Anne Luke, *Youth and the Cuban Revolution: Youth Culture and Politics in 1960s Cuba*.

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Even 60 years on, the Cuban Revolution continues to capture the imagination of people the world over. Despite this advancement in years, for many the island is still associated with the spirit of youthful rebellion. In this study, Anne Luke looks back at the formative decade of the 1960s—a time when globally the young seemed to be seizing the day, often inspired by the Cuban example—and asks what this meant for Cuba itself. Her analysis attempts to provide a “form of conceptual triangulation” (p. xi), exploring how “the sixties,” “youth,” and “Cuba” interacted with one another. In doing so, she questions the extent to which the Cuban youth experience differed from that experienced elsewhere during that tumultuous decade.

The book is clearly structured. Luke begins with a general discussion of what it meant to be “young” in Cuba during those revolutionary times, concluding that it was quite distinct from what young people elsewhere experienced. She then goes on to explore how youth found a special place in the discourse of the revolutionary regime, which in turn engendered a range of youth-oriented policies for this new generation. Despite the particular path that the island was pursuing, Cuba was not isolated from the global cultural forces of the sixties. However, Luke argues that while outside of Cuba young people were seen as challenging the status quo, in the island youth was perceived as “a positive force for change within the dominant revolutionary ideology” (p. 68).

Keen to avoid treating the young in Cuba as a homogenous mass, Luke delineates three main groups and dedicates a chapter to each one. There were those who were fully integrated with the revolutionary process; this saw the development of youth organizations, culminating in the consolidation of the *Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas* (UJC) as the vanguard of the new generation. Secondly, other movements enabled a significantly wider level of youth participation and voluntarism than that offered by the UJC, through the much-feted literacy campaign, revolutionary militias, and the *aficionado* movement that encouraged widespread involvement in the arts. Finally, there were those youths who were more on the cultural margins of the Revolution, seeking to push the boundaries of what this transformative process should mean through publications and music.

This is a very thorough study of how the Cuban political establishment perceived “youth,” and the role of young people in the forging of a new society. Luke successfully explains the details of the policies pursued and their ideological underpinnings. While asserting the exceptionalism of the Cuban case, she places it firmly within a global context. However, the study never really

succeeds in going beyond a top-down perspective. While those who were in influential positions, leading the discourse and directing developments, are amply cited, what feels lacking are the voices and actual lived experiences of young Cubans. What comes through clearly is the ideal form that “youth” was expected to take, albeit with shifts and arguments along the way. What we do not see is what being young in 1960s Cuba actually meant for those who lived it. This limitation of the study is present even in the discussion of the *Nueva Trova* song movement, which provided some of the more widely circulated, critically dissonant voices. Luke’s analysis focuses almost entirely on the leading figure, Silvio Rodríguez, and his friction with, and ultimately acceptance, by the official structures. Not only is there barely a mention of other prominent participants, but no real sense is given of the significance that such songs (or those of other musical tendencies) had for young people themselves. Nor is there any real attempt, beyond passing references seen through the pejorative lens of the revolutionary establishment, to bring into this analysis those who, for whatever reason, found themselves beyond the margins of what was considered acceptable.

This is really a study of how “youth was constructed” (p. 133) by the Cuban Revolution through its policies and discourses. While of course these were a powerful element in the way the identity of young people was formed, then and in the subsequent decades, it is only one part of the picture. To fully understand the formation of youth identities in Cuba, in the 1960s and in successive generations, it would be necessary to look beneath the veil of the official and semi-official polemics that frame this study. There is a wealth of material that could be tapped, alongside the more established sources that Luke concentrates on—literature, in its published and unpublished variety; commentaries and critiques by those who may not have found an official outlet for their views; and, above all, the testimony of those who lived through these events.

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