

historical essay (most of the others are ethnographic) as well as one outside the lowlands boundaries. There is clearly a sense in which analysis is converging interestingly around, and recasting, old discussions of violence and revenge, and in this sense the articles individually – and in part collectively – indicate the significant advances available.

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Iłja A. Luciak, *Gender and Democracy in Cuba* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007), pp. xxviii + 143, \$59.95, hb.

As the title of this book suggests, Professor Luciak's *Gender and Democracy in Cuba* seeks to connect two debates that already exist in Cuban research but which have rarely been considered together. Firstly, Luciak asks to what degree gender equality has been reached in socialist Cuba. Secondly, he asks to what degree democracy exists within socialist Cuba. These questions should be asked simultaneously because meaningful democracy must include the substantive participation of women across all levels of government and civil society. Gender relations in Cuba, especially since 1959, is a topic that has been researched by quite a number of scholars in recent years. Luciak's research on this topic is as much a bringing together of existing material as an original analysis. However relating this research to democracy in Cuba provides something more original, as Luciak examines whether Cuba has substantive democracy in a form that is a meaningful alternative to representative liberal democratic models that champion multiparty elections as the only form of democracy that counts.

The argument that underpins *Gender and Democracy in Cuba* is that, although significant achievements have been made in gender reform, Cuban triumphalism – the need to proclaim everything successful and harmonious – has had 'unintended consequences' that conceal or even compound barriers to women's integration in political participation and to convincingly democratic practices. In terms of women's integration into politics, the government's self-declared capacity to increase women's participation through positive discrimination highlights the general failure or disinclination to include women at the highest levels of powerful decision-making. Luciak joins others in arguing that the dominance of the *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas* over all issues and events related to women's interests has hampered a more pluralistic development of feminist activism in Cuba. Trumpeting the genuine achievements of the revolution in such areas as women's education, family planning, and legal rights in marriage and divorce has allowed the Cuban government to overlook other areas in which gender equality has never been reached.

Luciak argues that the perceived need to be unified in the face of US aggression has caused the Cuban government to restrict pluralism on the public stage and in the civil sphere. Luciak is sympathetic to the egalitarian objectives outlined by defenders of the Cuban system he interviews, but he is not at all an automatic defender of Cuban state policy, and is particularly clear in his criticism of aspects of Cuban governance that impede democracy, such as the imprisonment of dissidents, the lack of a free press and the absence of civil society organisations.

The book is written in a clear and straightforward manner, such that each chapter deals with relatively discrete themes; the early chapters cover the role of women in the Cuban revolution and gender relations since 1959, while the middle section turns

the focus to notions of democracy within and outside Cuba and the attitudes and practices of Cuban political organisations with regards to women's participation. A case study of the 2002–2003 National Elections provides an important example of a specific moment in Cuban politics to contrast against the more generalised discussions that constitute the rest of the book. Discussions about the relationship between gender and democracy are surprisingly brief in this book; they are addressed concisely in the concluding chapter but one has the feeling that the author had developed his theoretical position on the relationship between gender and democracy in his previous scholarship in Central America and did not see fit to rehash them here. This is a pity for Cuba specialists, particularly those (like myself) from disciplines other than political science, who are not au fait with Luciak's previous research and would appreciate a meatier theoretical analysis of how gender equality might enhance democracy and vice versa.

Luciak provides a methodological note early in the book, which raises the difficulties he encountered working in Cuba. Beginning the book by addressing this problem will be of interest to people similarly navigating the complex ethical issues and unwritten codes that shape doing scholarly work on contemporary Cuba. But more importantly, the methodological challenges faced by Luciak reveal the obstacles that prevent detailed 'ground level' analyses of politics in Cuba from being done. There is a question that people always want to ask about Cuba: what do Cubans really think about their current government, and about the future of the socialist revolution? Although Luciak is convinced through his research that most Cubans remain broadly supportive of the revolution, he cannot provide comprehensive data on this matter in the way that he does when addressing other issues. This of course is understandable, because foreign scholars (and local Cuban scholars) face limits in the sorts of research questions they can ask, but it raises something of a problem when one wants to assess whether democracy or gender equality is perceived to exist 'on the ground' by the Cuban voters. Instead, Luciak relies of a large number of interviews with a range of people from government, academia, and non-governmental organisations; although the scope of his interviews is admirable, this methodological approach nevertheless favours elite opinions over the practices and experience of average Cuban people. Luciak argues early in his book that formal policies on issues like gender equality and democracy are different from the actual existence of substantive gender equality and substantive democracy in practice. So it is unfortunate (but perhaps unavoidable) that, as Luciak recognises, in Cuban studies some of the most interesting questions remain difficult to air amidst the restrictive policies of Cuba and the United States, and within the context of deeply polemical positions that dominate public debates on Cuban society. Within such a context, Luciak does an admirable job of presenting balanced but critical research because, as he argues, 'Cuba merits an in-depth analysis on its own terms.'

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Alexander I. Gray and Antoni Kapcia (eds.), *The Changing Dynamic of Cuban Civil Society* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2008), pp. x + 202, \$59.95, pb.

In *The Changing Dynamic of Cuban Civil Society*, Alexander Gray and Antoni Kapcia successfully critique the political agendas and analytical assumptions implicit