

## CARIBBEAN AND LATIN AMERICA

DOMINIQUE GONCALVÈS. *Le planteur et le roi: L'aristocratie havanaise et la couronne d'Espagne (1763–1838)*. Foreword by MICHEL BERTRAND. (Bibliothèque de la Casa de Velázquez, number 39.) Madrid: Casa de Velázquez. 2008. Pp. xvi, 460. €43.00.

Dominique Goncalvès seeks to explain why Cuba remained loyal to Spain in the early nineteenth century while Spain's possessions on the American continent dissolved into independent republics. Goncalvès sheds new light on an old question by combining political analysis with an impressive prosopography of the Havana elite. The French scholar argues that this group differed from other Spanish colonial elites by its high degree of endogamy. Few aristocrats from other parts of the empire married into the group, and no titled noble from another Cuban town espoused a Havana aristocrat. The group maintained cohesion through this strategy and thereby controlled the town hall (*cabildo*), the most important political office open to Creoles. Almost all were sugar *hacendados*: that is, great planters.

After the British had occupied Havana from 1762–1763, the king of Spain came to rely even more on the “sacharocracy” as a pillar in the defense of Cuba. Havana's strategic position was vital to the empire, yet the insalubrious location and difficulties of supply and reinforcement forced the king to enlist the elite for help. In exchange the monarchy supported the sugar planters to the detriment of other elites, according to Goncalvès. Acting as arbiter and protector, the king lavishly bestowed upper nobility on the elite. The monarch issued forty-one titles and four elevations into the *grandeza*, the premier echelon of aristocracy, one of them non-hereditary. Goncalvès also underscores the capability of most captains general, who used their political leeway to accommodate the planters' demands. This conclusion reinforces established views according to which the sugar barons shied away from independence for fear it could ignite a race war of the slaves against their masters.

After returning to power from Napoleonic captivity in 1814, Ferdinand VII continued to favor the sugar planters for their loyalist stance. Land disputes with tobacco farmers were resolved to the benefit of the sugar barons, and the king allowed free trade even with other nations. Meanwhile the elite maintained exceptional ties to the court in Madrid, where several Cubans had the ear of the king. Although the liberals took command of Madrid in 1820–1823, and Spanish merchants made inroads by obtaining titles of nobility, the conservative Creole elite kept its cohesion beyond 1838. In that year the crown recalled the disputed Captain General Miguel Tacón y Rosique, who failed to bring the elite to heel. This victory for the sugar planters serves as the cutting off point of the study. The event demonstrates, according to Goncalvès, that the elite was able to withstand the energetic governor and perpetuate its influence well into the mid-nineteenth century.

Goncalvès has scoured parochial, judicial, and mu-

nicipal sources in Cuba and combined them with communications located in the Spanish Archive of the Indies and National Historical Archive. The scholar has also drawn on and contributed to the massive Fichos database based in Bordeaux and Madrid that registers social networks, including ties of family, ritual kinship, commerce, and patronage, among the empire's administrators. With this impressive source base, he can demonstrate the endogamy of the elite and trace the multitude of Castilian titles received from the king.

Goncalvès shows an inclination to prefer scholarship in the Romance languages over Anglo-American literature. While these tendencies certainly exist in other national historiographies as well, the author may have wished to include, for example, Sherry Johnson's *The Social Transformation of Eighteenth Century Cuba* in the bibliography.

Regardless, this is a strong book and a reflection of the remarkable recovery that the study of elites and their social networks has staged in Europe. In Toulouse, where Goncalvès defended his dissertation, and Bordeaux, historians analyze power relationships through serial biographies. This book therefore provides access to innovative historiographical currents. Goncalvès has written an excellent, well-researched book in which he proposes a new argument based on an intelligent and laborious methodology. For that reason the book is of interest to professional historians and students alike, for whom Goncalvès provides summaries in English and Spanish. A translation would go a long way to disseminate the work.

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IVOR L. MILLER. *Voice of the Leopard: African Secret Societies and Cuba*. Foreword by ENGR. (CHIEF) BASSEY E. BASSEY. (Caribbean Studies Series.) Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. 2009. Pp. xx, 364. \$55.00.

Sugar monoculture began to develop in Cuba during the latter half of the eighteenth century, after the Haitian Revolution removed Haitian sugar from the international market. At the same time the ethnic groups enslaved in Africa changed. The sudden, massive introduction into Cuba of several distinct ethnicities had major religious, cultural, and institutional impacts. The Yoruba (Lukumí) introduced Santería; the Kongo introduced Palo Mayombe; and large numbers of Africans enslaved in the Bight of Biafra were brought to Cuba, where they were called Karabalí after two ports on the coast of the Bight of Biafra, Old Calabar and New Calabar. They introduced *Abakuá*, a male secret society identified with the leopard.

Ivor L. Miller attempts to demonstrate that Africans brought to Cuba from the Cross River Valley and Cameroon grasslands established the *Ékpè* (Leopard) secret society, the major governing institution in the Bight of Biafra, in and near Havana during the mid-1830s, and that it continues as an informal governing, religious, and cultural institution to the present day. Discipline,

justice, payment of debts, protection of pawned persons, and enforcement of community laws were rapidly implemented by members of *Ékpè* lodges wearing elaborate costumes and wielding arms. In Cuba the *Ékpè* lodges were known as *Abakuá*; in the absence of what Western scholarship defines as a state, governance in the Bight of Biafra was local and segmented, allowing its transfer to Cuba.

This impressive book contains exhaustive comparisons of *Ékpè* in Africa and *Abakuá* in Cuba, relying on photographs and drawings as well as other descriptive materials. Miller compares images of *Ékpè* and *Abakuá* ceremonies, lodge temples, ritual paraphernalia, masks, costumes, and *nsibidibi* (sacred) writing, and examines the creation and use of *Abakuá* drums, dance, and chanting and their enormous impact on Cuban music. He traces the names of *Abakuá* lodges in Cuba to specific *Ékpè* lodges in the Cross River Valley and Cameroon; the author was initiated into an *Ékpè* lodge in Africa after revealing information about *Abakuá* in Cuba and building contacts between *Ékpè* traditions in Cuba and their counterparts in Africa.

Miller also discusses *Ékpè* governing institutions on both sides of the Atlantic. Leading offices in these strictly male secret societies were graded hierarchically. In the Bight of Biafra, *Ékpè* lodges controlled vast networks of regional trade, including the slave trade. Miller argues that without ongoing contact or influence from Africa, these secret societies continued to operate as governing institutions in Cuba. The first lodge authorized others, including those in Matanzas, which were established during the 1860s and survive to the present day. These *Abakuá* lodges were created in Cuba after *Ékpè* leaders from the Cross River Valley were captured in battle and sold as slaves to Cuba, where they recreated their governing institutions, producing their ritual paraphernalia in Cuba from memory. Miller dismisses direct, ongoing influence from Africa. The rules for establishing new lodges were elaborate, expensive, and required a charter from an existing lodge. It is quite possible that the first new lodge in Cuba could not follow these rules, but it enforced them when new lodges were created in Havana and Matanzas. *Abakuá* leaders also joined Masonic lodges, whose elements were introduced into *Abakuá*; these lodges survived the end of the Atlantic slave trade because Creole slaves and free people of color were allowed to join. A lodge of white Cuban Creoles was authorized in Havana during the 1760s.

A better explanation of the meaning of Karabalí in Cuba would help. Karabalí was a port, or at best a coastal region, not an ethnic designation, and it essentially meant any slave coming from the Bight of Biafra. Karabalí included the Igbo, who spoke a Kwa language and were exported mainly through Bonny and New Calabar. They vastly outnumbered the Northwest Bantu language speakers, the Ibibio and their subgroups, who were brought mainly from the Cross River Valley and Cameroon and exported through Old Calabar. Their percentage among slaves arriving in Cuba

from the Bight of Biafra increased during the nineteenth century, but the Igbo remained dominant. Igbo were about half female while the Ibibio were heavily male. The *Cabildos de Naciones Karabalí* included all of these ethnicities. *Cabildos de Naciones*, like *Abakuá* lodges, functioned as mutual aid and protective societies, redeeming their members from slavery and providing savings, health, and life and burial insurance; they also controlled labor on the waterfront. Despite their large numbers, the Igbo were marginalized within *Abakuá*.

This book minimizes some elements of *Abakuá*. Miller exaggerates racial harmony in Cuban history. The word “*Náñigos*,” commonly used for *Abakuá*, is largely ignored because of its association with criminality. This avoids discussing the myths about *Abakuá* criminality that became ideological fodder for the massacre of about 3,000 Afro-Cubans in 1912; the massacre is not even mentioned. The book offers a somewhat mythical history by posing the same questions to three Cuban informants with access to secret and esoteric knowledge of *Abakuá*. According to Miller’s informants, members of the top grades were chosen and installed not only for their wealth and power but also for their reputation, character, and moral standing. The fact that three informants responded with essentially the same answers independently tells us more about myths of the powerful role of *Abakuá* in Cuba’s history than about deeply rooted racism in Cuba. This book has truly stunning descriptive material, but it would have benefitted from more attention to changes in *Abakuá*/*Ékpè* on both sides of the Atlantic over time.

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JANA K. LIPMAN. *Guantánamo: A Working-Class History between Empire and Revolution*. (American Crossroads, number 25.) Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. 2009. Pp. x, 325. Cloth \$60.00, paper \$24.95.

In a historiographic essay in the February 1977 issue of the *American Historical Review*, David M. Pletcher called on scholars to extend the boundaries of the field of inter-American relations. In addition to analyzing relations between states and dissecting the decisions of leaders, Pletcher recommended that historians consider the economic, social, and cultural features of international relations. North American academics, explorers, investors, soldiers and marines, traders, and tourists had played prominent roles in Latin America. Pletcher urged historians to explore this inter-American social and cultural interaction by writing regional histories of oil camps, mining towns, and banana plantations. Over the past three decades, scholars like Jason M. Colby, Jason C. Parker, Dennis Merrill, Harvey R. Neptune, Mary A. Renda, and Emily Rosenberg have helped transform the study of the interactions between people and nations within the Western Hemisphere.