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Decolonizing the Cuban Missile Crisis

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Abstract:

Postcolonial scholars show how knowledge practices participate in the production and reproduction of international hierarchy. A common effect of such practices is to marginalize Third World and other subaltern points of view. For three decades, analysis of the Cuban missile crisis was dominated by a discursive framing produced in the ExComm, one in which Cuba was invisible. The effort to produce a critical oral history enabled Cuban voices - long excluded from interpretive debates about the events of October 1962 - to challenge the myth of the crisis as a superpower affair. Despite the oral history project's postcolonial intervention, however, and greater attention to Cuba's role in the crisis, this framing persists and is reproduced in the micro-practices of scholarship. Decolonizing the crisis, and by extension the discipline itself, is not easy to do.

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Introduction

Cuba's absence from the crisis that bore its name is a constant feature of U.S. scholarship for almost three decades following the events of October 1962. As commonly understood, the Cuban missile crisis - the standard U.S. label for these events[1] - took place between the United States and the Soviet Union. In this U.S.-centered account, initially articulated in the discussions of the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (ExComm) and reproduced in both scholarly and popular writings, 'the most dangerous crisis the world has ever seen' (Dean Rusk, in Blight and Welch, 1990: 179) has only two participants. As McGeorge Bundy, U.S. Special Assistant for National Security Affairs during the crisis, asserted: 'the conduct of *both sides* at the height of the crisis, and especially of *the two leaders*, was marked by prudence and skill' (1988: 407, emphasis added). Simply put, Cuba didn't matter in the Cuban missile crisis. In the early 1990s, this view of the crisis was brought into question. In a series of meetings initiated by U.S.-based scholars, U.S., Soviet and Cuban participants in the crisis were brought

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[1] For the Soviets, the events were the Caribbean crisis; for the Cubans, the October crisis.

together, in Moscow in 1989, Antigua in 1991, and Havana in 1992.[2] The aim of the meetings was to produce 'critical oral histories' of the crisis (Blight and Lang, 1995: 226-233). It emerged that Cuba's role was greater and more significant than U.S. scholarship had previously recognized; the standard account of the crisis as a two-party affair was rendered implausible. 'The Cuban missile crisis was very much a *Cuban* affair. Fidel Castro played a crucial role at every stage' (Blight, Allyn and Welch, 1993: 5). Subsequent analyses have been forced to acknowledge Cuba.

Building on postcolonial critiques of International Relations (IR), we examine relations between power, knowledge and international hierarchy through an analysis of the historiography of the Cuban missile crisis. The effort to produce a critical oral history of the crisis constitutes a postcolonial intervention in the literature, a moment when the Cuban subaltern - long excluded from debates about the events of October 1962 - can challenge conventional understanding of the crisis.[3] What happens when the subaltern speaks? How does the discipline respond to voices that challenge its commonsense accounts of the world? The return of Cuba in contemporary narratives of the crisis enables us to examine the extent to which IR, as an Anglo-American social science, can acknowledge the role of subaltern others such as Cuba in the making of our world, and on what terms. We use Cuba's initial absence from and subsequent appearance in standard U.S. accounts of the crisis to explore the prospects for producing better, less colonial

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[2] Two earlier meetings took place in 1987, at Hawk's Cay, Florida and Cambridge, Massachusetts, but no Cubans were present. Reports and transcripts are contained in Blight and Welch, 1990; Blight, Lewis and Welch, 1991; Allyn, Blight and Welch, 1992; Blight, Welch and Allyn, 1993. A sixth meeting took place in Havana in 2002, on the fortieth anniversary of the crisis (Blight and Lang, 2003).

[3] Making sense of the missile crisis from a Cuban point of view follows directly from the project's aim to generate a 'nuclear phenomenology' - a reconstruction of how the crisis appeared to the actors involved - that challenges the 'celebratory rhetoric' evident in

analyses of world politics.

That the practices of states produce hierarchies - among states, peoples and places - is obvious (e.g., Buzan and Little, 1996). It is less obvious that practices of scholarship are complicit in these processes. Postcolonial scholars have demonstrated how knowledge practices - including scholarship of the highest standards and integrity - participate in the production and reproduction of international hierarchy. A common feature of such practices is the marginalization of Third World and other subaltern points of view (e.g., Dunn and Shaw, 2001; Tickner, 2003a; 2003b). The accounts of world politics that serve as the ground for theory-building and substantive analysis in IR derive overwhelmingly from the experiences and perceptions of the Anglo-American world (e.g., Krishna, 2001; Suzuki, 2005). In analysis of October 1962, 'the very definition of the crisis and what exactly its main events were has been dictated by the American version of what happened' (Scott and Smith, 1994: 664). Asking 'Why doesn't Cuba count in the Cuban missile crisis?' and 'What happens when the Cuban subaltern speaks?' prompts analysis of the micro-practices through which the marginalization of Cuba is reproduced in IR scholarship. That is, we treat the invisibility of Cuba in the Cuban missile crisis - not unusual in itself[4] - as a puzzle to be explained. Through analysis of the standard IR literature on the crisis we show how scholarly practices combine with the practices of states to produce a hierarchical international order in which Cuba is not a significant locus of agency or knowledge.

Recent vigorous debate over political bias in IR scholarship, some of it about

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standard accounts (Blight and Lang, 1995: 228-9; see also Weldes, 1999a).

[4] Jorge Domínguez argues U.S. policy makers often ignore the particularities and significance of 'small countries' like Vietnam and, post-Cold War, Panama. Like Cuba, they are 'just a locale' (1993: ix).

analysis of Cuba (e.g., Snyder, 1999, 2001; Gibbs, 2001; White et al., 2002), raises issues about the relations between IR scholarship and U.S. foreign policy. A particular narrative of the events of October 1962 emerged from the ExComm deliberations and came for almost three decades to define the parameters of scholarly (and popular) analysis of the missile crisis. In that narrative, Cuban actions and interests are irrelevant, rendering Cuba an omitted variable and generating unreliable analyses of the causes and dynamics of the crisis. The invisibility of Cuba in the crisis was not an oversight, however, but an effect of power (Trouillot, 1995). We show here how - through what mechanisms - Cuba was excluded from analysis of the Cuban missile crisis, examining the discursive frames through which plausible narratives about the world are assembled. We also show that despite increased attention to the Cuban subaltern after the critical oral history project, the ExComm's narrative persists and is reproduced in the micro-practices of scholarship. Decolonizing the Cuban missile crisis, and by extension the discipline, is not easy to do.

Our analysis also highlights the relations between IR and historiographies of world politics, between the theories and models we build and the empirical ground those theories take for granted (e.g., Puchala, 2003). Empirical work by historians and other social scientists is not 'an unproblematic background narrative from which theoretically neutral data can be elicited for the framing of problems and the testing of theories' (Lustick, 1996: 605). Like IR itself, histories of world politics are shaped by power and informed by theoretical and political assumptions (e.g., Blaut, 1993). Across the social sciences Eurocentric and Orientalist assumptions structuring dominant understandings of world politics and its histories are being rethought (e.g., Coronil, 1997; Cooper and Stoler, 1997; Jameson and Miyoshi, 1998). For example, U.S. historians are

reconceptualizing their objects of analysis, rejecting myths of North American exceptionalism and engaging with the histories and narratives of other peoples and places (e.g., Bradley, 2000; Bender, 2002). Similarly, in analysis of inter-American relations it is no longer credible to 'leav[e] out the Latin Americans' (Gilderhaus, 2005: 325). The historical ground upon which IR and its theories are constructed is thus shifting, making it important that we are self-conscious about the ways in which scholarly practices have contributed to the invisibility of other experiences and points of view. Our analysis of Cuba's changing role in the Cuban missile crisis thus reflects wider developments with significant implications for IR.

The article is organized as follows. First, we discuss the relations between power, knowledge and international hierarchy, focusing on the ways in which the temporal and spatial assumptions structuring conventional analysis of the Cuban missile crisis have served to reproduce relations of international hierarchy. Second, we reconstruct the emergence of the dominant U.S. narrative of the crisis and show how it functioned to marginalize other understandings of the events of October 1962. Third, we examine the attempt by Cubans participating in the critical oral history project to articulate an alternative account of the crisis in which Cuba and Cuban actions did matter. Fourth, we consider IR's response to the subaltern and the implications for decolonizing the missile crisis. In conclusion, we draw out the wider implications of our argument.

Power, Knowledge and International Hierarchy

IR scholars have long recognized the close relations between power, knowledge, and hierarchy. In 1977 Stanley Hoffmann famously argued that taking U.S. status and

interests for granted rendered IR an American social science (Hoffmann, 1977). In a private correspondence, E.H. Carr agreed: '[t]he study of international relations in English speaking countries is simply a study of the best way to run the world from positions of strength' (in Haslam, 1999: 252-3). Hoffmann and Carr each raised serious questions about the ways in which power relations shape knowledge of the international. Knowledge production is never a neutral activity; rather, it reinforces the power relations out of which it emerges (Cox, 1986). Postcolonial IR scholarship reasserts these themes (e.g., Chowdhry and Nair, 2004; Gruffyd Jones, 2006). Although the international system is formally anarchic, it is not substantively so (Milner, 1990); the practices of states enact various forms of rule (Hobson and Sharman, 2005). Hierarchy - 'the formal arrangement of directives coercively deployed' - is a form of rule based on asymmetrical power and authority relations, on relations of super- and sub-ordination, in which superordinate states issue 'directives backed by the threat of physical coercion' (Onuf and Klink, 1989: 160, 169). Such relations confer privileges onto dominant states, not least the power to define - discursively to constitute - worlds of interaction with their attendant distributions of identities and interests (e.g., Shapiro, 1988; Doty, 1996; cf. Barnett and Duvall, 2005). Discursive practices of representation produce subject positions and interpretive dispositions that generate international relations of hierarchy.

International hierarchies are not produced by the actions of states alone, of course. They are also produced in both scholarly and popular analyses of world politics (e.g., Sharpe, 2000; Weldes, 1999b). Postcolonial scholars point to the multiple ways in which Anglo-American IR participates in the (re)production of hierarchal relations (e.g., Dunn and Shaw, 2001; Krishna, 2001). Perhaps most generally, IR takes for granted as

background knowledge, and thus truth, distinctions constitutive of sharp divides between spaces problematically referred to as the North and the South, the First and the Third World, or 'the West and the rest' (Pletsch, 1981; Lewis and Wigen, 1997). These practices make the Anglo-American world central to global history, acknowledging only contingent connections between 'the West' and 'the rest'. The former becomes the space of modernity, agency, knowledge, history and power. The latter becomes 'its lack, or other' (Doty, 1996: 157). The consequences for our *mis*understanding of the world are evident, for example, in analyses of the rise of the West to global dominance that overlook the significance of the non-West (e.g., Hobson, 2004), of the spread of sovereignty out of Europe and across the planet that ignore the close ties between sovereignty and imperialism (e.g., Anghie, 2005), and of a modernity assumed to be Western, thus obscuring the existence of other modernities (e.g., Halperin, 2006).

The discursive practices that render such Eurocentric accounts possible and plausible also make 'other possible readings/writings of world politics' more difficult, hence the near invisibility of Africa in IR theory (Dunn, 2001: 3). As active subjects of world politics 'the rest' drop from view. In postcolonial perspective, IR is a colonial field of knowledge: it imposes upon an irreducibly diverse world a single way of knowing in the service of an unequal world order (Muppidi, 2005: 274-5). In scholarship attentive to a postcolonial critique, then, the aim is to decolonize knowledge; to rethink the taken-for-granted historical geographies informing IR scholarship to enable recognition of subaltern agency and its role in the production of our world.

The Anglo-American nature of IR is evident in the assumptions about the historical geography of the international that structure analysis of the Cuban missile

crisis. For three decades virtually all analyses of the crisis presupposed and reproduced a specific set of temporal and spatial assumptions. Temporal assumptions are the taken-for-granted chronologies of key actors, central processes and significant events that structure the analysis. Spatial assumptions are the frameworks that organize the world in spatial terms and locate those actors, processes and events both in relation to each other and to world politics more generally. Taken together, these assumptions produce an historical geography of world politics in general and of the crisis in particular, one in which Cuba doesn't count. Standard accounts of the crisis define which actors and concerns are most important. The Cuban missile crisis, and by extension world politics, is not about Cuba or Cubans; it is about the United States and the Soviet Union. Here as elsewhere, world politics is great power politics (Barkawi and Laffey, 2006).

It has been 'the almost universal view among Americans since 1962 ... that Cuba was not an important player in the crisis, and that October was the purest superpower confrontation of the nuclear age' (Allyn, Blight and Welch, 1992: 211). Despite this broad consensus, 'the Cuban missile crisis' is not the only way these events can be understood. U.S. narratives of the crisis were confronted at the time by Soviet accounts of the Caribbean crisis and Cuban accounts of the October crisis (see Weldes, 1999a: chap. 1). These alternative accounts are not easily reconciled with the dominant U.S. narrative. In important respects they are simply incompatible with it; for example, the U.S. narrative marginalizes both Cuban sovereignty and past U.S. efforts, including military force, to depose Castro. In illuminating the contestability of the missile crisis narrative, these alternative accounts - readily available at the time and since in the statements of Soviet and Cuban state actors – highlighted the partiality of the U.S. narrative.

Introducing Cuba as more than either a passive stage or a Soviet puppet - the only options available prior to the 1990s - would have disrupted the framing of the events of 1962 as 'the Cuban missile crisis', leading perhaps to a different story and outcomes. But in the United States little attention was paid to Soviet and Cuban accounts. Prior to 1990 they remained marginal to the historiography and popular understandings of the crisis, with serious consequences for explanation and policy prescription.

The invisibility of Cuba as an active subject in U.S. narratives is an effect of power, reflecting the differential ability of social actors to shape the production of knowledge. Drawing a distinction between history understood as social process, as what actually happened (hereafter History 1), and history as knowledge, the framing of what happened in discourse (hereafter History 2), makes it easier to see 'the differential exercise of power that makes some narratives possible and silences others' (Trouillot, 1995: 25). U.S. analysis of the crisis has been dominated by the assumptions structuring the original discussions in the ExComm and repeated in memoirs, biographies and the writings of social scientists, as well as in U.S. popular culture. The prestige of U.S. political institutions as well as insider status - as a member of the ExComm, for instance - lends *prima facie* authority and credibility to accounts produced by former policy-makers. In contrast, Cuban participants and analysts, including state actors like Castro, have been excluded or marginalized.[5] As a result, the U.S. account has seldom been forced to confront alternative narratives.

Postcolonial scholarship foregrounds the necessity of giving voice to those rendered invisible or mute by the colonial character of existing fields of knowledge. It

[5] Dinerstein (1976) is a rare exception. On the implications of contesting taken-for-granted historiographies of international crises, see, e.g., Campbell, 1993; Milliken, 2001.

has produced a large literature devoted to 'subaltern studies' on which we draw to make sense of Cuba's shifting role in its crisis (e.g., Chaturvedi, 2000; Beverley, 1999). Dominant accounts of events, including international crises, typically exclude a variety of subaltern groups; postcolonial scholarship rewrites these accounts by attending to the experiences and views of the subaltern. While this is no easy task (e.g., Spivak, 1988; Alcoff, 1991), it has led postcolonial scholars to stress the need to seek out new sources, and to read old ones in new ways. Like the critical oral history project, these efforts have generated large amounts of new data. However, the aim is not just the production of more facts, as if eventually we will have them all and can then write definitive accounts of the past. Against such fantasies, postcolonial analysis aims to produce new ways of making sense of the facts, thereby to contest and perhaps transform colonial fields of knowledge.

What would it mean to decolonize the Cuban missile crisis? Postcolonial analysis begins by acknowledging the significance of colonial and imperial relations for the historical geographies of world politics, past and present (e.g., Cooper, 2005; Gregory, 2004) while opposing colonial and imperial power. It locates dominant forms of knowledge in relation to the continuing reality of such power, engages with subaltern forms of knowledge, and traces the relations of connection and constitution between colonizer and colonized, dominant and subordinate, in global life (Slater, 2004: 20-21; cf. Saurin, 2006). These relations are both context and, often, direct cause of events such as the missile crisis. Postcolonial analysis uses the periphery to throw light on the core, showing how dominant understandings and practices take on different meaning when viewed through subaltern eyes. But it is not just a critique of the mystifying and ideological effects of our representational practices (Lazarus, 2002). It entails also

analysis of the political economies of value and force through which international relations of hierarchy are produced and reproduced (e.g., Amin, 1989; Wolf, 1997). Decolonizing the missile crisis means rewriting accounts of October 1962 in these terms.

Of course, the typical referents of subaltern studies are not like the Cuban state. The former, such as South Asian peasants under the British, are often illiterate and so have left only indirect traces of their practices in the texts of colonial rule.[6] In contrast, the Cuban state is the hybrid product of a richly literate trans-Atlantic Hispanic, African and North American culture (Gott, 2004; Pérez, 1997). Moreover, modern institutions like the state are produced through and in turn generate numerous texts of diverse kinds. Whether in the form of a state actor such as Castro or the bureaucratic practices that give it form, Cuba can and does speak. There are nonetheless similarities between the two cases that license our use of postcolonial theory. In both cases there is a dominant and a subaltern mode of subjectivity - the colonial Indian state and South Asian peasants, or the U.S. and Cuban states, respectively - in terms of discursive power: the ability to articulate an authoritative account of events and so to constitute worlds of interaction. Neither an illiterate South Asian peasant nor a famously garrulous Cuban state actor has the power to narrate events in terms that effectively challenge dominant accounts. This asymmetry renders Cuba's relation to the United States that of a subaltern: however much noise it makes, Cuba remains unheard, drowned out and spoken for by more powerful voices such as the United States or, as in the resolution of the crisis, the Soviet Union (e.g., Castro in Blight and Brenner, 2002: 35-71).

On the basis of the preceding discussion, two questions central to our analysis

[6] Postcolonial theory is self-conscious about the ways in which it's analyses emerge from a particular standpoint, that of the postcolonial subject, in the service of an emancipatory

emerge: first, how has Cuba been marginalized from the standard account of the Cuban missile crisis? This question leads to a focus on discursive mechanisms of knowledge production - the ways in which a particular account of the crisis emerges from the ExComm and for three decades serves as the basis for subsequent interpretation and analysis. A second question follows from the 'discovery' by U.S. scholars through the critical oral history project of Cuba's role in the crisis: what happens when the subaltern speaks? This question leads to a focus on micro-practices of scholarship – on how IR responds to challenges to its commonsense. We explore these questions below.

Myth-Making: The Cuban Missile Crisis as Heroic History

The conventional narrative or myth[7] of the Cuban missile crisis was first articulated by President John F. Kennedy and his advisers early on during the events of October 1962. The framing of Cuba in the ExComm drew on a set of background assumptions and representations, on a particular historical geography of world politics, through which the United States constituted its international relations. In this section we trace those practices, showing the consequences for Cuba and U.S.-Cuban relations.

ExComm and After. During the ExComm discussions Cuba and Castro were only rarely mentioned (Weldes, 1999a: 74-78). Sometimes they appeared as a Soviet puppet, 'an outpost of the Soviet Union with little autonomy' (Brenner, 1990: 116). Most often, however, Cuba appeared not as an agent, even a proxy one, but merely as a place, and a 'little pipsqueak of a place' at that (Marine Corps Commandant David Shoup, in May and Zelikow, 1997: 181). Cuba was the place *in which* missiles were deployed by the Soviet

project (e.g., Scott, 1999); cf. feminist standpoint theory (e.g., Weeks, 1996).

[7] We define myth as a narrative that in a particular culture has 'the status of *paradigmatic*

Union and *from which* they had to be removed by the United States; the drama was thus between the United States and the Soviet Union. Possible U.S. actions during the crisis - surveillance, blockade, bombing, invasion - were directed against a Soviet threat *in Cuba*.

Through its practices during the crisis the United States re-enacted a particular set of international hierarchies between itself, the Soviet Union and Cuba.[8] The cold war United States represented itself as the apex of the hierarchy of states: the most advanced democracy, the bulwark against Communism, a force for good in the world (e.g., Weldes, 1999a: chap. 6). It had the 'right to the moral leadership of this planet' (John F. Kennedy, in Lundestad, 1989: 527) and the corresponding burden of world leadership. As such, the United States had both the right and the responsibility to deploy its power to defend the Free World from its enemies. The Soviet Union was represented in explicitly hierarchical terms as other to this U.S. self. Subordinate and debased, it was a 'totalitarian state' that practiced the 'secrecy' typical of 'despotism' (Kennedy, 1962: 367). Through 'a fanatical conspiracy, international communism' (Eisenhower, 1960: 95), it sought 'to impose its absolute authority over the rest of the world' (NSC 68, 1978: 385). It was thus represented as both dangerous and powerful, as a force to be taken seriously.

Cuba's position within these hierarchies shifted over time. Under Batista, Cuba languished as a minor satellite; it was an ally or client of sorts, but not very important. After the 1959 revolution a starker U.S.-Cuba hierarchy emerged. Cuba came to be represented as a communist state and, more specifically, as a renegade that had turned its back on its 'brothers' in the 'western hemisphere' (Weldes, 1999a: chaps. 4, 5). It became a dangerous 'enemy' 'poised at the throat of the United States' (Kennedy, 1961: 79),

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truth' (Lincoln, 1989: 24).

[8] Soviet practices also marginalised Cuba, but in different ways (Blight and Brenner,

acting as a ‘Trojan horse’ (Stebbins, 1963: 307) for the Soviet Union, providing ‘a base and staging area for revolutionary activity throughout the continent’ (U.S. Department of State, 1961: 25). Cuba also challenged U.S. credibility: ‘the intrusion of Soviet despotism’ into the western hemisphere defied the Monroe Doctrine, ‘the first and most fundamental of our foreign policies’ (Dulles, 1954: 591). Under Soviet influence, Cuba supported revolutionary movements elsewhere in Latin America, threatening regional peace and stability. In response, the United States resorted to increasingly harsh economic and political pressure as well as force, both overt - as in the Bay of Pigs invasion - and covert - as in support terrorist Cuban counter-revolutionary terrorism.

Simultaneously, however, Cuba was rendered insignificant and virtually invisible. Crucial was the assumption that Cuba had vacated its sovereignty by aligning itself with the Soviet Union, transforming itself into a satellite ‘was walking hand-in-hand with the Sino-Soviet block’ (Secretary of State Christian Gerder, in Stebbins, 1961: 314) and providing ‘a Communist bridgehead ninety miles from the United States’ (Stebbins, 1961: 292). Moreover, ‘Castro and his gang’ had ‘betrayed the ideals’ of the Cuban revolution, which initially ‘reflected the aspirations of the Cuban people’ for ‘individual liberty and free elections’ (Kennedy, 1960: 20). This representation separated the ‘Cuban regime’ from the ‘Cuban people’, rendering the government illegitimate and providing a justification for U.S. actions that over-rode Cuban sovereignty (U.S. Department of State, 1961). Through these representations, the United States constructed a Cuba whose concerns could be ignored. Cuba’s absence from the missile crisis and the subsequent myth, then, were both made possible by and served to re-enact Cuba’s subordinate position on the hierarchy of states.

2002).

These hierarchies were variously enacted by the United States during the events of October 1962. For example, U.S. decision makers determined that they had a right to conduct surveillance over Cuba. As Dean Rusk argued on October 16, 1962, in order to defend its security the United States should 'announce that … we are conducting a surveillance … over Cuba, and we will enforce *our right* to do so' (in Trachtenberg, 1985: 172; emphasis added). As it entailed a violation of Cuban airspace, this U.S. 'right' in fact abrogated Cuban sovereignty.[9] The United States further enacted the hierarchy by dictating to the Soviet Union and Cuba what weapons they could deploy, and where. President Kennedy had expressly warned on September 13, 1962, that 'if Cuba should possess a capacity to carry out offensive actions against the United States … the United States would act' (Kennedy, 1963: 675). In 1962 the United States had significant extra-territorial military deployments, including nuclear weapons in Italy and Turkey, which might have been taken to justify reciprocal Soviet measures. Instead, the United States succeeded in determining that the Soviet Union could not station nuclear weapons in Cuba and that the Cubans could not have nuclear or indeed any offensive weapons at all. In arrogating to themselves the right to determine which means were permitted for Cuban defense, U.S. decision makers again ignored Cuban sovereignty. That this has seemed unexceptional, exciting virtually no comment by U.S. decision-makers and in most U.S. treatments of the missile crisis, indicates how firmly entrenched is this hierarchy in U.S. foreign policy and scholarly discourse. Finally, this same hierarchy was enacted in the crisis' ending: Castro and the Cuban government were excluded from the negotiations

[9] This points to a difference between U.S.-Cuba and U.S.-Soviet hierarchies: while the United States asserted an explicit right to overfly Cuba, it limited itself to covert flights over Soviet territory. For Cuban perceptions of these relations, see e.g. Castro in Blight, Allyn and Welch (1993: 120).

and the crisis resolution was arranged between the two superpowers alone. As Castro later said, 'We had to endure the humiliation' (1992: 339).

In the years after the crisis, Cuba continued to be marginalized. Classic early accounts offered by participants, such as Arthur Schlesinger (1965), Theodore Sorenson (1965), and Robert Kennedy (1971), closely follow the ExComm narrative. For example, except for a brief discussion of whether the decision to deploy the missiles was Soviet or Cuban, and the claim that Castro's resistance to the verification procedures caused the United States to refuse Cuba a guarantee not to invade (1965: 795-796, 833), Schlesinger's chapters (30, 31) on the crisis ignore Cuba, treating it merely as the site of the conflict. At one point Schlesinger does mention that 'there was a brief discussion [in the ExComm] of a demarche to Castro, but it was decided to concentrate on Khrushchev' (1965: 807). No explanation for the decision is given, as if the reason were obvious: this was a U.S.-Soviet confrontation. Castro and Cuba did not count.[10] Sorenson similarly entitled his chapter on the crisis 'The confrontation *in* Cuba', not 'The confrontation *with* Cuba' (1965: chap. 24). As in Schlesinger's account, Cuba and Castro scarcely appear. Instead, the focus is on the standard components of the missile crisis myth: the Soviet deployment, the U.S. discovery of missiles, U.S. decision making, the 'quarantine', negotiations with Khrushchev, and Kennedy's success in getting Khrushchev to retreat from the brink. In 1971 Graham Allison's influential *Essence of Decision* inaugurated the preoccupation with the missile crisis as a canonical instance of crisis decision making. Here too Cuba is marginalized. Allison begins with four 'central questions': 'Why did the Soviet Union place strategic offensive missiles in Cuba?', 'Why did the United States

[10] During the Moscow conference in 1989 Theodore Sorenson said the United States did not negotiate with Cuba during the crisis because the missiles were Soviet; the decision to

respond with a naval quarantine of Soviet shipments to Cuba?', 'Why were the missiles withdrawn?', and 'What were the "lessons" of the missile crisis?' (1971: 1-2). None of the answers acknowledges a significant role for Cuba. Allison's book analyses U.S. and Soviet decision making; Cuban decision making is ignored.[11]

The Cuban Missile Crisis Myth: Heroic History in Postcolonial Perspective. Actions by the United States, statements by U.S. officials, contemporary media accounts, and early histories all coalesced into the myth of 'the Cuban missile crisis'. Allison summarized the crisis thus: 'For thirteen days in October 1962, the United States and the Soviet Union stood "eyeball to eyeball", each with the power of mutual annihilation in hand' (1971: 39). Cuba was again irrelevant. 'It is remarkable to note the unanimity on this point both within the Kennedy administration in 1962, and in American historiography of the crisis ever since' (Blight, Allyn and Welch, 1993: 402, n.8). This myth is an instance of what Bernard Bailyn (1974) calls heroic history. Early writings on an event like the missile crisis are highly politicized and in fact constitute part of the event itself. They continue its battles, taking sides and constituting the event *as* an event and as an event of a particular *kind*. For such early analyses,

> the outcome is still in some degree in question, the struggle in an extended form is still alive, emotions are still deeply engaged; and because of this immediacy, indeterminacy, and involvement, attempts at explanations of what happened tend to be *heroic* in character. That is, they are highly moral; the struggle they present is between good and bad; and they are highly personified; individuals count overwhelmingly; their personal qualities appear to make the difference between victory and defeat (Bailyn, 1974: viii).

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remove them would also be Soviet (Allyn, Blight and Welch, 1992: 94).

[11] In part, this is justified by reference to a lack of access to Cuban data. A similar lack in the United States and the Soviet Union did not slow development of a huge secondary literature on the crisis, however. Moreover, lack of access to archival evidence and a preference for interviews and memoirs reinforces Allison's reliance on U.S. state actors for his understanding of the crisis (Bernstein, 2000: 142-3).

Standard U.S. analyses of the missile crisis before the 1990s remain ensconced in this heroic moment. Intentionally or not, such analyses continue to take part in the politics of the events themselves. They do so, first, by adopting the categories and tropes put into place by U.S. decision makers in descriptions and policy practices at the time and, second, by reproducing the narratives constructed during and after the crisis by U.S. state officials, and members of the ExComm in particular. Scholarly practices thus participate in Cuba's continuing unequal encounter with the United States. The Cuban missile crisis and the relations of hierarchy enacted in it thus continue well beyond the formal resolution of the crisis in 1962.[12]

Seen in postcolonial perspective, the heroic missile crisis myth is a form of 'colonialist knowledge'.[13] In his analysis of the historiography of peasant protest in colonial India, Ranajit Guha (1983) shows how power enters into the production of knowledge, including what is often taken as basic empirical data. He shows how a particular account - History 2 - of peasant protest - History 1 - structures primary discourse such as the eyewitness accounts of colonial officials, secondary discourse such as memoirs, and tertiary discourse such as professional histories (ibid.: 3).[14] In striking parallels to the heroic history of the missile crisis, the assumptions of policy - the prevention and control of peasant protest in Guha's case - are built into the historical record and become the taken-for-granted data upon which History 2 is produced. Power

[12] The myth has changed over time, for example to incorporate the discovery in 1987 that President Kennedy had sought a missile trade with the Soviets (Blight and Welch, 1990: 114), but without challenging the structure of the narrative that we discuss here.
[13] On the cold war in Latin America as counterrevolution, see, e.g., Grandin, 2004. On the United States as an imperial state, see, e.g., Smith, 2005; in relation to Cuba, see, e.g., Morley, 1987.
[14] Guha defines primary, secondary and tertiary discourse according to the order of their appearance in time and their links, whether formal/acknowledged or real/tacit, with an

is thus not external to historical narrative but constitutive of it, inscribed in the narrative and the sources on which it draws. The resulting historiography thus participates in struggles it claims only to describe and/or explain. In its ‘affinity with policy’ such historiography ‘reveals its character as a form of colonialist knowledge’, a ‘prose of counterinsurgency’ (ibid.: 26, 1).

Cuba’s marginalization in the heroic missile crisis myth obscures the origins of the crisis in a persistent pattern of U.S. aggression towards and subversion of the Cuban revolution before October 1962. When Cuban state actors like Castro endeavor to raise issues like U.S. aggression or Cuban sovereignty, they are typically ignored, mocked, or misinterpreted. Similarly, Guha showed how peasants’ concerns are depicted in ways that render peasant protest pathological or inexplicable (ibid.: 12). Castro and Cuba are present in the heroic missile crisis myth, but always on someone else’s terms, largely those of U.S. policy makers in 1962. The subaltern are spoken for in ways that deny their historical agency and the legitimacy of their concerns while valorizing conceptions of the world in which, for example, a benevolent United States seeks to liberate the Cuban people from the malign influence of an alien Moscow-controlled Communist regime. Such representations participate, quite directly, in projects of colonial ordering.

In 1989, 1991 and 1992 the heroic missile crisis myth was challenged when U.S. and Soviet scholars and decision makers sat down with their Cuban counterparts to produce a critical oral history. In postcolonial terms, this was a moment when the subaltern spoke, when the Cuban subaltern could interrogate the crisis myth. What happens when subaltern narratives and representations encounter heroic history? Has the myth been reworked, and if so, how? Can we decolonize the Cuban missile crisis? As we

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official point of view.

argue below, despite generating new and important insights into the missile crisis, as a result of micro-practices that continue to marginalize the subaltern voice or simply explain it away the critical oral history project largely fails of its postcolonial promise.

Back to the Brink: Heroic History and the Subaltern Voice

In this and the next section we examine how IR reacted to Cuban challenges to the missile crisis myth. Through a series of conferences held between 1987 and 1992, scholars and participants in the Cuban/Caribbean/October crises were returned 'to the brink' to produce a critical oral history. Before the Cubans could speak, however, they had to be in the room. Unsurprisingly, Cuba was absent from the first two meetings in 1987, replicating the heroic myth by ignoring Cuba and its concerns. As David Welch, one of the organizers, put it: 'No one even dreamed of inviting Cubans to either of the first two conferences… we all still had the idea that the crisis was a U.S.-Soviet confrontation to which the Cubans were utterly irrelevant' (personal correspondence). Only when a third conference was organized by the Soviets in Moscow in 1989 were Cuban representatives invited; six politicians and scholars attended, including some who were in government during the crisis (Allyn, Blight and Welch, 1992: xxiii). The Soviet decision to invite the Cubans - taken without consultation with the Americans, who learned of it upon arrival in Moscow - produced 'consternation' among the U.S. participants, who 'still thought them irrelevant' and were 'worried it would turn into a political circus' (Welch, personal correspondence). Cuban representation was more substantial in Antigua in 1991 (Blight, Lewis and Welch, 1991) and of course in Havana in 1992, where Castro himself attended (Blight, Allyn and Welch, 1993).

What the Subaltern Said. Once in the room, what did the Cuban subaltern say? One of the questions most often asked from within the heroic narrative is: why were the missiles placed in Cuba?[15] From the subaltern view, the answer is blindingly obvious: 'the main origin of the crisis was American aggression against Cuba' (Risquet in Allyn, Blight and Welch, 1992: 149). In the October crisis narrative, responsibility rests squarely with the United States. The crisis follows concerted U.S. hostility towards the Cuban revolution and is a result of Cuban efforts, with Soviet help, to protect Cuba against an expected U.S. invasion, a larger Bay of Pigs with U.S. ground forces and air power (e.g., ibid.: 15; Blight, Lewis and Welch, 1991: 1-8, 71). Both to defend the Cuban revolution and to improve the strategic balance of power, the Soviet Union offered nuclear weapons (e.g., Blight, Allyn and Welch, 1993: 123). With some reluctance - it would have preferred a public deployment, given that the choice of weapons was legal in international law - Cuba accepted the missiles as part of its contribution to the defense of the socialist camp against capitalist aggression (e.g., Allyn, Blight and Welch, 1992: 70-71; Blight, Allyn and Welch, 1993: 82-87, 198-200, 208). Cuban representatives stressed these points in articulating their understanding of the crisis.

The subaltern rejected cold war articulations of Cuba that marginalized Cuban agency.[16] In orthodox U.S. accounts Soviet First Deputy Premier Anastas Mikoyan's visit to Cuba in March 1960 signals the subordination of the Cuban revolution to Moscow and prompts Eisenhower to allow the CIA to commence covert operations. Castro

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[15] For instance, this is the first question in Allison's *Essence of Decision* and also the first asked by Robert McNamara at the beginning of the Moscow conference (Allyn, Blight and Welch, 1992: 7).

[16] In preparing for the Havana meeting the organisers and other U.S. delegates drew on the 1961 Kennedy White Paper *Cuba* (Blight, Allyn and Welch, 1993: 38-39; U.S. Department of State, 1961).

rejected this explanation for U.S. action against Cuba, pointing out that ‘Hostility of all sorts had begun way before March of 1960’ (Blight, Allyn and Welch, 1993: 178).[17] Efforts to explain U.S. action as a response to Cuban subversion elsewhere in Latin America also got short shrift (e.g., Blight, Lewis and Welch, 1991: 14). In 1961 and 1962, said Risquet, ‘there was no Cuban action to export revolution’ (ibid.: 23). Cuban support for local revolutionary movements began after its U.S.-orchestrated expulsion from the O.A.S. in January 1962, legitimate self defense against states supporting U.S. efforts to generate a ‘Cuban counterrevolution’ (Risquet in Blight, Lewis and Welch, 1991: 49); indeed, ‘a country attacked and harassed as Cuba was then had every right to act the way it did’ (Castro in Blight, Allyn and Welch, 1993: 182).

Consistent with a postcolonial analysis, the subaltern challenged the heroic missile crisis myth by rejecting the temporal and spatial framing that made Cuba and U.S. imperialism invisible. Castro pointed to a long history of U.S. aggression against Latin American states and argued that the appropriate frame for analyzing Cuban actions - as reactive and defensive - was not the cold war but the history of unequal U.S.-Cuban relations (in Blight, Allyn and Welch, 1993: 174, 164-166). Americans, said Castro, had a poor knowledge of that history; needed was to ‘give Americans a proper education, and tell them the historical truth, instead of shaping their opinions on the basis of false premises’ (in ibid.: 176). For instance, they were taught that the United States was responsible for Cuba’s independence: ‘this teaching is incorrect… Spain was defeated, Spain could not continue the war against Cuba… and that is when the U.S. intervention

[17] The National Security Council agreed that Castro had to go in June 1959, only six months after the revolution and prior to links with Moscow (Gleijeses, 2002: 14-15). On U.S. plans to overthrow Castro, see Morley, 1987; for a Cuban account, see Escalante, 2004.

came' (in ibid.: 175-177). In Antigua, Risquet framed the crisis similarly, noting how Cuba was excluded from the peace conference that ended the Spanish-American War (in Blight, Lewis and Welch, 1991: 167, 195). This is a very different historical geography of the missile crisis; it shifts the temporal and spatial framing from the thirteen days of heroic myth to a century of U.S.-Cuban interaction, punctuated by repeated U.S. interventions in Cuba and elsewhere. This history is not heroic, but instead stresses the reality of imperial power and its meaning for the subaltern.

For the Cubans, the missile crisis is about the sovereign rights of small states in a world dominated by great powers. It is about the realities of imperial power and competition, and the corresponding need to build laws and institutions that defend the independence of small states. This is perhaps clearest in Cuban accounts of the 'lessons' of the crisis. U.S. scholarship routinely seeks to identify such lessons. Typically, they are conceived in terms of the interests of great powers and other states armed with nuclear weapons: 'the lessons of the October crisis… privilege one interpretation. I would say that that interpretation is basically the logic of the superpowers' (Rafael Hernández, in Blight, Lewis and Welch, 1991: 179). In contrast, a subaltern perspective is integral to the Cuban lessons. Pointing to the devastating effects of intervention in small Third World states, Hernández argued in Moscow that 'a new era in relations among the great powers would imply, as a lesson of the crisis, the acknowledgement of the sovereign interests of small countries and submission to the standards of international law' (in Allyn, Blight and Welch, 1992: 174).

Responding to the Subaltern. Getting into the room was not the end of Cuban problems in making themselves heard. In commenting on the Moscow meeting the

organizers noted that ‘the Americans and Soviets did most of the questioning and answering’ (Allyn, Blight and Welch, 1992: 201). When the Cubans tried to raise issues important to them, U.S. and Soviet participants often ignored them or changed the subject (e.g., ibid.: 14-18; 56-57; 68-75). As a result, Cuban concerns appear idiosyncratic and marginal to the real issues raised by the missile crisis, those discussed by the U.S. and Soviet delegates and highlighted in Blight and Welch’s account of the meeting (1990: 325-350). Reactions to the subaltern by U.S. participants were often dismissive, and tinged with anger (e.g., Blight, Allyn and Welch, 1993: 154). Cuban contributions, said the editors after Moscow, had to be read in light of contemporary politics. The subaltern - unlike the Americans and the Soviets - was not capable of discussing the crisis in a neutral, disinterested manner (Allyn, Blight and Welch, 1992: 202-3). For instance, Risquet’s ‘performance’ in Moscow was described as evidence that ‘Cuban officials … had difficulty transcending rhetoric and invective’ (Blight, Allyn and Welch, 1993: 9; 17; 27; 147). The editors also took exception to Fabián Escalante in Antigua describing U.S. operations against Cuba, not unreasonably, as acts of war and regarded the Antigua meeting as a ‘dead end’ (ibid.: 37-8). Behind the Cuban delegates the editors discerned Castro, whose ‘hovering presence… inevitably politicised’ proceedings in Moscow, Antigua and Havava (Allyn, Blight and Welch, 1992: 201; Blight, Allyn and Welch, 1993: 9, 11, 227, 291).

Beyond discounting repeated subaltern articulations of an alternative historical geography of the crisis as political, U.S. participants in the meetings responded in two further ways. First, they translated the subaltern voice into the social scientific language of misperception; second, they offered their own account of the history of U.S.-Cuban

relations. These responses, we show, effectively muffle or distort what the subaltern was saying, while reproducing key elements of the conventional crisis narrative.

Translating the subaltern voice into the language of misperception produced a causal and moral equivalence between the United States and the Cuban subaltern. This first response to the subaltern acknowledges a pattern of U.S. aggression. Thus, in Moscow McNamara accepts that the United States had engineered the Bay of Pigs invasion, that it had undertaken covert actions against the Cuban government, and that political leaders in the House and Senate were calling for invasion of Cuba (in Allyn, Blight and Welch, 1992: 7-9). However, having conceded the fact of U.S. actions against the Cuban revolution, U.S. participants immediately minimized their significance, referring to such actions as 'foolish', 'ill-conceived', 'irresponsible', and 'reprehensible' (Blight, Lewis and Welch, 1991: 47; Blight, Allyn and Welch, 1993: 155; 159; 266). At the same time, it was also accepted that, as a result of these 'foolish' actions, had U.S. policy makers been Cuban, they too would have expected an invasion. As McNamara said repeatedly, 'If I'd been a Cuban, I would have thought exactly what I think you thought' (e.g., Allyn, Blight and Welch, 1992: 7). The reasonableness of Cuban (and Soviet) fears is thus acknowledged. The next step - crucial to the translation - asserts that there was never any U.S. intention to invade, a claim also widely repeated (e.g., ibid.: 9). Determining the threat to Cuba is thus reduced to a simple binary - intent to invade or not. In the absence of such intentions, Cuban and Soviet fears of an invasion were based on misperceptions. This was not to blame them for the crisis, however. U.S. actions were also based on misperceptions, of the Cubans in particular (e.g., Blight, Allyn and Welch, 1993: 41-46; 321-2). The crisis is thus the product of mutual misperception. As Sergo

Mikoyan said, 'all of the pre-crisis history, beginning with January 1, 1959, is the history of misperceptions' (in Blight, Lewis and Welch, 1991: 39; 49-50). Editorial commentary after Moscow and Havana also strongly affirmed this view of the crisis (e.g., Blight and Welch, 1990: 329-331). Translating the subaltern voice in these terms mutes claims that the United States was responsible for the crisis, making it instead an unintended consequence of U.S., Soviet and Cuban actions. Subaltern rewriting of the historical geography of the crisis is reduced to one of three equivalent and 'incommensurable' sets of perceptions and misperceptions - the Cuban, Caribbean and October crises (Allyn, Blight and Welch, 1992: xxi).

While accepting that misperception had occurred, the Cuban subaltern refused this articulation of the crisis. The October crisis was not just one of three incommensurable narratives; rather, it described the continuing reality of U.S. imperialism. As Castro observed, 'No other country has intervened more in Latin America than the United States' (in Blight, Allyn and Welch, 1993: 174). Given that history, aggression against the Cuban revolution represented business as usual; the puzzle would be if the United States did *not* seek to overthrow the Cuban government.[18] Georgy Kornienko identified the implications of explanation in terms of misperception for subaltern knowledge: 'for Cuba and for the Soviet Union …, anticipating American military action or perhaps even an invasion, was not a *misperception*; it was a legitimate perception, based on plenty of evidence…. To call it a "misperception" is to excuse American policy' (in Blight, Lewis and Welch, 1991: 185-6). Framing the crisis in terms

[18] In Moscow, Andrei Gromyko, Soviet Foreign Minister in October 1962, said John F. Kennedy told him on October 18 that he had no intention to invade Cuba; Kennedy also said the political leadership and social regime in Cuba was unacceptable and unsuitable (Allyn, Blight and Welch, 1992: 49; 147-148; cf. Gromyko, 1995, 1996/1997).

of misperception, mutual or otherwise, elides U.S. imperialism and the systematic character of efforts dating since to change the Cuban government; the significance of U.S. aggression is greatly reduced while the failure to launch an invasion is greatly exaggerated (Hershberg, 1990).[19] As Mikoyan observed, 'Misperception is a wonderful word…' (in Blight, Lewis and Welch, 1991: 39).

The second response of U.S. participants to the subaltern's alternative historical geography was to offer their own account of U.S.-Cuban relations. Over the course of the project its organizers became increasingly receptive to subaltern claims. In Antigua, Welch said 'It has always been my view that the Cuban missile crisis began in the nineteenth century' (in Blight, Lewis and Welch, 1991: 188, 204). Blight, Allyn and Welch included a history of U.S.-Cuban relations, before and after 1898, in the transcripts of the final Havana meeting. The missile crisis, they said, 'cannot be understood' apart from this history (1993: 322-3). The subaltern had been heard, but how well? In making imperialism integral to the causes of the crisis, as part of a longer history of U.S.-Cuban relations, Blight, Allyn and Welch accept a key subaltern claim and their history pushes in postcolonial directions. They trace the patterns of racism, paternalism and imperial desire that shaped U.S. policy towards Cuba, as well as the resentment these policies produced on the island. The overtly anti-imperial character of U.S. foreign policy rhetoric, they argue, makes it hard for U.S. scholars to see U.S. imperialism and, when conscious of the imperial character of U.S.-Cuban relations, most North American observers see it as essentially benign (ibid.: 342, 338). Making sense of the U.S. role in

[19] It also neglects the possibility that U.S. intentions might change under the pressure of events (e.g., Blight, Lewis and Welch, 1991: 111, 123-4) and the role of U.S. policymakers in fostering misperception of their intentions (e.g., ibid.: 131ff; Allyn, Blight and Welch, 1989/90: 147).

the world thus requires seeing the United States as others do.

In other ways, however, Blight, Allyn and Welch reject the Cuban view of the crisis. In Moscow, Antigua and Havana the Cubans stressed the continuities in U.S. relations with Cuba. In contrast, Blight, Allyn and Welch offer a history of discontinuity. After 1898, U.S. policy had been ‘an imperialism of sorts’; Castro’s ‘belief’ that the missile crisis was a product of U.S. imperialism was thus ‘clearly understandable’ (1993: 338, 340). But after World War II, they argue, U.S. policy toward Latin America was driven by anti-communism (ibid.: 334). In linking U.S. opposition to the Cuban revolution to the history of U.S. imperialism, Castro got it wrong: he ‘failed to appreciate that the concerns animating American policy during the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations - ill founded though they were - had nothing to do with America’s quasi-imperial past and reflected a profound if paradoxical insecurity. Misunderstandings such as these are bound to affect the relations between states’ (ibid.: 342, 321). In this passage the history of U.S.-Cuban relations is important because it accounts for Castro’s misunderstanding of U.S. policy towards the Cuban revolution. In a move that reproduces heroic history’s individualism, the causes of the crisis are traced to the history of U.S.-Cuban relations as *mis*perceived by Castro, who is both product and prisoner of this history (ibid.: 323). The thin conception of imperialism informing the analysis is also evident: imperialism exists only if consciously present in the minds of U.S. policy makers. This is effectively to confuse the reasons given for an action with its effects, as if, for example, the Christian motivations of missionaries mean they do not also participate in the production of colonial relations of domination (e.g., Thomas, 1994: 125-144). Taking U.S. foreign policy makers at their word, U.S. cold war policy is

presented as discontinuous with what had gone before.

The subaltern, then, offered an alternative history of U.S.-Cuban relations. Rejecting that history requires more than simply believing what U.S. policy makers say. It requires a comparative analysis of U.S.-Cuban relations, before, during, and after the cold war. Consistent with the subaltern narrative, such an analysis undermines assertions of discontinuity in U.S. policy towards Cuba. A realist analysis of international hierarchy, for example, highlights relations of informal empire, 'in which subordinate states face periodic military intervention' and the expectation of intervention if they act in ways unacceptable to the dominant state (Wendt and Friedheim, 1995: 697, 698). The United States intervened militarily in Cuba in 1906, 1909, 1912, and 1917-1921; it supported or welcomed military coups in 1934 and 1952. Economic intervention was also persistent, for example through manipulation of the sugar quota (Morley, 1987: 31-39). Despite rejecting the subaltern view, Blight, Allyn and Welch also hint at such an analysis: 'A high degree of American influence in Cuba came to be taken so much for granted that when Fidel Castro stopped playing by the rules in the early 1960s, the dominant American reaction was righteous indignation' (1993: 340).[20] The justifications for intervention shift across the cold war divide but relations of hierarchy persist. A postcolonial analysis attentive to the political economy of imperialism also supports subaltern claims. Comparative analysis of U.S. reactions to social revolution in Mexico, Cuba, Bolivia and Guatemala, as well as in Chile and Nicaragua, highlights the consistency of U.S. policy towards Latin America throughout the twentieth century. At its core, policy is driven by the defense of U.S. capitalist interests - access to and

[20] Blight, Allyn and Welch do not detail the sheer scale of the U.S. impact on Cuba and influence over policy; see, e.g., Morley, 1987; Paterson, 1994; Perez, 1997.

domination of the hemisphere (Bergquist, 1996: 97, 100-101).[21] Continuity not discontinuity defines the longer history of U.S.-Cuban and U.S.-Latin American policy.

Drawing a sharp distinction between the cold war and what comes before and after it obscures such patterns. A cold war narrative of world politics provides the framework within which subaltern claims are interpreted and dismissed without proper investigation. Blight, Allyn and Welch explain the immediate origins of the crisis in the same cold war terms as the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations (1993: 335, 336);[22] their history thus provides a 'proper education' in which the subaltern and its alternative historical geography of the crisis are explained away.

After Havana: The Discipline and the Subaltern Voice

In this section we examine how IR has responded to the critical oral history project's postcolonial intervention. Decolonizing the crisis is not equivalent to taking subaltern claims at face value; rather, subaltern knowledge provides a vantage point from which to conduct a postcolonial critique of dominant understandings (Tickner, 2003a: 302). The larger significance of the critical oral history project lies in the possibility of an alternative account of the events of October 1962. Despite efforts to speak for the Cubans in the meetings and in editorial commentary, in Moscow, Antigua and Havana the subaltern voice was loud and clear. In IR scholarship, however, the postcolonial potential of what the subaltern said is mostly lost, drowned out by older narratives.

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[21] Blight, Allyn and Welch also refer to the role of economic interest in U.S.-Cuban relations across the Cold War divide (e.g., 1993: 327, 328, 330, 333, 335).

[22] For instance, growing ties with the Soviet Union are seen as an unintended effect of U.S. efforts to punish Cuba (Blight, Allyn, and Welch, 1993: 336); cf. CIA Director Allan Dulles in November, 1959 trying to force Cuba closer to the Soviets, as had been done in 1954 with Guatemala, in order to unify opposition to the revolution and provide a

Scholars were quick to appreciate the significance of the new information generated by the critical history project and the transcripts were widely cited. The project was one of the 'triumphs of glasnost', said Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein (1994: 6). Len Scott and Steve Smith suggested that the project, together with other new data, made possible 'a genuinely international history of the crisis' (1994: 678). The volume produced out of the Havana meeting, said Jorge Domínguez, was 'the best single work on the Cuban role in the crisis' (2000: 305, n.2). Perhaps the project's most obvious and immediate effect was to increase the number of participants in the crisis, from two to three: the United States, the Soviet Union, *and* Cuba.[23] The crisis is no longer plausibly represented as solely a superpower affair. Recovery of Cuban agency took place on familiar ground. Conventional disciplinary responses to the subaltern voice reproduced a great power conception of the crisis. Before and after the 'return to the brink', analysis of the crisis took for granted a cold war context and the territorial state as the basic unit of analysis. In standard accounts of the cold war the main causal dynamic is the superpower confrontation; the global south is accorded only a subordinate role (cf. Saull, 2001). On this view, the subaltern account of the crisis is about interactions between great powers and small states. Cuba becomes an active subject in the crisis but only a minor one, its role defined by U.S.-Soviet relations. Recovery of Cuban agency thus reproduces a conventional cold war historical geography and leads to a broadly realist conception of the crisis as the product of clashing state interests and interpretations, mediated by relative state power (e.g., Munton and Welch, 2007: 31).

The alternative historical geography of the crisis presented by subaltern linked it

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pretext for U.S. action (Cox, 2002: 449).

[23] Curiously, this is not true of Allison and Zelikow's revised edition of *Essence of*

not to U.S.-Soviet cold war crises such as and Berlin (1961) but to U.S. interventions in Latin America before and during the cold war. A clear indicator of whether or not the subaltern voice has been heard, then, is the treatment of U.S. imperialism. Most IR scholars define imperialism in geopolitical terms, as deliberate policies of foreign conquest and rule. The decline of formal empire means that imperialism is history; for IR, 'empires generally have passed away and are located elsewhere - Rome, China or the Soviet bloc countries' (Barkawi and Laffey, 2002: 111).[24] From this point of view, the subaltern account of the missile crisis makes little sense. During the cold war, the United States was a great power, a superpower; it was not an empire (cf. Cox, 2005: 21-22). In Lebow and Stein's (1994) otherwise impressive analysis of the crisis, there is no reference to imperialism; Cuba is compared with the U.S.-Soviet crisis over the Israel-Egypt war of 1973. In the updated edition of *Essence of Decision*, imperialism also does not figure; Cuba is linked to U.S.-Soviet conflict over Berlin, as it was by the ExComm (Allison and Zelikow, 1999: 181; 99-109; Weldes, 1999a: 47-48). Previously marginalized, U.S. actions against Cuba prior to the invasion are now prominent, but only as responses to Cuban actions; they are not part of a longer history of U.S. imperialism (e.g., Allison and Zelikow, 1999: 82-88; Munton and Welch, 2007: 12-20).

When reference is made to imperialism, it is confined to an historical past with little significance for the crisis. In defining the cold war as a clash between Soviet and U.S. empires, for instance, John Lewis Gaddis refers casually to U.S. domination of Latin America and its 'hemispheric hegemony' (1997: 177). But his account of the crisis (chap.

Decision, described as 'the first analytical synthesis of all the new evidence' (1999: vii).

[24] The return of imperialism in analysis of world politics after the attacks of September 11, 2001 thus focuses on the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as policies of counter-insurgency that can be interpreted as 'empire-building'; e.g., Bacevich, 2002;

9) ignores this context. Richard Snyder's analysis explicitly accords Cuba agency and refers to the U.S's 'imperialist past' and it's 'neocolonial power' toward Cuba (1999: 271). But the fact that the United States '*had been* an imperialist power' is a background condition, with no direct relevance for the onset of the crisis (ibid.: 286, emphasis added; cf. Nowell, 2002). In sum, then, the United States may once have been an imperial power, and at the time of the crisis it may have been a neocolonial one, but this is irrelevant for explanation of the Cuban missile crisis, save insofar as it shapes Castro's misperceptions of U.S. motives and intentions (e.g., Munton and Welch, 2007: 11-12).

Conceiving of the crisis in these terms limits the postcolonial potential of the critical oral history project, as is evident in the lessons subsequently drawn by both North American and Cuban scholars. For North American scholars, the most important lesson to be learned from discovery of the subaltern role in the crisis is the need for 'realistic empathy' between great powers and small states (e.g., Blight and Brenner, 2002: 177-192; Munton and Welch, 2007: 4, 103). The problem is that the North Americans and the Cubans simply do not understand each other.[25] If not properly understood, small states - such as Vietnam, Cuba, Iraq, North Korea and Iran - can hurt a great power like the United States (Blight and Brenner, 2002: 190-191). As British colonial officials also learned, it is important to know what the peasants are thinking. For the Cubans, the key lesson of the crisis is the need for better international laws and institutions to defend

Kaplan, 2005.

[25] This is contentious, both in 1962 and since. For instance, contemporary Cuban fears of a U.S. *military* invasion appear overstated but ongoing U.S. planning for a 'transition' on the island after Castro's death, including reprivatization of the economy, suggests 'misunderstanding' is not the root of the problem; see, e.g., the U.S. Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, www.state.gov/p/wha/rt/cuba; Editors, 2006.

small state sovereignty.[26] After the meetings in Moscow, Antigua and Havana, great powers and small states can draw new and different lessons from the crisis but for both the underlying conception of the international remains the same. Adding Cuba thus reinforces dominant accounts of the international. Making space for subaltern agency is thus not inherently postcolonial; it matters on which terms agency is acknowledged.

While no alternative historical geography exists fully pre-packaged in postcolonial theory and analysis, some of its basic elements are clear. For example, beginning with the subaltern voice opens up the past and present realities and implications of imperialism. The cold war's east-west logic is de-centered - without being discounted completely - in favour of a longer, largely colonial and imperial north-south dynamic. The global south becomes central (e.g., Saull, 2005; Westad, 2005). Amongst other things, this raises questions about the relations between the Cuban revolution and the cold war largely assumed away in the heroic myth, and helps make sense of the conflictual relations between the Soviet Union and Cuba, both during and after the crisis. Similarly, beginning with the imperial forces us to re-conceive the cold war and the U.S. role in it. If the cold war is not a distinct period but instead a moment in a longer history of U.S. imperialism, questions about how it relates to that history become crucial. It follows that the political, social, economic and cultural relations in particular localities in the context of the crisis - such as Cuba and the United States - cannot simply be read off the logic of cold war relations between the superpowers. Attention shifts from the politics and policies of great powers to the social relations through which great powers and other subjects of global life are connected, constituted, produced and transformed. Postcolonial

[26] Cuban lessons in the immediate aftermath of the missile crisis - the most important of which was that neither superpower could be trusted - were rather different (Blight and

scholarship demonstrates that 'the different meanings, social myths, and cultural self-understandings constitutive of state and national identities' are shaped by colonial and imperial relations (Muppidi, 2004: 16). Against accounts of the international which assume a nation-state ontology, then, a postcolonial analysis situates the crisis as a moment in which particular kinds of international subjects and the historical geographies through which they are constituted are reproduced or transformed.

Fortunately, in attempting to address such issues we do not have to start from scratch. The revisionist tradition in U.S. diplomatic history, for instance, provides a starting point for engaging the subaltern voice compatible with the themes of postcolonial scholarship. As William Appleman Williams put it, 'The tragedy of American diplomacy is aptly symbolized, and defined for analysis and reflection, by the relations between the United States and Cuba from April 21, 1898 through April 21, 1961' (1972: 1).[27] In this tradition the United States is approached from the outside, as it were, through analysis of its role in the world. Rather than simply an outward projection of U.S. power, revisionism has always been attentive to the ways in which foreign policy also shapes the United States. Significantly, when read through this literature the novelty of the critical oral history project's findings is reduced.[28] Almost twenty years before the Moscow meeting,

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Brenner, 2002: 31, 85-88).

[27] On April 21, 1898 the United States declared war on Spain; on April 19, 1961, the U.S.-backed exiles who had invaded the Bay of Pigs surrendered. The Spanish-American war constitutes a key moment in revisionist analyses of the emergence of U.S. imperialism; e.g., LaFeber, 1963.

[28] To our knowledge, no one in the critical oral history project or the subsequent literature has pointed to the close affinity between the subaltern account of the crisis and revisionist analyses. Like the subaltern, revisionist work is often cited but seldom engaged and sometimes explicitly marginalized. For example, in a conventional cold war framing of the crisis, Lebow and Stein (1994: 380, n. 6) note Paterson's (1989) 'neo-revisionist' argument - which makes U.S.-Cuban relations central to the crisis - without engaging it; Munton and Welch (2007: 108) simply refer to it as 'provocative'. Here too, there is

Williams framed the crisis as a function of Soviet and Cuban fears of U.S. invasion and a Soviet desire to redress the strategic imbalance (ibid.: 302); the origins of the crisis, argues Thomas Paterson, 'derived largely from the U.S. campaign to quash the Cuban Revolution. To stress only the global dimension (Soviet-American competition), as is commonly done, is to slight the local or regional sources of the conflict' (1994: 260). The larger point is that, in its conception of the historical geography of the international, revisionist diplomatic history provides an important resource in the effort to decolonise the Cuban missile crisis.

Conclusion

As a field of knowledge, IR is attentive to issues of hierarchy in world politics. Reflecting disciplinary conventions, the hierarchies typically studied are those produced by states and their relations. In this article, in contrast, we have focused on the micro-practices of scholarship, and traced the ways in which they too participate in the production of international hierarchies. From 1962 until the end of the 1980s, the heroic myth of the Cuban missile crisis articulated in the ExComm defined the limits of scholarly and popular commonsense. As I.F. Stone noted, the resulting accounts were 'appallingly ethnocentric. Cuba's fate and interests are simply ignored' (1966: 14). Almost three decades after the event, in the midst of a deliberate effort to produce new information, North American scholars still found it hard to imagine that Cuban policy makers and scholars had anything useful to say about the Cuban missile crisis. They were mistaken - and in Moscow, Antigua and Havana the subaltern told them so. Analysis of the critical oral history project, understood as a postcolonial intervention in the

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evident a cold war politics of scholarship.

historiography of the crisis, shows that IR has responded to the subaltern voice. It is no longer plausible to offer an analysis that does not take Cuban agency into account – although it still routinely occurs in U.S. and British textbooks, for instance[29] - and there is genuine progress towards a postcolonial view of the crisis. At the same time, however, ways in which the return of Cuba in this crisis has been managed, in the micro-practices of knowledge production and in post-1992 scholarship, shows that progress is at best partial, undermined by the day-to-day practices of the discipline considered as a whole. Modified and updated, the heroic myth persists. Despite our best efforts, we have failed to decolonize the Cuban missile crisis.

This failure undermines disciplinary ambitions. For more than three decades, Castro and Cuba were invisible in a vast body of research that sought to make sense of the crisis or drew on it in the service of theory-building and problem-solving. Even after the postcolonial intervention of the critical oral history project, the heroic myth persists, updated and reinforced. With rare exceptions, scholarship fails to take the subaltern voice seriously on its own terms.[30] Neither theory-building nor problem-solving is possible so

[29] On these pages, the heroic myth of the crisis as a U.S.-Soviet duet persists; see e.g., Kegley and Wittkopf, 2001: 67, 515; Viotti and Kamppi, 2001: 66-67, 108-9, 126-8, 216-219; Young and Kent, 2004: 236-241; Baylis and Smith, 2005: 100-1, 392-3; Brown, 2005: 34, 70-75; Nye, 2005: 35, 141-145.

[30] This is also true in popular culture. In 2000, the actor Kevin Costner starred in a movie about the crisis, *Thirteen Days* (New Line, 2000). Concerned that U.S. policy makers were complacent about the dangers of nuclear weapons, Costner screened the movie for audiences in the White House and on Capitol Hill. Alas, the script relies on the heroic myth of the crisis; hence Castro's question when Costner showed the movie in Havana, 'where are the Cubans?' (Blight, Allyn and Welch, 2002: 415).

long as the Anglo-American character of IR leads to blind spots when it comes to making sense of world politics. In the face of nuclear proliferation and a War on Terror fought largely outside the North Atlantic homelands of IR, the wider relevance of our argument is obvious; it is not only the subaltern who has an interest in decolonizing the crisis. The postcolonial potential inherent in critical oral history offers a way forward, as does the revisionist tradition in U.S. diplomatic history and the now-extensive body of self-consciously postcolonial scholarship. More than a decade after the meeting in Havana at which the subaltern spoke so clearly, however, it is sobering to reflect on how much remains to be done to decolonize the Cuban missile crisis. If our goal is to decolonize the discipline itself, thereby to produce better accounts of the international, we still have a long way to go.

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