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Cuba Today and Tomorrow: Reinventing Socialism by Max Azicri

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pasado en el presente, lo que se precisa es incorporarlo performativamente: la memoria, por tanto, no invade sino que informa al presente.

La inquietud que permanece es cómo reconstruir un sentido de comunidad. En América Latina, el fin de las dictaduras que debía ofrecer el espacio social idóneo para llevar a cabo la purgación del trauma social en tanto una labor colectiva, coincidió con la total implantación de Estados neoliberales. En ese sentido, la memoria colectiva ha debido enfrentar no sólo el olvido jurídico, sino sobre todo, la lógica de un modelo económico-social que impone el individualismo, la libertad de consumo, las relaciones de competencia, pero que no ofrece ningún modelo de comunidad “social” alternativo. En este sentido, el estudio de Jelin hace aún más evidente el imperativo de proteger y consolidar una sociedad que se sustenta en las experiencias compartidas con vías a lograr su propia reparación.

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*Cuba Today and Tomorrow: Reinventing Socialism.* By Max Azicri. Gainseville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2001. Pp. xviii, 396. Tables. Figures. Appendices. Notes. Index. \$55.00 cloth; \$24.95 paper.

There is considerable scholarly debate about contemporary Cuban political economy, and much speculation about Cuba's future. Can it carry off a Chinese-style authoritarian-led economic liberalization without the benefit of extraordinary rates of economic growth? Can Cuba's Communist regime survive its founder? Can Cuba encourage economic reform while preserving its egalitarian focus and maintaining its welfare state? *Cuba Today and Tomorrow* is a study of Cuban political economy since the demise of the Soviet Bloc. Though largely descriptive, Azicri's work contains a massive amount of useful information on contemporary Cuba and nicely complements other recently published works on the island nation.

Azicri's main argument is that by surviving the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, and by adapting to a dramatically changed international environment, Cuba is reinventing rather than “reforming away” its socialist system. Azicri clearly highlights the huge challenges that continue to face Cuba and carefully documents the Castro regime's remarkable survival when faced with an economic catastrophe in the 1990s. He nicely describes how Cuba's leaders initially reacted against Gorbachev's reforms by rolling back mild economic reforms (the “rectification process”). When the Soviet Union collapsed Castro was forced to reverse course again and adopt an impressive set of economic reforms that have allowed the regime to better integrate into the international capitalist political economy while still giving the Cuban state considerable control.

Less satisfying is his discussion of the political reforms enacted in the 1990s. He points to a number of institutional changes (especially electoral reforms) that, according to the official rhetoric, attempted to broaden popular participation in the

political process. However, these reforms have not done much to lighten the heavy hand of the Communist Party, much less Castro's personal control of the Party and state. While the reforms described by Azicri are portrayed as part of the Communist Party's attempt to reinvent and reinvigorate socialism, some might argue that the forms are essentially window dressing for a political system that is still predominantly authoritarian, dictatorial, and top-down. A related weakness was Azicri's discussion of human rights. He does not seem to entertain the notion that, ideology and geopolitics aside, Cuba's intolerance of political dissent may simply result from a well-entrenched, personalistic, authoritarian regime that wishes to remain in power. Moreover, even if it is clear that Castro's regime has changed aspects of its political culture, it is less clear that the population at large views human rights that differently from the citizens of liberal democracies.

Azicri provides an excellent treatment of the Castro regime's foreign relations. However, while focusing a great deal on the persistently antagonistic U.S. policy toward Castro's regime (in large part fueled by the domestic political power of Miami Cuban Americans), Azicri does not spend as much time discussing Castro's role in perpetuating and skillfully manipulating the conflict with the U.S. As argued in Ann Louise Bardach's *Cuba Confidential* (2003), Castro and the U.S. are locked in a "co-dependent" conflict that serves the interest of ideologues in both countries while harming the interests of citizens in both places.

There were some minor annoyances in this book. A bibliography would have been useful. The author depended very heavily on a large number of lists of points that at times made the book read almost like a PowerPoint presentation. In general the book contains much useful information, but at times the level of detail seemed excessive, and might have been included in the book's excellent statistical appendix. In his attempt to be evenhanded and balanced, Azicri often produced quotes from top Cuban leaders and leading Cuban intellectuals. However, sometimes these quotes were presented uncritically and not placed in their proper context (or at least not contextualized as thoroughly as the comments of regime critics). Despite some of its analytical shortcomings, *Cuba Today and Tomorrow* is an invaluable source of information. When used together with Bardach's *Cuba Confidential*, Ana Julia Jatar-Hausmann's *The Cuban Way* (1999), and Susan Eckstein's *Back From the Future* (2003), students of contemporary Cuban politics can gain a very clear picture of Cuba today.

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*The Price of Poverty.* By Daniel Dohan. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. Pp. xix, 295. Figures. Tables. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$60.00 cloth; \$24.95 paper.

In this comparative study of poverty in two Mexican American communities in California, Daniel Dohan not only debunks pejorative stereotypes of the poor but models a constructive contextual approach to understanding how poverty actually