JEAN STUBBS

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS ON CUBA

State Resistance to Globalisation in Cuba. ANTONIO CARMONA BÁEZ. Sterling VA: Pluto Press, 2004. vii + 264 pp. (Paper US\$ 29.95)

La Lucha for Cuba: Religion and Politics on the Streets of Miami. MIGUEL A. DE LA TORRE. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. xi + 181 pp. (Paper US\$ 21.95)

By Heart/De Memoria: Cuban Women's Journeys in and out of Exile. MARÍA DE LOS ANGELES TORRES (ed.). Philadelphia PA: Temple University Press, 2003. vii + 192 pp. (Paper US\$ 19.95)

Looking at Cuba: Essays on Culture and Civil Society. RAFAEL HERNÁNDEZ. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003. vii + 145 pp. (Cloth US\$ 24.95)

In the politically charged world of scholarship on Cuba, it is salutary to comment in one review essay on four quite different volumes, each complementing the others. Three are single-authored, two on island Cuba (by Antonio Carmona Báez and Rafael Hernández) and one on Miami (by Miguel A. de la Torre). All three draw on theory and concepts and are male-authored and place-centric (Cuba/Miami). The fourth (by María de los Angeles Torres) is an edited collection of the personal testimonies of women seeking a place in between the hardened politics of Cuba and Miami.

Carmona Báez, Puerto Rican, is the only non-Cuban. At the Transnational Institute in the Netherlands, he is among leading opponents of neoliberal globalization, and *State Resistance to Globalisation in Cuba* sets out to track Cuba's record in resisting the 1990s neoliberal trend. The introduction sets out the tenets of neoliberal globalization, anti-imperialism, socialism in a sea of capitalism, state capitalism, and the implications for studying Cuba, especially its party/state apparatus, after the collapse of the Eastern European socialist bloc. The concept of Gramscian hegemony is invoked to explain

global acceptance of neoliberal thinking and Cuban counterhegemonic discourse in maintaining a state-led economy.

Carmona Báez identifies four pillars of the Cuban Revolution – unity, continuity, state supremacy, and popular participation. Analyzing the causes and consequences of Cuba's 1991-96 economic crisis, he describes the gradual disintegration in the 1980s of a working model of Cuban economic integration in the Eastern European socialist trading bloc CMEA – forerunner to Cuba losing its Soviet backer in the 1990s and simultaneously having to withstand a tightened, then thirty-year, U.S. embargo. The Revolution was transformed to a “mutated social, political and economic project that is struggling to survive” with “new formulas for maintaining state control” (p. 37). His analysis of radical changes – legalizing citizens' use of hard currency (especially remittances from family abroad), building up tourism, opening up to foreign investment, and formalizing *cuentapropismo* (self-employment), embraced in the name of safeguarding the gains of the Revolution – is spot on.

For the period 1996-2000, when Cuba's social and economic indicators pointed to recovery, he draws similarities between some of the trends typical of neoliberal globalization and Cuba's new policies regarding production and capital accumulation – in the ways *cuentapropismo* and the *sistema de perfeccionamiento empresarial* (restructuring of state enterprises) impacted economically, socially, and politically, repositioning military and civilian forces. He points to close connections between those from military and civilian bureaucratic circles (and families abroad) and a new technocratic-entrepreneurial bloc, or proto-class, accumulating money and property, often at the expense of state resources and cementing new divides and inequalities, tourism-related prostitution, and racism.

He ends by returning to two major questions posed at the outset: Why does the Cuban Communist Party/state apparatus continue to exist? To what extent is the process of social, political, and productive restructuring in Cuba shaped by global trends and pressures? The study of Cuban socialism, he concludes, reveals that states do have the capacity to resist and denounce global trends, yet “no matter how hard the state leadership may try, some global trends are hard to resist” (p. 225). Shifts in Cuban society have made the political and economic structure more vulnerable and created cracks in the four pillars. What are possible future scenarios? Carmona Báez would like to see a new world order grounded on socioeconomic justice and more popular participation. In the meantime, will the Cuban party/state apparatus disintegrate from rising contradictions from within, resulting from post-1989 policies, as much as, if not more than, those from abroad?

Turning our attention to Miami, de la Torre examines the role of religion in the ascension of Exilic Cubans (his term in contradistinction to Resident Cubans) to unmask structures of oppression from within. “For many Cubans in the Miami community, everything good, holy, pure, true, and sacred is

the antithesis of Castro and his regime. Belonging is measured by the intensity of righteous indignation directed toward Castro" (p. xvi). *La Lucha* (the struggle) is a religious dichotomy between the Exilic "children of light" and Resident "children of darkness."

He begins and ends *La Lucha for Cuba* with the "Elián Saga" that hit world headlines in 2000. The struggle between father/Resident Cuban and great-uncle/Exilic Cuban for custody of five-year-old Elián González, rescued from the sea, fast assumed biblical proportions. "Pray for Elián" was the Exilic Cuban slogan. Elián became the miracle child, poster Christ in street vigils and at the shrine of Our Lady of Charity (Miami's Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, Cuba's patron saint). Santería followers claimed Ochún had spared Elián's life. Exilic Cuban Jews proclaimed Elián the Moses of the year 2000 who would lead his people to the promised land (Cuba). Adventists claimed him the Messiah.

De la Torre conceptualizes this as an "*ajiaco* Christianity" – borrowing from Cuban ethnographer Fernando Ortiz's metaphor of the Cuban stew, or *ajiaco*. As a theology of the diaspora, he argues, it is deeply rooted in the theoretical constructs of postmodernism, postcolonialism, and liberation theology, subverted to Miami's Exilic Cuban religious and political fervor. The religious dimensions of political battles reveal a continuing dichotomy between good (Exilic Cubans) and evil (Resident Cubans/Castro), the latter infidels in a holy war. Biblical invocations justify Exilic Cuban armed secret organizations, bomb attacks, and assassinations, including attempts on Fidel Castro himself. All but Exilic Cubans and their supporters surely cannot fail to see the parallels with modern-day fundamentalism and terrorism.

De la Torre uses the biblical story of Babylonian captivity in Psalm 137 to explore ethnicity in the construction of a Cuban identity in Babylon designed to protect power and privilege. Rich and powerful *caudillos* (strong men) foster a siege mentality parallel to that on the island and Exilic intra-oppression. In a cursory view of male-dominated phases of Cuban history (Amerindian conquest, African slavery, Chinese indentureship, U.S. emasculation), he eschews *machismo* as the metaphor for Exilic Cuban business and political elites to wield male, white, sexist, ethnocentric, class privilege to effeminize and domesticate the non-elite male "Other."

Will there be a post-Exilic Miami? The rise of Generation Ñ, counterpart to Euro-American Generation X – light-skinned, middle-class, bilingual, well-educated, successful, more moderate professionals – is one marker of change. But the hold of *la lucha*, cloaked in religiosity, only stiffened with Elián. De la Torre concludes, "Nothing else, for now, matters" (p. 139).

By Heart/De Memoria is a poignant antidote. A moving collection of women's testimony to the heart wrenching that can accompany exile and migration, the book is dedicated to their mothers and the memory of Lourdes Casal, Ana Mendieta, and Raquel Mendieta Costa "who, despite their deaths,

continue to form part of our bridges” (p. v). The journeys and forbidden spaces begin in Miami, looking toward the island, and end with an island gaze on exile.

Editor María de los Angeles Torres pens a thoughtful introduction situating the contributors in their post-revolutionary exile generation: 1960s Pedro (Peter) Pan, 1970s Freedom Flights, 1980s Mariel boat lift, and 1990s “low intensity” exiles. In “Where Ghosts Dance *el Guaguncó*” she highlights her 1960s experience as a Pedro Pan child, sent by her parents under the U.S. State Department-coordinated operation to “save” children from communism; 1970s intense island homecomings and sense of mission with the Antonio Maceo Brigade, formed by radicalized offspring rejecting their parents’ exile generation; and 1990s deep disillusionment: “I did not want to renounce the island, my nation, nor did I want to accept exile on its terms,” but rather to seek a place “where nations are fluid, where they are sustained by collective and personal recollections” (p. 5).

Contesting exile/nation boundaries and the right/left imaginary defines this anthology. The women carry traumas of a divided Cuban/U.S. existence, though not all experienced exile in a strict sense, as they returned – sometimes frequently. Those who became part of a politicized 1970s generation did so against the wishes of their parents, identifying with the Revolution. Others, friends of fleeting returnees, left later; for them, return had different connotations.

Through their poetry, prose, and art, they express their fears, hopes, dreams, frustrations, and longing. Achy Obejas opens her poem *The Boat*: “we don’t seem to leave the country/you and I, always with an open map” (p. 16). The island for Liz Balmaseda, growing up in 1960s Miami, became a fantasy, poetic place between memory and reflection. Nereida García-Ferraz’s family made the decision to leave in the early 1960s but were only able to do so on a 1970 Freedom Flight. Her return to the island from Chicago, where she was already a figure in the art world, was a major creative influence.

Teresa de Jesús Fernández’s experience was born of watching childhood friends leave, becoming the “other” who stayed. Her title “From this Side of the Fish Tank” refers to the glassed-in passenger waiting area of Havana’s airport. Daughter of writer Pablo Armando Fernández, she became close to those returning, her family home becoming theirs in Havana. She and her father having experienced political marginalization, she now has a university post in Italy, returning to her family every summer. She is the only one not caught in the Cuba/U.S. divide. Josefina de Diego, daughter of writer Eliseo Diego, whose home also became a second home for “returnees,” grew up with her grandmother’s childhood memories of living in New York. Her family almost left in the 1960s, but were prevented by her mother’s ill health. Her essay, “Through Other Looking Glasses,” draws on her grandmother’s love of the classic *Alice in Wonderland*.

Mirta Ojito was sixteen when she and her parents left in 1980, her uncle coming for them in the Mariel Boat Lift. “La Salida: The Departure” documents the traumatic process of being stripped of identity and treasured possessions – where does self end and home begin? Carmen Díaz also left through Mariel. “The Recurring Dream” reflects on youthful dreams of revolution and joining the guerrilla before she became a physics scholar in what she describes as 1970s authoritarian political culture: “I left because that world became too narrow for me” (p. 121). Now, in her dreams she says goodbye to revolution.

In “Only Fragments of Memory,” the late Raquel Mendieta Costa wrote of the excitement of 1960s revolution. While relatives left in the 1960s, her immediate family stayed; it was only decades later that her break with official history took her into exile. Madelin Camara’s “Words Without Borders” describes her journey as part of the 1980s generation, coming of age in search of philosophical positions beyond the Havana/Miami divide. She was one of many Cuban intellectuals and artists to seek this in neighboring Mexico, later moving to the United States.

The collection ends with island resident Tania Bruguera expressing in her art the loss felt when people left. Exile severed contact, and to explore that loss violated official political stands. Drawn by the work of Ana Mendieta, a Pedro Pan child who returned to work in Cuba, she recreated Ana’s work, and this led her to a multifaceted project on the longing for those who leave – nostalgia in reverse.

Looking at Cuba: Essays on Culture and Civil Society takes us back to the island. The 1999 Cuban edition was a compilation of “think-piece” articles by Hernández, one of Cuba’s leading contemporary political thinkers, some published in Cuba, some abroad, in the years 1993–99. The English-language edition includes a subsequently published text of 2001.

In the first defining essay, “Looking at Cuba” (*Mirar a Cuba*), Hernández sets out to debunk four myths:

First: “To be credible the author of a work on Cuba must be outside the country or be a ‘dissident within’” (p. 11). How can it be, he asks, that “the identity card that certifies an intellectual free spirit is more available to escaped officials, repentant Stalinists, turncoat functionaries, ex-professors of dogmatism, and former straw men of cultural conformity than it is to those who always sought and fought for room to think and act on behalf of freedom, independence, and the progress of the nation?” (pp. 12–13).

Second: “Fidel Castro is the source of the [Cuban] revolution and all its evils” (p. 13). Revolution is more than the imprint of leadership and ideology. Politics is the art of winning external and internal support and forging consensus. In the 1990s, a decade of lessening consensus and increasing discontent, Fidel Castro, having fine-tuned the art, was, he argues, the only one who could spearhead a viable transition to a more decentralized and

democratic system with the least trauma. Significantly, Havana, Miami, and Washington all recognize this.

Third: "Cuban socialism consists of a political system and an ideological discourse. Civil society has been suppressed" (p. 15). Cuba is not "the transfiguration of a doctrine or reification of a totalitarian philosophy" (pp. 15-16). He celebrates Cubans' "political culture" and asks, "doesn't that population have knowledge, maturity, and culture enough to face and understand the real changes the country needs?" (p. 16). The corollary question is, "Should we regret having created these demanding citizens?" (p. 18).

Fourth: "Cuba is the same as ever. It's just going through a process of surface or contemporary changes" (p. 19). Will Cuba need more than one party in the future? The answer, he declares, will depend on the party's capacity to push through change without losing touch with people.

Subsequently, he explores multiple concepts of civil society, from the classical Hegelian to the modern, and the role of intellectuals, with a critique of Jorge Castañeda's *Utopia Unarmed* and the Latin American cultural left. On Cuba, he concludes the net result of foreign policy relations, especially regarding the former USSR and the United States, "has been that Cuba's external policies are more open, pluralist, and flexible than domestic ones" (p. 97). "The gradualist line taken by the reform process in Cuba has been recovering zones of consensus from the bewilderment provoked by the shock of the crisis. But this process does not evolve free of outside interference. The main external factor is the nature of the relationship with the United States" (p. 109).

"On Discourse" opens with a quote from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, when Alice asked whether you can make words mean different things. "'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master – that's all.'" Musing on popular and political language, he concludes, "A stereotyped discourse is caught on the horns of a dilemma. Either it must undergo a profound transformation, or else it will go on reproducing itself as before, condemned to lose its way, fall out of daily use, and be ignored or abandoned because it has ceased to communicate" (p. 126).

Political debate or monologue? That is the final question. He argues convincingly that there has been real debate in 1990s Cuba on thorny, previously isolated or ignored topics and that in academia and in literature, art, film, and theater, "what is under thorough review today is the very foundations – and meaning – of socialism as a social order and culture in Cuba" (p. 132). The more charged the international atmosphere, the greater are the limitations, yet debate grows. Nor is it limited by geographical or political frontiers, with a certain convergence between Cubans on- and off-island.

Clearly, the intricate relationship between civil society and state is crucial to Cuba's future. Summer 2005 saw a palpable popular mood change, not least among the majority sector in Cuba that is non-White and has experi-

enced exclusion as a result of 1990s reforms. A sobering final thought, as one who has studied and written on race in Cuba in a Caribbean context, is how far race is central to Carmona Báez's "cracks in the pillars," marginal to de la Torre's "post-Exilic Miami" (where non-Whites are a minority), and thus accorded little space in Hernández's "convergence" and de la Torre's "bridges" to that "place in between." A question for each of the authors, all of whom come from broadly similar White middle-class/intellectual backgrounds and gloss over the race issue, is whether this might prove a driving force for future change. This does not, however, detract from the significant intrinsic value of each.

JEAN STUBBS
Caribbean Studies Centre
London Metropolitan University
London N7 8DB, U.K.
<j.stubbs@londonmet.ac.uk>