Joanna Swanger

Rebel Lands of Cuba: The Campesino Struggles of Oriente and Escambray, 1934–1974.
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The mountains of Oriente and Escambray served as important sites of rebellion during the Cuban wars for independence at the end of the nineteenth century and again during the revolutionary insurrection of the 1950s. After 1959, however, the two regions diverged sharply: whereas Oriente was seen as the cradle of the Cuban Revolution, Escambray served as the main locus of armed counterrevolutionary activity on the island in the 1960s. In *Rebel Lands of Cuba*, Joanna Swanger develops a compelling explanation for the differing responses to revolution of the residents of these two rural areas by examining the changing relationship between *campesinos* and the State in terms of race, gender, and class relations and land tenure arrangements. She argues that agrarian structures, relative racial diversity, and an established history of collective organizing in Oriente meshed well with—and, in fact, served as inspiration for—the projects of rural transformation undertaken by the Revolution. Dominant traditions of individual land ownership framed through notions of white masculinity in Escambray, on the other hand, led to counterrevolution and state repression.

Rebel Lands of Cuba stands out on a number of levels. While scholars have been paying greater attention to the regional particulars of Cuban history, this book is distinct in its comparative regional approach, and thus nicely complements the recent work by Gillian McGillivray on state formation in comparative regional perspective (see *Blazing Cane: Sugar Communities, Class, and State Formation in Cuba, 1868–1959*, 2009). Its focus on Escambray—which, as Swanger points out, has essentially been expunged from historical memory since the 1960s—is particularly welcome. Spanning the decades before and after the onset of revolution rather than seeing 1959 as a starting or ending point, the book capably considers how relations between *campesinos* and the State changed over time. By focusing on rural communities dedicated primarily to coffee production in Escambray and Oriente (specifically, the areas near the Sierra Maestra and Sierra del Cristal), it also provides a welcome counterpoint to the dominant historiographical focus on the Cuban sugar industry.

The first four chapters of the book cover the prerevolutionary period. Chapter 1 presents a composite sketch of a typical coffee-producing peasant household before delineating the different racial, gender, and land tenure characteristics of the peasantries in Oriente and Escambray. Compared to their counterparts in the western mountains, *campesinos* in Oriente—who were more likely to be Afro-Cuban and less likely to live in male-headed nuclear families—

worked smaller farms and enjoyed less secure access to land. Chapter 2 looks at government efforts between 1933 and 1952 to enact limited land reform while promoting an image of the white, masculine, land-owning, self-sufficient *guajiro* as an embodiment of Cuban nationalism. Throughout this period (as analyzed in the next two chapters) peasants in Oriente generally rejected the premise of the *guajiro* discourse, formed associations to defend their property rights, engaged in militant confrontations with landlords and state authorities, lent popular support to the Communist Party, and advocated for collective property ownership along with greater racial and even gender equality. The related constructs of private property and white masculinity found greater resonance in Escambray, which remained a “frontier” society with minimal government presence, stronger ties of cross-class paternalism, greater incidence of land disputes between peasants, and minimal collective organization. In recounting the popular insurrections in both regions, Chapter 5 argues that interaction with *campesinos* in the eastern mountains pushed the rebel leadership of the 26th of July Movement to pursue a more radical agenda, while concerns that communism would threaten private property and white male privilege emerged early in Escambray. Chapters 6 and 7 detail how and why Oriente served as a revolutionary showcase while Escambray became the epicenter of armed counterrevolution. An epilogue provides an intriguing look at efforts by the revolutionary state to promote a collectivist spirit in Escambray through theater and other means in the aftermath of pacification.

Rebel Lands of Cuba is characterized by clear, accessible, and engaging prose and rests on an impressive amount of research, including Cuban archival records in Havana, Cienfuegos, Trinidad, and Santiago de Cuba. At times the distinctions between Escambray and Oriente may be drawn too neatly. Racism, patriarchy, and individualism certainly remained strong in eastern Cuba (and, for that matter, other areas of the island), but overall Swanger makes a convincing case to explain the diverging trajectories of the two rebellious regions after 1959. Given the book's hefty price tag, it may not be ideal for course adoption, but it should be required reading for anyone interested not only in Cuban and Caribbean history, but also peasant studies, state formation, and (counter)revolution.

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