The Cuban Connection: Drug Trafficking, Smuggling, and Gambling in Cuba from the 1920s to the Revolution. Eduardo Sáenz Rovner. Translated by Russ Davidson. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008. ISBN: 9781469632100

In *The Cuban Connection*, Eduardo Sáenz Rovner traces the "trajectory of vice" in pre-revolutionary Cuba. In doing so, Sáenz Rovner more fully depicts the landscape of drug-trafficking in the early and mid-twentieth century in one of the first systematic pieces of scholarship examining the politics of drugs in Cuba during this time period. While he focuses primarily on exchanges between the United States and Cuba from American Prohibition in the 1920s to the Cuban Revolution in the 1950s, his project extends even further transnationally, bringing places of different scales like the Andes, China, Marseilles, and Western London into the narrative. Still, despite the global networks revealed in the book, Sáenz Rovner seeks to locate Cuba at the center of this world of vice, seeing it as both an "escape valve" for North Americans and heavily connected to global trade and regional politics.

On the surface this book focuses on flows - narcotics, money, laborers and tourists traveled across borders in both legal and extralegal networks. Sáenz Rovner's project, however, is more complicated. In his attempt to recenter Cuba in the contraband economy, Sáenz Rovner also sets out to methodically interrogate and deconstruct various myths that have plagued historiographies of Cuba and drug-trafficking as well as larger fields like that of North American economic and diplomatic history and histories of migration. In his introduction, Sáenz Rovner clearly marks his list of arguments and interventions – most of which work to emphasize the agency of Cuban actors in drug trafficking and consumption and overturn the narrative of Cuba's victimhood. In doing so, he reveals, for example, that drug trafficking did not arise out of

poverty, but rather required wealth, connections, and knowledge often held only by those in a higher class position.

The Cuban Connection, too, sets out to deemphasize the United State's role in the development of vice economies. Sáenz Rovner presents new origins for the development of casinos on the island, disputing claims of an American mafia influence and instead pointing to the deep roots of gambling in Cuban society as well as instability in the sugar industry as motivating factors. Finally, Sáenz Rovner highlights the political goals of Cuban governments to point to some of the origins of the myths he is overturning. He argues that during the Cold War, like American state officials who used Cuba's narcotics trade to discredit Castro, the Cuban government created propaganda that blamed North Americans for corrupting Cuba through vice.

Sáenz Rovner uses this comparison between U.S. and Cuban state officials and policies to frame many of the chapters in the book. In the first chapter, Sáenz Rovner opens by describing how Prohibition led to smuggling of alcohol from many countries, including Cuba. What made Cuba unique in this smuggling was that illegal narcotics were brought in alongside liquor. New forms of transportation and the Cuban government facilitated and encouraged tourism and trade in Havana. Still, Sáenz Rovner writes against the traditional understanding of this smuggling, arguing that Cuban officials still sought to police trafficking and negotiate with the United States.

In his second chapter, Sáenz Rovner describes the increase of smuggling following the end of Prohibition. Rather than identifying this surge in trafficking to U.S. factors, Sáenz Rovner points to a weakened, violent, and turbulent Cuban state. In a period peppered with literal explosions and changing leadership, Spanish immigrants capitalized on their connections and the nation's disorder to make profit in the illegal drug trade.

Still, as the next few chapters describe, this political instability benefited only those Cubans with the resources capable of taking advantage of the chaos. While wealthier and more connected immigrants profited, Chinese immigrants bringing in opium were targeted and blamed for Cuba's problems. During World War II, as America turned even more to Cuba, and Latin America more widely, as a partner for both legal and illegal trade, Cuban officials were still bribed heavily to ensure the survival of large drug trafficking networks. Sáenz Rovner depicts the high drug usage among Cuban elites, while also showing how poorer Cubans and racial minorities like Afro-Cubans and Chinese-Cubans were disproportionately prosecuted for drug usage.

In the later chapters, Sáenz Rovner turns to Cuba's culture of gambling as well as the role and extradition of American mobsters on the island. In the final chapters, the book traces the greater crackdown on international drug trafficking that arose with Cuba's revolutionary government. The book's strength, however, remains in its discussion of drug trafficking in Cuba. Although he uses his discussion on American criminal networks to dispute their significance or involvement, these chapters end up turning the focus of the book away from Cubans and back toward American actors.

In fact, although this book is thoroughly and extraordinarily researched, Sáenz Rovner frustratingly spends more time developing American rather than Cuban actors. While the book opens, for example, with a snapshot of two Colombian brothers detained for smuggling in Havana in 1956, the overall arc of the book relies more heavily on reappearing figures like Harry J. Anslinger, the head of the American Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN), to make its arguments. In a book with an explicit purpose of bringing forward Cuban actors and writing against the narrative of Cuba as victim-nation, too often Cubans remain undeveloped or in the

background. This is especially true for poorer Cubans or racial minorities. Some of this might have to do with the sources available. And yet, sources that might give voice to these figures, like the high number of novels referenced, remain under-examined and under-theorized. Because of the book's international perspective, domestic conditions in Cuba on a whole are under-explored, suggesting a space for future scholars to investigate.

This problem might have arisen as a result of this book's ambitious goals. Sáenz Rovner is trying to accomplish a lot in this book, and the discussions on gambling, the U.S. Democratic Party, and the mafia, while well-researched, sometimes distract from the book's central arguments. These sections, too, raise questions about their inclusion and other subjects' exclusion. While vices like drug trafficking and consumption, smuggling, and gambling are discussed, prostitution remains hidden throughout the book. By opening up this book to include gambling, the near invisibility of prostitution – and a relatively absent analysis of gender more broadly – stands out even more.

Still, despite these shortcomings, this book provides an impressive analysis of Cuban drug trafficking and Cuba's role in global trade as well as diplomatic and economic relations between Cuba and the United States. Scholars interested in comparing the modern Cuban and American states and economic systems will also find this book useful. Significantly, Sáenz Rovner also presents a thought-provoking portrait of a Cuban nation resisting American imperialist influences. Finally, as scholars continue to think about present day drug-trafficking both globally and more regionally in the Americas, Sáenz Rovner offers up an important glimpse into the past.

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