
Rachel Hynson has crafted a sophisticated study that highlights the Cuban revolutionary government’s limited reach into the intimate lives of its citizens. Through a series of chronologically overlapping, thematic chapters centered on the period 1959–71, she explores four social engineering programs—three of which have been eliminated from the “grand narrative of revolution”—designed to promote the “New Family” in postrevolutionary Cuba. *Laboring for the State* positions these programs, designed to control women’s reproduction, promote legal marriage, eliminate prostitution, and employ men in state-sanctioned jobs, within the broader context of the revolutionary government’s increasingly authoritarian tendencies across the period. Drawing on newspapers, interviews, government documents, and even rumors (*bolas*) about these programs, she interrogates the ongoing state-generated narrative that the Revolution achieved broad-based social change with limited coercion or repression.

Hynson’s analysis is most revealing when she explores not only how and why the revolutionary government attempted to reinforce state authority through the New Family, but also when and where those projects took place. Here we come to understand the full breadth and depth of social and economic control the state hoped, and ultimately failed, to achieve. For example, when we learn that 67 percent of the maternal homes constructed by the state were established in a majority Afro-Cuban province (Oriente), we understand that family planning programs were also about regulating the bodies of Black and *mulata* women. When we see that authorities centered the first campaign to legalize and register extralegal unions within the two provinces considered hotbeds of civil war between 1959 and 1966 (Las Villas and Matanzas), we understand that Operation Matrimony and Operation Registration were as much about disciplining and surveilling possible antirevolutionaries as they were about bolstering marriage rates.

If there is an element missing at times in these chapters, it is a sense of who stands behind the various programs. When institutions and government agencies become the central actors in the discussion, it can become difficult to understand the precise motivations and on-the-ground impact of decisions. Hynson does her best work on this front when discussing the role of the Committees for Defense of the Revolution (*CDRs*). Her analysis of CDR members provides a more granular view of the role government agents played in buoying up or undercutting revolutionary state projects aimed at increasing legibility and reinforcing the authority of the state.
Hynson finds that while the revolutionary state advanced a nuclear, Eurocentric model of the ideal family that promised government control over the lives and labors of its citizens, it never fully established that kind of hegemonic biopower. She uncovers instead one of the inconvenient truths of the Revolution’s social program: Cuban citizens consistently found ways to maintain a “measure of bodily and economic autonomy” (p. 38). In Chapter 2, for example, she describes how couples took advantage of material incentive packages of cakes, drinks, clothing, et cetera offered by the Cuban government in order to bolster marriage rates by marrying and divorcing several times or selling the coveted goods on the black market. The Cuban government continues to blame record-high rates of abortion and divorce, the prevalence of prostitution, and low rates of official economic productivity on “morally confused” citizens who refuse to embrace true revolutionary citizenship. Hynson posits an alternative reading of these practices: Cubans who embrace alternative definitions of family, labor, and sexual practice may not view their actions as counterrevolutionary at all. The very act of rejecting the nuclear family, for example, could be framed as a rejection of capitalistic modes of production that the revolutionary state itself rejects.

This fine study will appeal to academic audiences interested not only in Cuban history, but also in histories of the family/marriage, reproductive roles, masculinity, labor studies, and criminality/transgression more broadly. While the intent and impact of its argument is best captured by engaging the whole work, Hynson was smart to structure the book such that instructors could excerpt individual chapters for specialized course readings. She also models the potential of discursive analysis, especially through her refreshing work with bolas. She reveals how informal networks of information-sharing shaped popular understandings of, and reactions to, state policy in ways that undermined the revolutionary government’s ability to establish discursive hegemony. While recognition of the power of rumor to shape state-civil relations in Cuba is not new, it has rarely been engaged as thoroughly.

The book’s utility as a teaching text could have been bolstered by the inclusion of a timeline of key dates and a map of the island indicating the location of sites mentioned. Overall, however, this is a richly researched and well-crafted study.

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