

mandate (p. 192). Van Melkebeke notes a similar increase in material welfare among plantation workers in the colonial Kivu district, who were able to spend growing amounts of their wages on consumer goods like clothes, bikes, and sewing machines (pp. 210, 241). Such stories seem to conflict with messages about compulsion and declining real wages and therefore merit more attention than they currently receive.

Such concerns notwithstanding, Van Melkebeke has produced an original and rigorous analysis of two contiguous but differently organised coffee economies in central Africa. The book is mainly a social history, offering readers many detailed insights into the complexities of wage, *corvée*, and tributary labour in two African societies under Belgian colonial rule. For economic and agricultural historians, the main takeaways relate to the book's fundamental distinction between the settler economy that emerged west of Lake Kivu and the economy of independent smallholders on the eastern side of the lake. The book shoots off warnings about poorly paid plantation work and reminds the reader of the economic advantages of smallholding. But instead of viewing these two different production systems in opposition to one another, as scholars often do, Van Melkebeke has created a picture of historical interconnectedness, perhaps unique to the Lake Kivu region, where workers sought plantation labour to redeem themselves from obligations to powerful chiefs or to become independent smallholders themselves.

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CANDIOTI, MAGDALENA. *Una historia de la emancipación negra. Esclavitud y abolición en la Argentina*. Siglo veintiuno editores, Buenos Aires 2021. 272 pp. Arg. \$2,630.

Addressing a lesser-known moment of the African diaspora across the South Atlantic, Magdalena Candiotti's *Una historia de la emancipación negra* traces the paths of enslaved persons and families who lived through the final decades of slavery in Argentina. Using dialogical analysis, the book integrates the processes of creating and enforcing emancipationist laws with strategies developed by enslaved and freed people in pursuit of autonomy and of a less precarious status of freedom. Placed into a continental perspective, the work highlights characteristics that were common within the slavery-dismantlement process in other parts of the Americas, such as policies of gradual emancipation that resulted in new modes of racial violence, exploitation of forced labor, subjugation, police surveillance, and tutelage. At the same time, Candiotti's work also discusses the specificity of Argentina in the "era of abolition", revealing the formation of the myth of "the disappearance of Afro-Argentines".

The law that abolished slavery in Argentina was not followed by major public debate or festivities, much less armed conflicts, or records of public disorder. For a long time, the explanation for this exceptionalism was based on the fact that the country had undermined the structures of slavery perpetuation through

emancipationist laws enacted at least four decades before the Constitutional Decree of 1853 that instituted the end of slavery. As a bureaucratic act that supposedly formalized a previously accepted fact of society, abolition was long kept in a sort of interpretive limbo justified through self-evident reasons.

The book's time frame covers the period between the 1810s and 1860s, with the laws to restrict the slave trade (1810) and the Free Womb Law (1813) as its initial marks and the years between 1853 and 1860 as the final milestones, when the Constitution prohibited slavery. This period is defined as "*el tiempo de los libertos*", an expression taken from a testimony by an enslaved woman, Francisca Albarado, in 1835. The author's choice of transforming the enslaved woman's statement into an analytical category is consistent with the methodological project developed within the research. Based on diverse primary sources such as judicial and police documents, accounting and parochial records, and the press, the debates among the political, legal, and intellectual elites gain clarity within the scope of the social experience of the time. From this perspective, "*el tiempo de los libertos*" became known as a period marked by "elusive autonomy, separated families and unpaid work" (p. 73): dynamics that can be captured only on a micro-historical scale, and that demonstrate how various social groups experienced different statuses of freedom.

The establishment of the "*tiempo de los libertos*" did not occur in parallel with the development of the nation-state in Argentina, and the ability to weave these plots is one of the strengths of the book. Throughout seven chapters, conjunctural analyses conducted on a reduced scale are able to clarify and contest a broader narrative that constructed a mythical racial imaginary still predominant in the public debate in Argentina.

When Candiotti examined manumission proceedings in court records of the revolutionary years, she identified the Independence's major mottoes being appropriated by enslaved people in favor of their own emancipation: at the dawn of 1813, they appealed to the "Motherland's generous system", arguing that they had sung "the hymns of freedom, and united our desires, our hearts to the holy sentiments of the righteous system of Liberty" (p. 43). But the utilization of a liberal grammar in those contexts was contrary to the will of the creole elite, for many among the revolutionaries spoke of freedom with a caution typical of enslavers. In the first chapter, one can read that liberal rhetoric was carefully conceived during the Assembly of Year XIII, in a calculation that weighed humanist principles and individual rights. Within the making of the legal codes, the enslavers' property rights passed unscathed. At that moment, the option for emancipationist gradualism was consolidated in line with what was happening in other parts of the Atlantic.

Immediate and complete emancipation was not envisaged by the makers of the Argentine nation; in any case, abolitionism was included in the free motherland's foundational agenda as a passport to join the concert of civilized nations. The principle of free soil, the end of the slave trade, and the Free Womb Law comprised the tripod on which the policies for eradicating slavery rested. As the author demonstrates in the second chapter, these policies were considered enough for slavery to be seen as a turned leaf within the law-making debates (the subject was practically ignored by the members of the 1826 Constituent Assembly). Two issues from this chapter can also be found in the rest of the book. On the one hand, enslaved people were

aware of the legal provisions that could give them greater autonomy over their own lives. On the other, the enforcement of these laws was subject to casuistry and discretion by their executors, dynamics marked by a considerable degree of irresolution punctuated not only by immediate contention between enslaved and enslavers, but also by the inconsistency of political trends in dispute within the public sphere.

The third chapter addresses the Free Womb Law, and represents a central contribution on a subject still little explored in Argentina, especially if compared to the cases of Brazil and Cuba as studied by Rebecca Scott, Elciene Azevedo, Camillia Cowling, and Maria Helena Machado, among others. Candiotti exposes how the patronage system in the country was regulated in order to guarantee not only work exploitation of those born free by their mothers' enslaver, but also the latter's right to profit from the sale of guardianship, a strategy that repeatedly influenced the disaggregation of Afro-Argentine families. The experience of tutelage was barely distinguishable from life in captivity, and the uncertainties of that condition are demonstrated in a profusion of life stories that inform us about the "precariousness of freedom"⁹ for individuals who were born and raised under the control and the authority of employers, the police, and the legal system.

Two national myths are put to the test in Chapters Four and Five. The first concerns the benign nature of slave relations in that society, a belief that was based mainly on the relative proportion of manumissions attributed to a vaunted enslavers' compassion.¹⁰ Obviously, the fable of enslavers' moral benevolence does not hold up in the face of investigations of abundant notarial documentation. From these sources, Candiotti extracts a resounding repository of paternalistic reasons that guided dealings between enslaved and enslavers. In most cases freedom was not achieved immediately, and was conditional on arrangements that renewed relationships of dependency, debt, and subordination. The other myth considers enslaved peoples' participation in the revolutionary wars, contesting the idea that the military experience was a door for integration through which those egressed from slavery had abandoned their African cultural roots, having been drawn into the nascent patriotic sentiment. In the pages of this book, the war is presented in currents of uncertainty: the enslavers saw in the enlistment of enslaved people signs of a fissure in the unshakable legal protection of property; the enslaved created opportunities to invent new lives for themselves amid the erratic dynamics of the revolution. In an original way, Candiotti demonstrates that even when the African soldiers opted for strategies of social ascension through means of miscegenation and even racial whitening, they did so enmeshed in Afro-diasporic solidarity. Therefore, patriotic integration and the creation of multi-ethnic networks of Africans from different nations were not incompatible alternatives, but tactics activated in a concerted way.

The making of a deracialized modern citizenship was another pivotal sophism within the assimilationist discourse. In South American historiography, there are still few approaches that investigate racial primacy in debates on political rights

⁹Henrique Espada Lima, "Sob o domínio da precariedade. Escravidão e os significados da liberdade de trabalho no século XIX", *Topoi*, 6:11 (2005), pp. 289–326.

¹⁰To follow a trajectory of this debate from the long-term perspective within Argentine historiography, see Lucas Rebagliati, "¿Una esclavitud benigna? La historiografía sobre la naturaleza de la esclavitud rioplatense", *Andes*, 25:2 (2014).

and electoral participation behind the egalitarian abstraction. The sixth chapter highlights the variety of particular categories that shaped the Afro-descendants' citizenship in the debates of the 1810s: enslaved people, those born from free wombs, and their descendants were the "others" within the Republic's sovereign body; they were non-citizens or incomplete citizens. Later, when the criteria for citizenship were predicated on the principle of "color blindness", factors of restriction by occupation, literacy, and income hit the Afro-Argentine population in full. In any case, these restrictions were not insurmountable barriers, and the importance of organizations of men of color in electoral mobilizations of the time is already relatively well known. Candiotti returns to the theme to indicate how these racialized identities, especially among diverse groups of brown people, were also managed by those from below to create their own collective structures of political participation.

The last chapter deals with the final act toward abolition, seeking to identify the intellectual currents that inspired the Constitutional Decree of 1853. There was practically no debate in parliament at the time, and the theme was also scarcely discussed in the public arena, which led the author to compile a miscellany of law dissertations, opinion columns, and essays on political economy in order to infer (with little material in hand) the degree of insulation between the intellectual output and the reflection on the continuation or abolition of slavery in the first half of the nineteenth century.

This underlying base of silence and indifference among Argentine scholars characterized the first module of the long-term interpretative void around the subject. By the end of this last chapter, readers might have an idea of the dimension and importance of the work they have just read. Although the book does not present itself as innovative regarding its methods or analytical framework, *Una historia de la emancipación negra* has the virtue of extensive research and of systematizing advances in the work done by an entire generation of prominent Argentine historians, generously pointing out a wide variety of possibilities for the development of novel studies. As such, the book is an important landmark in the field of studies on the era of abolition in the Americas.

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Wage Earners in India, 1500–1900. Regional Approaches in an International Context. Ed. by JAN LUCASSEN and RADHIKA SESHAN. [Politics and Society in India and the Global South.] Sage, New Delhi 2022. 332 pp. \$41.68.

In *Wage Earners in India, 1500–1900*, the editors Jan Lucassen and Radhika Seshan, along with seven other authors, break new ground in the study of wages on the sub-continent across the long period between 1500 and 1900. Should readers hesitate to delve into such a volume, Lucassen and Seshan immediately try to convince them that the remuneration of wage labour and comparing it over time and across space "may be more relevant [...] for India than for any other country". They suggest that