

without as much ethnographic material offered to demonstrate why this might be so. We are gradually introduced to several women in MEC's leadership, but we do not come to know them as fully developed characters in the MEC story. Thus, while the narrative promises much, in the end the case material seems to be outweighed by excessive explanation of what we should take away from it. Moreover, for all the attention to this brief but significant period in recent Nicaraguan history, it is surprising that we hear only in passing of the allegations of sexual abuse made in 1998 against Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega that further divided the left, largely along gender lines (p. 202).

A broad issue at stake in this timely study concerns women's efforts to win citizenship rights, articulated by MEC through discourses of human rights. As part of a wider network of Central American women calling for new "laboring subjects" to promote "globalization from below" (p. 150), MEC stands to have an important voice in the future. Mendez's final chapter offers a brief update on MEC, and it is encouraging to hear that despite the many obstacles the organization has had to overcome, it has flourished in recent years. Her suggestion that MEC's feminist vision may be capable of producing social transformation will no doubt be put to the test in years to come. As a feminist ethnography of globalization, this book serves up ample food for thought and discussion. I intend to adopt it in my course on Gender and Cultural Politics in Latin America. Other scholars and students in anthropology, women's studies, and Latin American studies should likewise find it very useful.

Florence E. Babb

University of Florida

CHRISTINE AYORINDE: *Afro-Cuban Religiosity, Revolution, and National Identity*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004.

The topic of Ayorinde's book is timely considering the public emergence of Afro-Cuban religions during the years since the collapse of Communist Eastern Europe and the ensuing economic crisis in Cuba. While a number of studies have approached Afro-Cuban ethnicity from historical and (to a lesser extent) sociological perspectives, Ayorinde's book offers an account of the political significance of Afro-Cuban cultural heritage in the historical formation of Cuban national identity. Her investigation focuses on the political motivations underlying the "selective promotion" of Afro-Cuban religions by governments from the colonial era to the present day.

The book is organized into five chapters, the first of which orients the reader to a variety of Afro-Cuban religions, in particular *Santería*, *Ifá*, *Palo Monte*, *Abakuá*, and *Spiritism*. The chapter's description of the specific characteristics and modes of practice of these traditions is detailed, but avoids the tendency, present in other works, to reveal information that practitioners would regard private or not intended for public exposure. The chapter also clearly describes the complex phenomenon of multi-religiosity, that is, the ability of many—perhaps most—religious Cubans to follow multiple spiritual traditions simultaneously, seamlessly, and without conflict.

Each of the book's four remaining chapters focuses on a specific historical period. Chapter Two examines the period 1511-1898 in order to discuss the predicament of black Cubans under conditions of slavery and shortly after. The use of historical sources is refreshing in its presentation of anecdotes about events surrounding the Aponte Conspiracy, the Escalera Conspiracy, and other abolitionist movements. Ayorinde also sheds some new light on the formation of movements seeking independence from Spain by considering the issue of national identity from a perspective that holds race and racial inequality clearly in the foreground. The question of whether black Cubans would acquiesce politically in an independent Cuba or seek revenge for slavery, she argues, was ultimately resolved by the imposition of U.S.-style modernity, which repudiated both Spanish and African heritage.

Ayorinde's analysis of the period 1902-1958, presented in Chapter Three, leads her to aptly conclude that the promotion of racial integration "can and often does conceal a policy of *blanqueamiento* [whitening]" (p. 63). She shows how this was a defining theme in the formation of Cuban national identity in the Republican era, when social commentators, including Afro-Cubans, advocated social evolution away from "uncivilized" (i.e. non-European) customs and traditions. This provided a foundation for the Communist Party's later attempts to promote an "authentic national personality" that "assimilated" the positive elements and "eradicated" the negative elements of Cuban cultural heritage (p. 89).

Chapter Four details this process between 1959 and 1990. According to the 1st Party Congress, Afro-Cuban religious music and dance "should be assimilated, purging them of mystical elements, so that their essence can no longer be used to perpetuate customs and ideas inconsistent with scientific truth" (p. 99). With this guiding principle, institutions like the National Folkloric Ballet of Cuba set about presenting Afro-Cuban traditions to the world primarily as a form of folkloric art.

The final Chapter, which treats the period from 1990 to the present, argues that, "...as in the colonial and republican periods, Afro-Cubans who excel, in some

sense, shed their color as the price of integration.” Indeed, Ayorinde concludes that moving toward a more inclusive form of integration that recognizes not just the contributions, but living relevance of African heritage alongside European heritage, is a challenge still facing Cuba.

Some of Ayorinde’s historical observations could be deepened to account for a broader scope of existing literature. A more comprehensive examination of sources that detail the efforts of progressive Catholic leaders like Félix Varela and Bishop José Díaz Espada y Landa, for instance, would raise useful questions about the diversity of positions on race and slavery within the colonial era Church. That said, the book’s historical analysis is generally illuminating, and its diachronic approach to the racial politics of Afro-Cuban religion fills a void in the existing literature. A case in point is the clever juxtaposition of Fernando Ortiz’s views on the atavism of Afro-Cuban religions with the later ambitions of the Party-State to sanitize and “folklorize” undesired cultural practices. This approach allows Ayorinde to show how dominant sectors have repeatedly sought to assimilate and promote what *they view* as the positive elements of cultural traditions and eradicate what they view as socially backwards.

The book’s engagement with the debate on the contemporary emergence and future development of Afro-Cuban religions is rich with informants’ testimonies and literary quotes, but at times the source material seems to drown out the author’s own voice. A broader synthesis of the diverse local opinions about the emerging public character of Afro-Cuban religions would help remedy this, and also provide a useful platform for further research into questions like the following: What role might ethnic plurality and religious solidarity play in shaping the course of socio-political transition in Cuba and elsewhere? How can an awareness of multi-religiosity in Cuba inform our understanding of the way social boundaries are set up, maintained, and transcended between distinct sectors of the Cuban population? How might cooperative ties between distinct religious communities unite them in social action? How might a more sensitive understanding of religious solidarity in Cuba provoke more inclusive and effective policy initiatives both from within and outside the island? These questions, it must be said, are not Ayorinde’s focus and fall beyond the scope of her study. That said, any researcher who seeks to explore such issues would do well to read Ayorinde’s book first.

Adrian H. Hearn

The University of Technology, Sydney