

**Peter Abrahams. 2000. *The Black Experience in the Twentieth Century: An Autobiography and Meditation*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 409 pp. ISBN: 0253338336.**

Peter Abrahams has written a long and engaging “autobiography and meditation.” He was born in 1919 and finished the book at eighty having lived, as he tells us, longer than he had expected to. He was born the son of an Ethiopian father in then racist South Africa. He was a member of what the South Africans officially defined as the “coloured” or mixed community. Abrahams escaped the poverty and racial segregation of his childhood by working his way on a ship to England, where he settled in 1940. His life from that point on was one of unceasing interest, as he accomplished great things and interacted with a large cast of historical figures in politics and literature.

He worked with the great Pan-Africanist George Padmore, originally of Trinidad but by the 1930s firmly established in London. Padmore had once been the highest ranking African in the Communist Third International but by 1940 had left communism to become arguably the most important Pan-Africanist activist in the world. Abrahams helped edit the publications of Padmore’s International African Service Bureau (though he does not mention this) and was one of the group who helped Padmore and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana stage the epochal Fifth Pan-African Conference in Manchester, England in 1945. In England he also became a writer of international prominence and the author of such best sellers as *Mine Boy* and *Tell Freedom*.

In the mid-1950s, at a time when Jamaicans were emigrating to England in large numbers, Abrahams journeyed in the opposite direction. He had fallen in love with Jamaica and made it his home. In Jamaica he became a distinguished journalist, working at various times with both pioneer major radio stations, editing *Public Opinion*, the quasi-official organ of the Peoples National Party, and in other capacities.

Some of the most beautiful writing of the book comes at the

very beginning. Here Abrahams, with an economy of language not always seen thereafter and with the descriptive ability of the accomplished novelist, describes his early existence in South Africa. It was a world where fathers (and often mothers) were away working for the white people, where people struggled to make ends meet and where adults died young.

Abrahams' first community in England were left-wingers and he met Padmore through them. He worked for the Communist Party's *Daily Worker* until they dismissed him for not having a party card. He lectured to workingmen's organizations and he worked with the Pan-African movement. His involvement in these circles brought him in contact with such luminaries as Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya and Kwame Nkrumah, both members of London's Pan-African circle and both future leaders of their African countries.

Once his reputation as a prominent writer became established, Abrahams attracted to his home a who's who of aspiring colonial writers resident in England. John Hearne, Vidia Naipaul, Andrew Salkey, Jan Carew and Edgar Mittelholzer were among the London based Caribbean writers who visited his home in 1953. The success of his *Tell Freedom* in 1954 led to a book tour of the United States, where he became very friendly with Langston Hughes. While living in Paris in the late 1940s he met African American expatriates Richard Wright and James Baldwin. Wright introduced him to philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir.

Abrahams moved his family to Jamaica in the mid-1950s. "All my life up to now had been spent in fighting against racism...and economic exploitation," he explained. "Now, at last, Jamaica gave me the opportunity to work positively for change....It was emotionally emancipating" (p. 186). He had previously met Jamaican patriarch Norman Manley in England and the two men became good friends.

In Chapter 2 of the book Abrahams discusses W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey, to both of whom he returns throughout the book. DuBois, African America's great scholar-activist and integrationist, and Garvey, the Jamaican-born builder of the most

powerful Pan-African movement in African America and the world, were fierce adversaries in their lifetimes. But Abrahams likes them both. He likes the quotation attributed to DuBois that “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line,” though he disagrees with DuBois’ equally famous lament concerning his dual consciousness as an American and an African American. In Garvey Abrahams sees the triumph of the self-directed African descendant—“Garvey had none of the ‘two-ness’ which tortured DuBois,” he observes (p. 11). He speculates that something in Garvey’s Jamaican background may have provided him with the strength to rise above his contemporaries.

Thereafter the book oscillates between the minutiae of Abrahams’ family life, at times almost a kind of narrative scrap book, the recording of his professional life and his musings on the twentieth century. At times his references to historically important personalities and events are very frustrating. He interacted with so many important people and was present at so many important events that the narrative sometimes cries out for information and insights beyond what can easily be accessed in secondary sources. What was his role at the 1945 Pan-African Conference? Does he have any detailed recollections of it? What did he and Jan Carew and John Hearne and Vidia Naipaul talk about? Did they meet regularly? Did they critique one another’s work? He says he met DuBois in the 1940s (probably in Manchester) but nothing more is forthcoming about the meeting.

There are times, however, when he does enrich the record with recollections that could probably have come from no one else. He tells of Kenyatta’s upset with his criticism of female circumcision in Kenya. He contrasts his visit to Kenya in 1952, when Kenyatta turned out a VIP delegation to welcome him, to his 1965 visit when the streets had to be cleared before Kenyatta, now independence leader, could drive along them. He has an interesting observation on his visit to post-independence Ghana when Nkrumah, it seemed to him, had begun to lose his grip on the popularity of the people. Historians will find interesting his

recollections of his first meeting with Norman Manley in London in the early 1950s. Manley struck him as very hungry for information on the Pan-African world to supplement his Eurocentric journalistic sources. Abrahams lent him Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya*, which Manley read in two days. Abrahams also extracted from Manley a *mea culpa* for his role in prosecuting legal cases against Marcus Garvey in Jamaica.

Abrahams bemoans his lack of detailed knowledge on George Padmore's background and regrets that Padmore never spoke of his Moscow years. Nor does he himself provide enough information into aspects of his own relationship with Padmore. He does, however, furnish a fascinating glimpse into Padmore's work habits. Padmore typed his dispatches twice on an old typewriter capable of making six carbon copies each time. He sent these copies around the world to be reprinted in small publications. By such humble means did Padmore become one of the most influential Pan-Africanists of his day.

Abrahams' accounts of personal interaction with James Baldwin and Langston Hughes, two of the major Pan-African writers of the twentieth century, also yield up historically important tidbits. In a remarkably frank conversation in Paris, Baldwin openly admitted attacking Richard Wright because white America only allowed one prominent Black writer at a time and he wanted to displace Wright in that role. The fact that Wright had been a generous mentor to the younger Baldwin counted for nothing. "If you are black and want to get to the top," Baldwin explained, "you have to work to displace whoever [is] now at the top," even "if it is your brother..." (p. 84). Baldwin cited Langston Hughes as a writer who had been used and discarded by white folks. Baldwin didn't want to suffer the same fate and saw playing the white man's game as the way to survive at the top.

Abrahams "meditated" on this question of the position of the Black writer in a world of white publishers. He praised Langston Hughes for his courage in writing for Black people "without having to earn the approval of white publishers or white readers" (p.

146). Yet he insisted, perhaps contradictorily, that the Black writer should be “just a writer who happens to be black” (p. 62).

Abrahams also provides an entertaining aside on “the withdrawn and reclusive Derek Walcott” the Nobel laureate-to-be who worked under him at *Public Opinion*. Abrahams intervened often with publisher O.T. Fairclough to save Walcott from being fired. Walcott “rarely wrote, but when he did he always produced something special” (p. 195).

Abrahams’ memoirs really come to life in his treatment of his Jamaican adopted home. His friendship with the Manleys and decades of involvement in the highest echelons of Jamaican journalism have provided him with insights, often based on personal interaction with important people, that would be hard to match elsewhere. He discusses the contrasting impact of Peoples National Party and Jamaica Labour Party governments. He has illuminating insights into the style of governance of Alexander Bustamante, Edward Seaga, and Norman and Michael Manley, among others. He analyzes the delicate interplay between government and media and the contrasting approaches of the two parties towards the question of media freedom.

The question of race also runs throughout the book. Despite his seeming preference for Garvey the nationalist over DuBois the integrationist he inclines to the side of assimilation and integration over Garvey’s “race first”. His early status as a “coloured” South African, his marriages to two white Englishwomen, his association with Padmore at a time when Padmore considered Garvey “racist”, his experience of racism at the hands of white communists in London and Paris, and his intellectual admiration for Garvey have left him with unresolved contradictions in his racial world view. He says that you cannot categorize close acquaintances by color, race or class (p. 70). He annoys his hosts in Harlem by advocating assimilation (p. 153). He is against Garvey style “race first” for people of any race (p. 157). He scores Jamaicans for placing themselves in “the frontline of [racial] self-contempt” (p. 244) in their reluctance to accept a Black prime minister. He

cannot imagine a white Edward Seaga becoming prime minister of a non-racist South Africa or anywhere else but Jamaica (pp. 292-293). He misunderstands the complexities of African-Indian relations in Trinidad and Guyana but sees racially mixed African-Indian women as the most beautiful in the world (pp. 337-339). He cannot see why Jews have received reparations for World War II but South Africans have to settle for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission with no material benefits to the victims (p. 398). He defends his marriage to his wife of many decades (and the subject of many moving passages of matrimonial affection), as a consequence of accident rather than racial preference (p. 217).

The absence of an index in so important a book is a major irritant, though not the fault of the author. Dates are in short supply. There are a few factual errors (e.g., on Garvey's electoral performance in Jamaica), but these can be forgiven in a memoir spanning such a vast period.

All in all this is a welcome and very important book. It is of special importance to students of the Pan-African movement and of recent Jamaican history.

Tony Martin  
Wellesley College  
amartin@wellesley.edu

**Diana Paton, ed. 2001. *A Narrative of Events, Since the First of August, 1834, by James Williams, an Apprenticed Labourer in Jamaica*. With an introduction by Diana Paton. Durham: Duke University Press, lxxiii + 137 pp. ISBN: 0822326582.**

**I**n the days following George Bush's second inaugural address, commentators made frequent mention of the President's liberal use of the term "freedom." Eminent Harvard sociologist Orlando Patterson was among them, observing that,

“what the president means by freedom, and what the world hears when he says it, are not the same.” Indeed, Patterson suggested, the more “abstract notions of freedom” celebrated by politicians and pundits alike are often at odds with “what freedom means and how it is experienced” at an individual or social level (Patterson 2005:A31).

As the ongoing work by scholars such as Patterson and others demonstrates, it is in the interval between these lofty ideals and everyday realities that the meaning or “problem” of freedom emerges as a struggle among people of differing interests, desires, and power (Holt 1992). The story of James Williams, a cane worker who lived through the period of apprenticeship that followed the end of slavery in Jamaica, offers a rare historical example of how one person’s struggle to make emancipation meaningful in the face of persistent societal resistance influenced a broader public, hastening the move towards complete abolition of slavery in the British West Indies.

Apprenticeship was conceived as a transitional system that would ease former slaves into, and tutor them in, the workings and requirements of a free labor society. From the outset, as Thomas C. Holt has stated, it was a “half-way covenant in which the relationship between the planter and the worker was much the same as that between master and slave for forty and one-half hours a week” (Holt 1992:56). From its beginnings in 1834 to its end in 1838, the period of apprenticeship witnessed an escalating struggle between workers attempting to refashion their lives in ways that were fundamentally different from their past as slaves, and planters who remained committed to maintaining as much control as possible over their former charges. Increasingly, as word of abuses in the system reached beyond Jamaica, pressure was exerted on colonial officials to end what had become a prolonged slavery. James Williams’s account was instrumental in mounting public support for apprenticeship’s demise.

How his story came to light is a complicated one, as the narrative itself and Diana Paton’s edited version of this extraordinary text illustrate. *A Narrative of Events, Since the First of August, 1834,*

by James Williams, *an Apprenticed Labourer in Jamaica* is actually a compilation of Williams's "original" account, testimony from other apprentices and colonial officials, and Paton's introduction to these assorted documents. Williams's narrative, she insists, is important "not just for the information it provides about the experience of apprenticeship, but equally importantly as a call to action created through a complex collaborative process" (p. xv). The production of his account, she observes, was akin to that of many slave narratives collected in the United States: it required an interlocutor or "amanuensis" (p. xxxi) and was published with particular ends in mind. In the process of crafting and publishing Williams's account, then, Paton is careful to suggest how his words might have been modified to convey a more "authentic" voice and experience, one that would further strengthen the pleas of missionaries and resonate with Britons of varying backgrounds and positions. In order to blunt the potential arguments of those invested in a coercive system of labor, Paton states that the legitimacy of Williams's account—again, like those of former slaves—was established through supplementary documents or testimony that confirmed the essential "truth" of his story (p. xxxii).

Much of Williams's narrative and the additional testimony included here focuses on the abuses faced by Williams and other apprentices—especially women—as they served out punishments on the treadmill for assorted or alleged infractions. In what became known as "dancing the treadmill" (Holt 1992:106) workers were tied to a large, cylindrical device with narrow platforms or steps and forced to keep pace with the speed of the large, rotating device. Originally and ostensibly conceived as a means of inculcating good habits and a steady work ethic among a people making the transition to a free society, the treadmill quickly became a symbol of all that was wrong with the apprenticeship system: an "instrument of torture" (p. 86) rather than a tool for remedying wayward behavior. The incidents recounted by Williams of cruel and exhaustive stretches on the treadmill, especially those endured by women, are unrelenting in detailing the suffering that lead to injury, collapse, and "immodesty" as clothing was torn



away from women's bodies (pp. 61, 67, 77, 83).

Paton's introduction is first-rate in situating Williams's experience in a broader, highly charged social and political frame, and in the care with which she discusses how to establish the truth and reliability of documents or texts in such a context. What cannot be denied in Williams's narrative is his relentless effort to gain justice—as evidenced by his numerous trips to the magistrate—and his belief that apprenticeship, however slanted in favor of planters, was, or should be, different from slavery. “When I was a slave I never flogged,” Williams recounts; “but since the new law began, I have been flogged seven times, and put in the house of correction four times” (p. 5). One is also struck by the several instances in which workers and their families defined their restricted freedom in terms of communal, not solely individual, claims (see pp. xxxvii, xl, and 14). It was, perhaps, this communal sentiment that puzzled and irritated adherents of a free labor system who believed, all things considered, that individuals would choose to maximize their economic self-interest at the expense of other relationships or claims on their time. As planters soon found in their struggles with former slaves, expressions of freedom did not always follow the models drawn up on paper, just as the planters themselves were never quite committed to a free labor society.

In many ways, the assortment of documents and conflicting views found in Paton's edition of Williams's *Narrative* makes it an ideal book to assign undergraduate or graduate students in a course on slavery and emancipation, whether for methodological or comparative purposes. James Williams did not have to be shown, or tutored in, the ways of freedom. His life is eloquent proof of how one person, and one story—on its own terms and as the embodiment of many people and many stories—can change the course of history.

Jill Dupont  
 History Department  
 University of North Texas  
 jdupont@unt.edu

### References

- Holt, Thomas C. 1992. *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Patterson, Orlando. 2005. "The Speech Misheard Round the World". *New York Times*. January 22, p. A31.

**David P. Geggus, ed. 2001. *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 250 pp. ISBN: 1570034168.**

The long Haitian revolution that took place at the end of the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth century constituted one of the most important events in the history of the modern world. Nevertheless it suffered from monumental neglect for a very long time. Fortunately the situation is being slowly reversed and no one has contributed more to restoring the bibliographical visibility and international importance of the Haitian revolution than David Geggus. Since his first major publication on the revolution in 1982, Geggus has produced a prolific stream of monographs and articles dealing with diverse aspects of the revolution and opening up the field for others. The revolution has recently begun to attract a variety of international scholars partly as a result of the bicentenary of the declaration of Haitian independence in 2004 and partly because of the prominence of Atlantic studies. In this superb collection fifteen distinguished scholars reflect on the many fascinating dimensions that the slave revolution of Saint-Domingue in 1791 and the successful declaration of Haitian independence in 1804 had on the wider Atlantic world. All but two of the present essays were offered at a conference held at the College of Charleston in October 1998. The essays are arranged under four principal headings—overview;

politics; resistance; and refugees. The editor provides a very useful preface that nicely contextualizes the events as well as presents a synoptic description of the various chapters. In addition he does a highly informative chapter on refugee Jean-Baptiste de Caradeux' exile in Charleston and a short epilogue.

The three essays of part one set the general overall tone. David Brion Davis reminds us in his concise overview, "Impact of the French and Haitian Revolutions," that as early as January 1893 an aging Frederick Douglass had declared in his speech opening the Haitian Pavilion at the Chicago World's Fair that "Haiti was the original pioneer emancipator of the nineteenth century" (p. 3) and blacks owed more to Haiti than to any other country. Davis points out that "the Haitian Revolution was indeed a turning point in history" (p. 4). This view is supported by Seymour Drescher in "The Limits of Example" but he severely qualifies the Haitian impact beyond the circum-Caribbean area, noting that "beyond the Caribbean islands, the Haitian revolution seems to have played its most significant, if delayed, role in Gran Colombia. Its impact on Brazil, as a stimulus to emancipation or to slave trade abolition seems meager at best. Haiti's impact upon African slavery was smaller still" (p. 11) Robin Blackburn sidesteps Drescher's reservations to support Davis on the wider aspects of the Haitian influence, however, noting that "Napoleon's defeat in Haiti was in fact a defeat for all the slave powers of the New World" (p. 17). Moreover he points out that narrow military and political results should not be considered the only measures of impact.

The establishment of Haiti, as the other chapters emphatically show, had enormous political consequences across much of the western world. Karin Schüller reviews German journals between 1792 and the beginning of the twentieth century and notes some interesting variations with English and French reactions to the Haitian revolution and those of the Germanic states. Some of her observations are not surprising, but others, especially after the later nineteenth century when Haiti loses out to the broader Latin American reporting, demonstrate curious ways in which

German writers projected domestic political considerations on their international reporting. Olwyn Blouet's "Bryan Edwards and the Haitian Revolution" is a remarkably well-researched and informative chapter that presents a far more sophisticated view of Edwards than usually appears in the historiography and makes some insightful comparisons with Thomas Jefferson. Juan González Mendoza examines the sensitivity of Puerto Ricans to the revolutionary impact on the overall economy as well as on the delicate social equilibrium that the island enjoyed before 1804. Simon Newman uses the life of Nathaniel Cutting of New England to illustrate the ways in which Jeffersonian Republicans moved from "the party of republican revolution while yet distancing themselves from foreign social and racial revolutions that threatened the American status quo..." and partly answers the question of the American ambivalence to revolutions since then.

The two last sections deal with the impact of refugees on local situations and examine the reception of ideas regionally as well as the catalytic effects on domestic revolutionary politics. Robert Alderson connects the burning of Cap-Français with the spontaneous rumors and revolts that plagued the Carolinas and Virginia in 1793. Laurent Dubois establishes a direct connection between France, Saint-Domingue and the exacerbation of the uprisings in Guadeloupe between 1794 and 1802. Matt Childs details the way that the free black carpenter, José Aponte, used the examples of Louverture, Dessalines and Christophe to coalesce a broadly-based conspiracy in Havana in 1812. Aline Helg describes an obscure conspiracy that involved French slaves along the Caribbean coast of Colombia but admits that the socio-economic structure of the area proved inhospitable for any type of sustained revolutionary activity. Marixa Lasso further explores the Cartagena region for vital ways in which black republicanism drew on the iconic imagery of Haiti for its symbolic support in the early nineteenth century.

Refugees from both the Haitian and French revolutions spread broadly across the Atlantic world. Susan Branson and

Leslie Patrick provide fascinating details of the generosity of the federal government and private individuals to refugees but show that, at least in Philadelphia, this help went overwhelmingly to white refugees although the presence of black slaves and free persons created a quandary for local authorities. Philadelphia's black population demonstrated far less sympathy for black refugees although eventually remaining refugees managed to establish viable marginal communities in the city. Louisiana received about ten thousand refugees from Haiti—about double the number that went to Philadelphia—and Paul Lachance provides an impressive analysis of the demographic and economic impact as well as the complicated social repercussions of rapidly absorbing such large and diverse population.

Every essay provides fresh insights on a fascinating theme and the reader is persuaded by the editor's assertion in the preface that “[f]rom Philadelphia to Rio de Janeiro, from the imagination of poets to the world commodity markets, the violent birth of Haiti caused a variety of repercussions... Great power politics, slave resistance, movements of migration, and attitudes to race and the future of slavery were all affected” (p. xvi). This is an important volume that makes a substantial contribution to Atlantic and American history as well as to themes dealing with slave societies in the Americas.

Franklin W. Knight  
Johns Hopkins University  
fknight@jhu.edu

**Susanna Sloat, ed. 2002. *Caribbean Dance from Abakuá to Zouk: How Movement Shapes Identity*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 408 pp. ISBN: 081302904X.**

El Ser caribeño se mueve *de cierta manera*, ha dicho el escritor cubano Antonio Benítez Rojo. Una *cierta manera* imposible de describir, confiesa el autor, pero que consigue “conjurar el Apocalipsis”; hacernos desear que, a pesar de toda la adversidad, la vida continúe (Benítez Rojo 1989: xxii). La reciente antología editada por Susanna Sloat, *Caribbean Dance from Abakuá to Zouk: How Movement Shapes Identity*, constituye una contribución pionera a la reflexión sobre el lugar de la danza y el movimiento en el entretejido cultural e histórico que conforma el Caribe. Del ritual religioso a la celebración profana, del funeral al carnaval, del solar, al cabaré y a las tablas, este libro nos transporta a múltiples escenarios caribeños en los cuales se revelan los vínculos profundos que tiene el baile, en sus diversas manifestaciones, con nuestra historia social.

Más de veinte autores de diversos trasfondos académicos y artísticos —incluyendo antropólogos, periodistas, coreógrafos, bailarines y folcloristas, entre otros— se dan cita en este valioso volumen, que ofrece al lector una pluralidad de miradas y abordajes al tema en cuestión. El invaluable cúmulo de experiencias e investigaciones minuciosas aquí reunidas, hacen de este libro una especie de biblia de la danza antillana. Sin embargo, a pesar de la indiscutible competencia de los ensayistas en los temas que abordan, resulta inquietante constatar que los escritos aquí recogidos poco dialogan unos con otros —claro indicio de que el campo de los estudios de la danza caribeña se encuentra aún en estado incipiente. De esta manera, el volumen acaba produciendo un efecto de calidoscopio donde la cultura caribeña se nos presenta, una vez más, como un enrevesado rompecabezas de deslumbrantes fragmentos.

La propuesta de la antología, según expone Sloat en la introducción, estriba en dirigir el foco hacia la africanidad, como

elemento definitorio de la danza en la región: “Although there are dances of European or largely European origin throughout the islands, it is the African element and the way it remains intact, whether in a genuine African retention, a neo-African-Caribbean creation, or a mixture of the African and European in proportions that vary greatly (but that can give even a largely European dance form a distinctive bounce and lilt) that sets the Caribbean apart, that, in fact, has set the whole world dancing to Caribbean rhythms.” (p. xi) Partiendo de esta premisa, el volumen abre con dos ensayos que examinan justamente ese largo cordón umbilical enraizado en el África que nutre la danza caribeña. “Crossroads, Continuities, and Contradictions” de Brenda Dixon Gottschild y “What is Congolese in Caribbean Dance” de Nathaniel Hamilton Crowell, Jr. presentan, sin embargo, perspectivas totalmente diferentes en el análisis de la africanidad de las expresiones culturales de la diáspora. Mientras Gottschild propone una exploración de los valores de la estética africana y la forma en que éstos definen el *performance* caribeño, Crowell centra su análisis en ciertos patrones rítmicos de los géneros caribeños, en un intento por demostrar la permanencia, en la danza antillana, de unas células-madre específicamente congolesas. Esta dualidad de abordajes hace eco de un largo debate en el campo de los estudios afro-americanos, entre una tendencia a estudiar las transformaciones y la resignificación de los valores culturales africanos en el contexto de la diáspora, y otra que pone énfasis en identificar posibles *supervivencias* africanas en América.

Dentro de una perspectiva que centra su atención en los significados de las manifestaciones danzantes, más que en la búsqueda de sus orígenes, Gottschild destaca varios referentes fundamentales para comprender el legado africano en el Caribe. Entre ellos: la valorización del proceso creador dentro de la estética africana; la improvisación; la preservación colectiva del fundamento; la polirritmia en el cuerpo; la tensión entre intensidad y relajamiento; la dilución de las fronteras entre espectador y participante; y la celebración de *performances* maratónicos —carnavales, ritos

y otras festividades donde la danza se extiende más allá de los límites corporales. Si bien la autora, al menos en este ensayo, no considera las particularidades de las diversas culturas africanas de aquellos grupos que fueron esclavizados y transportados a las Américas, su perspectiva abre un camino prometedor a la investigación de los vínculos entre estética y relaciones sociales. Es un excelente comienzo para atender la pregunta que sirve de subtítulo a esta antología: *How movement shapes identity?* Desafortunadamente, a mi modo de ver, este importante punto de partida queda opacado, en el conjunto del volumen, por una visión panóptica más descriptiva que analítica. La propuesta panorámica del título *Caribbean Dance from Abakuá to Zouk*, acaba prevaleciendo a lo largo de la antología, frente a la indagación teórica que sugiere el subtítulo.

Los ensayos aparecen organizados en secciones nacionales o regionales, lo que posiblemente responde a un esfuerzo de sistematización necesario en un campo de estudios emergente. Sin embargo, esto no abona al desarrollo de una perspectiva realmente comparativa. Una lectura cuidadosa de todo el volumen nos revela algunos interesantes ejes temáticos alrededor de los cuales podría ir cuajando una mirada regional. Si bien, la atinada selección de los textos que componen esta antología permite al lector ir creando puentes, la edición podría haber facilitado ese proceso a través de una organización temática acompañada de breves notas introductorias a cada sección. Como ejemplo de la rica trama de asuntos explorados en los ensayos que componen *Caribbean Dance*, podemos mencionar: el lugar del baile dentro del universo ritual y su relación con danzas seculares en el *vodou* haitiano, la *santería* cubana, o el *limbo* de Trinidad y Tobago; el interesante diálogo entre bailaror y tambor en géneros cuyo origen se vincula a la plantación, como la *bomba* puertorriqueña, el *gwoka* en Guadalupe, el *guwanbèlè lisid* de Martinica o el *tambú* de Curazao; las complejas dinámicas de nacionalización de ciertos géneros regionales; el efecto de los desplazamientos y migraciones en la conformación de nuevos géneros; las transformaciones en las prácticas carnavalescas; las relecturas de lo popular desde la



danza contemporánea y el desarrollo de nuevos lenguajes en la danza-teatro, entre otros.

Una contribución significativa de este libro es el haber trascendido las fronteras que se establecen habitualmente al encajonar los géneros musicales y danzantes dentro de categorías como tradicional, popular, comercial o artístico, entre otras. Cabe destacar aquí, la importancia de incluir ensayos dedicados a la trayectoria de pioneros en el desarrollo de un lenguaje caribeño dentro de la danza contemporánea, como el cubano Ramiro Guerra, el jamaicano Rex Nettleford y la afro-americana Katherine Durham, quien estrenó piezas en las décadas del 1930 y 1940 nutridas por la investigación de campo que realizara en Jamaica, Haití, Martinica y Trinidad. La reflexión de Nettleford sobre el proceso de codificación de los elementos tradicionales y de creación de nuevos vocabularios, así como la experiencia del desarrollo de la *técnica cubana*, por Guerra y sus sucesores, resultan de mucha pertinencia para los creadores contemporáneos. La exploración teatral dentro de la danza es abordada en el escrito de Alma Concepción sobre la puertorriqueña Gilda Navarra, en el testimonio del bailarín y coreógrafo jamaicano Thomas Osha Pinnock, en el análisis del *performance* de Josefina Báez y Claudio Mir en torno a la experiencia dominicana en la ciudad de Nueva York y en el ensayo de Susanna Sloat sobre la danza caribeña contemporánea en los escenarios niuyorkinos.

La reflexión en torno a la danza en las sociedades caribeñas puede abrir interesantes y novedosas perspectivas que contribuyan a la discusión en torno al binomio unidad/diversidad en la región. Con la publicación de esta importantísima antología, se sientan las bases para el desarrollo del campo de los estudios sobre la danza caribeña. Cabe anotar que el libro incluye un glosario de alrededor de 300 términos relacionados a los diversos géneros abordados en los ensayos, así como una gran cantidad de fotos, mapas y diagramas que enriquecen la lectura del mismo. Por otro lado, debemos destacar que la contribución de *Caribbean Dance* trasciende el ámbito académico. Creadores comprometidos con la

búsqueda de nuevos lenguajes expresivos, aquellos que procuran la preservación y desarrollo de la danza tradicional, así como todos los amantes del baile, encontrarán en este libro una fascinante gama de experiencias e investigaciones, además de una poderosa fuente de aliento e inspiración. Esperamos que la publicación de este valioso libro sirva de punto de arranque para el desarrollo de nuevas investigaciones comparativas sobre la danza en la región, así como de intercambios culturales que nos ayuden a trascender las fronteras insulares tan perjudiciales a nuestras prácticas académicas y artísticas.

Mareia Quintero Rivera  
Departamento de Historia  
Universidad de Puerto Rico  
Recinto de Río Piedras  
mareiaq@yahoo.com

## Referencias

Benítez Rojo, Antonio. 1989. *La isla que se repite. El Caribe y la perspectiva posmoderna*. Hanover: Ediciones del Norte.

**Joseph L Scarpaci, Roberto Segre and Mario Coyula. 2002. *Havana: Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis*. Revised Edition. Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, xxvi + 437 pp. ISBN: 0-8078-5539-0 (Paperback).**

“Havana,” wrote Alejo Carpentier, “is a city of unfinished works.” This present volume, written by three specialists in architecture and urban planning with between them many years of familiarity with the Cuban capital, provides an in-depth biography of this city. Havana has captured the imagination of

many generations, and there is an already existing literature that deals with the formation and development of the city: from Roig de Leuchsenring's (1963) extensive notes on Havana's history, through Carpentier's (1970) impressionistic accounts, to more recent books that have fed the world's new-found interest (Álvarez-Tabío 2000; Barclay 1993). However, none can match Scarpaci, Segre and Coyula in their combining of a detailed and objective description of the city's growth with the contemporary reality of Havana as an urban space. That *Havana: Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis* should be re-released, in a revised edition, just five years after its first publication is testimony both to the timeliness and usefulness of such a volume, and the ongoing pace of change in Havana.

The book broadly falls into two main parts. The first traces, in four chapters, the historical development of Havana from its foundation in the sixteenth century, through the twentieth century and into the post-59 period. The way in which the physical space of the city, and the buildings that occupy it, have passed through successive expansions and reinventions is explored, giving the impression of layers partially covering earlier layers as new generations moulded Havana according to their needs. A possible criticism might be that there is a temporal imbalance in their approach, which squashes the first 350 years of the city's history into a single chapter, the next fifty years into another, with the rest of the book ostensibly dealing with the period from the 1950s to the present. However, since the past continues to remain a feature of the present this is perhaps a positive feature of the book, in comparison with so many other texts about the city in which the present becomes buried under the privileging of the past.

This historical review serves as an extended prologue for the second part, in which five thematic chapters explore key aspects of contemporary urban policy: city government and administration; housing; economy; social functions; and the special case of *Habana Vieja* (Old Havana), with its gradual restoration as a UNESCO World Heritage site. These each provide a wealth of

recent historical detail, and current facts that together builds a complex picture of today's Havana, seen as the result of shifting political, economic and social priorities.

In their Preface, the authors warn against taking the book's subtitle too literally (p. xx). Nevertheless, the characterisation of the city as having 'two faces' is something that reverberates, in different guises, throughout: whether of past and present, planned and improvised, or living and decaying. As anyone who has spent anytime in Havana knows, this is a city full of its own internal contradictions, and it is this that gives the city its remarkable vitality—a vitality that even the economic difficulties of recent years have not succeeded in dampening.

Throughout the book, the authors succeed in intertwining past and present together, such that even though the apparent structure of the volume would suggest that they are perpetuating the pre-59/post-59 dichotomy that dominates much literature on Cuba, they show how even in the revolutionary period the past remains ever present:

The city reaches out to pedestrians hurrying through its streets; they do not have to raise their head to see if the old companion of their dreams is stubbornly there—peeling, crumbling, distorted by salt and water yet incredibly alive and useful (p.195).

Although the authors' grasp of the more general historical context is at times wanting, this can be forgiven because they are so successful in combining both the linear temporal progression of the history of the city itself, with the juxtaposition throughout of fresh attempts to reinvent the city grappling with the results of earlier attempts.

It is this tendency for the city, or its planners, to never succeed in entirely reinventing itself that runs throughout the book. The authors chronicle the intermittent attempts at devising and executing grand master plans for Havana. Political will succeeds in carrying these plans only so far, only for them to be subsequently abandoned incomplete, supplanted by new priorities or coming up against insurmountable difficulties. Thus even Havana's planned

face has a feeling of improvisation about it. On the other hand, the improvised way in which *habaneros* have themselves played a part in changing the fabric of their city (whether constructing their own houses, adapting existing ones through vertical or internal extensions, or making use of unused spaces for food production) has itself been regulated, so preventing the uncontrolled sprawl of urban poverty that can be found throughout Latin America.

However, for all that the book demonstrates the multiple faces of Havana as a built environment, the two million faces that inhabit it appear as little more than shadows. Though they succeed in describing, in great detail, the city as a space to be lived, worked and played in; those who do the living, working and playing never become the subject. This is a weakness of the book, and detracts from the evident love that the authors feel for Havana. In the earlier historical chapters, they draw very little on contemporary accounts from the different periods of the city's history. Had they done so, this might have provided a more human feel for what the city was like in times gone by, and would have enabled a counterpoint to be established between Havana as a built and as a lived space.

The same is true of the later, more contemporary chapters. Thus, they present the hard facts of housing shortage and need, and detail the history of, for example, the microbrigade movement that was established to help solve this. But this story lacks the voices of those who did the building, and who needed the housing. Though the authors repeatedly refer to the need to empower the city's residents, the book's protagonists remain the town planners and architects: this is a book about them, and about the city they are responsible for. But there is something barren about a history of a city that is reduced to its constructions and its spatial arrangement, and the political choices that relate to this.

In writing about the renovation of *Habana Vieja*, the authors rightly criticise a tendency to forget about the inhabitants and their perceptions of what their city is and should be:

...the problem not only was one of color but also concerned issues of historical veracity given that such banal and pictur-

esque perfection never registered in the collective memory of *habaneros* (p.338).

This can be seen in recent times, with the attempt to clean up the historic centre, and remove from it something of the nocturnal rowdiness that has characterised the city since its foundation: as though the unruly, and thoroughly traditional, behaviour of its inhabitants were a distraction from the beauty of its architecture. Yet a city that lacks such vital signs is missing its reason to exist. It is this lack of a human face inhabiting its buildings and spaces that prevents this book from doing for Havana what Mike Davis (1990), for example, has succeeded in doing for Los Angeles.

Nevertheless, this should not detract from the great strengths of this book, which will deservedly become a much referred to source not just for all those studying Havana, but also for anyone who has been in any way touched by this remarkable city. This book is a testimony to Havana's ability to endure. The city continues to breath and grow, with its crumbling past somehow surviving and merging into present improvisations and future plans. To echo the authors: "*La Habana siempre, siempre nuestra Habana*".

Jonathan Curry-Machado  
London School of Economics & Political Science  
J.Curry-Machado@lse.ac.uk

### Referencias

- Álvarez-Tabío, Emma. 2000. *Invenición de La Habana*. Barcelona: Editorial Casiopea.
- Barclay, Juliet. 1993. *Havana: Portrait of a City*. London: Cassell Villiers House.
- Carpentier, Alejo. 1970 [1964]. *La ciudad de las columnas*. Barcelona: Editorial Lumen.
- Davis, Mike. 1990. *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los Angeles*. London: Verso.
- Roig de Leuchsenring, Emilio. 1963. *La Habana, apuntes históricos*. 3 vols. 2nd ed. Havana: Consejo Nacional de Cultura.

**Douglas V. Armstrong. 2003. *Creole Transformation from Slavery to Freedom: Historical Archaeology of the East End Community, St. John, Virgin Islands*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 384 pp. ISBN: 0-8130-2584-2.**

**D**ouglas V. Armstrong es uno de los estudiosos más destacados de la arqueología histórica del Caribe. Profesor del Departamento de Antropología de Syracuse University y autor del importante texto *The Old Village and the Great House: An Archaeological and Historical Examination of Drax Hall Plantation, St. Ann's Bay, Jamaica*. (University of Illinois Press, 1990), Armstrong pertenece a una generación de investigadores en Estados Unidos (junto con Robert Paynter, Mary Beaudry, Lou Ann Wurst, y James Delle, entre otros) que se han dedicado a la tarea de repensar la arqueología como ciencia antropológica crítica e histórica. Más importante aun, se han dedicado a promover una arqueología del período colonial y poscolonial (tanto en EE.UU. como en el Caribe, particularmente el angloparlante) que no resulta ser otra cosa que una genealogía en el sentido de Foucault, de la modernidad temprana.

El texto que aquí reseñamos, *Creole Transformation from Slavery to Freedom* se presenta como un estudio de caso que pretende no sólo historiar la comunidad del East End en la isla de St. John, sino interrogar a través de su cultura material y la documentación histórica disponible los vínculos entre lo local y lo global durante nada menos que dos siglos. En otras palabras, el autor busca entender diacrónicamente como los distintos modos de vida y las identidades de los habitantes del East End se alteraron, o en algunos casos se constituyeron a partir de una dinámica amplia de contactos e intercambios a nivel Antillano y Europeo. Armstrong esboza así un riguroso estudio que partiendo de un minucioso trabajo de campo arqueológico y análisis artefactual así como del manejo de diversas fuentes documentales localizadas en distintos archivos estadounidenses, europeos, y caribeños, llega a una sólida teorización sobre los procesos histórico-culturales,

políticos y económicos que afectaron a esta región.

Armstrong plantea que dichas dinámicas incidieron en East End de manera tal que produjo una de las primeras comunidades caribeñas mulatas y libres que coexistieron con el régimen de la plantación. El régimen de trabajo esclavista que dominaba dicha formación social ha sido privilegiado, según el autor, en el análisis histórico de manera que otras formas de trabajo y convivencia posible dentro de su órbita se han hecho prácticamente invisibles. Sin negar el obvio carácter opresivo de la plantación, Armstrong (siguiendo a Sidney Mintz) nos invita a examinar sus márgenes. En este caso resalta el espacio negociado de libertad que existió y perduró por casi dos siglos en la comunidad del East End de St. John.

Los enclaves europeos en el Caribe experimentaron una gama de formas políticas y culturales que no sólo transformaron a las sociedades indígenas originarias y los esclavos africanos importados, sino que también reconfiguraron los parámetros sociales del mismo colono europeo. En ese sentido, East End como el resto del Caribe fue sede de complejos procesos de transculturación. Armstrong en la primera parte del libro (o los primeros tres capítulos) detalla la historia del sitio de estudio así como de la isla de St. John. De esta manera pretende reconstruir no solamente los distintos patrones de asentamiento en la isla sino examinar sus funciones y conexiones en un contexto sobredeterminado por distintos poderes metropolitanos (daneses, británicos, y finalmente estadounidenses). En el caso de la geografía oriental de St. John, lo que se perfila paradójicamente es la historia de una comunidad semi-autónoma en la periferia de una sociedad esclavista.

Desarrollada por la imposibilidad o no deseabilidad (en el libro no está del todo claro el asunto) de un control total por parte de los poderes metropolitanos, la comunidad del East End de St. John experimentó con dos formas de vida muy particulares durante su historia temprana. En primera instancia surge la comunidad como espacio para proveer abastos al consumo local. A diferencia de la plantación, el asentamiento no se dedicó a producir azúcar



y algodón sino más bien a procurar víveres a través de la pesca, la recolección y la agricultura a pequeña escala para suplir al resto de la isla. Durante este proceso los residentes del East End (que incluía predominantemente a blancos pobres, mulatos y negros libertos) aprovecharon su cercanía a la costa y a otras Antillas como St. Croix, Barbados y St. Thomas para establecer un intenso comercio marítimo que no solo cohesionó la comunidad sino que ayudó a borrar (o por lo menos a problematizar) la frontera racial entre blancos y negros. Estos procesos que resultaron en una reformulación de la categoría del residente y del habitante fueron propiciados en adición por el establecimiento en el East End de una apropiación comunal de la tierra. La reconceptualización de este tipo de membresía comunitaria se sostuvo gracias a ese derecho colectivo sobre uno de los medios principales de producción.

En la segunda y tercera parte del libro (capítulo cuarto al octavo) se detalla a través del registro arqueológico (y de la documentación histórica) de algunas zonas dentro del East End como Hansen Bay, Pleasant Lookout, y Rebecca's Nancy la vida cotidiana de estos residentes "autónomos". Retomando el interesante análisis social del espacio propiciado por algunos arqueólogos neo-marxistas como Shackel y Delle, Armstrong le sigue la pista a los distintos cambios materiales y simbólicos que fueron incidiendo en la creación de asentamientos y poblados alejados por completo del modelo de espacio jerárquico de la plantación. El estudio de lo que los arqueólogos históricos llaman "información espacial" sugiere aquí un proceso de cambio social que apuntaba hacia mayores grados de interacción y cooperación entre los residentes independientemente de ideologías raciales y racistas heredadas de la colonia. En otras palabras, la cultura material de los habitantes del East End demuestra una segura dirección a la hibridez y al mestizaje cultural y técnico.

En la parte final del libro (cuarta parte), Armstrong repasa el significado de estos procesos no sólo a partir del contexto de su estudio de caso sino que su recapitulación pretende estimular el

debate entre otros estudiosos del Caribe. Aquí el autor teoriza sobre el complejo tema de la criollización. Asunto no del todo resuelto en la antropología del Caribe y según Armstrong poco reflexionado en la arqueología histórica (en detrimento de nuestro autor tenemos que señalar que el mismo ignora muchos de los trabajos en español que desde una perspectiva comparada le podrían ser útiles como por ejemplo los de la arqueóloga cubana Lourdes Domínguez entre otros). Sin embargo, estamos de acuerdo con el autor de que representar a la sociedad colonial insular como un mundo maniqueo, de opresores y oprimidos resulta simple en muchas ocasiones, particularmente cuando se le presenta la evidencia histórica y arqueológica que demuestran cada vez con mayor contundencia las áreas grises, es decir los distintos grados de negociación entre los sujetos que habitaban esas estructuras. En ese sentido, uno de los fundadores de la antropología histórica en los Estados Unidos y casualmente de lo que se identifica hoy con la agenda subalternista y poscolonial, Bernard S. Cohn, tenía razón cuando argumentaba de que el momento colonial implica y constituye tanto al sujeto que coloniza como al colonizado. Partiendo de esa premisa el trabajo de Douglas V. Armstrong sobre los espacios fugitivos y anómalos del colonialismo merece ser estudiado con cautela y atención.

Gabriel De La Luz Rodríguez  
Departamento de Ciencias Sociales General  
Universidad de Puerto Rico  
Recinto de Río Piedras  
gabrieldejaluz@onelinkpr.net

**David H. Brown. 2003. *Santería Enthroned. Art, Ritual and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 432 pp. ISBN: 0226076105.**

La llegada de los primeros misioneros cristianos a tierra Yoruba, durante el siglo XIX, trajo consigo, como históricamente ha ocurrido en todas partes del mundo, una actitud negativa hacia las formas autóctonas de religión. Las deidades “paganas” fueron demonizadas y sus expresiones materiales en la parafernalia religiosa sometidas a la purificación mediante el fuego.

No fue hasta la llegada al país Yoruba de Leo Frobenius, uno de los más grandes africanistas de todos los tiempos, ya en los albores del siglo XX, que se produjo una nueva lectura sobre el significado del sistema religioso vigente entre los pueblos Yoruba. En su *Mitología de la Atlántida* Frobenius (1949) trata, con emocionada admiración, sobre el culto a dioses masculinos y femeninos que en sus avatares mitológicos guardan una extraordinaria similitud con sus equivalentes griegos, pero a diferencia de la religión practicada por éstos en la Antigüedad Clásica, se trataba de una religión viva, objeto de culto cada día y todos los días. Traigo a colación esta referencia porque refleja la variedad y extraordinaria riqueza que encierra el sistema religioso de los pueblos Yoruba —capaz de deslumbrar a un Frobenius— que es el antecedente inmediato de la llamada Santería. Se trata ésta de una religión neo-africana que retoñó en Cuba, de la que fueron portadores grandes contingentes de esclavos Yoruba que arribaron a dicha isla sobre todo durante la primera mitad del siglo XIX. Este sistema religioso neo-africano es cercano al candomblé brasileño con el que comparte un origen Yoruba. La riqueza de la Santería ha tenido reflejo en las pasadas décadas en la amplia bibliografía que en todo o en parte trata de dicho fenómeno religioso.

Ya en nuestros días se cuentan por centenares los libros publicados sobre la llamada Santería, sistema religioso que cobra cada

vez mayor difusión en escala hemisférica y extra-hemisférica. Esa copiosa literatura puede dividirse en tres categorías. La primera de ellas está integrada por aquellos libros y folletos dirigidos al practicante, en forma de manuales o textos de contenido litúrgico-doctrinal, que tienen sus más importantes canales de distribución y venta en esos establecimientos comerciales tan peculiares que son las botánicas. La misma va dirigida al iniciado o neófito de la Santería y, con mayor o menor acierto, trata de llenar una laguna en cuanto a formas de transmisión de su teología y liturgia que han sido tradicionalmente orales y que desde hace más de un siglo han descansado en la confección de las llamadas “libretas de santo”.<sup>1</sup> La segunda, se inscribe en una corriente mística muy extendida en nuestros días, en búsqueda de nuevas formas de espiritualidad.

Curiosamente, la religiosidad en nuestros días, sobre todo en los países del llamado primer mundo, o se polariza en Iglesias constituidas, adoptando distintos matices de un fundamentalismo mayoritariamente cristiano, o se expresa en una búsqueda de nuevas formas heterodoxas, que descansan en creencias y prácticas al margen de colectividades o congregaciones, y que por tanto ostentan un marcado carácter individual. En esta segunda categoría figura una literatura de un tipo que pudiera definirse en términos de una Santería en la que se enfatizan los aspectos místicos de valor individual, a menudo entrecruzada o sincrética, como los textos que combinan el Tarot con las formas oraculares que son propias de la Santería.

La tercera categoría —la menos abundante— es la que se dirige al esclarecimiento de aspectos esenciales, de naturaleza sociológica o antropológica, los cuales están implícitos en la Santería. Esta última es la menos abundante y la que mayor esfuerzo demanda del investigador, pues suele ser el resultado de un paciente pesquizaje que toma mucho tiempo en completarse. Es aquí donde se inscribe *Santería Enthroned* de la autoría de David Brown.

Conocí a David Brown en La Habana, hace unas dos décadas, cuando realizaba el trabajo de investigación para su tesis doctoral en Antropología. Brown visitó Cuba muchas veces. Nos encontramos en distintas ocasiones a lo largo del tiempo y en cada encuentro se evidenciaba cómo iba madurando en él un conocimiento más profundo y abarcador de la Santería. Debe señalarse que con frecuencia tropezamos con investigadores que en su obra deslizan errores involuntarios, que son el resultado del sesgo introducido a partir de su propia formación individual en términos culturales o de una tentativa de comprobación de presupuestos falsos. Nada que ver con David Brown, que en *Santería Enthroned* es un fiel expositor de atinadas y bien expuestas observaciones, siempre dentro del contexto cultural más amplio de la cultura cubana. Es al propio tiempo una obra erudita, en la que se manifiesta el extraordinario y paciente trabajo de investigación realizado, el acopio de una información monumental, con frecuencia acudiendo a la comparación entre las distintas y muy ricas expresiones de una Santería siempre innovadora, en distintos templos y contextos, desde New Jersey o el Oyotunji Village hasta barrios populosos de La Habana, habitados por mucha gente sencilla, de pueblo, como el de Cayo Hueso.

Lo primero que habría que señalar, como una impresión a primera vista, es que se trata de un libro hermoso, hecho a la medida de un artista, que lo es David. El libro contiene además una iconografía excepcionalmente buena, fruto de una cuidada colecta, que por primera vez recoge imágenes desconocidas u olvidadas. Justamente la visión semiótica del artista, que es además estudioso del arte, en sus facetas tanto históricas como actuales, constituye la trama que nos lleva de principio a fin. En la Santería hay arte del bueno y la sensibilidad de David Brown ha sabido descubrirlo y ponerlo de relieve.

La obra de Brown, por derecho propio, está llamada a convertirse en un clásico de la literatura antropológica sobre la Santería cubana —en vías de convertirse en cosmopolita— un nuevo punto

de referencia a partir del cual continuar la búsqueda inagotable de nuevas interpretaciones y la develación de nuevas realidades no descubiertas aún.

Rafael López-Valdez  
Universidad Politécnica de Puerto Rico  
rlopez@pupr.edu

### Referencias

Frobenius, Leo. 1949. *Mythologie de l'Atlantide*. Paris: Payot.

### Notas

- <sup>1</sup> Las “libretas de santo” son, en efecto, cuadernos del tipo escolar, en los que la persona que está transitando por un proceso iniciatorio ha de escribir por mano propia los datos religiosos básicos que le conciernen, como las oraciones en lengua ritual y otras informaciones de valor en cuanto a la liturgia. Comenzaron a ser usadas en Cuba desde el siglo XIX, como un medio semi-mnemotécnico de registrar una tradición fundamentalmente oral del conocimiento religioso.

**Mimi Sheller. 2003. *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies*. London & New York: Routledge, 252 pp. ISBN: 0415257603 (Paperback).**

*Consuming the Caribbean* represents a novel approach to understanding the historical and contemporary Caribbean. It focuses on the different ways in which Western Europe and North America figured prominently in the process of consuming “the natural environment, commodities, human bodies, and cultures of the Caribbean over the past five hundred years” (p.3). One of Sheller’s aims is to account for the way these impe-

rial powers essentially constructed popular, economic, political, and other understandings of what people in the North have come to know as the Caribbean. This construction of the Caribbean imaginary is however tied, quite purposefully, to the practice of imperial consumption, whether it is related to place, people, plants, property or images.

The concept of consumption in this book is both interestingly employed, yet problematic at some levels. For Sheller, the concept of consumption is not always a social relation with political ramifications for productive and unproductive labor within a specific mode of production, distribution and exchange. Though the concept is certainly tied to the imperial project, it is not specifically or explicitly associated with a capitalist regime of accumulation and expansion. Rather the author uses the concept in a broader sense, which touches on the economic, political, cultural, social and emotional levels, thus at times creating some slippage between the metaphorical and the literal meaning of the word. According to this approach then, Western and Northern practices of consumption in the Caribbean can be located within the “European ‘discovery’ of the New World . . .” (p. 22). In this straightforward economic sense Sheller views the triangular slave trade as representing the most obvious example of the meaning of consumption. What is evident from the text however is that the concept of consumption is “never innocent” (p. 81).

In focusing on the collection and classification of plants by Sir Hans Sloane in his two-year sojourn in Jamaica, the author was able to demonstrate rather convincingly, the relationship between the consumption of scientific knowledge of the Caribbean and its contribution to the development of European life sciences. Sir Hans Sloane was a physician to Queen Anne and King George II, as well as president of the Royal Society 1727-1753. What Sheller was able to capture very well was the way in which this consumption of botanical knowledge obfuscated the connection to the slave trade and the lives of the people involved in the production of the plants, which Sloane felt important enough to gather. What

is missing here is the imperial hubris involved in the attempt to reproduce and represent all aspects of tropical botany and agriculture in the Physic Garden in London, with the concomitant claim of unquestioned expertise. It would also have been useful if Sheller had given the reader a sense of the indigenous sources of knowledge that Sloane had relied on in assembling and classifying his collection.

*Consuming the Caribbean* also concerns itself with, in the words of the author, the mobility of consumption. Here the idea is that the region of the Caribbean becomes the stage on which people enter by various methods of compulsion but also by choice. The role of power to determine one's mobility is crucial here and resides decidedly with North Americans and Europeans. For Sheller, the freedom of movement of some is contingent on the restriction of others in their place. In this regard, the author argues: "contemporary views of tropical island landscapes are highly over-determined by the long history of literary and visual representations of the tropical island as Paradise" (p. 37). Travelers and writers bought into and promoted these notions of the Caribbean as idyllic, thus establishing the foundation for consuming the region as a place of investment and leisure but also as exotic and therefore "other". As a space of the "other", the Caribbean in the late eighteenth century and in the nineteenth century came to be known as "a dangerous site of hybridization and potential 'racial' degeneracy" (p. 111). The European therefore had to be mindful of the possibility of bodily risk and change.

Building on the above formulation, *Consuming the Caribbean* examines what the author describes as the "embodied effects of material relations of consumption" (p. 144). She examines the ways in which the slave's body was consumed and later objectified. The analysis extends to the twentieth century where these forms of objectification and sexualization of Caribbean bodies continue to be exploited in the context of the growth of sex tourism in the region. Sheller notes: "I have argued that Northern consumers' desire to get close to exotic others in the Caribbean and to seek



out pleasures of excess consumption, operates to reconstitute boundaries of difference between dominant and subordinate positions” (p. 173).

*Consuming the Caribbean* devotes some space to the consideration of the origin and development of the concept of creolization. Creolization in the academic literature of the region falls under the rubric of what Sheller describes as ‘theoretical piracy on the high seas of global culture’. She states a preference for this concept over its trendier zoological alternative, hybridity. However, she is nonetheless critical of creolization endorsing the fact that it tends to privilege African-Caribbean culture over other creole cultures, among other things. Her bigger concern however is with the transition of the concept away from its political moorings as articulated by Caribbean theorists of the 1970s, to its cooptation first by the broader Caribbean diaspora academics, and then its ultimate consumption by global theorists during the 1990s who employ the concept without any reference to the Caribbean per se. One is not so sure that creolization as a concept has actually lost any of its fever given its globalized cooptation, for it never really held out any serious potential for transformation, never treated with the concept of social class and was always guilty of inattention to issues of conflict and contradiction. Nevertheless, Sheller’s point is that at the intellectual and theoretical levels, the process of consumption of knowledge is consistent with the other areas of appropriation of the Caribbean such as the environment, landscape, labor, product and image.

Finally, focusing on the agency of people of the Caribbean, something that the author would have been well advised to do more of, Sheller points to the post-Second World War era, when residents of the region began what she describes as a “counterflow”. This “counterflow” into the metropolitan centers represented “a process of migration sometimes referred to as ‘colonisation in reverse’” (p. 176). The very presence of these speaking bodies in England and by extension the United States represents a “colonisation in reverse”. Sheller seemingly cites this situation

with some approval. It is not enough to see this movement back to the metropole simply as a counterflow without coming to terms with the reasons people migrate, which are not so much as forms of resistance or acts of decolonization but of economic necessity. Given her line of argument then, one has to ask, to what extent do Caribbean bodies “consume” the Northern centers in the sense in which the bodies of the West consumed the landscape, nature and bodies of the region? Certainly one could argue that the counterflow contests or even destabilizes certain aspects of Northern hegemony but it does not consume this new space in quite the same way. The counterflow can make no claim to occupation and direct administration, political and economic appropriation, exploitation of labor power, alienation of the producer from the product or any other form of fundamental restructuring. In the end, these are really the hallmarks of the colonial project. In this regard, “colonisation in reverse” may have some resonance within the broad sense of cultural influence on the metropolitan centers but we should be mindful not to overstate this practice.

*Consuming the Caribbean* is an interesting read. It is a richly theorized text, located in a postmodernist conceptual frame. What is a bit troubling in this work however is that perhaps as a result of the theoretical stance it takes consumption is largely a story about the consumer. Except for the discourse on the slave trade and of slave production, much of what the book discusses relates to the way North American and European writers, adventurers, scientists, intellectuals and investors consume the Caribbean. Not enough is said about those being consumed. Except for some passing remarks, there is no strong sense of forms or expressions of resistance and subversion of this consumption – such considerations are secondary to what the hegemon does to the subaltern. In this sense, the hunter is still largely telling the tale of the hunt.

Related to the above is the concern that in this text, the Caribbean is largely constructed as a passive geographical space, merely waiting to be consumed. Thought this is perhaps not Sheller’s intent, the Caribbean only becomes known or knowable globally

when it is consumed. It does not seem therefore to exist outside of its consumption by others. This raises the larger theoretical and methodological question, is it simply about the desire to consume, or should such consumption be more specifically tied to the imperial, capitalist project of accumulation, and the appropriation of surplus value on a world scale? While the idea of consumption connotes a form of using up, and for Sheller, at times a literal ingesting, the notion of appropriation brings us closer to a sense of possessing that which is not one's own, of choosing to exploit the labor power and other resources of another. In short, in some ways the postmodern project comes with some built in limitations which affect Sheller's concept of consumption, and which might more fruitfully be explored by other paradigms. *Consuming the Caribbean* raises a number of questions and issues which would engage most readers and be of interest to all students of the region.

Linden Lewis

Department of Sociology & Anthropology

Bucknell University

llewis@bucknell.edu

**Gert Oostindie and Inge Klinkers. 2003. *Decolonizing the Caribbean: Dutch Policies in Comparative Perspective*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 284 pp. ISBN: 9053566546.**

This is certainly not a book for the casual reader or occasional student of the Caribbean. Nor is it a book for ideologues and politically-correct "Third Worlders." It is too factually detailed and thematically complex for the first group and too candidly counterintuitive regarding "colonialism" and decolonization for the second.

Based partly on an extensive analysis of Dutch Foreign Office

documentation and on interviews on both sides of the Atlantic, the book reads like one of those colonial commissions of enquiry which, let it be said, has left us such an extraordinary historical record. One can thus excuse the stiff, even plodding, narrative style surely made all the worse from being a translation out of the Dutch. None of this, however, is fatal to the enduring importance of the book. This is not only a seminal contribution to Caribbean Studies and the study of post-World War II decolonization generally, it is also in some ways an intellectual watershed in our understanding of the contemporary Caribbean. Why? In part that is because it avoids making any concessions to political correctness and ideological certainties. True, the title of the book, “Decolonizing the Caribbean” and some of the early assertions about the Haitian Revolution formally beginning decolonization – “the dawning of a new era” (p. 9)– are misleading about the central thesis of this book. It is not about “decolonization” *à la* Haiti with its death and destruction, it is about a twentieth century Caribbean willfully and consciously resisting the Haitian route. By the authors’ own telling, twentieth century Caribbean people have prolonged and delayed decolonization by playing some astute, and quintessentially polite and peaceful political games. It was, in fact, this adept game-playing, a combination of honed political negotiating skills and an acute sense of Dutch individual and collective psychological vulnerabilities, which brought about what they call the “final denouement” of the decolonization process (p. 10). In both the British and Dutch cases “Caribbean obstruction successfully blocked the effort to accomplish a full retreat [from colonialism]” (p. 10). “Victory” was defined, not by the successful storming of the colonial barricades, but by the successful stymieing of European desires and efforts to sever the colonial bonds. Of the four major colonial powers in the region, only the French were ever determined to hold on to their former colonies regardless of cost. They are now costly, very costly, parts of the French nation. After the failure of their scheme of Federation, the British managed to push the major islands overboard, while

keeping a few “British Overseas Territories” two of which (Bermuda and the Caymans) were self-supporting. The Americans, who would dearly like to avoid the heavy cost of statehood for Puerto Rico, have no recourse but to wait for the Puerto Ricans to make up their minds. All these cases are neatly analyzed to provide a backdrop to the Dutch case, fully justifying the subtitle “in Comparative Perspective.”

The authors do not beat around the bush in asserting that for the past fifty years, in economic terms, and in spite of idle hopes of ‘reciprocity found in the original Kingdom Charter of 1954, assistance has remained a one-way affair. “The Caribbean,” they generalize, “has never been the window of opportunity sought for by the Dutch –neither in the time of slavery and their aftermath nor in the twentieth century. And this is not likely to change” (p. 166).

Their arguments are detailed and plausible, pursued through a detailed and well-documented review of Metropolis-colony relations in four spheres: (1) constitutional goals and actual outcomes, (2) migration, legal intentions and real results, (3) economic policies and their consequences, and (4) cultural policies, fundamentally teaching familiarity with Dutch culture and language skills. They see the outcomes as paradoxical in all four areas. In the face of Caribbean passion, a Dutch colonial “guilt complex” over their truly brutal actions in Indonesia and a concern with not being seen as “imperialists” led to constant “overcompensation” in the face of Dutch-Caribbean demands. This response, they tell us, only deepened the dependence of the Caribbean colonies, a process the authors aptly call “decolonization upside-down.”

The plausibility of the authors’ “decolonization upside-down” thesis weakens when they analyze the case of Suriname. Again, there was no mass anti-colonial movement in that colony, since in many ways Surinamese were the most Dutch of all the colonials. Be that as it may, the Dutch were absolutely determined to decolonize, i.e., to cut-and-run. Stopping the flow of Surinamese into the Netherlands was worth a “Golden Handshake.” This is what the

Surinamese got in terms of a bundle of money. Rather than holding a plebiscite on independence (which the authors claim would have failed), the Dutch went along with the sitting government's designs. "The whole procedure," they tell us, "which was far too short, between February 1974 and November 1975, had an exceptionally feverish character" (p. 114).

We all know the consequences: ethnic violence, a *coup d'état* followed by political assassinations, 60% of the population migrating before Independence closed the door, and the entrenchment of a veritable drug mafia.

These results of "decolonization" were hardly recommendations to the few in the Antilles who wished to move towards independence. Already frightened by the 1969 riots and violence in Curaçao, the Suriname case truly stiffened the resolve of those who would not be pushed into sovereignty. These were the disincentives. Among the important incentives for not decolonizing were freedom of migration and retaining Dutch citizenship in the context of an open-borders European Union. Fortunately for the Dutch, with Suriname cut loose, the relations with the Antilles was manageable. "In the end," say the authors in their forcefully candid way, "the burden of the post-colonial relations has never weighed heavily enough to make The Hague opt for really radical—and possibly judicially contestable—policies. This dossier has never caused much commotion or difficulty within Dutch politics" (p. 228).

Even inter-island conflicts such as the historical antagonism between Aruba and Curaçao, could be—and have been—finessed by a neat new Dutch constitutional arrangement called *Status Aparte*. The fact that Sint Maarten now is interested in acquiring a similar status hardly seems to rattle anyone in The Hague. That ex-colonial Metropolis appears to have settled down to managing what can only be called a situation of "complex interdependence" within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The authors end this important book by mentioning four dimensions of this interdependence: (1) good governance, specifically combating administrative

corruption and waste, (2) assistance in benefiting from EU advantages without having recourse to illegal subterfuges, (3) lending a hand to American concerns with the drug trade and money laundering through the islands' offshore businesses, and (4) better management of the migration flows, including the linguistic and cultural preparation of Antilleans for life in the Netherlands. In an age when the politics of identity reign supreme, this last goal might prove to be the most intractable. The Leeward (ABC) islands appear no more eager than before to give up their beloved Papiamentu and the Windwards cling perhaps tighter than ever to their English. In addition, in the face of such cultural-linguistic resistance, the Dutch appear little enthused about engaging in a *mission civilisatrice*. Just "muddling through" has worked before, chances are it will work again for these pragmatic people.

All this represents a big change from a decolonization usually defined in terms of blood, sweat and tears, *à la* Haiti or, indeed, Indonesia. Perhaps this peaceful Caribbean process should be described by a word other than "decolonization."

Anthony P. Maingot  
Professor Emeritus of Sociology  
Florida International University  
maingota@fiu.edu