

The decidedly fascist cast to the military regimes headed by Major Rafael Franco, Marshall Félix Estigarribia and General Higinio Morínigo throughout the 1930s and 1940s reinforced the traditional xenophobia permeating Paraguayan political culture, enshrining authoritarian values. These strongmen buttressed the norms of resistance to and suspicion of 'foreign' ideas, as in democratic ideology and systems of government not geared to the realities of the Paraguayan experience.⁴⁵ This monotonous history of dictatorship with only brief and chaotic interludes of open government paved the way for Stroessner's own *golpe* in 1954.

Such a persistent authoritarian pattern is an underlying factor nurturing and sustaining a soldierly elite vested in militarism and producing a public psychologically habituated to dictatorship. Knowing no other political arrangement than authoritarianism, the people boasted no expectations of a more balanced polity. Politically naive, apathetic and xenophobic, Paraguayans accepted Stroessner (exalted, appropriately as '*El Continuator*') more or less willingly as congruent with the milieu.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Paul Lewis, *Socialism, Liberalism and Dictatorship in Paraguay* (New York, 1982), p. 23. See also Guido Rodríguez Alcalá, *Ideología autoritaria* (Asunción, 1987).

⁴⁵ Alfredo Seiferheld, *Nazismo y fascismo en el Paraguay* (Asunción, 1985), pp. 211–16.

⁴⁶ On these and related points, see Paul C. Sondrol, 'Authoritarianism in Paraguay: An Analysis of Three Contending Paradigms', *Review of Latin American Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1990), pp. 83–105.

A crucial determinant of Stroessner's longevity centred on his recognising the importance of ceremony and symbolism in Paraguayan culture. Stroessner effectively manipulated the myths and values of the nation to lend legitimacy to his dictatorship, approximating the archetypical *caudillo* described by Hugh Hamill:

The success of the caudillo is not only the number of years in power but also ... the skill with which he weds himself to the patriotic mythology, history, folk, customs, religious observances, fraternal and kinship groups, national psychology, and political traditions.⁴⁷

Stroessner's communion with Paraguayans took two seemingly contradictory forms – the 'common' and the 'regal' style. Stroessner was a perfectly approachable and familiar figure to *Paraguayos*, practising a petitionary form of rule in keeping with Paraguay's 'shirt-sleeve populism'.⁴⁸ Congruent with the egalitarian nature of Paraguayan society, Stroessner devoted an enormous amount of time to parochial concerns, including photo opportunities with schoolchildren, meetings with well-wishers, consultations with leaders of industry, business and labour, average citizens, or any complainant with a problem, often of a personal nature, who felt the right to go directly to the President. At least prior to Nicaraguan ex-President Anastasio Somoza's assassination in 1980, Stroessner drove himself without protection to the local chess club in downtown Asunción and played any and all challengers who happened to stop.⁴⁹ Stroessner ruled a small nation of 3.5 million for almost two generations. By 1985, 70% of the population had grown to adulthood knowing no other leader.

Stroessner's apparent folksiness and availability, aside from the obvious public relations benefit, was functional to his conception of role and rule. Stroessner had no larger utopian vision than keeping himself in power. He may or may not have cared about political popularity – which was impossible to gauge empirically given restrictions on press and free expression. But being surrounded in the Presidential Palace by sycophants had an isolating effect. Travelling the country and meeting with ordinary citizens, regional military commanders or local party officials afforded Stroessner continued access to new channels of information, keeping him abreast of a changing political environment. This sort of 'constituency service' distinguished Stroessner from more removed authoritarians who simply retired to corpulent languor in the presidential palace and never visited the country.⁵⁰ It also legitimated Stroessner by making him appear

⁴⁷ Hugh Hamill, *Dictatorship in Spanish America* (New York, 1965), p. 13.

⁴⁸ Paul H. Lewis, *Paraguay Under Stroessner* (Chapel Hill, 1980), p. 108.

⁴⁹ Bourne, *Political Leaders*, pp. 182–5.

⁵⁰ See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, 1966).

responsive to the people. Stroessner's singular ability to play the role of ombudsman in redressing local grievances was similar to the personal link that Castro performs.

Stroessner's pre-eminence, like Castro's, allowed him to bypass institutional channels for decision-making and to determine policy or course corrections by fiat. Stroessner alone commanded the attention to galvanise public opinion behind regime initiatives. He was no mere figurehead. Stroessner, like Castro, was the 'great helmsman' and guiding spirit of the *Stonato* (the Stroessner regime).⁵¹ Personal inspection tours, often unannounced, allowed Stroessner to serve, as does Castro, as his regime's 'intuitive barometer of popular sentiment, sounding out public opinion and eliciting criticism from the rank and file'.⁵² Stroessner's direct, common touch was important in cultivating and maintaining mass allegiance over many years.

Stroessner proved equally adept at the more regal functions associated with chief-of-state duties. He presided over the nation's most important ceremonial occasions with a solemnity that a still traditional, highly religious and intensely nationalistic populace appreciated. Glittering occasions such as the feast days of San Blas, Corpus Christi, or Heroes Day and Chaco Armistice, found the President laying a wreath or giving a patriotic speech. Stroessner headed the pomp and pageantry surrounding visits by foreign heads of state, trade delegations or military missions, ceremonies which received heavy coverage by the local, controlled press and were followed closely by the people. As citizens of a small, poor country, Paraguayans obviously enjoyed and took pride in these displays of the importance of the nation, its traditions, and the dignity that Stroessner displayed.⁵³

Machiavellian designs to maintain power fail fully to explain Stroessner's longevity. Retaining control clearly was the overriding goal, but other motives existed. Stroessner was a patriotic hero of the Chaco War. Like Castro, Stroessner exhibited in his personal mannerisms and style of leadership the same sorts of qualities his countrymen admired. Because he was so typically Paraguayan – authoritarian, ultra-nationalist

⁵¹ González, *Cuba Under Castro*, pp. 182–5; Paul Lewis, *Socialism*, p. 69; Carlos Miranda, *The Stroessner Era* (Boulder, 1990).

⁵² González, *ibid.*, p. 184.

⁵³ The author remembers attention in Asunción riveted on Stroessner's June 1988 speech before the United Nations General Assembly on (of all topics) nuclear disarmament. The speech was carried live via direct satellite feed on both of Paraguay's television networks. It was patently crafted for domestic consumption; being more a nationalistic defence of democracy 'Paraguayan style'. The cameras remained glued to Stroessner. Later, it was revealed the General Assembly was almost empty of spectators who were boycotting the speech in protest against Stroessner's dictatorship. The speech was a huge success in Asunción.

and xenophobic – Stroessner succeeded in eliciting an almost irrational admiration on the part of many Paraguayans more characteristic of a totalitarian like Castro. While he dedicated his energies to maintaining power, Stroessner also clearly believed in the conservative, patriotic and religious values of the society from which he emerged. He saw nothing incompatible in the manipulation of those symbols to support his rule.

Stroessner's durability thus rested on considerable skill as an astute politician. An unquestioned administrative capacity, coupled with a penchant for details, long work hours and a ruthless obsession for personal power helped him overcome initial opposition from within the Colorado Party, bureaucracy and military.⁵⁴

Identifying himself with the century-old Colorado Party, Stroessner secured a popular base for his regime; a key difference from other contemporary right-wing dictatorships in Latin America, such as Brazil (1964–84) or Argentina (1966–72; 1976–82). Stroessner's decision to collaborate with the Colorados was a pretext to bring the party under his formal control.

A pseudo-totalitarian 'caesarist' impulse to expand the scope of his control pervaded the *Stronato*.⁵⁵ By purging the Colorados of dissidents, Stroessner adeptly transformed the organisation into a personalist vehicle of his dictatorship. By 1976, no factions divided the Colorados; everyone was a *stroessnerista*. Since the only avenue to a modicum of safety, prosperity and power lay with the hegemonic regime, allegiance and proximity to Stroessner became the *sine qua non* of political survival. Moreover, a fanatical partisanship akin to totalitarian cadres, clearly going beyond that normally associated with rightist, conservative authoritarian regimes, handed Stroessner a weapon shared by Castro: a disciplined, militant mass-based party totally subservient to the dictator.

Stroessner reorganised the Colorados along verticalist lines. Membership was structured (and later computerised) through a national network of *seccionales* and *subseccionales* (branches and block wards). Similar to Castro's Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, these grass-roots organisations functioned to maintain party discipline and militancy, keep a registry of members, disseminate propaganda, dispense welfare and patronage to *correligionarios* (party brethren) and keep oppositionists under surveillance.

Under Stroessner, a key criteria for securing employment in government was political affiliation and the growing bureaucracy represented an

⁵⁴ For Stroessner's consolidation of power, see Leandro Prieto Yegros, *El Coloradismo Eterno Con Stroessner*, tomo 1 (Asunción, 1988).

⁵⁵ The term comes from Lanz, *Cesarismo Democrático*. See also Franz Neumann's conceptualisation of the term in his *The Democratic and Authoritarian State* (Glencoe, 1957), p. 236.

enormous patronage network for loyal Colorados. Party headquarters became the central agency for public sector sinecures. In a poor country like Paraguay, a good job in the burgeoning popular sector engendered loyalty to Stroessner. As head of this spoils system, Stroessner was the ultimate *patrón* and thus counted on a loyal bureaucracy directly responsive to his policy preferences. With only lip service paid to merit, Stroessner enjoyed almost complete control over tenure, salaries, promotions, pensions and retirement. Party bureaucrats were also required to make mandatory 'contributions' to Colorado coffers.

Stroessner never relinquished formal command as head of the military that brought him to power in 1954, and he intervened directly in troop movements and promotions of all officers. Not satisfied with mere obedience, he introduced political criteria (Colorado Party membership) for promotions and assignments, oaths of loyalty to Stroessner personally, and penetration via indoctrination in Stroessner's thoughts and pronouncements.⁵⁶ As a counterweight to the military, Stroessner created a parallel structure; a 1,500 man elite presidential escort regiment of heavily armed soldiers, each carefully screened by the secret police before being allowed to join.⁵⁷

Ameliorating Stroessner's totalitarian leanings, however, was the absence of any ideological imperative to restructure society and values as in Castro's Cuba. Moreover, while mirroring Castro's almost complete domination over the regime he headed, loyalty to Stroessner was not based on any comprehensive and intellectually elaborate ideology or charisma, but rather on a mixture of fear and rewards threatened and offered to his collaborators. Linz terms this form of leadership 'patrimonialism' whereby the binding norms and relations of bureaucratic administration are constantly subverted by the personal arbitrariness of the ruler.⁵⁸

Loyalty to Stroessner by core regime elites – party hacks, bureaucrats, cabinet ministers and army officers – was ultimately based on the establishment of personal, reciprocal ties of faithfulness and obligation. Anthropologist George Foster calls these clientelistic relationships 'dyadic contracts' that 'tie people ... of significantly different socioeconomic status (or orders of power), who exchange different kinds of goods and services'. Lower ranking members of the contract anticipate protection,

⁵⁶ See, for example, Dr Augusto Moreno, *La época de Alfredo Stroessner: Valoración política, histórica y filosófica* (Asunción, 1966); Ubaldo Centurión Morinigo, *Stroessner, defensor de las instituciones democráticas* (Asunción, 1983); Alfredo Stroessner, *Política y estrategia del desarrollo* (Asunción, 1986).

⁵⁷ This personal Presidential Escort Regiment fought the motorised Cavalry Divisions headed by General Andrés Rodríguez in the coup of 3 Feb. 1989. Approximately 300 men from both sides died in the fighting.

⁵⁸ Linz, 'Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes', pp. 259–63.

economic aid and security while higher status members of the dyad expect fealty, deference and service.⁵⁹

These interweaving clientelist links characteristic in Latin America are an authoritarian theme of Paraguayan political culture, intersecting at the apex of the national authority structure under Stroessner's dictatorship. Frederick Hicks argues that emphasis on reciprocal loyalties and obligations forms the basis for *caudillismo*. It had been transcended in most of Latin America by 1870, but continued under Stroessner, featuring personalist rule supported and maintained by the creation of a loyal following of retainers rewarded by '... wealth or the power to bestow patronage through control of access to the sources of wealth'.⁶⁰

Cronyism, corruption and contraband were essential components binding subordinates to Stroessner. Lacking the ideological consensus found in Castro's Cuba, Stroessner substituted more materialistic inducements for loyalty. Moreover, unlike high-profile, accessible (but also easily controllable) and strategic Cuba, Paraguay's geopolitical position as a small, landlocked, isolated country bereft of great-power investment or Cold War considerations made racketeering a logical consequence. Many high-ranking military officers enjoyed lucrative side interests involving rich sinecures in state monopolies controlling major commercial areas, providing a front for the narcotics, contraband and prostitution trades. Foreign companies (mostly Argentine and Brazilian) owning close to 80% of the nation's legitimate large businesses made regular payoffs to Colorado bureaucrats to evade taxes and governmental red-tape.⁶¹

Stroessner's enormous black market racketeering bought complicity and support from leading figures in the armed forces, businessmen and politicians resulting in elite groups owning a personal stake in Stroessner's rule and spoils system. An oft-repeated phrase heard in Asunción, reportedly turned by Stroessner himself, summed up the nefarious

⁵⁹ George M. Foster, 'The Dyadic Contract', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 63 (1961), pp. 1,173-92; *idem.*, 'The Dyadic Contract II', *ibid.*, vol. 65 (1963), pp. 1,281-94. Quotation from p. 1,281.

⁶⁰ Frederick Hicks, 'Interpersonal Relationships and *Caudillismo* in Paraguay', *Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs*, vol. 13 (1971), pp. 89-111. Quotation from p. 99.

⁶¹ General-President Andrés Rodríguez, long a Stroessner intimate before turning on him, is considered by law enforcement authorities to be Paraguay's No. 1 drug trafficker. See *The Arizona Daily Star*, 5 Feb. 1989.

The assassination of deposed Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza was rumoured to be linked to a faction of the officer corps surrounding Rodríguez, for Somoza's *parvenu* involvement in the military's international cocaine trade. See *COHA's Washington Report on the Hemisphere*, 30 Sept. 1980. For more on military corruption, see Carlos María Lezcano G., 'Lealtad al General-Presidente', *Investigaciones Sociales Educación Comunicación - ISEC*, vol. 6 (Asunción, 1986), p. 3.

philosophy thus: 'It is necessary to foment criminality, because criminality produces complicity and complicity produces loyalty'.⁶²

Conclusion

The Stroessner and Castro dictatorships offer parallels merging Latin American authoritarian, totalitarian and *caudillo* rule. Both Stroessner and Castro were and are the critical fulcrums of their respective regimes. Both autocrats cultivated a personality cult, fanatical following and dominated a single, official mass-based political party organised along personalist lines.

Beyond these similarities, however, the two dictators diverge. Castro is a pure totalitarian. Stroessner was largely authoritarian, yet a proto-totalitarian urge pervaded his rule. Castro remains the charismatic, visionary ideological strongman. Stroessner possessed no ideology beyond social conservatism, rabid anti-Communism, maintaining and increasing his power. Castro is needed, not just as a person, but as a function to sit at the centre of his movement, to guide, give shape and lend it legitimacy. Stroessner's 'function' was Stroessner in power and little else. Loyalty to Castro is based on a blend of revolutionary, public-spirited ideological utopianism and *caudillismo*, creating a psychological and emotional identification between leader and followers. In Stroessner's regime, *caudillismo*, but also corruption, bound elites together in felonious complicity via a notorious web of clientelistic 'contracts'. And yet, the political backwardness and traditions of Paraguay afforded Stroessner's predatory sultanism a degree of popularity with the very masses repressed by his retainers.

Castro conforms to the larger, general totalitarian taxonomy. He evokes leadership comparisons with Hitler, Mussolini, Mao or Stalin. He is Cuba's charismatic maximum leader and continues to dominate a political system largely his own creation and bearing his indelible stamp. Revolutionary Cuba without Castro is almost inconceivable; no better measure of his influence exists.

Stereotypes of Stroessner's long rule abound, but are largely inaccurate as no perfect analogy to his dictatorship exists. The *Stronato* was never a military junta or faceless bureaucratic-authoritarian dictatorship. Neither the collective Paraguayan military nor the Colorado Party ruled Paraguay: Stroessner ruled. Stroessner was not simply *primus inter pares* within an oligarchy; he was a personalist dictator, totally dominating the political regime. Stroessner even appeared relatively popular for an authoritarian

⁶² Robert J. Alexander, 'The Tyranny of General Stroessner', *Freedom at Issue*, vol. 41 (1977), pp. 16–17. Quotation from interview with journalist and author Guido Rodríguez Alcalá, 7 June 1988, Asunción. Translation by author.

autocrat. Mass acceptance of Stroessner stemmed from Paraguay's unique authoritarian heritage, Stroessner's own belief in and manipulation of the nation's socio-cultural values, his control of a mass-based official party, the penetration and politicisation of the military and corruption binding the regime's elites.

Fidel Castro and Alfredo Stroessner mirror the diametrics of totalitarianism and authoritarianism in ideological orientation, role conception, and the public versus private ends of dictatorship. Examination reveals how they intersect as unique examples of personalist dictatorship in Latin America. Analysis of Stroessner, in particular, implies that totalitarian and authoritarian dictatorships are relative rather than absolute concepts. Stroessner's regime inched towards totalitarianism, but the rudimentary nature of the political system, the limited pluralism and parameters of custom and convention conspired to render it authoritarian in actual application.

Dictatorships are 'more' or 'less' totalitarian. Instead of Platonic ideals or rigid typologies, research should focus on directions, impulses and trends. This, however, is not to deny the valuable purpose totalitarianism serves in comparative analysis. Simply calling Castro's or Stroessner's 'personalist' or 'single-party' regimes utterly fails to capture the distinguishing features of such systems, other than their being autocracies. Totalitarianism continues to distinguish dictatorships such as Castro's and Stroessner's, but in these cases, less in kind than in degree.