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The Charismatic Revolutionary Leadership Trajectories of Fidel Castro and Lázaro Cárdenas: From Guerrillas to Heads of State in the Age of U.S. Imperialism

Joseph J. García

Abstract

After attempting to overthrow the government of Fulgencio Batista in 1953, Fidel Castro fled to Mexico where he, his brother, Raul Castro, Ernesto Che Guevara, and other revolutionaries were later jailed by the Mexican government under the orders of the Batista dictatorship to be returned to Cuba. Using his knowledge of the Mexican Revolution, Castro wrote a letter asking for help from former president and revolutionary general, Lázaro Cárdenas, appealing to his sense of revolutionary history and social justice. Cárdenas was impressed by this young revolutionary and worked to obtain political asylum for he and his comrades. This allowed Castro to enter Texas clandestinely in order to collect funds for the Cuban Revolution. This chance encounter of two revolutionaries is not well known in the annals of Mexico and Cuba, yet provides us with an important historical interaction between two dynamic and charismatic leaders who were uniquely loved by their respective publics, and often clashed with attempted international interventions. Moreover, their relationship did not end with the release of Castro in 1956 as they continued to influence each other. Yet, historians have largely ignored the connection between Castro and Cárdenas. I argue that both men were effective revolutionary leaders who followed similar trajectories as they became highly revered for their charismatic leadership based on their combat experience, victory over national and international challenges, leadership of their nations, and the nationalization of petroleum which institutionalized both revolutions.

Keywords: charisma, revolution, leadership, imperialism, hegemony, defiance, nationalization, international relations, Latin American relations

Introduction

From 1956 to the death of Cárdenas in 1970, Fidel Castro and Lázaro Cárdenas developed a friendship that would bear witness to the influence of the Mexican Revolution on Cuba, as well as the Cuban Revolution on Mexico. At different points in time, each man served as head of state in their respective countries, which required them to each face challenges with the United States and allowed the development of their charismatic revolutionary leadership. Within a few short years after their first encounter in 1956, Cárdenas would join Castro in July of 1959 as a

guest of the revolution shortly after its triumph by providing advice for the young revolution.¹

In 1961, as the Bay of Pigs Invasion sought to end the Cuban Revolution, Cárdenas boarded a plane in Mexico City bound for Cuba where he and his entourage were ready to support the Cuban Revolution in defense of Cuban sovereignty. Their plane never left the ground as Mexican President Adolfo López Mateos had the Mexican army prevent the plane's departure (Keller, 2015, pp. 1-2).

Lázaro Cárdenas and Fidel Castro each rose to power while confronting the United States, often considered the most powerful country in the world. The United States became an adversary that unintentionally enhanced their nationalist leadership through efforts to undermine revolution. In order to explore the aforementioned interactions, this article is organized into three sections. First, I analyze Weber's concept of charisma through the critique of individually focused interpretations of charismatic leadership by explaining the importance of the revolutionary experience in the development of said charisma. Second, I explain how this charisma – which seemingly coalesces around the figure of the dynamic leader – is actually tied to a series of events, or charismatic moments, which influence social and environmental justice. Third, I address the combination of events and factors that were transformed by Cárdenas and Castro using the nationalization of petroleum to institutionalize revolution and develop mass political participation (Skocpol, 1994, pp. 268-269). The combination of both men being revolutionary leaders who had earned their positions as heads of state was further enhanced by the challenges they encountered in their efforts to implement national sovereignty and use national resources for economic, political, and social reform. In 1938, Cárdenas nationalized nearly all petroleum properties setting a standard that 22 years later led to Castro's strategic nationalization of the Shell and TEXACO petroleum refineries. This act led to the end of Cuban and U.S. relations and began the period of Cuban and Russian collaboration. This led to the 1962 Missile Crisis and began the process of the institutionalization of the revolution by nationalizing all foreign-owned properties in Cuba.

Charismatic Revolutionary Leadership in the Americas

The first successful revolution of 20th-century Mexico led the way in terms of overthrowing the regime of Porfirio Díaz. Once considered a national hero for defeating the French occupation in 1872, Díaz and his regime, the Porfiriato (Díaz dictatorship), were ousted from power by revolution in 1911. Mexico's long revolutionary trajectory led to the election of Lázaro Cárdenas in 1934, who under serious threat, managed to institutionalize the revolution by removing the post-revolutionary dictatorship of Plutarco Elías Calles Maximato. During his *sexenio* (six-year presidency), Cárdenas ushered in renewed efforts toward the social and

¹ Cuauhotémoc Cárdenas Interview by author (2012), Zocalo, México DF, México (All translations by author).

environmental justice the 1917 Mexican Constitution had laid out (Waklid, 2011, pp. 22-23).

In the case of Cuba, efforts at revolution began with a coup organized by Fulgencio Batista in 1933, which ousted the U.S.-backed dictatorship of Gerardo Machado. This led to the development of the 1940 Cuban Constitution, similar to Mexico's 1917 Constitution, which laid the groundwork for the nationalization of natural resources after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. In 1959, under Castro's leadership, the Cuban Revolution ended the U.S.-backed dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. As a result, Castro would remain in power for nearly 50 years bringing forth radical leadership and social reform to Cuba. Institutionalization of the revolution through the expropriation of oil refineries led to confrontation with the United States placing Castro in a precarious position (Zunes, 2016). In the case of both Cárdenas and Castro they challenged dictatorships (Díaz and Batista) that limited public political participation creating the crisis for the development of both revolutions (Skocpol, 1994, pp. 268-269). Mexico during the Cárdenas presidency developed its nationalization policy as fascism was on the rise in Europe prior to World War II, while the Cuban Revolution seized power at the height of the Cold War as the United States and U.S.S.R., once allies, came close to nuclear annihilation.

Having been molded by the circumstances of their respective countries, Cárdenas and Castro came to embody the concept of charismatic authority as defined by sociologist Max Weber, which furthered the revolutionary trajectories that brought them to power (Weber, 2013, pp. 266-271). Weber describes the manner a leader is able to earn authority with "genuine charisma," through actions of "personal heroism or personal revelation" (Weber, 1958, pp. 262-263). Further, charisma rests "on devotion to the specific and exceptional sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him" (Weber, 1968, pp. 46-47). I argue that it is also the influence of the society which provides the forum for charismatic authority to develop. Cárdenas and Castro are linked through a charismatic connection as a result of Cardenas spearheading the release of Castro from prison in Mexico. The conceptualization of Revolutionary Charismatic Leadership is most evident during catastrophic moments and requires a combination of Weber's Charismatic authority and Theda Skocpol's political crisis theories for a complete understanding of its theoretic structure and evidence once in practice. Charismatic moments that call for revolutionaries to take action and require bold decision-making occur under major duress and crisis. Therefore, Skocpol's description about the abuse of power that dictatorship created in Mexico and Cuba made it vulnerable to overthrow.

Weber describes two other forms of authority, traditional and rational-legal (bureaucratic), which are also important when assessing the charismatic revolutionary leadership of Cárdenas and Castro. Traditional authority is the result of a long-established cultural pattern that I argue is the root of the revolutionary trajectory of the Cuban and Mexican Revolutions. Both are rooted in indigenous tradition present in the Latin American and Caribbean uprisings and rebellions led by local leaders with traditional authority which sought to challenge European

conquest and subjugation. In this regard, the Haitian Revolution is the beginning of a history of social movements based on slave rebellion and independence that directed South American independence through the eventual end of slavery in the Americas (Dubois, 2004, pp. 304-305). The charismatic leader, as described by Max Weber, became the example that “in order to do justice to their mission, the holders of charisma, the master as well as his disciples and followers, must stand outside the ties of this world, outside of routine occupations, as well as outside the routine obligations of family life” (Weber, 1958, p. 248). We saw this in Toussaint Louverture, a charismatic leader, former slave, and a serious threat to the institution of slavery (New England Historical Society, 2020). His effort to launch movements that brought an end to slavery through revolution began a trajectory that connects to 20th-century revolutionary leaders through Mexico and Cuba, which required taking bold actions that fostered the weakening of elite and foreign control of the political process.

Therefore, the Mexican and Cuban Revolutions followed a tradition that began with the triumph of the Haitian Revolution and its impact on the legacy of Charismatic Revolutionary Leadership in the Americas. Haiti, the second independent nation in the hemisphere with little international assistance was the first revolution to defeat not one but three empires: Britain, France, and Spain. Haiti, alone in its fight for liberation, became a symbol for slave-led independence feared by the slave-owning American and European empires.

After years of colonial rule and foreign use of ancestral lands, people of the Americas sought independence through economic nationalism and self-determination or national sovereignty, and the reactionary result was the U.S. and European counter-revolution which opposed efforts at independence from global capitalism. Ideologies in Europe and the United States affirmed their “legal” right to “civilize” the world for the purposes of expanding the world capitalist system. The independence and national liberation movements required rational-legal authority to enact laws that would institutionalize revolutionary gains propelling national sovereignty. Thus, there is a continuation of a struggle that began in Haiti to end slavery by further challenging the overriding commercial interests of governments in the United States and France, and their weak claims to equality and liberty.

Meteoric Rise to Power:

Charismatic Revolutionary Leadership in Mexico and Cuba

Through their participation in revolution and eventual leadership of revolutions in Mexico and Cuba, Cárdenas and Castro were part of an established charismatic revolutionary leadership trajectory in Latin America and the Caribbean that was driven by societal features of their home countries. They became the ultimate leaders of their respective revolutions by utilizing their charisma to legislate the institutionalization of revolution as a result of the nationalization of petroleum.

For example, as revolution spread throughout rural Mexico, peasant populations once marginalized and excluded from the political process by

dictatorial violence, led to the rise of charismatic revolutionaries Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata. As a boy, Cárdenas was swept up into the frenzy of the revolution, rising through the ranks of Venustiano Carranza's Constitutionalist Army. As a result of his leadership and intellectual abilities Cárdenas, initially a part of Emiliano Zapata's guerrilla army, joined Carranza's Constitutionalist army representing the interest of the *hacendados* (landed gentry) in 1915. Cárdenas fought for the overall victor of the rebellion: Alvaro Obregón, a general of the Carranzista faction from Northern Mexico. Cárdenas then developed into a charismatic revolutionary leader under the tutelage of Plutarco Elías Calles, a general in Obregón's army. Joining the revolutionary army, Cárdenas became a young general nicknamed by Calles *el chamaco* (the boy) to describe his youth, loyalty, and service, emblematic of the youthful nature of revolution in the 20th century.

The unexpected Cárdenas presidency in 1934 resulted from a loss of legitimacy in the Mexican revolutionary government of former president Calles's *Maximato* (1928-1934), who handpicked presidential candidates to maintain his power with U.S. support through the 1928 Calles-Morrow Agreement where he recognized oil land titles claimed before ratification of the 1917 Constitution. Eventually, Calles tried to maintain legitimacy by placing Cárdenas (known for his honesty) as his handpicked candidate for the presidency. Cárdenas, promoted as the regime's official candidate, was chosen for the great respect and integrity he had earned as governor of the state of Michoacán (Córdova, 1995, pp. 421-423).

Calles wrongly assumed that after Cárdenas became president, he would be subservient to his behind-the-scenes rule. Though a trusted subordinate, Cardenas' true loyalties remained with the revolution and its commitment to social change. Therefore in 1935, as Cárdenas learned of a coup, he peacefully expelled Calles from Mexico for the rest of his presidency (Schuler, 1999, pp. 42-43). As a leader with military and political experience, Cárdenas understood the risks and the importance of his role in the Mexican Revolution. The risks he faced included the decision to expropriate petroleum, not just for Mexico's development but to solidify his power and maintain the sovereignty of the 1917 Constitution. Had he not expropriated petroleum, redistributed land to the peasants, and supported labor rights, the Mexican Revolution might not be as important to the revolutionary trajectory of Latin America and the Caribbean.

A contemporary of Cárdenas in Cuba, Fulgencio Batista, rose to power through a coup in 1933 leading a coalition with the Left who sought social change for Cuba. The success of Batista's leadership in the 1930s led to the implementation of important legislation culminating with the 1940 Cuban Constitution. After years in power and his retirement to Florida in the 1940s he grew restless, yearning for the glory of the charismatic leader he once was. Batista, still in control of the Cuban military returned to Cuba from Miami, seizing power in 1952 with the support of the United States.

The 1952 coup by Batista occurred on the eve of national elections, which influenced Fidel and Raul Castro to organize the ill-fated attack on the Moncada Barracks on July 26, 1953. This was a failed effort to spark mass rebellion against

the Batista Dictatorship. The Castro brothers and their surviving accomplices were jailed for two years, where they formed the 26th of July Movement and continued their plans for an insurrection against Batista. After two years of incarceration they were given amnesty and immediately fled to Mexico. Therefore, a number of similarities can be drawn between the experience of Cárdenas and Calles, and Castro and Batista. Both Calles and Batista assisted revolutions that ended dictatorship in Mexico and Cuba only to attempt to reinstall their own. As Cárdenas and Castro challenged the growing power of both Calles and Batista, their goal was to institutionalize the revolutionary spirit of independence and self-determination.

The dictatorial corruption of Batista and Calles ushered in the rise of young leaders with moral leadership (Fulbright, 1966, pp. 98-99). Their youthful dedication to duty was based on the depth of the actions and commitment exemplified by their later nationalizations and redistribution of natural resources (Castro, 2010, pp. 231-232). They knew that to be successful they had to provide tangible results for the success of their movements. Otherwise, they would become part of the counterrevolutions they had defeated (Cárdenas, 1972, p. 19).

Through participation in revolutionary struggle and becoming heads of state, Cárdenas and Castro were able to gain support from societies that had undergone revolutionary change but had been suppressed by counterrevolutionary efforts led by Calles in Mexico and Batista in Cuba. Furthermore, by engaging the populace through active participation for increased social welfare, their commitment to environmental and social justice reached beyond national boundaries to develop a lasting alliance between Cuba and Mexico (Waklid, 2011, p. 166). As Cárdenas re-established the Mexican Revolution in the 1930s, which implemented land and labor rights, he influenced Castro's commitment to environmental justice through similar conservation methods. Both Cárdenas and Castro engaged in the nationalization of lands and designation of said land as national parks, an effort which included the participation of local communities in order to manage and maintain them.

The disbursement of millions of acres of land to indigenous and peasant communities who had lived and worked those lands for ages, meant Cárdenas fulfilled the promises of the Mexican Revolution. This included his touring the outer reaches of Mexico by foot and horseback to see the need for education, agrarian reform, and national development. Castro also engaged in a similar gesture that in addition to nationalizing petroleum, initiated the nationalization of all foreign owned properties. The revolution first nationalized the Castro family lands and reduced rents across Cuba by half, while sending out doctors and teachers to assist in the immediate needs of rural Cubans.

The circumstances that developed the authority of both Cárdenas and Castro was a result of the collective response by the popular masses who endured years of social hardships that led to the Mexican and Cuban Revolutions (Allahar, 2001, p. xiii). Through their revolutions, the people enhanced political participation to not just include voting, but active engagement in implementing social reform on their own. Added to this, a collective righteous indignation followed in response to the corruption and foreign domination that in the case of Mexico and Cuba, ushered in

revolutionary leaders committed to social change (Tilly, 2003, p. 41). Castro's and Cardenas's ability to lead not only armies in battle but also citizens in social change contributed to on-going success during subsequent international crises further extending their credibility and tenure.

The sense of injustice experienced by both countries radicalized the Cuban and Mexican people to engage in an effort to reinforce national sovereignty and promote economic independence (Philip, 1982, p. 226). In Mexico, this was expressed by the widespread participation of Mexican people in reimbursing the petroleum companies for the loss of their properties and paying off roughly \$159 million dollars (U.S. State Department, 1938). In Cuba, tired of violence and limited participation, the people rallied behind the revolution by serving in various capacities that influenced policies for better healthcare and education within the first few years after seizing power. Through the use of history as an educational tool, the Cuban and Mexican revolutionary governments developed support for national sovereignty and social development. Using Mexico and Cuba's collective experiences of struggle, their revolutionary engagement provided for more nuanced and sophisticated social change.

The struggles of Mexico and Cuba are presented here as intellectually based, involving analysis and experience in decision-making processes. Efforts to obtain national sovereignty, holistically served as examples of integrity to the masses, reinforcing a revolutionary commitment through institutionalizing the 1917 Mexican and 1940 Cuban Constitutions. *New York Times* journalist Herbert L. Matthews (1975) views Castro as possessing a level of integrity special to Latin America and the Caribbean, establishing a new standard for excellence in principled leadership that "Anglo-Saxon historians" are unfamiliar with:

His [Castro] right to rule is his charismatic stature as a hero, and he can achieve that image as much by defying the laws of his country as by climbing a political ladder ... Anglo-Saxon historians are wasting their time when they judge Fidel Castro by their own standards of morality and virtue. (p. 48)

Cárdenas and Castro:

The Role of Agrarian and Labor Reform

The rigor of a historically intellectual approach to revolution stemmed from a dedication to serving the majority while pursuing a process of democratization through agrarian and labor reform (White, 2007, p. 61). An aspect of early environmental conservation, both revolutions were based on the need for land reform through the indigenous and peasant struggles for access to common lands for cultural survival. Both countries' revolutionary efforts combined their knowledge of history and the struggles the people endured as a result of the foreign economic and political dominance that created massive unemployment and conditions of near starvation. The lack of control of resources and limited access to farmland made agrarian and labor reform immediate issues. I argue that applying rigorous intellectualism to revolution, or intellectual justice, made for an equally

radical approach to governing that, for hundreds of years, had been at the service of powerful foreign interests.

Without agrarian reform and its impact on natural resource nationalization, the Cuban and Mexican revolutions would not have caused so much strain between the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean. As both revolutions seized properties from elites and their institutions, especially from the United States, this led to the failed invasions of both countries during the Mexico Revolution in 1914 and 1916 and after the Cuban Revolution in 1961 (Baklanoff, 1975, pp. 27-45). Thus, straining U.S.-Latin American relations on the grounds of private property versus indigenous concepts of collective ownership of land. As local elites engaged in capitalist accumulation while allowing the entrance of foreign capital, immense wealth was extracted, and poverty increased substantially.

Therefore, the rhetoric and discourse of both leaders reflect their ability to confront the major challenges of the times while simultaneously conveying a strong sense of conviction towards social justice. Christopher M. White (2007) describes the importance of the relationship between both leaders and the importance of agrarian reform:

The focus of agrarian reform in the Mexican and Cuban revolutions ... turned Mexico and Cuba into two of the most notable revolutionary regimes in Latin American history... the strong relationship between Castro and Cárdenas epitomized this Mexican-Cuban connection. (p. 61)

Agrarian reform was important because it re-established the ability of both the 1917 Mexican and 1940 Cuban constitutions to nationalize natural resources based on indigenous, African, and peasant approaches to land conservation. Through this, both revolutions used an intellectual approach that valued the written word in developing the masses into stewards of the land through revolutionary governments. Cárdenas and Castro carried out the demands of peasants who had taken part in revolution and championed agrarian and labor reform.

As such, rigorously crafted correspondence, speeches, and government policies testify to their intellectual development as charismatic revolutionary leaders (Schuler, 1999, p. 4). Added to their rigor and discipline, Cárdenas and Castro followed a long revolutionary charismatic tradition as outsiders. Cárdenas did not necessarily face the danger of assassination by an outside foreign government as Castro did, but by nationalizing petroleum he ushered in a concerted U.S. effort to challenge any attempt to establish economic independence after the 1938 Petroleum Nationalization (Waklid, 2011, p. 74). Cárdenas' experience was not lost on Castro, who based his political strategy on the groundbreaking approach of the Mexican Revolution (Keller, 2015, p. 3). As a veteran of the Mexican Revolution, Cárdenas learned from the precarious history he had lived. The Mexican and Cuban revolutions are replete with examples of the masses risking life and limb for the greater country. The mere audacity of mounting revolution in the first place openly espoused the convictions of following through with the nationalization of petroleum.

Mexican and Cuban Revolutionary Leadership History

The Mexican Revolution followed a longer course to social, political, and economic transformation as a result of its proximity to the United States and influence on the development of the country. It also lasted longer due to the social revolution that developed after 1913 that removed the old state with Díaz and assassination of Madero and brought out the forces of the lower classes. Moreover, the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) resulted in the United States seizing half of Mexico's territory, something so damaging it is a fresh memory even today. The country then became the historical bellwether for future U.S. expansionist efforts influencing the development of various foreign policy initiatives. All of this focused on imperial expansion that evolved into the multinational corporate control of natural resources for U.S. industrialization (Williams, 2009, p. 15). The longer revolutionary trajectory of the Mexican Revolution also served as the basis for Cárdenas' rise to power based on the continuous international efforts to control Mexico's development.

Charismatic revolutionary leadership is trivialized by the United States, a tactic often employed as a means to address serious issues: "the abuse of 'charisma,' which the U.S. media uses synonymously with physical attractiveness or even sexiness, so too 'socialist' has been employed indiscriminately to discredit any political leader or systems that oppose capitalist democracy" (Allahar, 2001, p. 19). The Haitian Revolution was feared and criminalized for the audacity of freeing slaves and territory as the second independent nation in the Western Hemisphere. The nationalization of petroleum by Cárdenas audaciously challenged the nascent U.S. Military Industrial Complex as Haiti had challenged the transnational colonial institution of slavery. Mexico exposed the illegality of multinational corporations as they grew to influence the rise of the Military Industrial Complex and U.S. hegemony in the post-war capitalist world-system that Cuba encountered at its greatest adversity in the 1960s (Castro, 2010, p. 168).

This gave rise to the development of "capitalist democracy" in spite of men who fought for national liberation in the Mexican and Cuban Revolutions. Revolutions were used for counterrevolutionary purposes, using the language of criminalization or anti-communism and intervention to destroy national sovereignty. The revolutions were used as examples of countries that would influence others to rebel, leading to the myth of a communist domino effect toppling stable countries. In actuality, this led to a reduced role for Europe and the United States, as revolutionary leadership mobilized the masses through social change and brought about the transformation of the developing world in the 20th century.

Cárdenas and Castro possessed unique qualities demonstrated through their revolutionary struggles and earned them the charismatic characteristics attractive to the masses they led. Anton Allahar (2001) provides a strong description of the type of leader that both men represent:

populist leaders are seen by their followers to have unique personal qualities and talents, and on that basis they are empowered to defend the

interests of the masses and of the nation. Among the special qualities they possess, Michael Conniff lists the following: ‘great intellect, empathy for the downtrodden, charity, clairvoyance, strength of character, moral rectitude, stamina and combativeness, the power to build, or saintliness.’ (p. 19)

In a preventive move and with foreknowledge of a coup d’état, Cárdenas removed the Maximato serving as one of two major charismatic moments ensuring his presidency; the second was the 1938 Petroleum Nationalization. Both moments proved that Cárdenas had returned to the agrarian and labor roots of the Mexican Revolution and challenged the power structure at work in Mexico (Córdova, 2006, p. 315). He used the Constitution of 1917 to set the terms for returning lands and resources to the Mexican people through his presidential six-year plan (White, 2007, p. 59). Charisma was used to re-instate the revolution and the promises made to the Mexican people that were ignored by the Maximato through the Calles-Morrow Agreement of 1928 that recognized the rights of petroleum companies over the Mexican Constitution. Initially, Cárdenas was an accidental leader chosen for his loyalty to Calles, but after becoming president demonstrated his commitment to the 1917 Constitution and the Mexican people. Castro, in a different set of circumstances, also rose from relative obscurity, similarly committed to the 1940 Cuban Constitution.

Castro, an outsider compared to Cárdenas, engaged in the radicalization of the Cuban Revolution with a meteoric rise to power. During the early part of the 20th century, Cuba underwent a major change after independence in 1898, resulting in colonial Cuba becoming a client state dependent on the United States. The Platt Amendment was forced upon the newly independent Cuba, undermining its sovereignty in the 1902 Cuban Constitution (Gargarella, 2013, p. 125). Cuba thus endured a controlled form of “self-government” in the service of U.S. expansion after the defeat of the Spanish Empire (Castro & Ramonet, 2006, p. 66).

Nonetheless, Cuba’s revolutionary trajectory, similar to Mexico’s, completely altered the military and political structure of the country (Knight, 1990, p. 46). Revolution was the process of a historical elimination of the remnants of the colonial and neocolonial legacies the old militaries represented, in keeping with Immanuel Wallerstein and Charles Tilly’s view of revolution as an improvement. Alan Knight (1990), in *The Mexican Revolution* (Vol. 2), describes the impact on Latin America regarding the “dissolution” of military and political institutions serving as a historical process of elimination:

The process of military and political dissolution cannot be easily mapped. Historians of the Revolution want to trace its advance with an eye on the major cities...This took form, not of a tide sweeping across the country, but rather of an insidiously rising water level, which first inundated the rural areas, for some time lapped around the islands of Huertismo, and finally swamped these to cover the face of the earth like Noah’s flood. (p. 46)

Knight describes the historical swelling that followed other revolutions in history, and much like Mexico, Cuba's revolutions in 1933 and 1958, eliminated the old military and political structures inherited from Britain, France, Spain, and the United States.

In the case of Mexico, after independence from French intervention and the death of President Benito Juárez in 1872, the Mexican army supported dictatorship by maintaining a caudillo type of rule under Porfirio Díaz from 1876 to 1911. In Cuba, a similar development occurred with the 1933 Revolution toppling the Machado dictatorship. The years 1910 and 1933 are important rebellions in Mexico and Cuba. Subsequent counterrevolutionary coups by Huerta (Mexico) in 1913 and Batista (Cuba) in 1952 were U.S.-supported dictatorships (Blasier, 1985, pp. 33-34). The result was a lesson not lost on Ernesto Che Guevara, who learned from experience that "we cannot guarantee the Revolution before cleansing the Armed Forces. It is necessary to remove everyone who might be a danger" (Blasier, 1985, p. 178). The rise of *campesino* armies in both countries ushered in charismatic revolutionary leadership, as the entrenched regimes were removed from power.

Importantly, initial revolutionary efforts in both countries became counterrevolutionary, as repression and a lack of leadership created a vacuum for later rebellions. The Porfiriato/Huerta and Machado/Batistiano regimes resorted to barbaric means of control at any cost through assassination and torture. Mexico then Cuba subsequently fell into chaos with the 1911 collapse of the Porfiriato, the 1913 Huerta Coup, and the 1928 Maximato, resulting in instability and the rise of charismatic leaders (Zapata, Villa, and Cárdenas). In Cuba, the neocolonial instability established by the Platt Amendment (1901-1933) lent support to the Machado Dictatorship (1925-1933) that was toppled by the Fulgencio Batista led 1933 revolution that left Cuba with a legacy of limited sovereignty and control over its resources and labor until 1959.

Confronting a lack of legitimacy in Mexico, Cárdenas overcame the Maximato (Plutarco Elias Calles Rule) while Castro overcame the Batistiano (Batista Dictatorship) both leaders reestablished the trajectory of both the Mexican and Cuban Revolutions. Castro provided the characteristics needed for a true revolutionary stating, "revolutionary valor is needed, revolutionary morale is needed, revolutionary dignity is needed. To tell the people the truth, one must be revolutionary" (Castro, 2010, p. 157).

The Appeal of Cárdenas and Castro: Anti-Imperialism in the Age of U.S. Hegemony

According to the U.S. government and the multinational corporations (MNC), Cárdenas and Castro were extremists based on their rejection of U.S. hegemony and thus vilified as communist and criminal (Brands, 2012, pp. 40-41). The 1938 Petroleum Nationalization in Mexico began a coordinated MNC/U.S. government effort, described by President Eisenhower in 1961 as the Military Industrial Complex, to undermine the sovereignty of developing countries and stem the tide

of communism with the ultimate goal of promoting U.S. interests (Blasier, 1985, p. 7). Henceforth, as a result of the strong nationalist current in the Americas, divisive identity politics were developed as a method to undermine critiques of capitalist democracy. Separating people based on ethnicity and class was thought to divide movements toward national sovereignty. Such tactics resulted from the rise of the anti-communist Cold War period specifically the 1950 U.S. Objectives and Programs for National Security (NSC-68) document establishing the Soviet Union and other revolutionary movements as a political rather than a military danger leading to a broad range of threats, “all them ... understood in terms of their proclivity for anarchy and disorder” (Campbell, 1998, p. 31). Allahar (2001) illustrates the divisive nature of identity politics and their impact on antisystemic national liberation movements:

Movements based on racial, ethnic, sexual, and religious identities are at best reformist, in that they do not embody a critique of capitalism and liberal democracy; hence, they are not really perceived as problematic by so-called guardians of the public order. Consequently, such movements are not singled out by authorities for elimination. Class-based movements like socialism, however, are serious matters and the authorities are relentless in their efforts to discredit and destroy them. (p. 20)

The history of U.S. interventions created mistrust in Mexico and Cuba and challenged the struggles for national liberation witnessed by the protests and mobilizations in support of nationalization in both countries. Both revolutions utilized natural resources to engage in economic development through conservation, ending exploitation. Exploitation here meant that elites in both countries supported by foreign investment stymied economic and political development creating the conditions for revolution. This was a reversal of the years of dictatorship both in Mexico and Cuba that suffered long periods and opened them to exploitation, placing great importance on agrarian and labor reform. As social reform confronted the exploitation of labor and natural resources through revolution, large masses of people who had previously not taken part in the political process were mobilized to defend their newly gained liberty.

Contrary to the “world responsibilities” of the United States in its efforts to mask hegemony, Castro provided some insight regarding “the duty of the people ... to be realistic, have no illusions and prepare to confront with strong resolve the policies announced by imperialism” (Castro, 2010, p. 192). Identity politics, as a tactic, have been used by the Military Industrial Complex established by NSC-68 implemented against threats, “world communism, the economic disintegration of Europe, Red China, North Vietnam, Cuba, Nicaragua, Libya, ‘terrorists,’ drug smugglers, and assorted ‘Third World’ dictators,” as a means to smash social movements perceived as a threat to the capitalist world-system (Campbell, 1998, p. 31). As such, the two men studied here, based their success on revolutionary action, providing dangerous examples that openly challenged the effectiveness of partisan

identity politics. Castro (2010) described the growing transnational solidarity among revolutionary countries:

The message from people to people, from revolutionaries to revolutionaries, the countries they have tried to divide criminally and who today are more united than ever before in the defense of their independence, their sovereignty, and sacred rights. (pp. 160-161)

Revolutionary Charismatic Leadership in Times of Crisis

The ideology of self-sacrifice lends itself to the development of charisma in leaders. Allahar (2001) incorporates Max Weber's differentiation of pure and modern charisma with the pure form being, "charisma [that] can only be awakened and tested; it cannot be learned or taught" (pp. 6-7). It takes events such as revolutions to "awaken" leadership that is "tested" by time and events. Charisma is "particularly disdainful of economic pursuits or economic gain and prefers instead to be supported by voluntary gifts and communal largesse: charisma quite deliberately shuns the possession of money and pecuniary income" (Allahar, 2001, p. 6-7). In the history of both revolutions, experience taught Cárdenas and Castro the importance of charismatic revolutionary leadership through their ability to survive by engaging and implementing what previous generations had instilled as a sense of duty to country described by José Martí:

A true man does not see the path where advantages lie, but rather where duty lies, and this is the only practical man, whose dream of today will be the law of tomorrow ... the future lies on the side of duty. (Chomsky, 2004, p. 306)

Material gain is counterproductive to the development of charisma, in many instances young idealistic students have been the backbone of revolutionary movements, as in the case of Castro, who became a militant while a student. The experience of Cárdenas and Castro enduring hardship as revolutionaries without any guarantee of success conditioned their role as future leaders through humility and discipline. Education was foremost in creating a generation of revolutionaries striving for social justice in both countries. Their aim was an attempt to develop honest, forthright, and intense adherents unbowed by power or wealth (Castro, 2010, p. 192).

Both Cárdenas and Castro had what some would call a meteoric rise to revolutionary leadership being that in most cases leaders of their countries were middle-aged men of a certain social class. Can their charismatic approach be understood as a new direction with revolutions being led by people from a diverse array of backgrounds? Allahar (2001) weighs in, describing how "Since it is extraordinary, charismatic authority is sharply opposed to rational and particularly bureaucratic, authority ... charismatic authority is irrational in the sense of being foreign to all rules" (p. 13). Therefore, Cárdenas from a working-class background enters the Mexican Revolution at age 15 to become president of Mexico by age 39.

By comparison Castro, the son of a landowner, seizes power in Cuba at 32. Both the Cuban and Mexican revolutions provide examples of leaders from a variety of class backgrounds. The unpredictable nature of revolution supports the notion that charisma is “being foreign to all rules,” but it certainly requires a charismatic revolutionary leader with the prescience to understand their place in history.

As such, the revolutionary conditions in Mexico and Cuba lent themselves to the development of charismatic revolutionary leadership. Due to the circumstances and conditions of each country being geographically close to and influenced by the United States, and thoroughly owned by U.S. elites and their corporations prior to revolution, revolution radicalized the population’s consciousness of the role of imperialism developing a mixed class and ethnic revolutionary corps. Charisma requires governments that support the masses to create the conditions where leadership can rise with a “magico-religious ambience,” meaning special gifts that connect them to the people and vice versa. Places such as Cuba and Mexico have a spiritual charisma “where scientific and rational world views have not yet taken deep root” (Allahar, 2001, pp. 16-17).

Part of the radical nature of Cárdenas and Castro’s rise to power, is due to the chaos created by the end of colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when the United States rose as a hegemon, thus pushing conditions towards revolution (Fulbright, 1966, p. 72). Allahar (2001) writes,

A mix of rebelliousness born of slavery and colonialism, on the one hand, and of hope born of emancipation, on the other. The hope concerned the possibility of creating a more just and equal society, wherein the former downtrodden and dehumanized could come into their own as free men and women in charge of their own destinies. Thus, the stage was set for the appearance of charismatic-populist leaders. (p. 18)

Cárdenas and Castro represent a charismatic revolutionary trajectory exemplified by their dedication to providing the promises made by their revolutions in the way of agrarian and labor reform. Theirs became a process of elimination; their rise to power evolved as a result of a loss of legitimacy/authority by the neo-patrimonial dictatorships of Díaz, Calles, Machado, and Batista to the short-lived American and French Revolutions that historically did not live up to their own standards of equality (Williams, 2006, p. 43).

Twentieth century national liberation struggles sought to rectify a lack of integrity on the part of the Western “democratic tradition.” According to Wallerstein and Theda Skocpol, the struggle for national liberation is foreign to core countries of the capitalist world-system as the developing world produced leaders of different experiences and connections to the masses. Leaders did not come from a specific class and their success is based on their ability to provide real solutions to significant problems plaguing developing countries. Social revolution, as described by Skocpol, occurred in countries with the flexibility to solve the problems of underdevelopment and poverty. Countries dedicated to social change understood the need to engage in extended struggles to implement lasting social

transformation. For that reason, developed or core countries are not revolutionary because they are governed by elites who continue the neocolonial dominance of developing countries and do not allow for social revolution at home or abroad.

Thus, the importance of this article in addressing the similarities and differences of charismatic revolutionary leadership is the legacy of mobilization and the revolutionary trajectory of Cárdenas and Castro. The combined legacies of both men overlap and include Cárdenas' influence on the revolutionary and national liberation struggles developed in the 1950s and 1960s. The victory of Castro and the Cuban Revolution reinforced the impact of the Mexican Revolution in a time of major strife during the 1960s. Both the Cuban and Mexican experiences created a backlash from Europe, Japan, and the United States as they controlled the petroleum market. Surviving the 1980s and 1990s, the legacy of overlapping influence of Castro through 21st-century natural resource sovereignty carried on the trajectory of revolutionary national liberation. There is a legacy that began with Louverture in Haiti and matured in the tumultuous 20th century as charismatic revolutionary leadership transferred into the modern world. To conclude, as recent as 2003, Castro (2003) reminds us of the great influence of Cárdenas' leadership and role in the Cuban Revolution:

General Lázaro Cárdenas, a true moral beacon for his people, took an interest in our case (26th of July Movement), and that helped to shorten our prison time and limited the worst consequences of the incident...Nevertheless, the unexpected meeting with that leader marked the beginning of a friendship that lasted until the end of his life. As the years passed, he went on to occupy positions of great responsibility in his country. If it were not for him, there might not have been any reason for telling this story today. (p. 5)²

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² Building on Weber, sociologist Nelson Valdés situates charisma as being granted by the communities where a charismatic leader originates, challenging individualistic theories that see charisma as inherently specific to the person.

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