Pablo Alonso González, *Cuban Cultural Heritage: A Rebel Past for a Revolutionary Nation*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2018. xiv + 335 pp. (Cloth US\$ 84.95)

Pablo Alonso González, a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon, is the author of several publications in the area of cultural heritage, archaeology, visual anthropology, and spatial planning. In *Cuban Cultural Heritage*, he incorporates “the study of heritage into the general question of postcolonial Cuban nation-building[,] thus enhancing our understanding of heritage in Socialist countries” (p. 1). The book’s seven chapters cover both the conceptual debates about heritage (coloniality, postcoloniality, and socialist condition) and the history of nation building in Cuba since independence, but especially since 1959.

In 2012 and 2013, Alonso González conducted dozens of interviews throughout the country with historians, museologists, and directors of museums big and small. The strength of this book resides more in its extensive use of primary sources (including vintage photographs) and interviews than in its mastery of secondary sources. For instance it overlooks most of the work of Rafael Rojas, perhaps the most important historian in the area of culture, history, and national identity in Cuba.

The seven chapters are mostly organized chronologically: introduction, 1898–1959, 1959–73, 1973–90, 1990–2014, the Office of the City of Havana since 1990, and a final chapter on “the coloniality of heritage in postcolonial Cuba.” A common thread in histories of Cuba during this period is the quest for a strong national identity, based on a coherent interpretation and memory of both its colonial and postcolonial past. Alonso González offers a meticulous and balanced interpretation of how successive generations of political leaders tried to use the past for their own political interests, while reproducing some of the dominant and general passions of their time. Discussing the republican period, for instance, he writes that “Cuban heroes were all white, and when they were black like Maceo, their monuments represented them as white” (p. 58). The 1959 Revolution ushered in a “new symbolic order” that combined national-revolutionary myths and Marxist-Leninist dogmas, a difficult task that often generated debates. “Fidel assumed a nationalistic and revolutionary position close to Martí’s ideas but far from Guevara’s radical criticism of socialist realism. Even if Fidel played a central role in settling controversies at the time, he preferred not to intervene in most debates, leaving the door open for ambiguous interpretations ... For decades, the Revolution used heritage to remind others of the revolutionary triumph and to structure public meanings and symbols

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in terms of ‘winners’ and ‘losers’” (pp. 74, 268). For Alonso González, “what is specific about the Cuban Revolution is its capacity to generate a selective production of amnesia about the republican and colonial pasts and even between the different periods of the Revolution, such as the denial after 1990 of previous soviet influence” (p. 277).

Some discussions are particularly illuminating: one on the monument to Martí in the Plaza Cívica, now known as the Plaza de la Revolución (“How could a space perceived as fascist turn into the hub of revolutionary fervor?” [p. 85]); one on the creation of institutions such as the Museum of the Revolution, the Advisory Board for the Development of Monumental Sculpture, or the Office of the City Historian of Havana; one on the decimation of architecture as a “bourgeois discipline” during the 1960s; and one on the “touristification” of Cuban/revolutionary kitsch over the past quarter of a century, especially in Old Havana.

This is an exhaustive and sometimes exhausting book, because Alonso González insists on exploring every nook and cranny of material that is rich but ultimately redundant and at times obvious. The propensity of governments to use monuments and museums for their own propagandistic ends is, unsurprisingly, particularly strong under mobilizational and totalitarian regimes like the one that has ruled Cuba since the Revolution. The sovietization of Cuba affected official conceptions of heritage, nation, and identity, and the post-Soviet period brought a reordering of ideology and official conceptualization of nation, not because Cuba broke with the Communist model but because the Soviet Union ceased to exist. The general evolution of a country that, since 1959, changed so that everything could stay the same, found echoes in the official conception of history and nation, and sometimes in debates opposing the two usual factions in Cuba (to simplify: orthodox communist/Soviet/rigid socialist realist versus unorthodox radical nationalist). The book’s analysis of Cuba as a “postcolonial nation-building Socialist process” is nuanced and often insightful, but one can wonder if it was necessary to draw so much from postcolonial theory, which often tends to be tautological (once a colony, always postcolonial) and not so useful to examine the politics of culture in Cuba. Nevertheless, *Cuban Cultural Heritage* is a serious and valuable contribution to cultural heritage studies and Cuban studies.

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