

*Mapping Cold War Cuba-Germanies Conceptual Frameworks through Castro Speech Data Base
(1975-1990)*

LLILAS Benson Digital Scholarship Fellowship Report

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Introduction

This research project aimed to examine the conceptual frameworks entwined among Cuba, the German Democratic Republic (GDR), and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) from 1975 to 1990. It built upon the New Cold War History studies, an approach that has promoted new interpretations after the collapse of the Soviet Union, replacing the Washington-Moscow opposition with a more inclusive and global perspective. From this point of view, this research relied on the idea that Cold War History should decentralize its traditional Eurocentrism, reestablishing the geopolitical importance that other regions like Latin America had on the map of power relations during the second half of the twentieth century. In this vein, Fidel Castro's speeches have been viewed as an essential source of Cuban official discourses regarding both Germanies, serving as an example of Cuban foreign policy that considers not only socialist systems but also capitalist ones.

Although Fidel Castro's declaration of the socialist character of the Cuban Revolution led to Cuba's early integration into the Socialist Bloc (Castro 1961), diplomatic collaborations between the German Democratic Republic and Havana reached a high point after Erich Honecker's visit to the island in 1974. Consequently, a new stage in Cuba-GDR relations began (Dieter Kröber and Meyer 1974), controlled by the Solidarity Committee and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON). On the other hand, after more than a decade of the Hallstein Doctrine, the FRG reestablished diplomatic relations with Cuba in 1975. Hence, the time period ranging from 1975 to 1990 was a suitable period for studying the system of relations among Cuba and both Germanies since it comprised the most active stage of their bonds during the Cold War.

The main purpose of this project was to create datasets on Cuban-Germanies semantic networks focusing on the ideas mobilized in Fidel Castro's Speech Data Base from the Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin. It also included providing data visualizations of the main themes underscored by Castro concerning German culture, politics, and economy, in order to unveil the imaginaries

that revolved around Germany from the official perspective of the Caribbean island. As the following pages will demonstrate, the datasets created through this research, along with their graphical representations, show the main trends encouraged by Germany in these speeches in a broad sense, ultimately outlining how the European culture and the divided country were perceived in the Cuban official discourse at that time.

Furthermore, this project illustrates the variations experienced by these discourses across the period, functioning as a "window" into the fluctuating Cuban foreign policy, which was far from being stable and homogeneous. The "inconsistencies" in Castro's speeches regarding both German countries can be partially explained by historical events, such as the peak and decay of Cuba-GDR labor collaborations, the failure to comply with trade agreements before and after the Fall of the Berlin Wall, together with the abrupt end of Cuba-GDR exchanges following the German Reunification. Nevertheless, this "distant reading" of Castro's speeches has also uncovered the complexities of Cuba-FRG relations, the unexpected allegorical and symbolic role played by German history in Castro's claims about the United States of America, as well as the abundance of cultural stereotypes and scientific misinformation that capitalize on the concepts surrounding German culture.

1. Voyant Tools Cuba-Germanies Datasets

The Castro Speech Data Base's corpus, ranging from 1975 to 1990, comprises 1,112 documents, including not only speeches but also interviews, reports, meetings, articles, and conferences. By employing the Voyant "Context" tool, I have searched for a set of terms related to the German countries. In this regard, I sought words such as "German," "Germany," "Germans," "Germanism," or "Germanics," which help to isolate the main semantic statements related to both European countries. Terms such as "GDR" and "FRG" were also examined using the "Context" tool, and they were extensive enough to generate datasets on the ideas mobilized by the capitalist and socialist countries in Castro's declarations. I also attempted to build datasets based on other German references, and while some German cities (such as "Berlin," "Leipzig," "Munich," or "Hamburg") returned valuable information, terms and expressions related to German "high" culture (for instance, "Wagner," "Beethoven," "Thomas Mann," "Goethe," or "Novalis") yielded minimal or zero results.

I have created multiple datasets on "Germ*" terms, "FRG," "GDR," and "German cities," which were organized following the "left" and "right" columns distribution prompted by Voyant. By using a maximum of 20 words in context before and after the appearance of these terms, the textual framework obtained provided sufficient scope for the project's next stage, in which I read and transformed these ideas into specific concepts.

Terms	Frequency
Berlin	28
FRG	82
GDR	178
German	76
Germanics	1
Germanism	1
Germans	12
Germany	29
Hamburg	2
Munich	2
Leipzig	2

Table 1. Terms' Frequency in Castro Speech Data Base

As Table 1 illustrates, the most frequent term used when it comes to the German framework is "GDR" since the period encompasses the peak of trade, labor, and cultural agreements between Cuba and East Germany, which Castro often refers to. However, words associated with German culture in a broad sense are also commonly found in his speeches, followed by mentions of the FRG. On the other hand, the search for "Germ*" words has shown that there were three texts in the corpus in which the themes and topics surrounding Germany were particularly central, as exemplified by the visualization from the Voyant "Trends" tool.

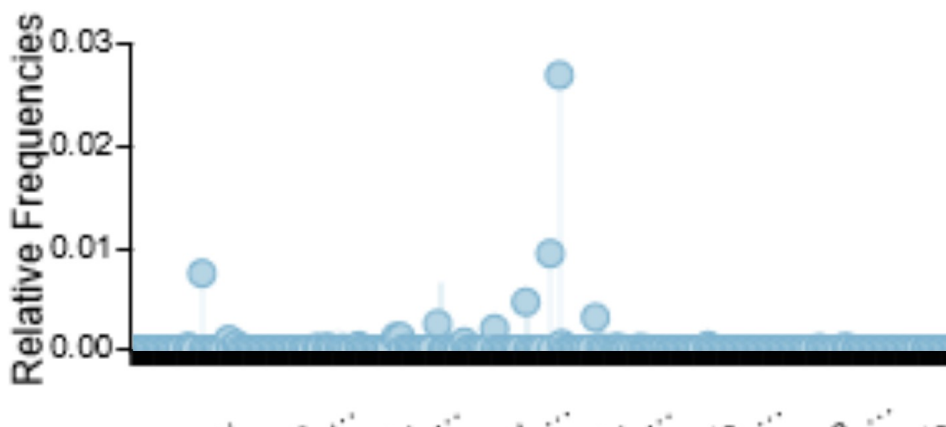


Figure 1. Frequency of "Germ*" in Castro Speech Data Base

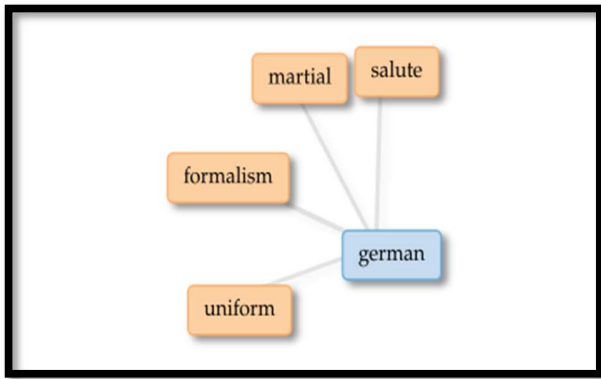


Figure 2. "Germ*"’s Connected Terms in 1981_09se_21

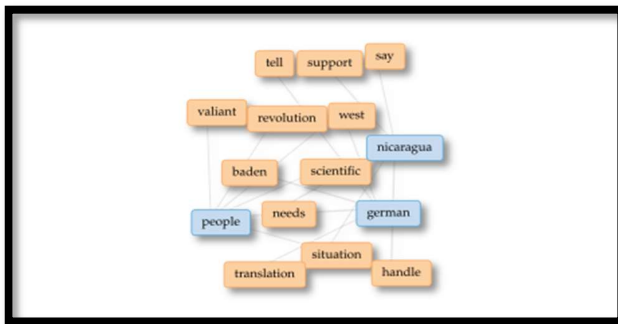


Figure 3. "Germ*"’s Connected Terms in 1984_10oc_19

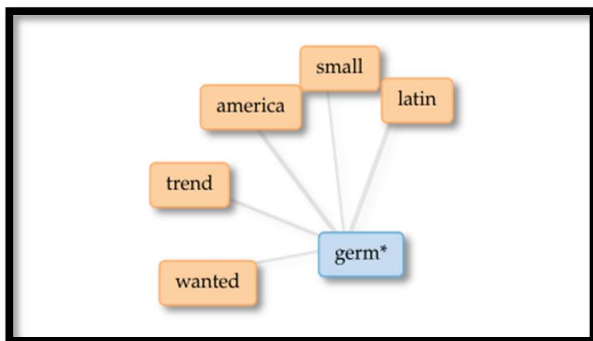


Figure 4. "Germ*"’s Connected Terms in 1985_07ju_10

Although I consider that these three documents ("1981_09se_21," "1984_10oc_19," "1985_07ju_10") deserve a "close reading" analysis at another time, thanks to the "Cirrus" and "Links" tools in Voyant, I have also performed a "distant" visualization of the most common words connected to "Germ*" in those documents, as Figures 2, 3, and 4 display. It seems to me that the first two frameworks are particularly interesting since it is clear that while German culture is associated with military and war imagery in 1981 – something closely related to German history in the XX century – the interview from 1984 exhibits a more "human" but also more "practical" image of the European country. Not only is the word "people" central in this second document, but also "support," "needs," "handle," or "situation," since Castro is possibly referring to the Nicaraguan Revolution (1979-1990) and the international support from the German countries, where the Sandinista National Liberation Front was backed by the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Somoza regime by the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG).

2. Building and Visualizing Conceptual Datasets

The second phase of the project was devoted to building a group of datasets on the concepts suggested by the previous term contexts. In other words, during this stage, I read the "left" and "right" columns that surrounded the chosen terms, and after that, I designed a set of concepts that summarized the themes and beliefs arising from these words. Concepts such as "Fraternity" or "Friendship" when it comes to the "GDR," "United States of America," or "Capitalism" regarding the "FRG," or even more historical references related to Germany's past such as "Fascism," "Nationalism," or "War Crime," were unsurprising topics addressed by Castro in his interventions.

Therefore, a set of datasets organized by a "term" and a "concept" column was built. I have also added a "document" and a "year" column where I inserted the attribute data regarding the document's name and the year in which the Castro intervention took place. As I am going to show in the next section, these secondary data were ultimately very useful to trace the evolution of these concepts over time, offering a diachronic conceptual landscape of Castro's "trends of thought" and, as a consequence, of Cuban official foreign and internal policy during the period. At this stage, I focused specially on the concepts emerged when Castro refers to the GDR and FRG. These notions were represented employing the open source project RAWGraphs through which I was able to visualize the most frequent concepts conjoined with East and West Germany in the Speech Data Base. In this sense, Figure 5 illustrates hierarchically which notions are usually "triggered" when Castro talks about the GDR.

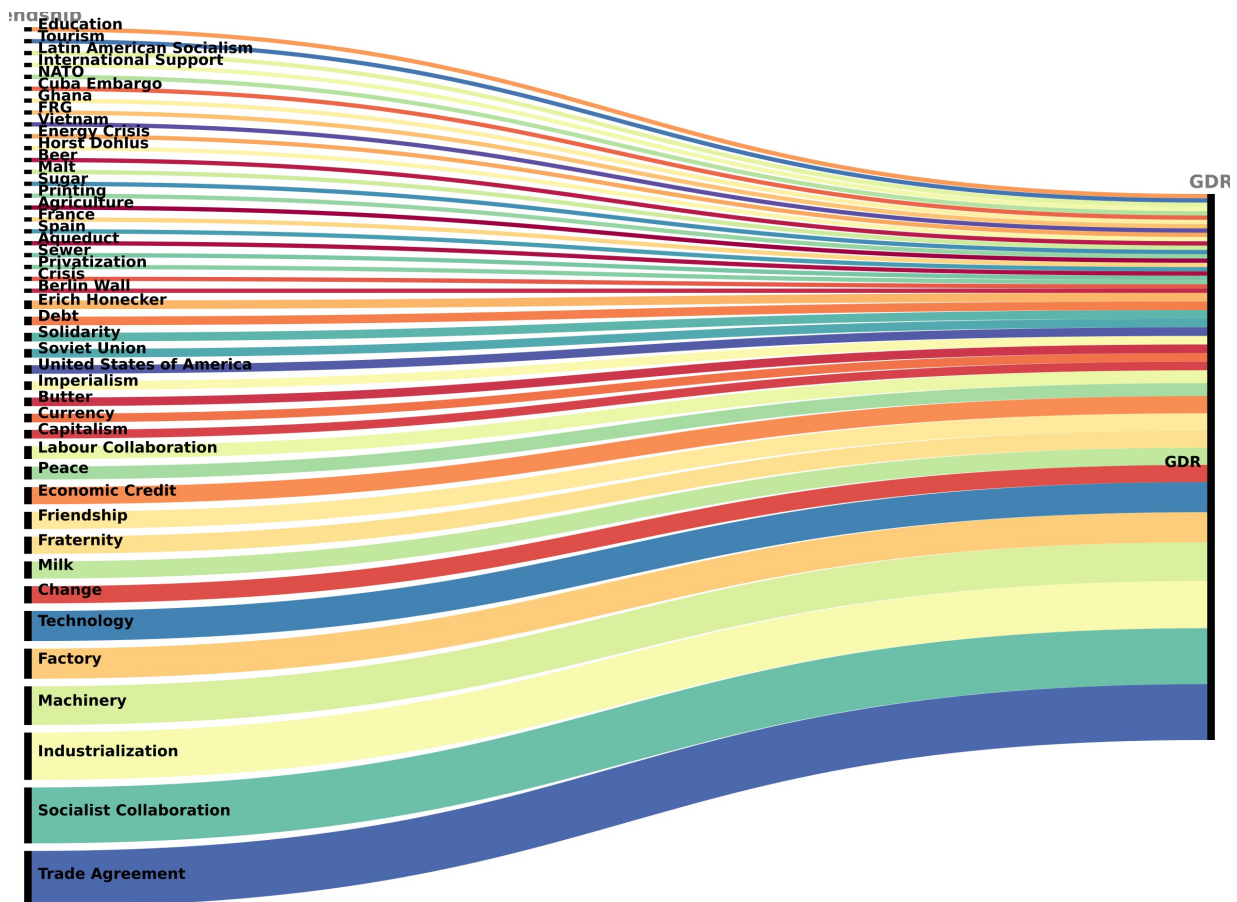


Figure 5. Frequency of GDR's Affiliated Concepts

The visualization presents a thought-provoking landscape of GDR's role in Cuba's policy, where economic interests play a prominent role. Although the ideas of "Friendship" and "Fraternity" between the two nations hold a middle position, the references to "Socialist Collaboration" between Cuba and the GDR are clearly translated into a practical and material relationship in Castro's mindset. Upon reading the surrounding textual contexts of "GDR," I noticed that the majority of themes related to East Germany, as addressed by Castro, are associated with the various trade agreements Cuba maintained with the socialist country. Specifically, it pertains to the German machinery imported by Cuba for the construction of new factories and industrial units.

The need for industrialization in the Caribbean country was a key aspect in Castro's speeches, wherein East German parts, machines, and at times, German instructors and engineers played a significant role. On other occasions, non-technological goods also take center stage in Castro's GDR imaginary, such as "Milk," which played a leading role in Cuba-GDR trade agreements. The sudden termination of this agreement following

the fall of the Berlin Wall remained a topic of negotiation for a considerable period, leading the GDR to make an exception and maintain the remaining bilateral agreements for humanitarian reasons.

In general terms, the concepts most closely affiliated with the GDR clearly reveal the prominence of the economy and utilitarianism behind the rhetoric of "brotherhood" from Cuba's perspective. This sheds light on the truly important issues underlying the discourse of socialist solidarity for a country like Cuba, which was entirely economically dependent on the Eastern Bloc. Furthermore, the absence of cultural references to GDR-Cuba exchanges could be seen as a counterpoint to these primarily material priorities, as the aesthetic exchange, although present, only held symbolic meaning and failed to capture Castro's thoughts on East Germany.

On the other hand, Figure 6 illustrates the most common concepts associated with the FRG in Castro's speeches. Unsurprisingly, the graph demonstrates that "United States of America" and "Capitalism" were the most frequently mentioned notions when the FRG appeared in Castro's interventions. The triad of "United States-Capitalism-Crisis" is a recurrent theme when he discusses capitalist countries in opposition to socialist ones, since Western countries are usually depicted facing the "evils" of capitalist system such as unemployment, labour strikes, urban violence, or poverty. However, it is interesting to note that concepts such as "Machinery," "Industrialization," and "Trade Agreement," which were previously linked to the GDR, are also connected to West Germany in Castro's imaginaries. In this regard, the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between Cuba and the FRG during this period could partially explain why West Germany is portrayed positively as an example of technological and scientific development, as emphasized by Castro on three different occasions. Hence, the mentions of "Trade Agreement" between the FRG and Cuba, which Castro promised in two different speeches, could be interpreted as another indication of the economic intentions underlying the ethical rhetoric, enough to displace the "demonization" of capitalism embodied by the FRG at the beginning of the 1980s.

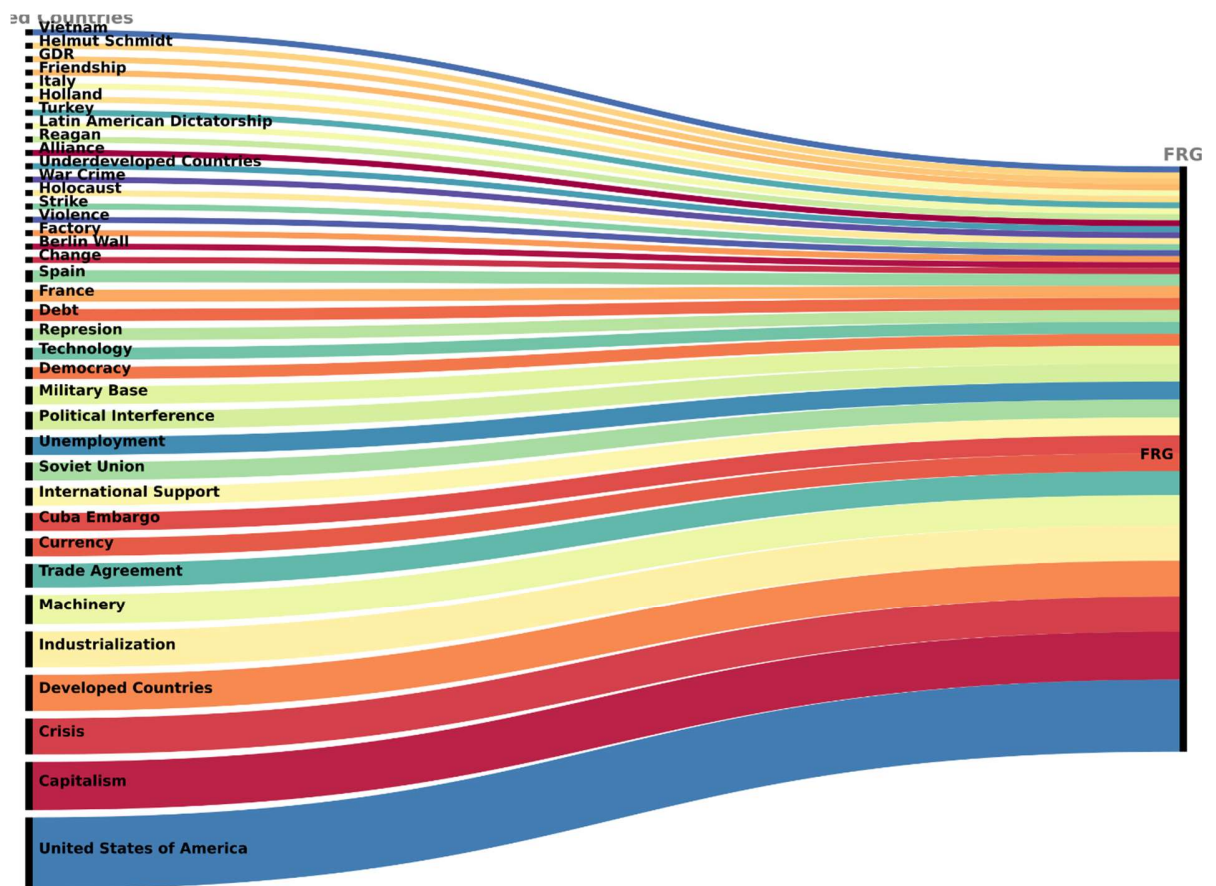


Figure 6. Frequency of FRG's Affiliated Concepts

1. Mapping Cuba-Germanies Imaginaries during the Cold War

The last set of datasets created for this project involved constructing two network databases based on the terms "Germ*" and "FRG" and "GDR." Following the table format required by the open-source software Gephi, I cleaned and prepared the primary and attribute data in columns such as "ID," "Source," "Target," "Type," "Relation," "Document," and "Year" in the edges table. I defined a consistently "directed" type of relation between the nodes and used the standard "framework" naming "F" for the relation among them. In this case, the "source" column represents the terms I have been examining, while the "target" column corresponds to the concept(s) associated with these terms in each document. By specifying the relation between the terms and concepts as "directed," I aimed to illustrate which of these concepts are more closely connected to the analyzed terms.

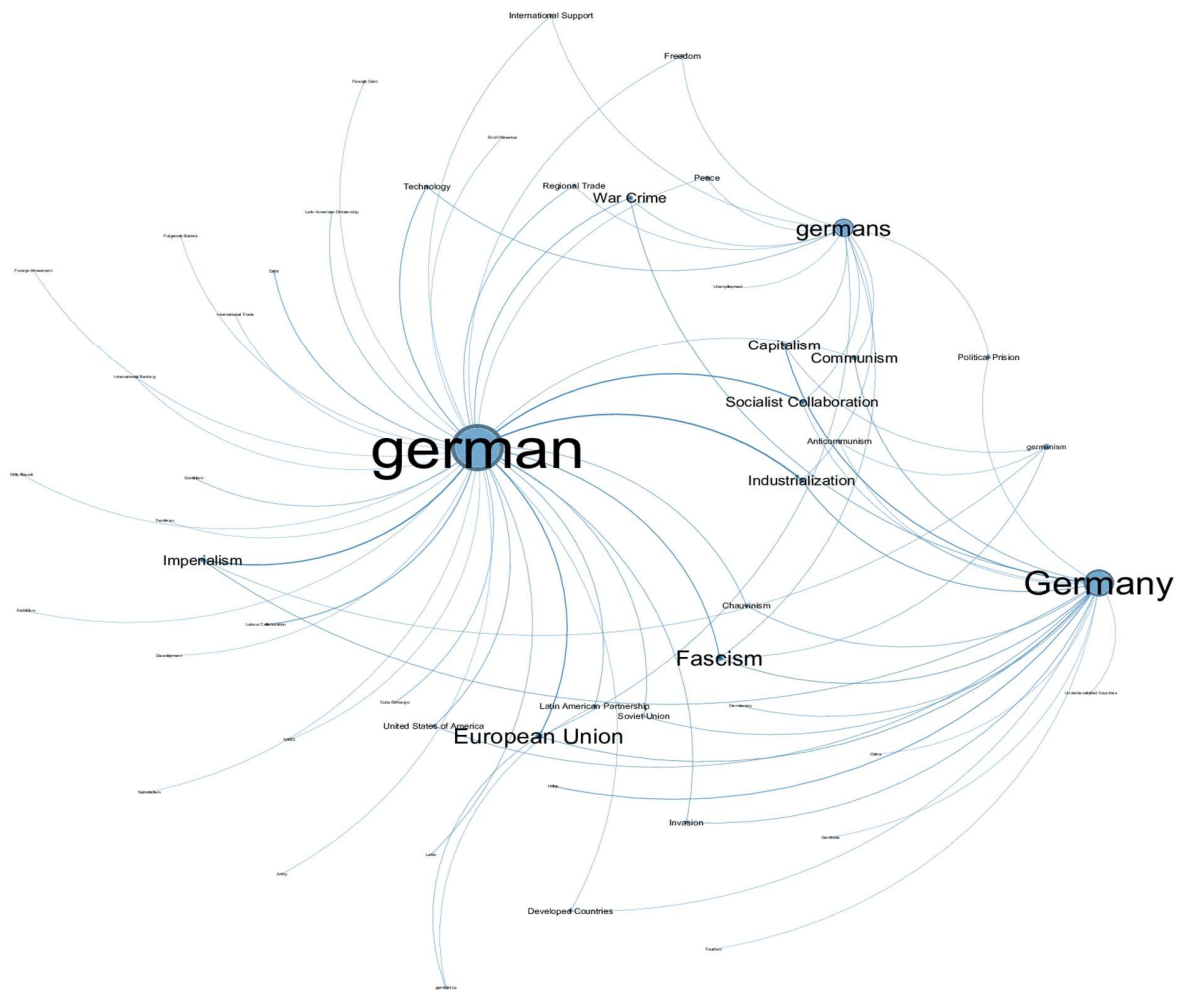


Figure 7. "Germ*" Conceptual Map in Castro Speech Data Base (1975-1990)

After presenting the overall "Germ*" conceptual relations in Figure 7, I divided the map into three different stages to trace the patterns and trends of Castro's discourses over time. The main objective of this temporal division was to identify the range of meanings attributed to the German universe in accordance with the specific moments in Cuba-GDR-FRG relations. For instance, it was surprising to observe how deeply intertwined the German imaginaries remained with the notion of a "fascist," "nationalist," "imperialist," or "chauvinist" nation during the initial period (1975-1983), as depicted in Figure 8.

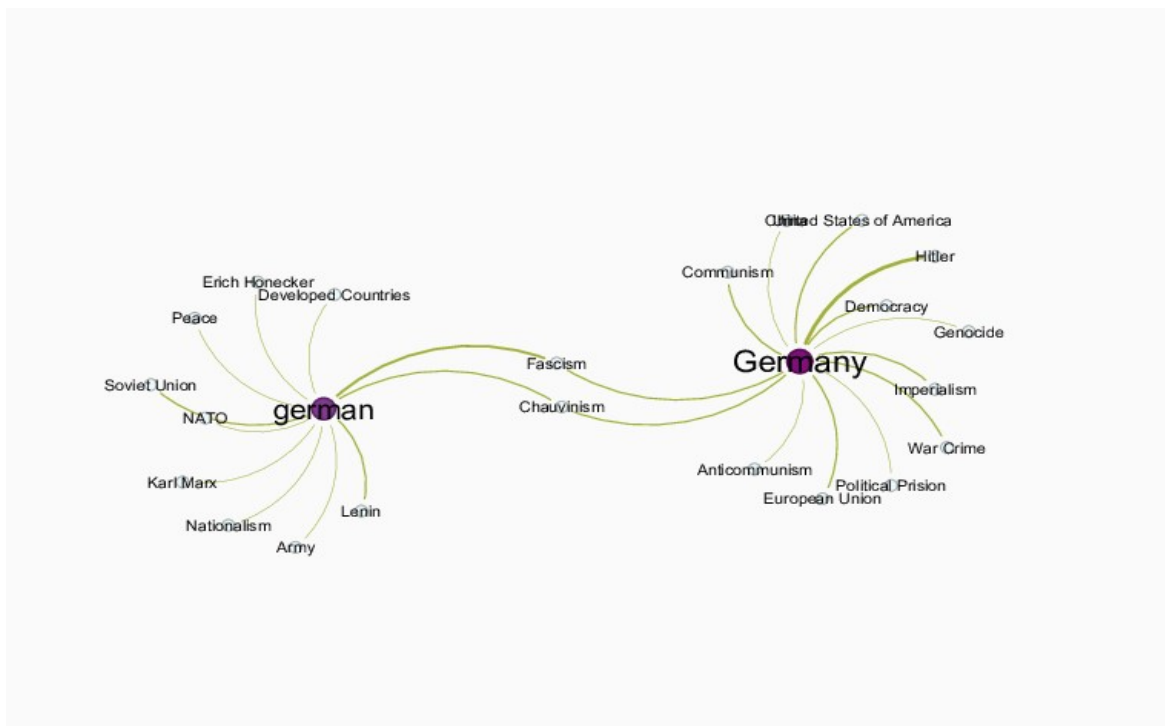


Figure 8. Conceptual Map of "Germ*" (1975-1983)

The reference to Germany in this context may seem anachronistic, considering that forty years had passed since the end of World War II. However, it becomes evident that historical Germany is used here as a metaphor for the United States of America: particularly when addressing an international or foreign audience, the German past as an imperialist nation driven by the pursuit of conquering and governing other nations is invoked as a comparison to the USA. The World War II imagery associated with Germany also serves as an allegorical representation of the opposition between capitalist and socialist regimes, despite a part of Germany being a socialist country. Castro's later reference to the Soviet Union's triumph over Hitler's Germany, offers one again a forty years later unusual metaphorical comparison in which former fascism is equated to current capitalism.

Figures 9 and 10 illustrate the evolving perceptions of Germany in the mid-1980s. The peak of relations between the GDR and Cuba, along with the emerging economic ties between the island and West Germany, shift the symbolic interpretations of European nations towards a more realistic perspective.

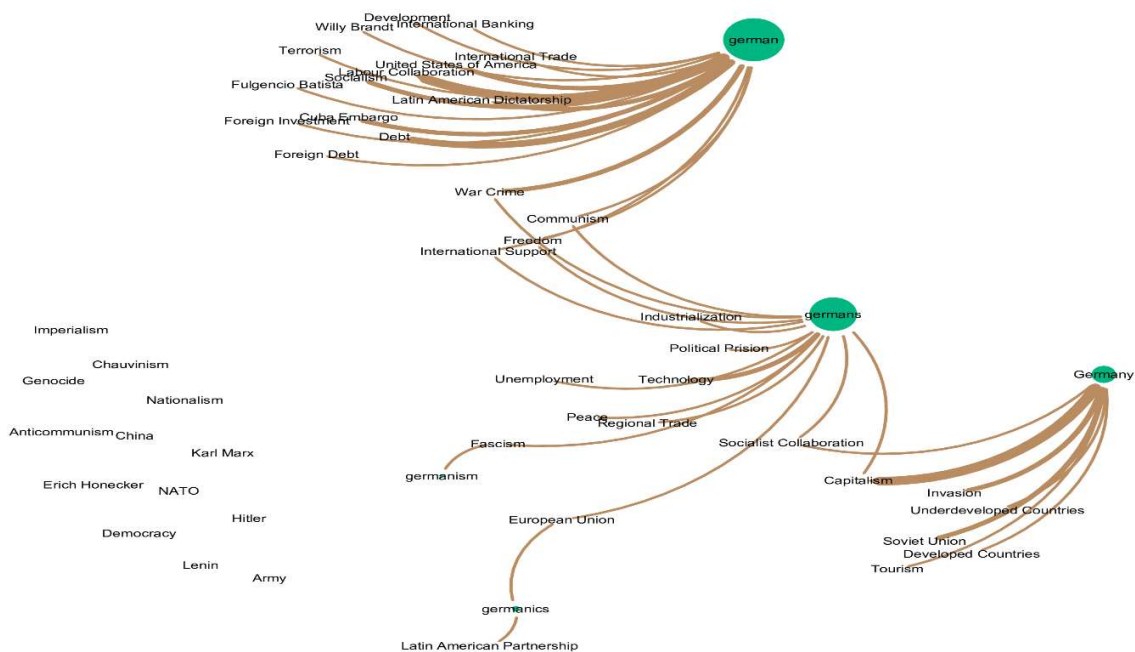


Figure 9. Conceptual Map of “Germ*” (1984-1986)

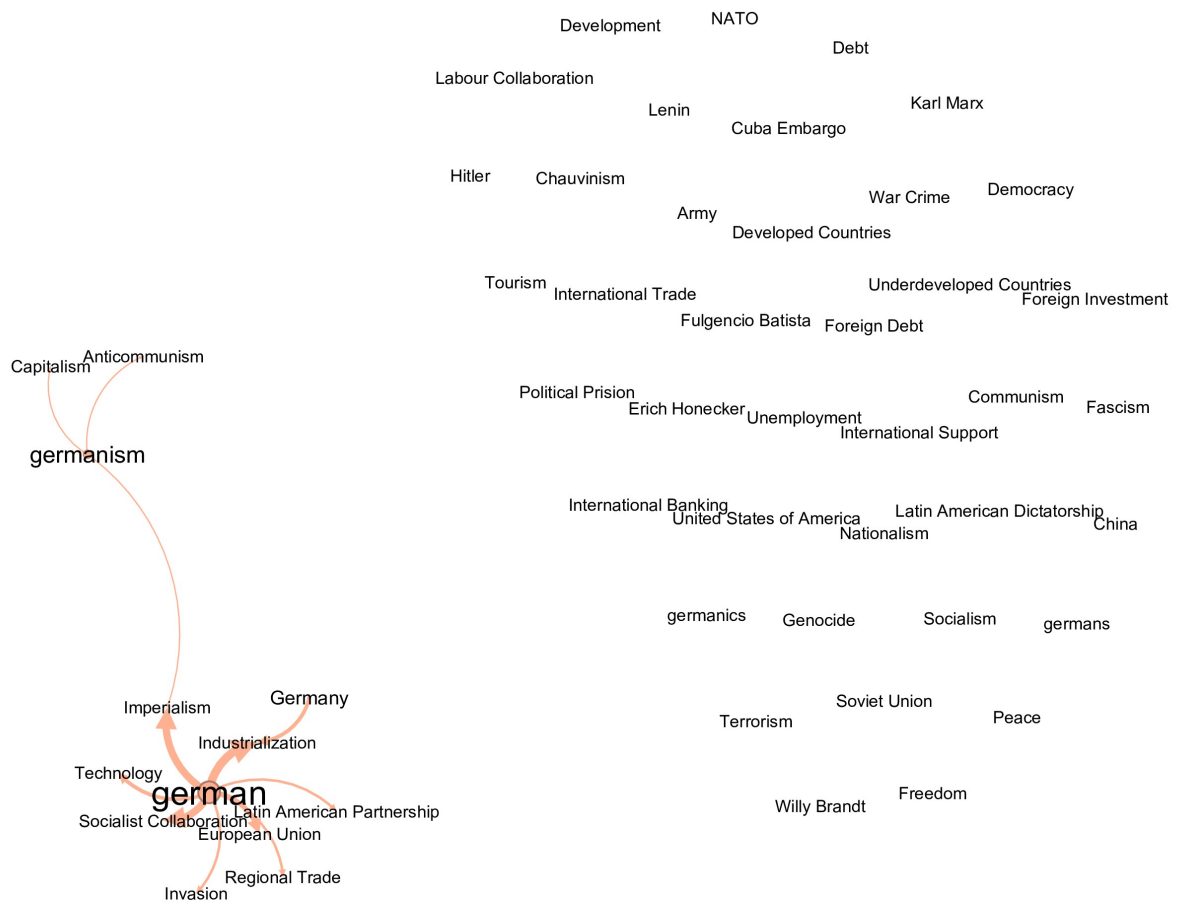


Figure 10. Conceptual Map of “Germ*” (1987-1990)

The second period (1984-1986) highlights the increasing significance of the aforementioned trade agreements with the socialist country, particularly in light of Cuba's increasing economic difficulties, such as monetary currency issues, national external debt, and the United States embargo against Cuba. These factors suggest the justifications provided by Castro for Cuba's failure to fulfill its part of the bilateral trade agreements with the GDR.

The last period (1987-1990) presents a very different scenario. On one hand, there is a resurgence of the "imperialist" ideas, which could be seen as a sign of the abrupt end of relations between Cuba and Germany. On the other hand, new ideas concerning "regional trade" and "Latin American partnership" emerge, now linked to the European Union (then the European Economic Community, founded in 1957). This shift in Castro's perspective regarding Germany can be attributed to the termination of Cuba's trade agreements with

most Eastern Bloc countries due to the successive collapse of socialism in Central and Eastern Europe by 1989, leading to the disappearance of Cuba's main commercial, political, and ideological international partners. In this context, Castro's call for the establishment of Latin American regional cooperation, akin to the EEC, can be interpreted as a desperate resource to address the economic crisis that Cuba would face in the coming years, known euphemistically as "Special Period."

The following dynamic graph illustrates diachronically the “trends of thoughts” regarding German countries over time:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/11Or8XHjnLq1rQ33k3OxY0tbWxo0WXoA2/view?usp=share_link

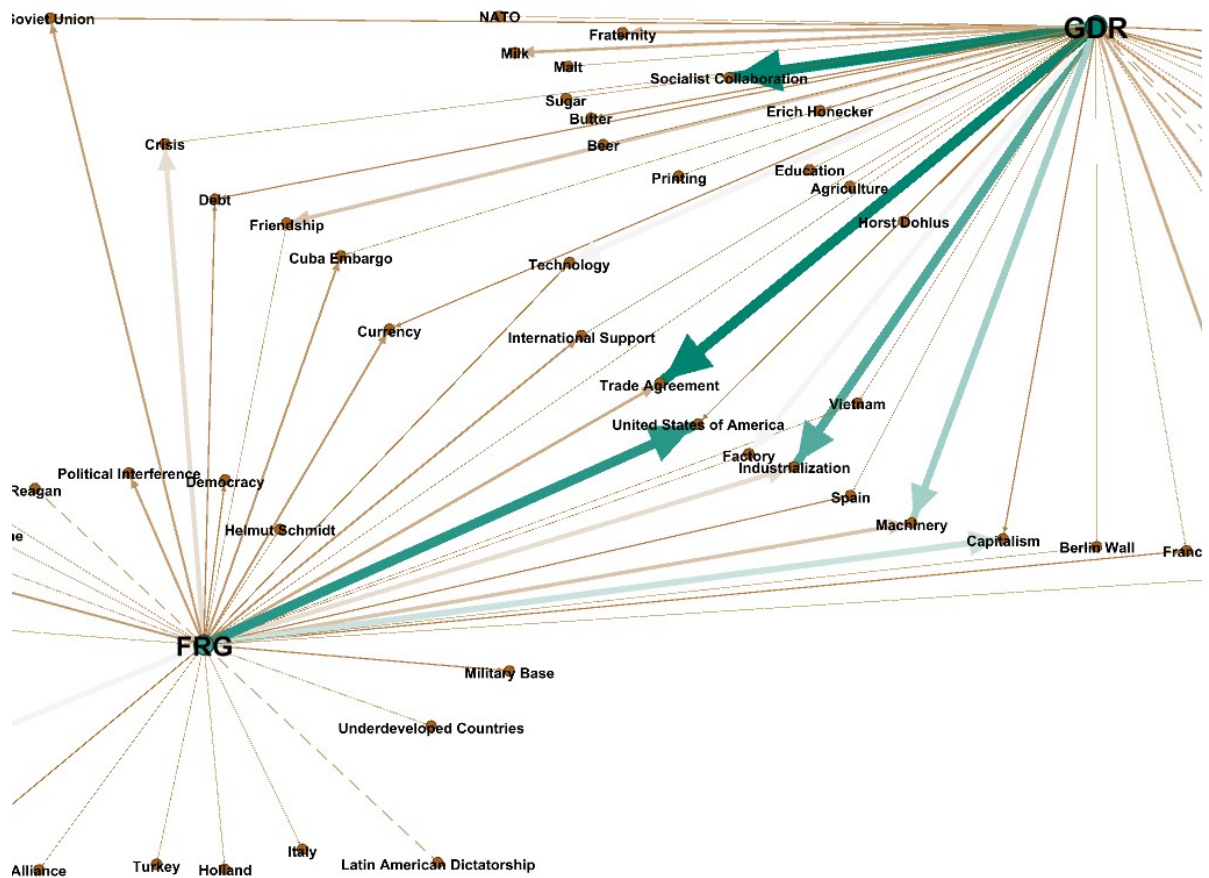


Figure 11. Conceptual Map of “GDR” and “FRG”

In a different aspect, the map of GDR and FRG concepts confirms the shared ideas concerning technical and material support to Cuba that both Germanies mobilized in Castro's speeches. An unexpected finding was the set of statements that arise when he discusses certain German goods that Cuba either imports or aspires to import from East Germany. His comments on milk, butter, malt, or beer production and consumption in the European country provide an interesting catalog of cultural stereotypes and, at times, scientific misinformation that also contribute to the construction of foreign and distant country's imaginaries in Castro's interventions.¹

¹ For instance, when he talks about the milk consumption in the GDR he states that: They have surplus milk after the butter is taken out. *Consumption of butter is one of their national habits*” (1990_09se_29). Another example come to light when he resolves around the beer ingesting in that country: “I have asked how much is consumed in the GDR, 160 liters per capita are consumed, *which demonstrates that they do not drink water with their meals*”. (1985_12de_24).

Conclusions

This research may serve as a starting point to uncover the role played by these conceptual frameworks in the formation, circulation, and establishment of ideologies and ideas between Cuba, the GDR and the FRG. It has explored the influence of such imaginaries and mindsets on their respective societies, in a sense that the ideas and notions expressed in Castro's speeches can be viewed as a "co-creation" of socialist identities regarding Cuba-GDR associations, shedding light on the close links between these authoritarian economic regimes. Moreover, by examining the statements and concepts around the Germanies in Castro's speeches, this research offers insights into Latin America's role in the power relations of the Cold War era, incorporating methodologies from the Digital Humanities often focused on cultures of the Global North.

Acknowledgments

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