

Openness processes and new subjectivities: Analysis of the Cuban case

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Abstract

Motivation: Previous studies of the external restrictions on Cuba have not linked it with political subjectivity. Its consideration allows us to make visible discourses and collective imaginations that help us understand the political and economic dynamics of this Caribbean country.

Purpose: The article aims to identify the measures, financial flows, and subjectivities that should be projected in the future both to make this external restriction more flexible and long-term economic growth sustainable.

Methods and approach: To this end, it examines, from both a qualitative and quantitative approach, the interaction among the external constraint, openness processes, and subjectivities in the case of Cuba.

Findings: Historically, Cuba has aimed to mitigate the external constraint that has hampered its economic growth through balances of power and strategic alliances compatible with and reinforced by political subjectivity. However, when these alliances have been broken or have been insufficient to compensate for the scarcity of foreign exchange, opening processes that require new subjectivities have had to be adopted.

Policy implications: The tension between established and emergent subjectivities will define the limits that any opening process in Cuba will face in the future.

KEYWORDS

economic growth, external constraint, foreign policy, political subjectivity, regulatory framework

1 | INTRODUCTION

Donald Trump's election as US president appeared to put an abrupt end to the new path initiated by the Cuban government in the previous decade in the form of the reforms approved in the 6th Congress of the Cuban Communist Party, the thaw agreed with the Obama administration, and the election of the first Cuban president

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TABLE 1 Estimation of the BPCG model for the Cuban case

Paper	Estimation method	Period	Explanatory Variables ^a	π^b
Mendoza & Robert (2000)	OLS 3 stages	1973–1999	X, EF, TOT	1,75
Cribeiro & Triana (2005)	OLS, Cointegration Johansen, Engle and Granger, ECM	1960–2004	X, TOT, D89	1,87
Alonso & Sánchez-Egózcue (2005)	Cointegration Johansen	1960–2000	X, TOT	2,44
Vidal Alejandro & Fundora Fernández (2008)	Cointegration Johansen	1950–2005	XGS, EF, TOT	2,08
Fugarolas Álvarez-Ude et al. (2009)	Cointegration Johansen, VAR, ECM	1960–2004	XGS, TOT	1,77
Palacios Cívico (2019)	Cointegration, ECM	1975–2013	XGS, FDI, EF, REM, TOT	2,02

^aX: exports of goods; XGS: exports of goods and services; EF: external funding; TOT: terms of trade; FDI: foreign direct investment; REM: remittances; D89: dummy of structural change; OLS: ordinary least squares; ECM: error-correction mechanism; VAR: vector autoregression.

^bIncome elasticity of imports.

Source: Author's own elaboration

born after the Revolution. It remains to be seen if, following the election of President Biden, Trump's mandate will simply be a temporary diversion or whether it will force the Cuban government to readjust the compass and once again change direction.

With the aim of understanding and identifying the factors that can drive and limit the openness process in Cuba, this study places the external restriction of the Cuban economy—understood as the limit to economic growth derived from the structural scarcity of foreign exchange—and its interaction with the construction of political subjectivities at the heart of the issue. By making this interaction visible, this article seeks a better understanding of the factors that determine and limit each of these dynamics.

While social and political subjectivity can be viewed through a multidimensional lens, this analysis focuses only on the factors that directly affect the regulatory mechanisms of the model and the different sources of foreign exchange. Similarly, the study is not aimed at assessing or comparing different subjectivities but instead focuses on making them visible through recognizing their interaction and influence on the rest of the analysed variables.

Previous literature on the external restrictions in Cuba (see Table 1) has not linked it to political subjectivity. However, the concept of political subjectivity allows discourses and collective imaginations to be made visible that help us understand the political and economic dynamics of this Caribbean country. Although there are some limitations to the formation of new subjectivities in Cuba regarding, for example, freedom of expression and the creation of new organizations or political parties, this does not prevent the emergence of subjectivities that interact and dialogue with the previously established ones.

To achieve the objectives stated above, the article is structured as follows: Section 2 describes the concept of political subjectivity and reviews the literature that has contributed to its theoretical development. In Section 3, the historical relationship between external restrictions, political subjectivity, and openness dynamics in Cuba are analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Section 4 concludes.

2 | POLITICAL SUBJECTIVITY AS A NEW ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK TO UNDERSTAND REFORM PROCESSES

The theorization of the subject as a free reasoning and acting agent has featured in philosophical thought since Descartes' "cogito, ergo sum." In the 1960s, the notion of subject and subjectivity gained prominence in the field

of the social sciences, thanks to the contributions of authors such as Michel Foucault, Alain Touraine, and Clifford Geertz (Solomon, 2005).

While there is no single agreed definition, some conceptualizations help us understand how subjects and subjectivities can be shaped and how their political agency can be exerted. One of the most influential contributions to the topic was made by Foucault, who explained political subjectivity as a double process of self-making and being made by power relations. According to Foucault, a first source of influence is *discipline*, understood as a mechanism of individualization of power that enables the control of individuals by ensuring its distribution based on a set of rules that allow some individuals to evaluate the behaviour, aptitudes, or performance of others (Foucault, 1991a, 1999). Foucault (1991b) described new forms of influence through the concept of *governmentality*, understood as a set of rationalities (following the definition of Pyykkönen, 2015, p. 9, as “specific forms of reasoning, which defines the telos of action and the adequate means to achieve it”) and technologies (understood, following Miller & Rose, 2008, p. 16, as “assemblages of persons, techniques, institutions, instruments for the conducting of conduct”) that can guide behaviour in the direction desired by the authorities.¹ These rationalities and technologies “mutually reinforce each other to produce individuals who, through their reflexivity and self-government, contribute to the maintenance of social order and reduce the state’s need to resort to disciplinary or coercive power” (Palmer & Winiger, 2019, p. 4).² Despite the described mechanisms of influence, Foucault also deemed that “power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are ‘free’” (Foucault, 2001, p. 342), thereby recognizing that subjects are free and capable of different forms of action.

In a more recent work, Torres Carrillo (2009) defines *subjectivity* as the mechanism by which individuals can prefigure new realities, create meanings, and transform the social order, by constituting them as subjects. Similarly, in the field of interaction, a process of subjectivation takes place, triggering a tension between *individual* and *social subjectivity*, described by González Rey (2008) as the historical integration of meanings from different social spaces such as family, school, work, and community that interact and condition each other. In González Rey’s opinion, it must be understood how social and individual subjectivity continuously interweave with each other in countless tensions and spaces, including speeches, representations, codes, norms, and morality, which are instituted in a social space and define the subjective burden of these spaces.

According to Duque Monsalve et al. (2016), the concept of *political subjectivity* involves the recognition of everyday experiences that generate alternative political views, producing breakdowns, resistance, and dissidence from creative actions that deny the thoughtless repetition of hegemonic and homogenizing life forms, breaking with the idea of determinism, linearity, and universal laws. In doing so, individuals or groups gain recognition and a voice that make them recognizable and able to address (and be addressed by) authorities.³ Other works, including Braidotti (2002) and Piedrahita (2013), go further in considering “desire” and “affection,” together with their organization, channelling, and transformation, as key supports of political subjectivity, thus reminding us that our acceptance of or resistance to cultural norms cannot be explained simply by acts of will.

In the same vein, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and Biesta (2011) describe the formation of *political subjectivity* through the following perceptions (Martinsson & Reimers, 2020):

- a. **Things are not as they should be:** thereby recognizing the existence of conflicts and disagreements, which lead to new social aspirations and goals.

¹Authorities should be understood as going beyond the state to include all the authoritative discourses and institutions that create the necessary expert knowledge through which people are assessed and assess themselves. In doing so, Foucault went beyond Althusser (1971) in considering that all knowledge—not just science—is ideological and productive of subjects (Blackman et al. 2008)

²More recently, Chatterjee (2004) has reintroduced the concept of *governmentality* to distinguish between *civil society* and *political society* and to reconsider the political agency of marginal peoples—defined as *political society*—when dealing with government agencies in charge of security and welfare policies.

³While some authors recognize the differentiated nature of political subjectivity, Díaz Gómez and González Rey (2012) consider that it is inseparable from social subjectivity due to its being continually affected by subjective meanings from other non-political social spaces.

- b. **The social situation must not remain as it is:** the current situation is not permanent; it is contingent and can be changed.
- c. **We can act to change the present for the better:** individuals and collectives become subjects and are able to prefigure new and wished-for realities and to act to achieve them.

While part of the literature associates political subjectivity with emancipatory practices and meanings, other works, such as Torres Carrillo (2009), recognize that the subjective can be aligned with either the *established* or *dominant subjectivity*, which legitimizes and maintains the hegemonic power, or with the *emergent subjectivity*, as resistance action expressed in the creation of other social relations, thus generating a fundamental tension between the two.⁴ A similar conclusion is drawn by Mahmood in her study of the lives of pious Muslim women of Salafi orientations in Cairo. In her work, the post-structuralist and post-colonial anthropologist questions are seen as predominant Western conceptual frameworks which identify secularism as modernity and religion (and Islam) as threats to Western progress, conceptualizing female agency simply “in terms of subversion or re-signification of social norms, to locate agency within those operations that resist the dominating and subjectivating modes of power” (Mahmood, 2005, p. 14).

Throughout the process of subjectivation, part of the literature deems certain “events” as *agency factors* of political subjectivity, if they are accompanied by a narrative capable of strengthening the political capacity of the subject and altering their daily life and their relationship with reality (Alvarado et al., 2010). A similar role can be played by the *charisma* of authorities, in the sense that some of the governed can submit to being ruled just by their beliefs in the extraordinary qualities of the charismatic authority, be they real, alleged, or presumed. Therefore, “the legitimacy of charismatic rule rests upon the belief in magical powers, revelations and hero worship” (Weber, 1946, p. 296).

The literature also identifies five ways of active expression of political subjectivity (Ruíz Silva & Prada Londoño, 2012):

- a. **Identity:** thanks to which we can mark the boundaries between *us* and *them*, between *the same* and *the different*, or between *inside* and *outside*. Far from presenting itself as something natural, static, or monolithic, it must be conceived as a battlefield which depends on the knot of intersubjective relationships that occur throughout history, thereby allowing us to think of ourselves as a collective project.
- b. **Narrative:** construction of individual and collective stories about our own life that allows us to understand ourselves, build, and become historical subjects. When narrating, we combine events, temporarily dispersed, that enable us to define a way of being and evaluate our existence in a retrospective and projective way. However, this does not make us owners of meaning, since when we narrate we incorporate other narratives and interpretations that preceded us. The narrative also serves as a tool of power when trying to universalize stories.
- c. **Memory:** memory is selective and imaginative. According to Ricoeur (2003), it allows us to configure our own identity through the narrative function and represent an intersubjective sphere. Our memories are also woven by others, where affective and factual elements of the individual or collective combine to form ethical judgments.
- d. **Positioning:** connects forms of identification, narration, and memory to define a position before the world. It is therefore recognized as an act of self-affirmation with a strong political and relational component.
- e. **Projection:** assumes history as a space of possibilities. Projection allows us to define horizons of shared expectations and dreams. By projecting, subjectivity acquires a sense of future to build, emancipated from the past. In Ricoeur’s words, projection implies a commitment to others, who receive the promise and await its fulfilment (Itatí Rodríguez, 2012).

⁴Martínez and Cubides (2012) highlight the difficulties faced by the emergent subjectivity in its operating in a framework that has been configured by the dominant subjectivity.

The question of subject and its homogeneity has also been widely discussed by Marxist economists. Orthodox Marxists, like Rosa Luxemburg, advocated that capitalism leads to proletarianization, such that any fragmentation of subject positions should be explained as a contingent reality. Conversely, some revisionist Marxists, like Eduard Bernstein, argued that political subjects and identities do not necessarily have to be explained by strict class boundaries, thereby acknowledging that workers are not just proletarians but also citizens, consumers, and participants in a plurality of positions that can be contradictory and mutually neutralizing. The question of unity was also addressed by Sorel (1903), who linked it to the capacity of some groups to impose their position. A key contribution of Sorel's thought was to consider that identities of social agents are indeterminate and depend on the confrontation with opposing forces. As a result, Sorel described "war" as a necessary condition for the construction of the proletariat's identity, such that any co-operation with the bourgeoisie would contribute to the weakening of the working class (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).

Once the hope of a revolutionary recovery of the working class was abandoned, some of Sorel's followers found in nationalism a substitute myth for fighting bourgeois decadence. This transition in the unifying element—from social class to nation—was highlighted in Verdery (1993). In this work, the author points out the similarities between socialist rule and nationalism, insofar as the two share a fundamental essentialism that allows for the representation of society as a whole.

Although there is no specific literature that has analysed the economic dimensions of political subjectivity either theoretically or empirically, an understanding of this must take previous theoretical developments as references. An analysis of this kind should also consider some theoretical traditions (Marxist, Weberian, or institutionalist) that link the economic sphere with institutions, norms, and values that define, in each moment and place, the social sphere of production.

In the case of Marxist thought, the concept of *superstructure*, defined as the set of elements of social life, religion, morals, laws, political institutions, ideology, traditions, and so on, depends on the economic conditions of each society and explains the behaviour of individuals in such a way that private property, for instance, would not only be protected by the laws in force in a capitalist social formation but also by the value judgment that would cause any expropriation in the rest of individuals (Marx, 1859/2003). From a similar approach, Althusser attempted "to explain how the conditions for the reproduction of production happen within institutions which ensure not only the reproduction of skills but also of the submission to a ruling order" (Butler, 1997, p. 118).

The connection between cultural values and the economic realm is also evident in some of Max Weber's works, such as *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (1905/2001) and *The social psychology of world religions* (1921/1946), in which the German sociologist stresses the relevance of religion, and the associated ethic, to economic issues, in linking the emergence of modern capitalism with the Protestant work ethic and distinguishing between the sacred values desired by each religion and their effect on the workaday world and economic life.

A third theoretical tradition that aimed to connect the cultural and economic spheres is Institutionalism. Despite not constituting a homogeneous school of thought, institutionalist authors share a historical and cultural approach to economic phenomena by conceiving the economy in continuous interaction with a broader sociocultural and political system.⁵ According to Gruchy (1972), institutional thinking can be divided into three large groups: the first generation of institutionalists (Thorstein Veblen, John Commons, and Wesley Mitchell), which covers the end of the 19th century to World War II, the neo-institutionalists, which covers between 1945 and 1980, and the new institutional economy, the origin of which dates from the end of the 1970s. Within the latter, North defined *institutions* as the formal and informal rules of the game that govern society and explain economic growth in the long term.⁶ Similarly, Stanley and Sokoloff (2005) argue that economic growth involves institutional

⁵Accordingly, a country's economic system is seen as a unique historical and cultural product in permanent evolution, although it may have many elements in common with other economic systems (Dugger, 1990).

⁶"We cannot see, feel or even measure institutions. They are constructions in the human mind, that constitute the underlying determinant of the economic performance" (North, 2001).

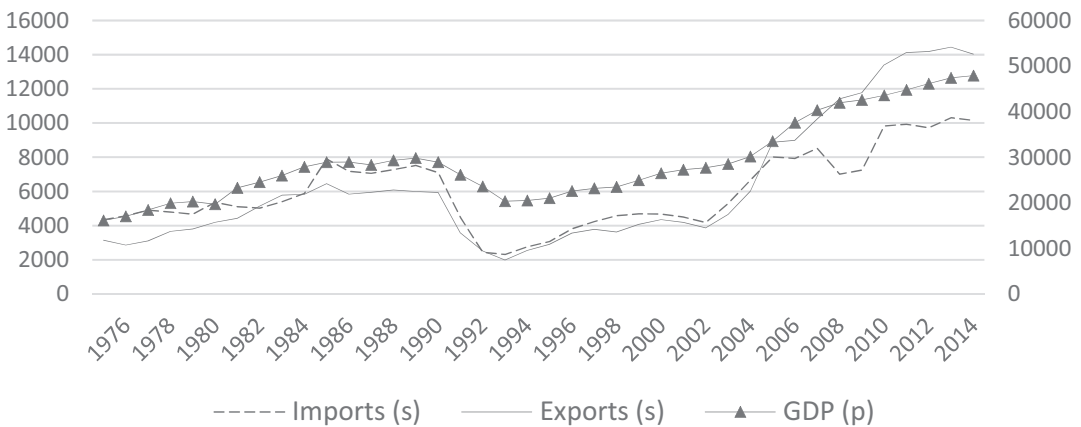


FIGURE 1 GDP, exports and imports of goods and services of Cuba between 1975 and 2014 (millions of pesos at constant 1997 prices). Source: Prepared by the author based on data provided by the National Economic Research Institute (INIE) for the period 1975–2003 and data from ONEI (2004, 2009) for the period 2004–2014.

change and must be analysed considering the local conditions of each country, thus questioning the existence of universal institutions to promote development.

The role of superstructure or institutions in the economic sphere should be analysed from a dynamic and bilateral perspective, based on an understanding of how consensuses, norms, and values determine the material conditions of each historical period while, at the same time, taking into consideration the capacity of the latter to generate new consensuses, norms, and values.⁷ In such a dynamic analytical framework, the concept of political subjectivity gains relevance because of its capacity to capture the process of social and institutional changes.

3 | EXTERNAL CONSTRAINT, POLITICAL SUBJECTIVITIES, AND OPENNESS PROCESSES IN CUBA: A HIDDEN RELATIONSHIP

3.1 | The external restriction of the Cuban economy

Throughout its recent history, Cuba's economy has been shown to be highly vulnerable to changes in its environment. While periods of greater economic growth have been linked to contexts that have favoured the expansion of exports, economic crises and slowdowns have coincided with serious foreign exchange restrictions. On the other hand, the hypothesis of external restriction seems plausible in the case of small, open, low-income economies like Cuba's, with hardly any foreign exchange reserves and with expensive and limited access to international financing, because of the 1986 economic embargo and default. While it is true that correlation does not always imply causation, analysis of the series shown in Figure 1 indicates that Cuba's gross domestic product (GDP) is highly sensitive to changes in external sector conditions, suggesting that, in this case, there is a cause-and-effect relationship.⁸

⁷Some authors, such as Chang (2010), have vindicated the endogenous nature of institutions, arguing that, according to the empirical evidence, they should be understood as one of the main consequences of the development process rather than one of its main causes.

⁸The Pearson correlation coefficient, which measures the linear relationship between two variables, shows in the Cuban case a strong correlation between GDP and trade flows (0.85 for imports and 0.96 for exports).

Cuba's recent history depicts an economy whose long-term growth seems to be limited by a shortage of foreign exchange and structural deficits in the current account. The empirical analyses of the external restrictions have traditionally been based on the estimation of balance-of-payments-constrained growth (BPCG) models. Studies that have applied this methodology to the Cuban case have concluded that its economic growth is restricted in the long term by the availability of foreign exchange because it would be unable to finance an endlessly expanding deficit. Table 1 presents the main results of these studies.

The significance of the income elasticity of imports confirms the existence of the external restrictions. In turn, the estimated values allow us to infer that a GDP growth rate of 1% needs Cuban exports to grow at a rate of 2%.

3.2 | The formation of political subjectivities in Cuba

This section analyses how the process of subjectivation has evolved in Cuba since the Revolution. The analysis is divided into six historical periods with the aim of understanding how some external factors and government narratives and decisions have contributed to the formation of *revolutionary* and *emergent subjectivities* in each period.

- **Period 1959–1989:** After the triumph of the Revolution on January 1, 1959, the new Cuban government implemented a programme hallmarked by its sovereign and social aspirations. However, the suspicion with which the US administration viewed the newly constituted Cuban government quickly led to a break in relations between the two countries and the 1960 US administration's approval of an economic embargo which, in the context of the Cold War, explains to some extent why Cuba embraced the socialist model and redirected its economic relations towards the socialist bloc. From then onwards, a progressive concentration of economic relations in favour of this bloc was initiated, with stable and preferential commercial and financial conditions.⁹ The transformation of the political and economic structures led to the establishment of a single-party system and the social ownership of the means of production (represented through the state and central planning) became the main mechanism for allocating resources. From the very beginning, the model promoted the development of a new social conscience in which moral stimuli were prioritized to the detriment of material ones, thereby promoting, for most of the period in question, a political subjectivity that identified private property, free markets, the US, and imperialism as the main enemies of Cuban socialism. During this first stage, the Cuban government strived to build an identity that was closely linked to the definition of its own economic and political model and the defence of national sovereignty, which was consistently jeopardized by US imperialism and its multiple attempts to destabilize the Cuban project. The Cuban state played a fundamental role in the construction of this identity, with a narrative clearly aimed at universalizing a shared story that reinforced it and by which a *revolutionary memory* was consolidated with an important symbolic and emotional charge.
- **Period 1990–2002:** Upon the collapse of the Soviet Union (USSR), Cuba lost its principal trading partner. Consequently, Cuba's GDP plunged by 35% between 1990 and 1993, and the availability of foreign exchange reached historical lows (ONEI, 1997). With the aim of seeking to cause the overthrow of Castro's regime, the US administration tried to deepen the crisis by passing new laws (Torricelli and Helms–Burton) that made conditions for trading with and investing in Cuba more difficult. The severity of the crisis forced the Cuban government to urgently undertake a reform programme that liberalized and decentralized areas of the economy that had previously been centrally planned, with the twofold objective of increasing efficiency and reinserting the country into the international economy. Some measures distanced the government's policies from the dominant

⁹Mesa-Lago (1993) estimates that between 1960 and 1990 Cuba received credits from the socialist area accounting for USD 25,279 million and under favourable conditions.

discourse and gave way to new subjectivities. The arrival of tourists, for example, was an important source of foreign exchange but also the gateway to new values, consumption patterns, and realities, which had until then been marginal in the dominant revolutionary subjectivity. In turn, the dynamism of the tourism sector threw up business opportunities in the self-employed sector, mainly related to the leasing of rooms, food-related services, and transport. The expansion of self-employment started to change the perception of a large part of the Cuban population towards private initiatives, which began to be identified as a more profitable and attractive labour option than working for the state. During the 1990s, one of the most visible changes in Cuban social subjectivity was to do with the image of Cubans who had emigrated to the US. For a long time, the official discourse and part of the Cuban collective imagination referred to these emigrants as *gusanos* (worms), but the authorization of remittances contributed to improving the perception of Cuban emigrants, whom the government from then on referred to as *comunidad en el exterior* (the community living abroad). Although it played an important role, economic openness was not the only factor generating new subjectivities in the 1990s. By way of example, the serious material restrictions faced by the Cuban population after the disintegration of the USSR altered the social perception of both black-market transactions, which from then on came to be known as buying and selling *por la izquierda* ("to the left"), and of illegal ways of obtaining extra revenues (such as theft in state-owned companies), which from then on were considered a way to *resolver* (resolve). These new words and meanings helped to reconfigure the Cuban collective imagination and reduce the negative connotations of certain actions in a context of scarcity. Nevertheless, the new subjectivities were not unproblematic. A source of tension can be found in the government's discourse which, during this period, referred to the reforms as "necessary evils" that were contrary to socialist principles but imposed by reality. Thus, after seeing how reforms increased inequality between state and non-state workers and among those who received remittances from abroad and those who did not, the dialectic between *established* (revolutionary, hereafter) and *emergent* also appeared. Although the disintegration of the USSR was a serious blow to the Cuban socialist project and the socialist subjectivity that had accompanied it since 1959, the hardening of the embargo triggered a moral resistance that united the country around a revolutionary and anti-imperialist discourse.

- Period 2003–2007: The acceleration of export growth in 2004 can be explained by the trade agreements reached within the framework of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA). Under these agreements, Cuba began to export professional services, mainly to Venezuela, and to import Venezuelan oil under preferential conditions.¹⁰ In this way, the largest island of the Antilles obtained three million tons of oil per year, 80% at world market prices at 90 days and 20% based on the average annual price of oil, payable over five and 20 years (Mesa-Lago, 2015).¹¹ As a result, exports of professional services, and especially medical services, grew between 2003 and 2007 at a rate of 46.6%, representing 48% of total Cuban exports in 2007 (Quiñones Chang et al., 2009) and allowing, for the first time in its revolutionary history, current account surpluses for the years 2004, 2005, and 2007. Integration into ALBA also reinforced the socialist identity of the Cuban project by creating a framework of international co-operation inspired by socialist principles. Similarly, the greater financial margin allowed some of the decentralization measures implemented during the previous decade to be reversed. Some examples include the creation of a Foreign Exchange Allocation Commission, the recentralization of foreign trade, the contraction of foreign direct investment (FDI), the major restrictions imposed on self-employment, the approval of de-dollarization measures, the elimination of business funds, and the loss of financial autonomy derived from the new regulation of state companies (see Decree Law 281, Council of Ministers, 2007).
- Period 2008–2013: The global economic crisis in 2008 was a new setback for Cuba's foreign trade. Although the country's financial system was not exposed to the commercialization of toxic assets, the lack of international credit and the contraction of global GDP greatly affected Cuban exports and production. According to

¹⁰Between 2010 and 2015, 40% of Cuba's total commercial exchanges were with Venezuela (ONEI, 2016), which supplied more than half of Cuban fuel needs and imported most of its medical services (Quiñones Chang et al., 2009).

¹¹This way, Cuba received in oil the equivalent of a transfer of 2.6 billion dollars during the five years of the contract (Mesa-Lago, 2010).

ONEI (2015), the overall supply contraction in 2009 was 1.1%, although the estimated economic growth in the Economic Plan was 6% and 4% according to the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC, 2009). The combination of lower exports and external financing and higher imports and external debt commitments triggered a balance of payments crisis that ended up affecting the payment system and causing a considerable delay of bank transfers (Liquidity Certificates). Again, the financial difficulties were accompanied by an opening process that was intended to improve the overall efficiency of the economy and to make the external restriction more flexible. The ascent to power of Raúl Castro in 2008 marked the beginning of a new decentralization process that would culminate with the celebration of the VI Congress of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC). Some of the main measures approved during the Congress were the separation of state and business functions, greater autonomy for the non-state sector, the expansion of non-state activities, the redefinition of markets as useful mechanisms to allocate resources, and the promotion of FDI. The deepening of the opening process was accompanied, on this occasion, by a change in Raúl Castro's speech which now defended, among other aspects, the need to facilitate self-employment and break the stigmas that surrounded it (Castro Ruz, 2013) in a context where there had been important differences from previous processes. In the same way, the opening of the process to the population at large meant a substantial change in its conception, which allowed the greater involvement and co-responsibility of Cuban society. Therefore, on this occasion, the new subjectivities emerged not only from the nature of the reform process, but also from the government narrative.

- Period 2014–2017: On December 17, 2014, the presidents of Cuba and the US reached a historic agreement geared towards normalizing relations between the two countries. Political measures such as the reopening of embassies and the withdrawal of Cuba from the list of countries supposedly sponsoring terrorism were accompanied by economic measures such as new trade regulations, the easing of travel restrictions and sending of remittances to Cuba, and US airline and shipping companies' permission to travel to Cuba without specific authorization from the Office of Foreign Assets Control. One of the variables on which the new regulations had the most visible effects was remittances, which went from USD 1.45 billion in 2008 to USD 3.44 billion by 2016 (The Havana Consulting Group & Tech, 2017), representing the largest growth in the region during the period. It is worth noting that the historic approach to the US occurred in a context of new difficulties in the balance of payments (ONEI, several years) and significant potential risks linked to the change of government in Venezuela. Moreover, the interest awakened by the normalization process was attested to by the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement signed by Cuba and the European Union on December 12, 2016 and the repeal of the Common Position. In 2014, a major change in the telecommunications sector took place. Through ETECSA, the Cuban government began to enable public Wi-Fi zones in the country's main cities,¹² thereby improving access to information and communication abroad.¹³ Regarding the reform process, on April 16, 2016, the VII Congress of the PCC took place, with the triple mandate to analyse the evolution of the reforms implemented up to that time, to update their guidelines, and to lay the foundations for a National Economic and Social Development Plan up to 2030. Among the main conclusions of the new Congress were dissatisfaction with the result of the reforms and the confirmation of their piecemeal implementation, as recognized in the 6th Plenary Session of the PCC Central Committee by Marino Murillo, head of the Permanent Commission for the Implementation and Development of reforms (Puig Meneses & Martínez, 2018). Throughout this period, and despite the difficulties, the advances in the opening process have contributed to the creation of new emergent subjectivities, especially among the youngest Cubans, paring away at the monolithic subjectivity built after the Cuban Revolution. This is reflected in the results of a survey of 1,200 Cubans residing in Cuba conducted in 2015 by Bendixen & Amandi International, according to which 80% of Cubans (and 83% of Cubans under 50) had a positive or very positive opinion of President Obama, 70% would like to open their own business (76% of Cubans under 50), 96%

¹²On June 8, 2021, the number of public sites with Wi-Fi amounted to 11,095 according to the official Empresa de Telecomunicaciones de Cuba S. A. (ETECSA) website: http://www.etcসা.сu/internet_conectividad/areas_wifi/.

¹³Since December 6, 2018, residents in Cuba can also access the internet using mobile data.

considered that tourism had had a positive effect, 53% saw the US as a friend, and 96% considered that the normalization of relations with the US was good for Cuba.

- Period 2017–2021: Despite the growing interest in Cuba on the part of US businesses and the positive assessment of the US–Cuba thaw by a large part of the US electorate, Donald Trump decided to harden the US position towards Cuba. To this end, on June 16, 2017, a first package of measures was announced to reduce trade and tourist flows from the US. Later, in April 2019, the US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, and the National Security Advisor, John Bolton, announced a new package of measures aimed at placing Cuba's finances under further strain. Some of the most relevant measures announced were the end of Title III of the Helms–Burton Act—allowing owners of properties confiscated during the Revolution to claim them before US courts, the prohibition of visits to Cuba via cruises, the limitation of remittances to USD 1,000 per person per quarter, the restriction of travel for non-family reasons, and the prohibition of financial transactions with companies linked to the Cuban armed forces (Lima, 2019). Beyond their direct impact on two of the most important sources of foreign exchange for the Cuban economy—remittances and tourism—the new measures put a serious brake on FDI in Cuba due to the legal uncertainty generated by the potential claims before US courts. In 2020, the Cuban economy was hit, once again, by a new external shock: the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Alejandro Gil Fernández, Cuba's Minister of Economy and Planning, the Caribbean economy shrank 11% in 2020 (Marsh & Acosta, 2020), the highest fall since the disintegration of the USSR. The impact on the Cuban external sector is going to be particularly severe, with revenues from the tourism sector and remittances likely to fall by USD 1 billion and 2 billion, respectively. The election of President Biden could be a new opportunity for Cuba's interests. However, while he announced during the campaign his willingness to re-thaw relations with Cuba and relax US sanctions (Faiola & DeYoung, 2020), he has so far retained Trump's policies. In fact, the new inclusion of Cuba in the list of countries which do not co-operate fully with US anti-terrorism efforts or the recent statement of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken that Washington “will condemn the repression of human rights on the island” and will defend “the human rights of the Cuban people, including the right to freedom of speech and assembly” suggest that a policy shift on Cuba is not currently among President Biden's top priorities (Vicent, 2021). Last, on April 16–19, 2021, the VIII Congress of the PCC was held with the triple objective of evaluating the reform process,¹⁴ restating the gradualist implementation of the reform process, and confirming the leadership of the new Cuban president, Miguel Díaz-Canel.

The analysis of political subjectivities in Cuba appears to reproduce the dichotomy between *established* and *emergent subjectivities*. As pointed out above, the Cuban government has been very active in promoting of a *revolutionary subjectivity*, conceived to legitimize the Cuban political and economic model. This identity relied upon the two cornerstones described in the literature: the concepts of *nation* and *ideology*. Indeed, from the outset, the concept of nation has played a central role in the configuration of the *revolutionary subjectivity* in Cuba because the Cuban socialist model was not perceived as the imposition of a foreign power (as it was in Eastern European countries) but as the natural result of US hostility and interference.¹⁵ In line with Sorel's view, it can be argued that the *revolutionary subjectivity* has been promoted through the identification of common enemies (the US and the bourgeoisie) and their confrontation (*us* against *them*). Moreover, the US was not just a potential adversary but was (and remains) the root cause of the problem of the Cuban model: material scarcity (explained in the official narrative as a direct consequence of the US embargo).

During the period analysed, three further elements contributed to the consolidation of the hegemony of revolutionary subjectivity: the *Revolution*, as the agency factor underpinning the dominant narrative; the leaders'

¹⁴According to the Central Report of the VII Congress of the PCC, 30% of the 201 reforms passed in the VI Congress have been implemented and 40% are currently underway (Agencia EFE, 2021)

¹⁵The relevance of the national dimension in the construction of the revolutionary subjectivity can be appreciated in the constant references to the heroes of Cuban independence (such as José Martí, Antonio Maceo or Máximo Gómez) in the official discourse.

charisma, crucial for the legitimation of the new political and economic model; and the role played by the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR), which turned out to be an effective and decentralized mechanism of social control and discipline (as described by Foucault) by assuming the function of mobilizing the Cuban people in defence of the Revolution and inhibiting any attempt at destabilization and external interference.

Nevertheless, as we have also seen, some of the decisions adopted by the Cuban government after the collapse of the USSR have contributed to the formation of new subjectivities, which have been constructed outside the official narrative and have questioned its main elements. They are new identities that rest on new meanings, demand more autonomy, more spaces of freedom, and more openness (to market reforms but also to the world), and make the Cuban social space more heterogeneous. To this effect, it is worth noting that the source of such emerging subjectivities is not so much the new regulations as the daily experience derived from them, insofar as they allow the governed to come together and recognize shared interests.

3.3 | The role of the external constraint and political subjectivities in the openness processes in Cuba

The hypothesis presented in this study broadens the analytical framework that has traditionally been used to contrast the external constraint, linking it not only with the evolution of long-term GDP but also with the construction of certain political subjectivities. This link can be clearly seen in the effects of the external constraint on two crucial elements in Cuba: the country's geopolitical positioning and the regulation model of its economy, thereby determining the level of Cuba's external and internal openness.¹⁶ Having made these effects visible, it is easier to understand both the way in which the Cuban government has historically responded to the balance of payment crisis and the limits faced by any political or economic opening process in the Caribbean country.

Since the triumph of the Revolution, whenever geopolitical socialist alliances guaranteed sufficient foreign exchange (relaxation of the external constraint),¹⁷ the Cuban government opted for such alliances (less external openness) and the centralization of the economy (less internal openness), both reinforcing the *revolutionary subjectivity*. However, when these alliances were broken or insufficient (tightening of the external constraint), the Cuban government was forced to promote internal and/or external openness processes that weakened the political subjectivity and opened the door to new subjectivities. Within this analytical framework, both the reform process launched in the VI Congress of the PCC and the approach to the US should be understood as attempts to alleviate the external restriction at the expense of weakening the revolutionary subjectivity.

With the aim of empirically comparing these relationships, Figure 2 shows the evolution of a set of indicators that approximate both the openness processes and the external restriction of the Cuban economy.¹⁸ The external restriction is approximated by the series of imports of goods and services (ONEI, 2010; 2015; INIE, nd). Several variables have been used to approximate the socialist geopolitical positioning, depending on whether it has increased or decreased, the first using sugar subsidies from 1975 to 1990 (INIE, n.d.) and oil barrels imported from Venezuela between 2000 and 2014 (Mesa-Lago, 2015; PDVSA, 2009–2016), and the second using remittances from abroad (ONEI, 1997 and 2005 for the period 1994–2004; and Havana Consulting Group for the period 2005–2013) and number of US tourists (ONEI, several years). Based on the methodology followed in Doimeadiós and Vicente (2007) and Palacios Cívico (2013), a composite index of economic decentralization is constructed to approximate the internal openness. It synthesizes the evolution of private property, free markets, business autonomy, and FDI in Cuba, based on the methodology of Principal Components Analysis (see Appendix B). Both the

¹⁶External" being understood as a process of widening and diversifying Cuban foreign relations beyond the socialist and/or anti-imperialist bloc and "internal" as a process of economic decentralization.

¹⁷Such as the integration into the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) or into ALBA.

¹⁸Data availability determines the period of study.

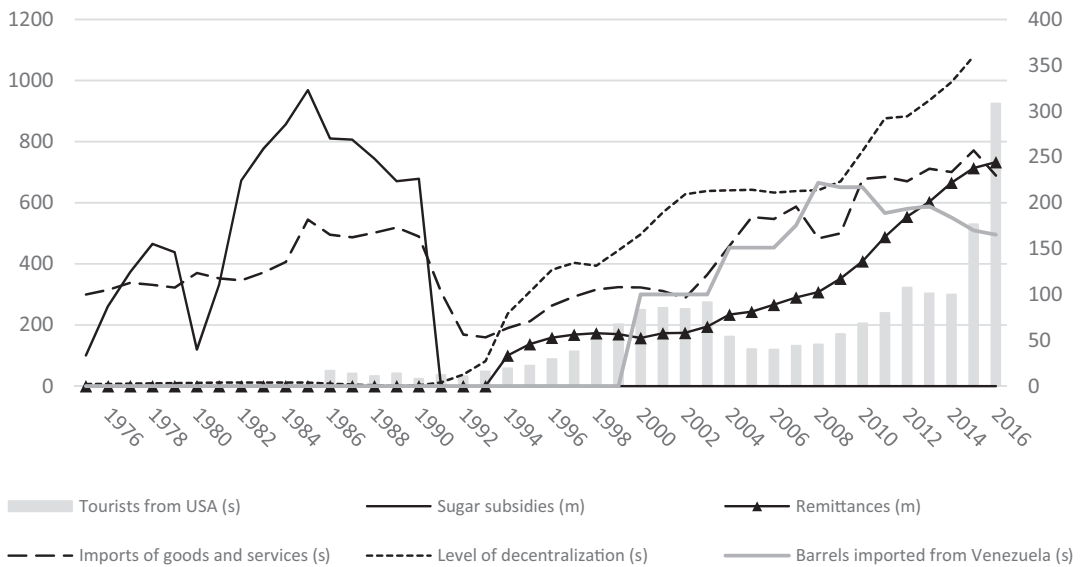


FIGURE 2 Imports, sugar subsidies, level of decentralization, oil imported from Venezuela, US tourists, and remittances (1975–2016). Source: Author' own elaboration. Note: the different scales of the variables are included in the main axis (m) or the secondary axis (s)

KMO and Barlett's value and the strong correlation between the selected variables (shown by the correlation matrix) indicate the suitability of applying factor analysis to our data. A second result that would validate the methodology is the high percentage (86%) of the variance of the original variables that can be explained with a single component. These variables have been approximated by the following indicators: number of self-employed workers (ONEI, 1997, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015), sales in free markets (ONEI, 1996, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015), number of companies included in the Business Improvement Programme (Caminos, 2011; Gómez Bugallo, 2017; Marquetti Nodarse, 2006), and the number of International Economic Associations (Pérez et al., 2016).¹⁹

The joint analysis of the considered variables allows for the identification of periods when the lack of foreign exchange has caused the stagnation or contraction of imports, as can be seen in Figure 1, and the specific response of the Cuban government to relax such restrictions. During the period 1975–1985, there was a sustained and vigorous import growth, mainly supported by increased sugar subsidies. Although the renegotiation of the advantageous trade conditions in 1986 began to diminish Cuba's import capacity, it was the disintegration of the USSR that saw Cuban imports plunge by more than 82% between 1990 and 1993. At first, the urgent need for foreign exchange was met by the implementation of a reform process that increased the decentralization of the Cuban economy, boosted the tourism sector, and authorized the receipt of remittances. With the turn of the century, the finances of Cuba improved substantially, mainly due to the agreements reached with Venezuela within the framework of ALBA. This agreement allowed the external restriction to be relaxed by increasing the supply of oil barrels at subsidized prices and reinforcing the *revolutionary subjectivity* in two ways. The first was the socialist nature of the regional co-operation framework and the second was the partial reversal of the process of economic opening initiated in the previous decade, as shown by the stagnation of the decentralization index between 2002 and 2008. The foreign exchange crisis suffered by the Cuban economy in 2008 and represented by the sharp fall in imports that year, was accompanied by new attempts to make the two restrictions more flexible. Internally, as explained previously, Raúl Castro began a process of decentralizing the economy, reflected in the evolution of the synthetic index as of 2009. Externally, relations with the US began to experience a first improvement with

¹⁹The official data on the flow of FDI are available in the Statistical Yearbooks of Cuba published by ONEI only for the period 1994–2001.

the election of Obama and the easing of regulations to travel and send remittances to Cuba, which explains the growth in the number of US tourists and the volume of remittances from that date. In recent years, Venezuela's complex political and economic situation and the subsequent contraction of the oil supply would justify, in part, the Cuban government's attempt to normalize relations with the US and boost US tourism, which tripled between 2014 and 2016. The arrival of Donald Trump to the White House and the restrictions approved by his administration caused a new hardening of the external restrictions which, if maintained by Joseph Biden's administration, will probably force President Díaz-Canel to reactivate and continue advancing in the process of liberalization and decentralization of the Cuban economy.

4 | CONCLUSIONS

The previous analysis allows us to identify tensions between still latent subjectivities in different areas of Cuban society, the government, academia, and the population, from which emerges an identity in continuous construction with heterogeneous factors. It is a new framework within which the Cuban government has sought to subsume the *emergent subjectivities* into established ones, enabling the adaptation of the system to a changing environment, while safeguarding its own identity compatible with revolutionary memory.

This analysis highlights the relationship between the external constraint, openness processes, and political subjectivities in the Cuban case. Only by making them visible can the way in which the Cuban government has historically responded to crises in the balance of payment and the limits faced by any political or economic opening process in this Caribbean country be understood. These limits are dynamic and are (and will be) defined by the effects of such processes (or their reversal) on political subjectivities. In turn, the understanding of this interaction should facilitate long-term equilibria by avoiding both the possibility of a blurring of the *revolutionary subjectivity* and attempts to ignore new subjectivities and identities.

In sum, future subjectivizing collective projects depend on their credibility and coherence, on their narratives, and on how they are consolidated in the collective memory. In this context of uncertainty and conflicting options, it is especially interesting to identify partial openings which, without exceeding or breaking with socialist subjectivity, allow for growth and the availability of foreign exchange. This could be the objective of measures such as the promotion of exports, the facilitation of Cuba's return to capital markets (such as the agreements reached with the Paris Club), the promotion of FDI and self-employment, or the regulatory changes that allowed the productive investment of remittances.

To this effect, the new subjectivities will continue to be present, conditioning the response to future recessions or recentralization processes, and contributing to the building of new positions and projections. Over the next few years, Cuba will continue to seek its own identity for self-recognition. With less symbolic capital than was accumulated by the leaders of the Revolution, the new Cuban president, Miguel Díaz-Canel, will have to tackle a new economic crisis in the coming months, keeping a close eye on how its social cost and the reforms adopted in the aftermath can contribute to the consolidation of new political subjectivities, especially those of the younger generations who do not identify themselves with the Revolution and are trying to shape their own destiny.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Some data that support the findings of this study (imports of goods and services; exports of goods and services; GDP between 1975 and 2013; sugar subsidies between 1975 and 1990) are available from Instituto Nacional de Investigación Económica, but restrictions apply to the availability of these data and they are not publicly available.

This data set is, however, available from the authors upon reasonable request and with permission from the Instituto Nacional de Investigación Económica. The other data sets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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