Illes i Imperis, 6. Estiu 2002, pp. 179-181

FREDERICK COOPER; THOMAS C. HOLT; REBECCA J. SCOTT. *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies*.
Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

THE PRESENT VOLUME consists of a tightly nit and creatively interwoven collection of essays by some of the foremost experts on slavery, colonialism, and empire from the Universities of Michigan and Chicago. This collection is the result of an intriguing change of historiographical priorities within the North American academy from the decades following the Civil Rights Movement, when exposing, adjudging, and condemning the legacy of the terrible institution of slavery was at the forefront of many a scholar's agenda. Writing in today's neo-liberal international political economy, these historians are now preoccupied with the complex problematic and broken promises of freedom.

The books consists of three essays bracketed by a thought-provoking introduction and a brief afterword. As indicated in the introduction, the authors are concerned with how various discourses, ideas, and ideologies –concerning family and work, economic development, and qualifications on citizenship and political participation– played themselves out in post-emancipation societies. They demonstrate how both rhetoric and policy –gendered, racist, and on occasion anti-racist– generally reified some rather functional and predetermined methods of agrarian exploitation: private ownership, tenant farming, and wage labor. The resolution of most of these stories was quite familiar: despite often making brief claims to power through collective action, revolutionary or non-conforming social movements, faced serious impediments and limitations from the outset. Ultimately, non-Western, unfamiliar or simply unpermited labor and family organizations within post-emancipation societies were forced to come to terms with a capitalist imperative.

The organization of the essays proceed more or less chronologically. Versions of the first two, by Thomas C. Holt and Rebecca J. Scott, both appeared in slightly different forms in *Historia Social* (Fall, 1995), so their content may not be entirely novel to the Spanish reader. Holt's contribution, "The Essence of the Contract: The Articulation of Race, Gender, and Political Economy in British Emancipation Policy, 1838-1866," focuses on Jamaica, beginning with the emancipation of "apprenticed" ex-slaves and culminating with the abolition of self-government. Centering his study on the political culture of colonial administrators, he traces the abandonment of classical liberalism and its attendant promises, the extension of color-blind civil rights and the enfranchisement of former slaves and their descendants. This was gradually interchanged for a racist ideology, in which Blacks were deemed ill-equipped to exercise their liberties responsibly. To Holt, this transformation was not only due to cultural prejudice against Jamaican families who did not conform to a bourgeois, Victorian ideal, but also to the rational calculation that Blacks might use their sovereignty to test ideas and promote interests adverse to those of the metropolis.

Changing gears from the ideas and actions of imperial officers to those of the formally enslaved and other rural workers, Rebecca Scott's "Fault Lines, Color Lines, and Party Lines: Race, Labor, and Collective Action in Louisiana and Cuba, 1862-1912" consists of a comparative study of collective action in the cane fields of the Louisiana Bayou and the Cuban province of Santa Clara. The outcomes were different. Louisiana sugar workers ended up in a racially segregated workforce, where white supremacist ideology ran rampant and in which "black" was generally associated with wage labor and "white" with small freeholding. In Cuba, although the appeal to racial pluralism was an effective mobilizing force during wars of independence against the Spanish, the conclusion of colonial conflicts did not usher in social harmony. A new capitalist alliance between Creole planters and United States occupation forces meant that peasants faced daunting challenges in the twentieth century.

Frederick Cooper's essay "Conditions Analogous to Slavery: Imperialism and Free Labor Ideology in Africa" traces international colonial attitudes toward slavery, free labor, and forced labor in Africa beginning with the Congress of Berlin and ending with the aftermath of World War II. He begins by discussing the diffusion of the idea that colonialism brought with it a civilizing mission, characteristic of advanced societies, that promised to obviate the slave trade and various repugnant, primitive forms of forced labor. In British East Africa, the slogan of anti-slavery accompanied the drive to convert Africans and former slaves into proletarian wage earners. Cooper continues by demonstrating how various practices that did not conform to this free-labor ideal gradually became "tolerated", based on the belief that Africans were "different". Some justified this less-dogmatic, yet nonetheless baldly instrumentalist, approach by claiming to be respectful of what they perceived to be, or held to be, "traditional" culture and practice. He concludes by outlining issues intertwined with the gradual and reluctant elimination of forced labor, first in the British and later in the French colonies.

It is important to note that *Beyond Slavery* is more than a collection of specific case studies, given that each author freely draws upon an impressive and dense wealth of knowledge. In other words, this is not a book in which speculative and overly ambitious theories hinge on observations of isolated occurrences; rather, broad methods of focusing complex questions are derived from years of archival experience, scholarly expertise, and plain erudition. The authors contextualize specific cases within a comparative framework in order to provide vivid, graspable illustrations of general phenomena. The reader is led first into Haiti and the British West Indies, continues with the American South and the Spanish Antilles, and culminates in British, French, and even Belgian and Portuguese Africa. This short volume obviously makes no claims at exhausting the analysis all post-emancipation societies, but it does cleverly and flexibly elucidate the major ways of focusing the discursive possibilities conditioning political outcomes.

Beyond Slavery harbors broader implications that perhaps transcend the colonial

experience. One observation, alluded to briefly in the afterword, is worth highlighting. Post-emancipation possessed important similarities in Europe where legally defined feudal relationships also broke down in favor of discursively circumscribed and more diffuse relations of power. Multiple historical actors –from collective actions movements to official policymakers– also made use of the categories of "race" and "class" to transform, and sometimes undermine, for better or for worse, and from left to right, many of the central tenets and much of the egalitarian vocabulary of classical liberalism. The case of Russia, and later the Soviet Union and its sphere of influence, proves particularly interesting. Cathy Frierson, in her influential *Peasant Icons*, has researched various depictions of the Russian peasantry in the decades following the emancipation of the serfs. She has noted that, despite exalted images propagated by literary giants such as Tolstoy, late nineteenth-century intellectuals became disenchanted, stripping the peasantry of their mythically redemptive powers said to be rooted in their "authentic" Russian purity. Arguably, such intellectual endeavor carried cataclysmic political consequences, given the fact that Russian, like many East European, peasants were later brutally uprooted and ultimately subjugated, largely against their will, to an agrarian *regime* characterized by forced collective farming and state central planning. Interestingly, Stalinist solutions to modernizing a "primitive" agrarian labor force followed a socialist, anti-capitalist economic theory, discursively antithetical to many of the policies and ideas described by the above-mentioned authors. Needless to say, Marxist-Leninist ideology also ran rampant during the period of decolonization in Africa and Asia, in which movements of national liberation espoused the well-known propagandistic arsenal of anti-racism, anti-slavery, and anti-imperialism.

The above observation evidences the appeal of this volume, which provokes one to reflect on similar issues falling outside capitalist economies and "liberal" post-colonial settings. Elegant yet unpretentious, theoretical sophisticated yet highly readable, *Beyond Slavery* represents a challenging work to the expert, an eye-opening introduction to one confronting such issues for the first time, and a must read for those interested in the history of political ideas. Its broad scope, intrepid though nuanced assertions, and comparativist methods constitute some of the most positive attributes that North American scholarship has to offer today.

STEPHEN JACOBSON
King's College, University of London