to resolve the crisis of the state, proposed by Álvaro García Linera, the Marxist vice-president of Bolivia. Not surprisingly, Sader is a strong supporter of the radical continentalism that has emerged in the twenty-first century in Latin America, not least for its capacity to enhance left forces within nation-states. In the perilous process of ‘state transition’, the previous history of Latin America has often been marked by violent reaction and the physical and political slaughter of the left. In the twenty-first century, the left in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador have defeated coup attempts, but succumbed in Honduras and Paraguay. Older forms of the reform versus revolution debate may have lost their relevance, but the dilemmas they represented are still burrowing up through their own molehills. Sader’s book is a very serious contribution to such debates today, based on a lifelong engagement. It carries its scholarship lightly, and anyone with an interest in the direction of anti-capitalist politics will appreciate this very accessibly-written book. Those interested in the particular potential of the new politics of Latin America to underpin a new phase of development in the Cuban Revolution will need to take into account this magisterial survey and its strategic perspective.

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Reviewed by Luis Herrán-Ávila

Knowing what we know about the US government’s efforts to destabilise Castro’s regime in Cuba there would seem to be few stories left to tell. However, Daniel C. Walsh’s An Air War With Cuba delivers a fresh perspective on the achievements, limits and shortcomings of the ‘air war’ against Castro and, more broadly, on the arguable effectiveness of radio propaganda campaigns as instruments of foreign policy. In comparing the successful political uses of radio broadcasts in Guatemala with the persistent failure of the propaganda wars against Cuba, Walsh brings together the histories of communications technology and the post-Bay of Pigs Cold War, showing the often disjointed efforts by subsequent US administrations to lay the legal and political groundwork for the creation of Radio Marti, the most palpable product of these arguably ineffective ‘radio wars’.

Walsh takes the reader into the intricate world of bilateral diplomacy and international espionage, and fleshes out the political dilemmas posed by an ideologically diverse exile community, the effects of the various waves of Cuban emigration, and the anxieties within the American political system towards
‘the Cuban question’. The author clearly situates the Reagan administration’s anti-communist crusade in Latin America as the turning point in the rehabilitation of the propaganda and disinformation ‘wars’ as instruments of foreign policy, and in supporting the efforts of Cuban-American hard-liners to marginalise those who advocated for a moderate approach to normalise relations with the island.

At times, Walsh’s reliance on the language of ‘game theory’ to explore the different scenarios that arose from the creation of the Commission on Broadcasting to Cuba seems to intrude into the book’s persuasive and smooth narrative. However, the argument about the prospects of a ‘radio war’ that seemed far more economically and politically costly for the US than what the Reagan administration was willing to accept is remarkably persuasive. In this regard, Walsh’s main contribution is that of understanding the project of Radio Marti as an intentionally overt – and ultimately failed – strategy promoted by the ‘hard-liners’ to escalate the propaganda offensive against Castro and arouse political opposition in the island. This would be done at the expense of American radio stations potentially affected by the jamming of radio signals, and by neglecting the difficulties of foreseeing the Cuban response to the station’s overt anti-Castro tone. This, along with the hard-liners’ battle to keep Radio Marti away from standard American legal and political regulations, introduced an element of unpredictability that could backfire against American public and private interests, and turn Radio Marti into a policy nightmare for the Reagan administration.

In that sense, a reader well-acquainted with the political dynamics of the Cold War can actually appreciate the utmost importance of Walsh’s emphasis on these ‘game theoretical’ uncertainties regarding Radio Marti’s national and international effects, rooted in the intricacies of assessing the myriad of domestic and foreign actors, interests and contingencies at play. Interestingly, Walsh notes that, by the end of the 1980s, Radio Marti’s impact was greater in the US than in Cuba, as persistent domestic criticism over the cost-effectiveness of the station, along with the decreasing perception of Cuba as a threat to national security, put Radio Marti – and its Cuban-American sponsors – in a very complicated position. Since ‘normalisation’ or ‘rapprochement’ stood far from what the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) had envisioned as Radio Marti’s mission, these hard-liners took on the goal of pushing for a tougher stance against Castro by unleashing an internal ‘witch-hunt’ against those Miami-based organisations with more moderate positions, and by proselytising to get a CANF ally, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, elected for Congress in 1989. This, along with Bill Clinton’s support for the Cuban Democracy Act, evinced the political weight of the Cuban-American community, and of the CANF in particular, but also placed Radio Marti on the national spotlight as ‘the one issue’ incarnating the aspirations of a rather divided Cuban-American public.
In Walsh’s narrative, this insertion of Radio Marti in national politics was both a key turning point and the prelude to another defeat of the CANF’s hard-liner agenda. In the context of Clinton’s ambiguous support for what would become the Helms-Burton Act, the successful launching of TV Marti landed on very difficult political terrain, for a new Cuban immigration crisis and Florida’s increasing electoral relevance changed the stakes of the administration’s policy towards Cuba, now directed towards securing votes from an increasingly moderate Cuban-American public. The final chapters in Walsh’s reconstruction of Radio Marti’s voyage through the labyrinths of the American political system provide a portrait of the swinging pendulum that would characterise the more recent developments of these ‘air wars’: the hijacking of the hard-liner agenda by Cuban-American representatives in Congress, and the shifts in the CANF’s position from the emphasis on de-stabilising the Castro regime to imagining the various scenarios of a post-Castro Cuba. Although Walsh’s conclusions or projections on the subject matter remain a bit unclear, the reader is left with the impression that the context that gave birth to Radio Marti is long gone, and that the ideological and political environment in which the station is now embedded carries far more implications for local and domestic politics than for the actual stability of the Cuban government.

At large, Walsh’s book is neither a rigorous historiographical treatise, nor simply a journalistic exposé. It strives, with relative success, to reconstruct specific processes and events with a clear prose, skilfully adorned with interesting anecdotes and an insistence on the ambivalent – when not outright futile – results of the lengthy ‘air war’ against Cuba. Thus, while not at the highest level of scholarly sophistication, An Air War With Cuba stands out as an interdisciplinary contribution to the re-inscription of US–Cuba relations in a transnational framework that takes into account the role of technology and communications, while stressing the historical shortcomings and political complications of waging wars through the airwaves.

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Reviewed by Rosa García-Chediak

When one wishes to know a specific society, it is vital to take into account its history. However, discourses about the social processes of a country are frequently imprecise, overloaded with topics, or often folkloric. In short, they are unable