

indentureship. This chapter of the work (chapter 7), which discusses the particular problems of women, is the book's strongest section. What comes out most clearly is the male-dominated establishment's ambivalence, and its consequent hamfistedness in dealing with what was arguably the most fragile aspect of the colonial attempt to solve the labour problem through unfree labour.

The question of labour has been the most persistent in colonial history. Unable or unwilling to do the necessary manual work themselves, the European powers sought to devise creative ways of solving that problem. At first it was the use of Amerindian labour through *repartimiento* and *encomienda*. Subsequent to this they used *engagé* or indentured European labour which did not last long. Some European nations even bypassed this resort as they proceeded directly to the use of African labour, which soon became the accepted mode, lasting for some four centuries. Following this, from 1834, there was a return to indentured labour; this time from Asia. *Fragments of Empire* focuses on two dimensions of this long story of labour, namely the African and Indian, dealing with the *problematique* in a thematic manner, providing much that is new from varied archival sources. It is not only history, but rather it interweaves sociological theory with gender considerations in what can aptly be described as a proper subaltern perspective.

The study could have benefited from the inclusion of comparisons with the other Asian group which emigrated, namely the Chinese. This was a very similar – and very different – experience and an exploration of the mechanics of this other form of Oriental servitude would have enhanced the quality of the work. The virtual absence of Chinese women on these indentureships, and the ways in which the Chinese men coped with this loss, would have been enlightening. Some maps indicating the major areas importing these bonded labourers and the routes taken to the Americas over time, would have complemented the up-to-date and exhaustive bibliography which comes at the end of the text. As a total piece of work, however, *Fragments* offers a new and refreshing perspective, taking us beyond chronology to a thorough examination of some of the macroconsiderations which tied together an early attempt at globalization, linking East with West, the Old World with the New. What happened subsequently was a development of these patterns in a more sophisticated manner. Any attempt to understand this present must be based on that past. *Fragments of Empire* successfully unravels much of that complicated past, making sense of a tangled maze of imperialistic devices. In this sense it is a very useful continuation of our understanding of worldwide diasporas.

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CASANOVAS, JOAN. Bread, or Bullets! Urban Labor and Spanish Colonialism in Cuba, 1850–1898. [Pitt Latin American Series.] University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh 1998. xiii, 320 pp. Ill. \$45.00. (Paper: \$19.95.)

This study is among the most valuable works on the Cuban labour movement.¹ It also covers Cuban social and political history and the Spanish colonial system on the island,

1. Recently a Spanish edition of the book has been published: *¡O pan, o plomo! Los trabajadores urbanos y el colonialismo español en Cuba, 1850–1898* (Madrid, 2000).

describing their variations and consistencies in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Significantly, however, this is one of the few studies – despite the increasing trend toward these kinds of analyses in Spanish historiography – that does not perform a linear analysis of Spanish colonialism, but explores the reasons for its actions and changes, compares its mechanisms, and examines the consequences of these changes and reforms. Casanovas shows how the consequences of the reforms introduced by the Spanish government from the 1860s onward exceeded the scope anticipated and instigated revolts among bourgeois and proletarian associations. Some of these associations struggled against the *Partido Español* to achieve greater reforms, although they did not always pursue independence during these years. By participating in the *Partido Reformista*, the elite white artisans protected their class interests and sometimes set aside the racial barriers. The 1860s also contained the roots of the proletarian struggles of 1880. Authors such as Aguirre, Plasencia, and Hidalgo have overlooked this continuity.

I believe that understanding the true value of this book requires situating it in Cuban historiography, and especially in the studies of Cuban society in the period between 1868 and the first decade of the twentieth century. Comprehensive studies on this period are scarce and have begun to appear regularly only recently. This study by Casanovas is interesting for several reasons. For nearly a century, for example, Cuba was a slave society. This situation led to very peculiar intra-ethnic and interethnic relations. As Dr Casanovas has mentioned in a few articles, this condition heavily affected the island's politics until 1898. Both the Negro element and the growing white influence weighed on the society, which was conditioned both by its demographic evolution, by the strengthening of proletarian movement, and by the configuration of the nation that was conceived largely by the elite. Nonetheless, the coloured population gradually became incorporated in the country's civil and political affairs. The progressive abolition of slavery, the continuous arrival of immigrants, and the growth of the proletariat were major factors in this society. Some scholars have described it as a class society, while others refer to a caste society within a class society.

In recent years the panorama of Cuban social history has been enriched through partial contributions, including studies on immigration, race, the proletarian movement, artisans, banditry, and, to a lesser extent, gender, prostitution, crime, settlers, everyday life, establishment of patronage, catechism, and rural workers. Over time, contributions from the history of science and mentalities have gradually been added to both social history and the general history of the island. As with cultural history, which elucidates social conduct, these contributions have not been elaborated. Nor has their scope had the deserved impact of broadening and complementing knowledge on the theme.

Cuban history during the last century under Spanish rule, when consensus was lacking about the presence and definition of the social classes, or concerning their production system under capitalism, has become more complex with the application in recent decades of working methods that, because of their rigidity, often present a rather schematic and reductionist panorama. This impression highlights continuities with the present, by decontextualizing the objects of study and overlooking periods in history that do not substantiate these continuities. On the other hand, most authors consider these approaches too simple to explain a complex process such as the changes that affected the island and transformed it from a caste society into a class society throughout the nineteenth century, and especially during the last three decades. After all, this transition was neither linear nor perfect. Many factors and interests converged, for example, to avert the replacement of slavery by proletarianization or to counteract the weight of the Negro population.

The above factors enhance the value of this book and add to its importance. This study by Casanovas is conducive to a debate about other studies on the labour movement that stress its revolutionary potential and make it virtually dependent on the power of summons by José Martí. In my opinion, however, Joan Casanovas has demonstrated that reformism and anarchism were the labour movement's chief ideologies, as they promoted the measures and solutions that best suited the workers. This has led him to contradict one of the most managed theses, which attributed the influence of anarchism to the prominence of immigrants, especially Spanish ones, as confirmed by Olga Cabrera in her discussion of the Hispanicization of the labour movement. Her archival research and her knowledge of colonial politics enable her to oppose most of the historiography emanating from Cuba, and to demonstrate that the strength acquired by the labour movement deeply transformed colonial society, in addition to contributing to the victory of the independence movement, notwithstanding her criticism of Cuban nationalism.

The effort in most of this historiography to identify continuities with the present has motivated many authors to lapse into reductionist explanations. Regarding the reformist movement of 1860, some authors have maintained that their ideology prevented the workers from developing a national awareness and class consciousness. Compared with these arguments, the work of Joan Casanovas explores the social and political conditions of the final decades of the nineteenth century and re-evaluates the role of anarchism within Cuban separatism. His position teaches us the meaning of anarchism, mutilated and manipulated by a large share of this historiography that focuses on the Hispanicization of the labour movement, noted above as one of the factors that prevented this group from taking power and underlay the lack of national awareness. On the other hand, Joan Casanovas refutes more official theses, by showing that the changes within the Cuban labour movement in the late nineteenth century enabled and caused anarchism to become the leading syndicalist ideology on the island. Anarchism remained important until the 1920s, when the syndicalists – who were mostly anarchists – began to be persecuted, assassinated, and expelled.

Associationism plays a key role in every social structure and provides document registers of groups that would otherwise not have left any historical evidence. This is especially true for associations formed and cultivated by people born abroad and indicates the types of interest and problems that arise within a community, its hierarchy, the measures taken to address them, and the breakdown of the spheres of action between political and civil circles. This study has revealed new analytical perspectives about Cuban civil society, which, as Dr Casanovas submits, experienced major political changes at the end of the nineteenth century. The resulting legalization of certain forms of expression has enhanced awareness of their discrimination, which underlay the emergent nationalism that confronted Spain in 1895.

Finally, this work's importance derives both from its presentation of a different valuation of the Cuban labour movement, and of anarchism, and from its analysis of the changes in Cuban society and the colonial regime in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, which paved the way toward twentieth century society. Some changes were achieved directly by the subordinate Cuban elements, whose ideology was based on anarchism.

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