Cuba and the Missile Crisis, and: Secret Missions to Cuba: fidel Castro, Bernardo Benes, and Cuban Miami (review)

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trust and censorial responses emerged. The authors relate with often intriguing detail the State's tactics of increased monitoring to stifle intellectual openings and debate. By the early 1990s it had become evident that reforms would be economic, not political. Part of the CEA's staff argued for democratic politics within socialism as an important reform to incorporate into the overall transition then occurring. The assessment that economic reforms were introducing a type of economic apartheid was not welcome. This response signaled that CEA's incursion into Cuban affairs using the same intellectual prowess and critiquing capacity that it had applied to other countries in the Americas was not acceptable. The implications rippled throughout the CEA and served to warn other State-affiliated researchers.

The authors experienced CEA's reduction in autonomy during the 1990s. Continual reminders that academics could never successfully separate themselves from political objectives were part of a generational difference of expectations and experimental space for socialism. State intervention in the CEA's respected journal, *Cuadernos de Nuestro América,* by the placement of hardline government functionaries on the editorial board, coupled with the appointment of personnel from the armed forces, Ministry of the Interior, and agencies of the Central Committee, were all actions underscoring CEA's transformation into mediocrity and ideological purity.

The example of the CEA's decline adds to the critiques of the failure of authoritarian rule to create and securely maintain an atmosphere favorable for intellectual creativity in the social sciences. Furthermore, a moderate left, concerned as it is internationally with socioeconomic and political inequalities, cannot, as yet, be part of the Cuban public debate or institutional framework. A redefinition of the State and the role of nationalist critics must await a future date.

The authors appear to be doing just that from their posts in Canadian and Puerto Rican academic venues.

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Carlos Lechuga. *Cuba and the Missile Crisis*. Translated by Mary Todd. Melbourne, Australia: Ocean Press, 2001. 174 pp.

Robert M. Levine. *Secret Missions to Cuba: Fidel Castro, Bernardo Benes, and Cuban Miami*. New York: Palgrave, 2001. 323 pp.

In his book *Cuba and the Missile Crisis*, Carlos Lechuga blames the United States for the crisis and does not present any innovative argument that would

contribute to our understanding of this event. The book is basically a political tract, full of the official rhetoric of the Cuban government. According to Lechuga, Nikita Khrushchev came out of his meeting with John Kennedy in Vienna in June 1961 convinced that the Americans were going to invade Cuba. From then onward, Khrushchev repeatedly told Fidel Castro that the Americans were coming. Lechuga affirms that, indeed, the Kennedy administration, after the Bay of Pigs experience, planned to topple the Castro government with an invasion by the U.S. military. Lechuga informs us that, at the end of May 1962, a Soviet delegation traveled to Cuba and offered the Cuban government deployment of nuclear weapons in the island. Castro immediately accepted.

The author says that the two main motivations, for both the Soviet and the Cuban governments, for deploying the missiles in Cuba were to defend Cuba against an attack by the United States and to strengthen the nuclear capabilities of the Soviet military in the face of an American quantitative advantage in nuclear weapons. Yet Lechuga emphasizes that the foremost cause of the missile crisis was growing threats of a military invasion of Cuba by U.S. armed forces. He asserts that an attack by the United States against the island appeared imminent at the time. He argues, "That — nothing else — was the root cause of the dangerous confrontation [the missile crisis]" (4).

Despite the litany that Lechuga presents of real or imputed threats to the Castro government in various American spheres — for example, in the press, in Congress, and in military exercises — he fails to refute a conclusion that various scholars have reached: that the Kennedy administration never intended to use the armed forces of the United States to attack Cuba. Not even after the Americans discovered the Soviet missiles in Cuba was an invasion (advocated by some top officials) of the island a first choice for Kennedy. Had Kennedy wanted to attack Cuba, he would not have discarded and abandoned the Cuban exiles at the Bay of Pigs.

Of the two main reasons for stationing the missiles in Cuba that Lechuga presents, he wants to emphasize the defense of the Castro regime from a possible American invasion. But from the story he tells, one could also conclude that the main motivation for the Soviets was to gain a bargaining chip in their worldwide confrontation with the United States. Lechuga's book does not refute this alternative explanation as the main cause for the deployment of the Soviet missiles. For example, the American missiles in Turkey bothered the Russians. Soviet rulers saw an opportunity to put missiles in Cuba, and apparently they intentionally played on the fears of the Cuban government that the Marines could land on the island. The Soviets got the Americans to remove their missiles from Turkey, and the Americans promised not to do what they did not want to do anyway — invade Cuba. When, on 27 October 1962, Robert Kennedy conveyed the offer to Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin that the Kennedy administration was willing to trade the missiles in Cuba for a public

announcement that the Americans would not invade Cuba and a verbal agreement to remove the missiles from Turkey, Khrushchev immediately accepted the trade.

Despite the superior scholarly quality of Levine's work, in contrast to Lechuga's book, one thing the two books have in common is that they present distorted views, Lechuga's of the Cuba policies of the Kennedy administration and Levine's of groups of activists in Miami who were opposed to the Castro government and of the Cuban American community in that city. Early in the book, Levine does justice to the fact that most Cubans arrived in Miami practically penniless and that through hard work ended up being mostly responsible for the growth and progress of the Miami metropolitan area. Also, Levine has made an important contribution in compiling a lot of details about interactions between the Cuban and American governments during the Carter and Reagan administrations. However, *Secret Missions to Cuba: Fidel Castro, Bernardo Benes, and Cuban Miami* ends up presenting a biased characterization of the Cuban-American community. The book intends to portray the nature of the Cuban-American community from 1959 to 2000. Extending the analysis to recent times makes the constructed image of the exiled community even more illusory.

To produce his portrait of the exiles, Levine uses the story of Cuban American Bernardo Benes who attempted to normalize relations between the Castro and U.S. governments and who advocated engagement with the Cuban regime. Levine equates groups or activists opposed to the Castro dictatorship with being "right-wing" and prone to terrorism, of having a tendency to suppress (usually by violent means) the freedom of speech of those who deviate from certain political views, and even of being anti-Semitic. The author implies that these attributes also apply in a more general sense to the Cuban-American community in Miami.

The facts are that anti-Castro (I would say pro-democracy) groups in the United States, and even in Miami, have never been homogeneous in their political views or in their strategies. This heterogeneity has increased with time. Exiles all along the politico-ideological spectrum want to see a democratic regime in Cuba. To attach the label "right-wing" to all those opposed to the Castro regime is unreasonable. For years now, there have been groups of Cuban exiles very active in the anti-embargo, pro-dialogue movement, and there are some radio programs in Miami that are quite sympathetic to the Castro government. Yet "the anti-Castro militants" are not perpetrating violence against them. For quite some time, the vast majority of pro-democracy groups in the exile community have adopted the position that change in Cuba should be sought by peaceful means. Cuban American support for opposition groups in Cuba has increased with time, and it is very clear that the activists in the island want to bring about a transition by peaceful means. More recently, the

Varela Project, created and promoted by a leading democratic activist in Cuba, Osvaldo Payá, has gained widespread support among Cuban Americans. The project has petitioned the Castro government to hold a referendum on steps toward democratization based on legal statues of the 1976 communist constitution. Although many groups and individuals in Miami do not support the Varela Project, in large part because it is perceived to be a strategy for change within the communist system, disagreements about the project have not led to threats or violence in the community. In one last example that shows how far removed from current reality Levine's book is, the Cuban American National Foundation has officially adopted a position in favor of negotiations with officials in the Castro regime.

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Antoni Kapcia. *Cuba: Island of Dreams.* New York: Berg, 2000. 295 pp.

This book is not an easy review because it is not an easy read. The reasons are evident from the start: an excessively complex conceptual scheme from which the author draws selectively to guide the historical and empirical analysis. Claiming that scholars have been reluctant to deal with the issue of Cuban ideology, and that whenever they did, they "misunderstood" it (5), Kapcia believes that his book fills that gap. To him, Cuban revolutionary ideology is *cubanía rebelde,* which he claims is the line that runs throughout Cuban history and which he argues should not be confused with *cubanidad,* or Cubanness. In order to show the difference, he establishes the conceptual parameters of the discussion of this *cubanía* in an introductory chapter entitled "The Concept of *Cubanía* and the Nature of Myth." As part of what he calls his "methodological concerns" (33), that chapter analyzes the concepts of nationalism (as "imagined communities"), political historical myth, symbols and icons, political totemization, political culture, ritual, gender, and language.

Let it be said, this is an author who knows his theory. Each of these concepts is brilliantly discussed and on those grounds alone the introductory chapter makes a contribution. The problem is that most of these conceptual concerns are subsequently hardly touched upon in a book that is fundamentally intended to elucidate what the author calls "codes" in both prerevolutionary and postrevolutionary Cuban history. His central thesis is that throughout Cuban history there has been "an emerging potential code" struggling to become reality only to be repeatedly frustrated. He calls that code *cubanía rebelde*. His argument that those potential codes are to be found at the "popular-empirical" and not the "intellectual-theoretical" level (17) hardly clarifies how