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UCLA Historical Journal

Title

McCrea, Heather. *Diseased Relations: Epidemics, Public Health, and State-building in Yucatán, Mexico, 1847-1924*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4m477748>

Journal

UCLA Historical Journal, 23(1)

Author

Dufendach, Rebecca

Publication Date

2012

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McCrea, Heather. *Diseased Relations: Epidemics, Public Health, and State-building in Yucatán, Mexico, 1847-1924*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010.

McCrea examines how agents of the emerging nation state of Yucatán, Mexico during the 19th and early 20th centuries implemented public health projects and how local people negotiated such reforms. McCrea claims that projects aimed at hygiene served the parallel objectives of safety and “normalization” of the population. Demographically the Yucatán has long had a majority indigenous Maya population and geographically it is a peripheral region that has more in common with the history of the circum-Caribbean than with greater Mexico. It is in this context the author addresses the cultural significance of “civilization” and “barbarism” that easily align with hygiene and sanitation issues as defined by elites of the period. The study of public and private spheres shows the growing reach of the nation state into the lives of its citizens after the Independence of Mexico. The author’s analysis places a special emphasis on the relationship between agents of the state and larger population to formulate the over-arching narrative of state building and creation of a citizenry. It is from these relationships in the microcosm of Yucatán that McCrea paints a larger picture of how responses to disease can be traced globally across cultural and geographic boundaries.

The organization of the book follows a series of public health initiatives focused on smallpox, cholera, and yellow fever. The first section tells the story of smallpox vaccination campaigns found in the correspondence between young medical school graduates stationed in outlying regions and the local authorities. Using these papers, McCrea attempts to document the “penetration of the organic structures of Maya culture and an attack on the elaborate techniques and theories of health care that the Maya had built up over the centuries since the conquista (p. 56-7).” Although the author does refer to sources such as the *Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel* as well as herbal manuscripts, we are left with an aerial view of the actual medical practices of the Maya during this time period. The author devotes very little space to how Mayan people interpreted disease. Although McCrea acknowledges she cannot prove open resistance to the vaccination project in Maya communities she refers to evasion or disinterest that show ambiguity between local authority and

state demands. According to the author this project failed for several reasons, the lack of authority between the state and federal government, the multifaceted regional and culture medical concepts, and the economic and ethnic tensions that surfaced in the violence of the Caste War.

The periods of epidemic disease such as cholera and yellow fever that overlapped with the Caste War are the focal point for the second part of this book. The Caste War, in simplified terms, pitted the creole elites against the largely Maya population for political and economic control of the region. During this war McCrea shows how the Yucatán state dominated public spaces in the form of cemetery organization by looking at government regulations, community petitions, as well as newspaper articles. Although the state vied with the church for control over burial regulation, ultimately the state gained control of the “intimate domain of death (p. 94).” The appropriation of cemeteries eventually by the state often forced people to rely on informal and church based networks, not unlike the colonial period.

Then final section of the book explores the efforts of the Rockefeller Foundation in conjunction with state of Yucatán to eradicate disease in the post-revolutionary period. These programs were effective at eliminating yellow fever and represented further state regulation because “the state emphasized that individuals’ responsibility for sanitizing their homes, gardens, patios, and water cisterns contributed to clean homes, communities, and state (p. 189).” As the Yucatán state began to turn to socialist measures, the Rockefeller organization retreated. McCrea provides a great amount of details from the archival documents about the relationship of this organization with the state. However, some readers might have wished for a more nuanced investigation of the goals of a foreign philanthropic organization in the Yucatán.

The author argues that epidemic diseases were the perfect opportunity for the state to increase their power to “civilize” the populace. However, the author concludes that the inequities between the rural and urban inhabitants only increased over time. McCrea liberally uses terms like civilization and barbarism without clear definitions. Readers might also question whether these terms can be found in the documents or whether this a borrowed term from John K. Turner. The most rewarding sections show the negotiated terms of the emerging modern nation state and the populace it governs

The topics within this book engage in many historical debates and are applicable to regions outside of Mexico. One example is the intersection of public health and state building present in works from Warwick Anderson. The book is also situated among scholars hoping to validate resistance in many forms like James Scott, often in the face of “modernity” found in the scholarship of Claudia Agostoni. McCrea also hopes to engage debates about the Caste War in the Yucatán present in the works of Terry Rugeley and Gilbert M. Joseph. The book relies heavily on the administrative and institutional concepts of disease and prevention established by Charles Rosenberg.

McCrea’s book successfully explores the public health measures dictated by the forming nation state in Yucatán, Mexico. It contributes to our understanding of myriad of ways that public health measures attempt to enter more private spaces of “citizenry” based on solid archival research. McCrea creatively uses sources that might have been used to prove domination instead to support negotiation with state institutions. This book provides historians interested in Latin America with a basic understanding of the nature of citizen and state interaction in relation to public health in Mexico.

Rebecca Dufendach