

Impact case study (REF3)

[Institution: University of Nottingham		
Unit of Assessment: UoA26 Modern Languages and Linguistics		
Title of case study: Providing intelligence on Cuba to shape policy and to inform governmental communities and journalistic practice.		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2007–2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Prof. Antoni Kapcia	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Latin American History	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 1 September 2003 – 30 September 2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 1 August 2013 – 31 December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Much of the contemporary analysis of Cuba is framed within an anachronistic and reductive paradigm inherited from the Cold War and the Cuban Revolution. As countries around the world seek to understand and interact with Cuba in the context of a rapidly changing global geopolitics, it is crucial that this framework of interpretation is nuanced and updated. Research by Kapcia has influenced national policy formation and improved the intelligence base on Cuba for the media. The research has informed and shaped UK government policy towards Cuba through a long-term advisory relationship between Kapcia and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). It has also influenced the decision-making [Redacted text] foreign ministry regarding its policies guiding the country's relationship with Cuba. Kapcia's research has improved the quality of interpretations of Cuba's political system and culture in international media discourse, including at Reuters, helping to overcome outmoded misrepresentations of the country's political system.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Kapcia's research has provided models to understand the evolution of the Cuban political process (always known as 'the Revolution') from 1959 until today. While the Revolution's legacy as a cultural and political phenomenon in the context of the Cold War continues to play a pivotal role in the First World's perceptions of Cuba, those perceptions are often inaccurate, anachronistic and simplistic. Equally, the Revolution's allure for the Left around the world has often been shaped by stereotypes. The limited and outdated nature of existing analyses has created a need for research that offers cultural mediation and nuanced political interpretation, which Kapcia has provided through four inter-related thematic research projects.</p> <p>Building on his earlier path-breaking work on the role and nature of ideology in the Revolution, Kapcia then argued (2) that the Revolution's political trajectory followed a cyclical pattern of crises and debates. This finding revealed the fundamental role of hitherto unseen internal debates which determined the processes of policy formation and which demonstrated that decision-making was often a complex process of negotiation between various political actors and interests (1). That model challenged the dominant narrative that the Cuban political system is both personalist and monolithic, operating in an autocratic top-down manner. Kapcia also showed that the Revolution is best understood as a delayed process of radical nationalist nation-building rather than being shoe-horned into perspectives of post-1945 Communism in the Eastern European and Asian contexts.</p> <p>This research led to work on theorising Cuba's system, offering the perception of it as a quasi-corporatist structure. This resulted in the formulation of the model of Cuba's three circles of power and decision-making (4). Through interviews in Cuba and a re-reading of primary and secondary sources, Kapcia advanced the thesis that power and decision-making in Cuba since 1959 has always been distributed among individuals and groups (below the</p>		

level of the key leaders) with various levels of influence inside the circles of power: the historic 'inner circle' (largely the 1956–58 guerrillas); the larger 'outer circle' (with narrower but still crucial spheres of influence); and an amorphous and changing 'intermediate circle' comprising those individuals moving between the core group and the periphery of influence, depending on timing, current concerns and the external context. The research revealed a remarkable continuity in those players' power and influence, challenging the dominant narrative that places an exclusive focus on the two Castros and Guevara. Understanding these dynamics provides a key framework for anyone wishing to interact with the Cuban policy-making process as it challenges Western expectations.

Kapcia's subsequent research as part of a Leverhulme Trust-funded project [G1] addressed the **processes of decision-making within the world of culture**. The research (3), based on around 130 interviews with writers, editors, promoters and critics, provided a detailed account and explanation of the evolving systems, structures and processes of cultural policymaking and practice, and produced new insights on the periods that caused problems for writers. It concluded that often those problems had been caused by the absence of mediating structures in the cultural field and the existence of 'fiefdoms' of autonomous and restrictive power, and that a more systematic cultural structure after 1976 created more and not less space. This challenged the dominant cultural-studies approach to post-1959 Cuba and brought insights into new areas of decision-making. The work revealed that cultural policy and cultural practice, particularly literary production, have been fundamental to the post-1961 processes of political socialisation in Cuba.

During a second Leverhulme Trust-funded project [G2], the focus moved away from the capital (Havana) to understand the **cultural decision-making processes on the periphery**, taking rural Granma province as a case study. Through extensive interviews and close observation in the field, Kapcia (with Kumaraswami) developed a deeper understanding of the contradictions and complexity of the processes of decision-making and decision-implementation at the local level. The research revealed that, contrary to previous views, implementation of decision-making always involved more negotiation than was immediately evident. The local processes proved to be very different from the epicentre of the Revolution in Havana, helping to shape a reassessment of how the distinctiveness of local implementation can be viewed in relation to the capital, and providing a crucial basis for political, charity and business partners wishing to work in Cuba.

This led to Kapcia developing the findings about the processes of decision-making into a theory of the **matrix of power and authority** in Cuba since 1959 (6). Starting from the premise that the Cuban state is not monolithic, but rather a complex, multi-layered, quasi-corporatist matrix, characterised by processes of constant negotiation and structured participation, this research traced the evolution of the state after 1959 and developed a nuanced analysis of the ways in which decision-making, decision-influencing and decision-executing power has operated in Cuba. This research, consisting of interviews, close observation, and reassessment of existing theories, examined forensically the different vertical and horizontal structures of governance, ideological authority (the Party), and participation, in order to understand why decisions were taken or might be taken in the future (6).

3. References to the research

1. Book chapter. **Antoni Kapcia**, 'Political Change in Cuba: The Domestic Context for Foreign Policy', in Michael Erisman & John H. Kirk (eds), *Redefining Cuban Foreign Policy: The Impact of the 'Special Period'* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006) ISBN: 9780813029375
2. Book. **Antoni Kapcia**, *Cuba in Revolution: A History since the Fifties* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008) ISBN: 9781861894021
3. Book. **Antoni Kapcia** & Kumaraswami, P. *Literary Culture in Cuba: Revolution, Nation-building and the Book* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012) ISBN: 9780719083754
4. Book. **Antoni Kapcia**, *Leadership in the Cuban Revolution: The Unseen Story* (London: Zed Press, 2014) ISBN: 9781780325255

5. Book chapter. **Antoni Kapcia**, 'Raúl's Decade? Or the First Swing of the Pendulum?', in Emily J. Kirk & Anna Clayfield (eds), *Cuba's Forgotten Decade: How the 1970s Shaped the Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019, pp. 7-21) ISBN: 9781498568739
6. Book. **Antoni Kapcia**, *A Short History of Revolutionary Cuba: Power, Authority and the State* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020) ISBN: 9781788312165

Two research grants:

G1. 2004-2009. F/00 114/AA. Leverhulme Trust 'Interactions between Literature, Politics and the Reader in Revolutionary Cuba'. £108,572 (PI Kapcia).

G2. 2012-2017. RPG 2014-182. Leverhulme Trust 'Beyond Havana and the Nation? Peripheral Identities and Literary Culture in Cuba'. £80,005 (Co-I Kapcia).

4. Details of the impact

Kapcia's research provides an evidence base to question the misconception of the Cuban leader as the sole decision-maker in the country's political process. This misconception impedes relations between Cuba and the outside world and frames Cuba's reception in popular, media and international policy discourses in anachronistic terms. Through providing beneficiaries with an understanding of the significance of the role of negotiation in the collective decision-making process, an appreciation of its prolonged, cyclical nature, and skills to identify windows in time appropriate for intervention, Kapcia has enabled a better response to, and representation of, Cuba's political process.

The UK government through shaping FCO policies towards Cuba

Kapcia's research, delivered through workshops and briefings, has enriched the knowledge base of policymakers in the UK and in turn informed the UK Government's diplomatic policies towards Cuba in response to new developments and the execution of these policies. Since 2014, Kapcia has regularly advised the **Foreign & Commonwealth Office** (FCO) (at least once a year) on recent developments in Cuba and their likely evolution. In turn, these contributions have informed numerous decisions about the United Kingdom's relationships with Cuba: '*Professor Kapcia has been a regular contributor to the British Government's assessment of Cuba and Cuban issues, over many years and in different ways*' (Americas Group Research Analyst at the FCO, **A**).

Kapcia's research (**2, 4, 6**) shaped the outlook of two new **UK ambassadors to Cuba** (each with a tenure of 4–5 years), briefing them in advance of their appointments [**A**]. Kapcia's work equipped the new ambassadors with the necessary understanding of the Cuban political system's intricacies to enable them to navigate it successfully, particularly in relation to issues on the agenda when they arrive in Cuba. This is particularly important as high rotation of diplomatic staff between posts, especially at the first and second secretary levels, often causes a loss of expertise.

In addition to regular and ambassador briefings, Kapcia has '*given exclusive briefings to groups of FCO officials and to individual senior officials, both to consider Cuba in general terms as well as specific topical developments*' [**A**], which included the working of the political system, the significance of recent and forthcoming events such as party congresses and elections. These briefings equipped the FCO to respond flexibly to evolving situations and informed confidential FCO initiatives. '*Most recently, on 17th March 2020 (...) he gave an assessment of the situation in Cuba, including future prospects at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office*' [**A**]. This testifies to Kapcia's instrumental role in maintaining up-to-date intelligence on Cuba and his close involvement in informing FCO practice. In the words of Americas Group Research Analyst at FCO, Kapcia's input '*is of considerable assistance to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the development of government policy towards Cuba*' [**A**].

Building on his role as a key source of intelligence for the FCO, Kapcia '*was commissioned to produce a podcast on Cuba for the FCO Diplomatic Academy*' [**A**]. This consisted of a 20-minute training resource on contemporary Cuban politics. The FCO Diplomatic Academy is open to all FCO staff (currently 12,500) both in the UK and overseas and '*provides its staff with skills and knowledge needed to represent the UK national interest*', with Cuba covered under the theme of 'States and Societies' [**B** pp.1,5]. The podcast was taken up by the UK

ministries, including the Ministry of Defence and Department for International Trade, and *'is now in use with FCO staff seeking to learn more about the affairs of that country'* [A]. While in-person consultations occur at the level of FCO Section and Department Heads, Kapcia's input into the FCO Diplomatic Academy has served to develop a sustainable and accessible knowledge base regarding Cuba at the FCO. Kapcia's research provided insights regarding predicted changes to the security and economic situation in Cuba, which would impact on the UK's national interests in Cuba and the Latin America region.

Informing [Redacted text] Government's relationship with Cuba

[Redacted text]

Transforming media discourse about politics in Cuba

UK and US media perceptions of Cuban politics continue to be shaped by decades of Cold War readings of post-1959 Cuba, the focus on the Revolution and on the figures of Fidel and Raúl Castro. Through frequent media requests to comment on individual events and developments (four per year on average), Kapcia has countered outdated visions of Cuba, contributing to dismantling the legacy of Cold War thinking in media discourse on post-1945 communist countries. As a Reuters Correspondent and Financial Times contributor in Cuba testifies, Kapcia *'stands out as a source of information'*, with *'an extraordinary understanding of Cuban culture, daily life, and the self-narrative of the Cuban Communist Party, the state and people. (...) His academic rigour provides objective analysis and critical insights on the situations in Cuba'* [E].

Approaches based on a Cold War legacy are especially prevalent in US media, with sources mostly drawn from the Cuban American community and Latin American journalists in the US, who represent dominant narratives seeking to confirm western stereotypes of Cuba. Through his research, Kapcia provides an alternative perspective that has empowered the media discourse to move beyond polarising interpretations. Kapcia's *'standing up to the dominant first world narrative about [Cuba]'* with his own interpretation is *'important for the journalist profession seeking an unbiased view on events'* [E].

Kapcia's role as an interpretative authority informing media practice and discourse is further confirmed by the continuous flow of requests for contributions. Since 1 January 2014, at least 111 news items in press and on the radio have quoted Kapcia's work, with an average impression count (number of times an article is displayed) of 14 million views per news item, and upwards of 3 billion impressions for the most popular article on easing US sanctions towards Cuba early under the Trump presidency (MSN.com article, 19 Dec 2014) [F]. With at least 54 direct quotations in US media alone [F], Kapcia's intelligence informed the media coverage in 22 countries worldwide: in Europe (Austria, France, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, UK), Asia (Arab Emirates, China, India, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore), South and Central America (Argentina, Bolivia, Cuba, Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela), Canada and South Africa. The channels and media sources include BBC Radio 4, BBC 5 Live, BBC World, BBC World Service, CBS, Radio Sputnik, Al Jazeera, Russia Today, TRT Turkish TV and the Economic Times [F].

As Kapcia *'provides reflection on the interpretation of emerging news stories in journalistic practice'* [E], key stories whose interpretation was informed through challenging often stereotypical media questions and polemical press views include:

In December 2014, following the unexpected US-Cuban diplomatic détente, Kapcia's research on Cuban foreign relations (1, 2) allowed him to locate this event within recent developments, highlighting the serious limitations of what most observers wrongly saw as the end of the US embargo. His reading proved accurate, given the embargo's significant strengthening and the increased US pressure on Cuba under Trump, and was featured in 18 countries [F]. In November 2016, Fidel Castro's death led to media enquiries about his historical significance. Kapcia corrected misunderstandings, which had exaggerated the extent of his political control over decision-making, and signalled probable developments in the future of Cuba's leadership (2, 4, 5, 6). Among many shorter interview appearances, Kapcia influenced the interpretation presented in the 2016 *Last Words* obituary programme on BBC Radio 4 (30 minutes) on Fidel Castro, highlighting misunderstandings regarding an exclusive emphasis on Castro's personal power [G]. In January 2017, Kapcia focused on the interpretation of worsening US-Cuban

relations after Trump's accession in the light of the limits to Obama's détente (1, 4, 6). Particular influence was felt in Argentina, Bolivia and Venezuela, with an interview with Kapcia on Infobea, Venezuela's leading online news outlet, with a centre-right outlook reaching over 8 million impressions. Challenging the typically anti-communist stance of Infobea, the interview prompted the editorial board to question the stereotype of Fidel's drive for autocratic power and opened up a discussion of the role of the unstable system in his prolonged political position. In the spring of 2018, after Raúl Castro's retirement and Díaz-Canel's election, Kapcia was requested by International Business Times (US) and the Express (UK) to explain the change, his responses later picked up by other news outlet. Informed by (2, 4, 5), Kapcia analysed the new leadership and explained Raúl Castro's continuing role as a party leader till 2021 [F].

Kapcia is one of the main media informers on Cuban affairs and has made a mark on the ways in which Cuba has been reported in the media in the last decade. As a journalist reports: *'I turned to Kapcia for guidance among other [journalists], as all these events unfolded and that filtered higher up both in Reuters and the Financial Times, as well as other clients such as ABC News, the Economist, The Washington Post and Clarin, in countless discussions with editors regarding editorial decisions and the interpretation of news on Cuba to their readership. Thus, I do not simply use Kapcia as a talking head for a few quotes in a story, but seek his council in search for perspective on my work'* [E].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- [A] Testimonial from Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Americas Group Research Analyst outlining Kapcia's influence on UK policy towards Cuba and the practices at FCO
- [B] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Diplomatic Academy Brochure
- [C] Letter from the [Redacted text], outlining impacts of Kapcia's advice on the country's approach to Cuba
- [D] Analysis report submitted by Kapcia to a foreign ministry outlining his advice on relations with Cuba
- [E] Testimonial from Reuters Economic Correspondent in Cuba on Kapcia's influence on media profession and media discourse on Cuba
- [F] Media Report on media coverage and readership of news stories covering Kapcia's work
- [G] Link to BBC recording: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b083r9x3>