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# Review of Hosoda, Haruko, Castro and Franco: The Backstage of Cold War Diplomacy

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**Haruko Hosoda.** *Castro and Franco: The Backstage of Cold War Diplomacy.* London: Routledge, 2019. 148 pp. \$180.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-138-34317-7.

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**Commissioned by** Aaron Coy Moulton (Stephen F. Austin State University)

*Castro and Franco*, an English-language translation of a Japanese-language work published in 2016, tackles an intriguing Cold War-era subject: the relatively cordial relations maintained between two countries, Cuba and Spain, whose ideological foundations should have driven them apart in the context of the East-West confrontation where, according to traditional narratives, each state had to choose a side. In a concise study of just over one hundred pages, Haruko Hosoda seeks to resolve this apparent contradiction: Why did Fidel Castro's Cuba and Francisco Franco's Spain, two authoritarian regimes with radically opposing views on communism, maintain diplomatic relations throughout the 1960s and 1970s? To answer this question, the author examines four key factors to highlight a certain convergence between Castro and Franco's leadership: their shared Galician heritage, a Catholic upbringing that shaped both leaders' "political morality," a common experience in guerrilla warfare tactics, and an exacerbated nationalism that fostered a deeply rooted anti-United States stance (p. 4).

To explore how these factors influenced the evolution of Cuban-Spanish relations during the Cold War, the author draws on archival sources from Cuba, Spain, and the United States to provide a "global" perspective that incorporates not only Cuban and Spanish policies but also the US gov-

ernment's influence and pressure. The author also mentions the Cuban community in Miami and the mediating role of the Vatican.

However, what initially promises to be an original and ambitious analysis ultimately results in a confusing and at times contradictory book that lacks a clear argumentative thread or a robust theoretical framework. While the reader is introduced to a series of revealing and unexpected details about the fluctuating interactions between these two nations with a long-shared history, these insights are unfortunately overshadowed by a fragmented structure, characterized by simplistic, poorly substantiated claims and abrupt transitions between loosely connected topics.[1]

One element that could have strengthened the arguments of this book is a more decisive engagement with Cold War historiography and international relations studies. While the author cites Odd Arne Westad in the introduction, this reference feels more like a mandatory "gesture," which is left underexplored without a clear explanation of how Westad's "global history" approach applies to the case at hand (p. 1). Another issue that could have been more thoroughly addressed is the role of personalism versus structural factors in shaping international policies, on which the author offers no definitive stance. The second chapter delves into the childhood and adolescence of Fidel

Castro and Francisco Franco, unconvincingly attempting to trace an emotional matrix that could explain the continuation of relations between the two countries after the Cuban Revolution of 1959. This section suggests that personalism—specifically the roles of Castro, Franco, and other officials with Galician origins like Cuban Carlos Rafael Rodríguez and Spaniard Eduardo Barreiros—was key in shaping bilateral relations. However, in the book's solid sixth chapter, the author astutely pinpoints the importance of commercial pragmatism between the two states, particularly from Havana's perspective as Castro's regime needed to diversify its economic ties to compensate for the lack of exchanges with its "northern neighbor" (p. 65).

The "essentialist" and subjective arguments in the first part of the book lack empirical evidence to substantiate claims about how factors such as the two authoritarians' common Galician origins, their attachment to the idea of "Hispanidad," or their Catholic traditions influenced the maintenance of Cuban-Spanish relations (p. 50). In contrast, the second part delves into components far more conclusive and methodologically sound, grounded in structural causes like the regimes' shared "anti-Americanism," which prompted Spain to strengthen ties with Cuba despite Washington's directives and pressures (p. 69). Additionally, the author persuasively highlights the economic needs of an island unable to afford the luxury of discarding potential trade allies in light of Washington's embargo. However, this more promising line of argument is often overshadowed by simplified and out-of-context historical references, including Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, Cuban policy in Africa, the 1960 meeting between Castro and Malcolm X, and Miami-based Cuban exiles (pp. 61, 69, 71, 74, 77).

These frustrations take away from the book's real contribution. What does this surprising bilateral convergence, best evidenced in Castro's declaration of three days of mourning for Franco's

1975 death, reveal about the nature of the Cold War? What did the bipolar conflict, decolonization, and other global disputes mean for these and other authoritarians? While the book effectively identifies a range of relevant factors, it leaves the reader questioning how to prioritize them. Should we emphasize a "spiritual" explanation, as the author suggests, or should we trace practical considerations, as indicated in the book's final passages (p. 56)? Although the author cites previous works on relations between Cuba and Spain, a more thorough engagement with the literature on Cuba's Cold War-era international relations—particularly its ties with the USSR and other Western countries such as Canada—could better situate these issues within their broader context.[2] Unfortunately, despite the substantial research conducted, *Castro and Franco* leaves these many questions unanswered.

#### Notes

[1]. It is possible some of these issues derive from the understandable challenges that come with translations.

[2]. John M. Kirk, "Unraveling the Paradox: The Canadian Position on Cuba," in *Cuba in the International System: Normalization and Integration*, ed. Archibald R. M. Ritter and John M. Kirk (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995); Jonathan Brown, *Cuba's Revolutionary World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

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