

Kirwin R. Shaffer. 2013. *Black Flag Boricuas: Anarchism, Antiauthoritarianism, and the Left in Puerto Rico, 1897-1921*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press. xv + 220 pp. ISBN: 978-0252037641.

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Despite the 1970s historiographical shift towards a more critical interpretation of Puerto Rican social history, anarchism still lags behind in this academic effort. Except for the biographical works on the anarchist, feminist, and Spiritist Luisa Capetillo, anarchism has been represented as a mere footnote to Puerto Rican history. Only, a recent renewed interest in the topic, triggered by the visibilization of anarchist ideas and practices in the global protest movement, opens up new academic inquiries into the relation of anarchism and the national past. Kirwin Shaffer's *Black Flag Boricuas: Anarchism, Antiauthoritarianism, and the Left in Puerto Rico, 1897-1921*, contributes in significant ways because it offers new interpretations on the different manifestations of the island's radical culture.

Shaffer's elegant narrative eloquently brings to life a rigorous archival research not only from Puerto Rico but also from international archives in the Netherlands, Cuba, and the United States. Although it studies Puerto Rican anarchism, it also looks at the transnational networks in order to present a broader picture of anarchist organizing that includes the Caribbean Basin and beyond. The chapters are organized chronologically, which is helpful for those readers who might not be completely familiar with the complex history of the island at the cusp of the century.

The first three chapters broadly review the origins of anarchism in the island and serve as a historical background for the rest of the book. In the fourth chapter Shaffer looks at the networks and alliances created among anarchists, freethinkers, and Spiritists; something that had not been done before and that opens the door for further studies. In the fifth chapter Shaffer studies the cultural manifestations of the left along with their interpretation of gender and the role of revolutionary violence played in their struggles. The last two chapters focus on the "Bayamón Bloc" and their activities after 1911, year in which the State tried to repress any radical activity on the island. The manifestation of anarchism serves as a cohesive element throughout the book as Shaffer looks into the labor movement and other subaltern sectors such as the Spiritists and the Freethinkers. *Black Flag Boricuas* offers theoretical

chapters, such as the second, which talks about the radicals' electoral politics and unionism, and the fifth chapter, which analyzes the anarchists' construction of the theoretical elements that dictated their praxis, in order to give context to the rest of the book which focuses on more concrete manifestations such as the *Centros de Estudios*, newspapers, and radical groups in the lines of the "Bayamón Bloc."

Even though Shaffer offers a well-researched study of anarchism and its multiple manifestations in the island, there are aspects that need to be revised. The name itself, *Black Flag Boricuas*, contains an interpretation that some will find problematic. He argues, without any reference, "Those familiar with Caribbean and especially Puerto Rican history will know that the island's pre-Columbian inhabitants referred to themselves as Boricuas" (p. 16). Actually, according to Jalil Sued Badillo, the term has indigenous roots but was not used as an identifier. It was coined in colonial history for the first time during the 1822 expedition led by Ducoudray Hollstein to establish "The Republic of Boricua." Boricua was, in fact, an erroneous translation of Boriquén. The meaning of Boricua does not correspond to the Taínos nor does it recall past inhabitants of the island's past. Instead, the term was constructed in the twentieth-century Puerto Rican Diaspora in New York in order to displace the derogatory nature of the term "jíbaro" and was later adopted by people living in the island.

Apart from misleading terminology, there are problematic deficiencies in Puerto Rican historiography. For example, the author attributes the creation of the labor movement to Santiago Iglesias Pantín (pp. 19, 28-29, 37). This approach has been contested since 1930 by Andrés Rodríguez Vera's book *El Triunfo de la apostasía: Comentando el libro de Santiago Iglesias Pantín*, and later critically developed by historian Gervasio García, along with Ángel G. Quintero Rivera, Amílcar Tirado, Ricardo Campos, Rubén Dávila Santiago, Rafael Bernabe, and a full range of scholars since the 1970s. In fact, Gervasio calls it the "Early Riser Myth" because it diminishes the importance of various social and historical elements that were intertwined in the process of creating a movement and gives god-like attributes to individuals, thus reproducing a dignitary approach to history. Shaffer's weak understanding of the beginnings of the labor movement in Puerto Rico causes further historical misunderstandings. For example, Shaffer asserts that Ramón Romero Rosa created *La Miseria* (p. 48) and that *Voz Humana* was Juan Vilar's newspaper (p. 77). However, the early anarchist press was indeed the product of a collective effort of several individuals in Puerto Rico because they lacked the resources necessary for its (re)production. Romero Rosa worked hand by hand with Rafael Alonso Torres, Severo Cirino, José Ferrer y Ferrer, Manuel Valdés, Eugenio Sánchez

López, and Santiago Iglesias while Vilar worked with Pablo Vega Santos, Antonio Arroyo, Tadeo Rodríguez, and other comrades from the multiple transformations of Caguas' *Centro de Estudios Sociales*.

While Puerto Rican scholarship has proven that Ramón Romero Rosa abandoned his radical praxis and became a reformist, Shaffer has obviated Puerto Rican studies in his assertion of Rosa's writings.¹ According to Walter Mignolo, one mistake of postcolonial scholars and intellectuals is to pay more attention to the "thinking" rather than the "doing" and disregard the local historical connection between doing and thinking.² Amílcar Tirado's biography of Romero Rosa proves the shift in Rosa's political orientation during his last days.³ Because of this lack of historiographical reflection, Shaffer has misinterpreted Rosa's political praxis. Similarly, Shaffer argues that the group *El Comunista* was anarchist-oriented. Even though some anarchists such as Ramón Barrios and Venancio Cruz collaborated with the group both economically and ideologically, while reproducing some anarchist articles⁴ and constructing a revolutionary rhetoric, it would be historically mistaken to identify the group as anarchist. The editorial line supported the Communist Party of the United States of America,⁵ ascribed to the Third International,⁶ and articulated a Marxist oriented group identity.⁷ We cannot attribute this to ideological naïveté because they had a clear sense of the differences between anarchism and communism, as testified by the writings of Ángel María Dieppa, Juan José López, and Venancio Cruz.

In the Epilogue Shaffer looks over anarchist activity throughout the century and ends up covering the contemporary anarchist movement on the island. However, the totalizing picture does not correspond to the local reality. He argues, for example, that the "Grupo Puerto Rico Libertario first came on the fore in June 2009 but remained on the margins" (p. 178) with no more reference than their website. This creates an erroneous idea of local active organizing at a time when there was none. The author goes to mention other organizations such as La Acción Libertaria and Semillas Libertarias, the latter being just a website, as they "held classes on anarchism, and revived anarchist theater—which had been absent from the island for almost a century" (p. 178). The former did organize classes but, even though it was tried, theater was never successfully done. The perception of an organized effort by an external scholar does not correspond to the local experience of Puerto Rican anarchism, comprised of an amorphous entity and a system of networks, individuals, and grassroots groups that are trying have come together to push anarchism forward and whose bones would shriek if they found out they had been externally categorized as "Black Flag Boricuas."

While there are substantial interpretational problems, Shaffer's *Black Flag Boricuas* provides the reader interested in the history of radi-

cal ideas in Puerto Rico, the Caribbean, and Latin America, along with its migrant communities in the United States, a general introduction to the still obscure topic of Puerto Rican anarchism. Its value rests on Shaffer's cartography of the transnational anarchist networks and the analysis of the role Puerto Rico played in them.

Notes

- ¹ Campos, Ricardo and Juan Flores, "Migración y cultura nacional puertorriqueña: Perspectivas proletarias," in Ángel G. Quintero, et al., *Puerto Rico: Identidad nacional y clases sociales*, (Río Piedras, P.R.: Ediciones Huracán, 1981), pp. 81-107.
- ² Mignolo, Walter, *The Idea of Latin America*, (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), p. 68.
- ³ Tirado Avilés, Amílcar, "Ideas y acción de Ramón Romero Rosa." Master's Thesis at the State University of New York, 1976; also, in a letter to Santiago Iglesias, Romero Rosa asserted: "From radical I transform into a conservative-reformist." See, Ramón Romero Rosa, "Carta de Romero Rosa", *Unión Obrera*, (October 6, 1906), p. 2.
- ⁴ Lombadrozzi, Inocencio, "¿Qué es la anarquía?," *El Comunista*, August 14, 1920, p. 3.
- ⁵ "El partido comunista norteamericano," *El Comunista*, November 13, 1920, p. 3.
- ⁶ "La tercera internacional," *El Comunista*, May 29, 1920, pp. 1-3.
- ⁷ See: Marcial, Sandalio, "Meditando," *El Comunista*, May 29, 1920, p. 3; "El comunismo por la dictadura del proletariado," *El Comunista*, July 19, 1920; General Archive of Puerto Rico, "Manifiesto a los trabajadores de Puerto Rico," *Junghamns Collection*, Box 100, File 1576.