Luis René Fernández Tabío, Cynthia Wright & Lana Wylie (eds.), *Other Diplomacies, Other Ties: Cuba and Canada in the Shadow of the U.S.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018. vii + 376 pp. (Paper US$35.95)

*Other Diplomacies, Other Ties* goes beyond the analysis of the traditional diplomatic ties between Cuba and Canada to focus on a complex picture of “non-traditional” or “other diplomatic ways” of conducting relationships between the two countries. Together with the editors, the 15 Cuban and Canadian contributors bring multiple perspectives to explore how a variety of actors—including politicians, members of the solidarity movement, the Cuban migrants in Canada, students, journalists, and even spies—have shaped the nature of the bilateral relationship. Moreover, the book describes how corporations such as the Canadian company Sherritt International, the largest single foreign investor on the island, and tourism can shape foreign policy priorities. (Cuba ranks third as a destination for Canadian travelers and Canada is Cuba’s major source of tourism.) Taken together, the articles develop a coherent argument that without the significant role of these actors engaging in diplomacy, building trust, and interacting in common spaces in Cuba and Canada, the relationship between the two countries would be less beneficial to both.

The book is divided into three overreaching themes. The first part, “Histories and (Other) Diplomacies,” examines critical political moments in the first years of the Cuban Revolution. The decision by Canadian Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, for example, not to break diplomatic ties with Cuba, while most of the countries in the Western Hemisphere did, shaped the future of Cuban-Canadian relations. Notably, Maurice Demers and Michel Nareau explain how the example of the Cuban Revolution inspired youth in Quebec to promote self-determination and provided a stimulating model for their struggle in the 1960s. They conclude that, even with much less influence than before, the image of the Revolution lives on in Quebec.

The second part, “Canada and Cuba in the Shadow of the US: Structures and Economies,” explores the triangulated nature of U.S.-Cuban-Canadian relations. While Canada has agreed with some U.S. objectives such as constraining Cuba’s support for revolutionary movements in the Third World, Canada has opposed the U.S. economic embargo. As Calum McNeil argues in his article, even though Canada has maintained a policy of engagement with Cuba since official diplomatic relations were established in 1945, the United States has largely structured Cuban-Canadian relations. More interestingly, he focuses his analysis of the triangulation of United States-Cuba-Canada within the trust-building framework. The value of this approach is that it allows McNeil
to tackle what may be the most significant problem that confronts attempts by Cuba and the United States to build “normal” relations—the long legacy of mutual distrust. At the same time, he explores how representations, perceptions, and emotions can shape the rationality of decision-making in the way Washington and Havana relate to each other. McNeil argues that although the tripartite relationship is frequently presented as a factor undermining better Cuban-Canadian relations, it could potentially provide an example of how developing trust, respect, and understanding between Cuba and Canada could serve as a “model” for U.S.-Cuban relations. By highlighting how Cuba and Canada benefit from engagement and multilayered social interactions, he offers valuable lessons for Cuba and the United States.

The third part, “Constructing Canada and Cuba,” highlights the significance of personal interactions in building links between the two societies. Through three case studies focused on Cuba’s presence in the Canadian media, the Cuban diaspora in Toronto and Montreal, and educational exchanges, this section examines emerging topics in Cuban-Canadian studies. Although lacking an analytical overarching framework, these cases contribute to the analysis of how the representation of Canada and Cuba shape perceptions and construct realities. The authors draw on a variety of research methodologies, including the analysis of media coverage of two Canadian newspapers (the Globe and the Toronto Star), site visits, participant observations, in-depth interviews of the transnational Cuban migration to Canada, and personal experiences of Canadian students in Havana. This diversity of approaches offers a nuanced understanding of the influence of social interactions generated by educational, cultural, and personal exchanges in foreign policy.

The editors of Other Diplomacies, Other Ties have provided a valuable resource for understanding the multiple faces of Cuban-Canadian relations which could usefully inform efforts to improve Cuban-U.S. relations.

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