

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Cuban Slave Market, 1790-1880* by Laird W. Bergad, Fe Iglesias Garcia and Maria del Carmen Barcia

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society's lowly, but when the victims were judged not to have resisted sufficiently, they themselves were punished by being confined to a 'casa honorable' for a period of months or years, in effect a form of forced labour, thus depriving them even of their status as victims.

Marc Edelman's richly detailed and entertaining study of devil pacts goes beyond the familiar interpretation of them as responses to economic exploitation (as argued principally by Michael Taussig) to assert that 'la dominación sexual y el antagonismo de género también producen potentes emociones, que encuentran su expresión en creencias acerca de fenómenos diabólicos'. Edelman's deft analysis of the oral traditions that still persist about Francisco Cubillo (d. 1948), a peasant-turned-cattle baron in Guanacaste province, concludes that Cubillo's immense wealth and legendary sexual appetite were in themselves not enough to explain the durability of the stories about him. Rather, they are repeated so often because they allow the narrators – including the many who do not believe in devil pacts – to identify with Cubillo 'en términos de clase, etnia y género' (p. 132).

Yet to view the subjects of these essays as the agents of a defiant popular culture, as the editors tend to do, is to exalt them, for little evidence can be found of a collective consciousness or any intent to forge a distinctively subaltern 'public' over against a ruling bourgeois 'public'. The editors' more modest claim is perhaps more credible: that in a society sundered by class, gender and ethnicity, the notion of a 'cultura nacional' is of doubtful utility, and that the liberal elite's attempts to forge one in its own image had only limited success.

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Laird W. Bergad, Fe Iglesias García, and María del Carmen Barcia, *The Cuban Slave Market, 1790–1880* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. xxi + 245, £35.00.

This important book charts the 'price history' of the Cuban slave market from 1790 to 1880. Laird W. Bergad, Fe Iglesias García, and María del Carmen Barcia have examined the notarial protocols which registered over 23,000 slave-selling transactions. Aggregating and analysing the recorded attributes – age, sex, birthplace, occupation, and price – of those sold in the market, the authors provide an outline of the economic history of Cuban slavery.

The historic profile of the slave trade, the authors argue, was traced along the demand curve for sugar. Beginning in the 1790s, as new lands were cultivated and new mills built, slave prices rose and the trade expanded. Prices remained relatively stable through the next half century – the trade periodically expanded to meet demand – and then began to rise again with the price of sugar in 1850. When expansion of the sugar economy slowed, prices of slaves stabilised and imports diminished. Though prices fluctuated in response to political factors after 1850, demand apparently remained high: in Cuba the New World's central institution retained its economic viability well into the period of its hemispheric decline. By the time the massive trade to Cuba ended in 1868, over 780,000 Africans (70% of them male and 80% between the ages of fifteen and forty-five) had been imported and sold alongside a like number of Cuban-born slaves.

If the market in slaves reflected demand for sugar, the decisions made in the slave market were shaped by politics: imperial and colonial laws outlawing the

trade (passed in 1817, 1835, and 1845, and honoured in the breach); the closing of the trade and abolition of slavery elsewhere in the Americas; Revolution and beginning of emancipation in Cuba (1868–78). The authors argue that slaveholders reacted to threats to the trade by shifting rather than reducing demand. In periods when the future of the *trata* was in doubt, young people and women were sold at price premiums, on occasion women brought 130% of the prices paid for men. In the reflection of the market's short-term responsiveness, one can see Cuban slave buyers imagining a world without the *trata*: stretching their choices over time by buying the young; providing for the reproduction which would replace importation; hoping the bodies of the people they bought would insulate them from history.

Such a brief account can scarcely summarise all of the interesting findings of *The Cuban Slave Market*. Of particular note is a chapter which compares the developing economies and changing slave market structure of Havana, Santiago, and Cienfuegos, and another which outlines the history of *coartación*, the practice by which Cuban slaves could initiate the process of self-purchase (60% of those who did so were women). Other findings will be of particular interest to specialists: price premiums paid for Creole slaves; the apparent absence of price distinction between Africans from different regions; the similar prices paid for men and women in periods when the future of the *trata* was not in doubt, a clear contrast to the United States where the slave population was self-reproducing and prices were higher for men; the high percentage (35%) of sold women described as domestic servants.

It is perhaps a paradox of scale that a book which tells us so much about the market has so little to say about the marketplace, in particular the possibility that wide-spread fraud shaped the data on birthplaces and ages upon which the authors rely. In particular, the 1845 Cuban law against the trade, which allowed the government to confiscate African slaves from the grounds of previously off-limits plantations provided a substantial incentive for sellers and buyers alike to mis-record the birthplace of their slaves. Likewise, buyers' stated preference for 'prime-aged' slaves may have introduced a measure of fraud into the notarial records. The question of birthplace is more important than that of age to the current study (fabricated ages being an even better indicator of demand than real ones), but reconsideration of both will be important to those who seek to use *The Cuban Slave Market* as a way into the history of slave life in Cuba.

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Victor E. Tokman and Emilio Klein (eds.), *Regulation and the Informal Economy: Microenterprises in Chile, Ecuador, and Jamaica* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), pp. vi + 211, \$49.95.

In this edited volume, two major figures in the study of the Latin American informal economy present their latest findings on the characteristics of small entrepreneurs and the origins and behaviour of the economic units that they create. The study is comparative, involving surveys of micro-enterprises in four economic sectors in Chile, Ecuador, and Jamaica. It is not altogether clear what were the reasons for selecting the sectors. Garment production, food, and repairs, to which furniture making was later added in two of the countries, appear to have