

BOOK REVIEWS

ANDERSON, CLARE. *Subaltern Lives. Biographies of Colonialism in the Indian Ocean World, 1790–1920. [Critical Perspectives on Empire.]* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge [etc.] 2012. x, 219 pp. Ill. Maps. £55.00; \$99.00. (Paper: £19.99; \$32.99.) doi:10.1017/S0020859013000357

For a long time it was held to be a truism that the archives of colonial administrations could tell us little about the lived experiences of ordinary people. And if any documentation on individuals had been preserved, it was invariably on the elites. Such sources could hardly be depended on to provide reliable information on class structures and racial inequalities. Sometimes snippets of biographical information can be found outside state archives, but these are usually fragmentary and present historians a challenge in trying to beef them up. As such, these problems are not necessarily colonial in character; they can be considered classic problems for social historians. However, they become particularly thorny within a colonial context, saturated as it is with racial prejudice.

In the colonies, ethnic boundaries are almost inseparably mixed with categories of class, gender, and education. Over the past twenty-five years a good deal of energy has been devoted to proving the inescapable presence of the colonial discourse and to bringing to light the refractory prism of the colonial archives. However, the colonial archives *do* tell us something about class, education, and gender, and this is what Ann Stoler emphasized when, some years ago, she advocated reading along the archival grain first before reading against the grain.

Reading along the grain teaches one that colonial archives have more to offer than material for ethnographies of the colonial state or the views of the elites. Here we arrive at the title of Anderson's book, *Subaltern Lives*, which refers to individuals marginalized under colonial rule but who nonetheless appear in official records. Fragments of their lives are captured by judicial records, for example, and more extensive parts of their life courses in the files of penal systems. In terms of numbers, penal systems encompass a substantial group of very different origin.

Throughout the British Empire a web of British penal colonies absorbed about 300,000 convicts in the course of the nineteenth century. Some aspects of the lives of these convicts are the best recorded in the British Empire. Anderson took this system as a starting point to discuss three interrelated themes. First, the various systems of punishment themselves, including the gender and ethnic hierarchies, not only within penitentiary settlements but also between different settlements. To which settlement one was dispatched was, after all, determined by gender and ethnic categorization. Second, how this web of British penitentiary settlements in the Indian Ocean, which stretched from Mauritius and the Andaman Islands to Penang, Singapore, and Australia, should be studied as an important unfree migration circuit. And third, Anderson addresses the question of how race as a cultural category became hardened over the course of the nineteenth century. In this study the three themes converge in a dozen "subaltern prosopographies", which are directly or indirectly related to the penitentiary system and embody changing visions on nationalism, gender, and Britishness, to mention some of the most important in this context. Anderson travelled widely across the former British Empire searching for needles in the archival haystacks, to which she added visual sources, genealogical information, interviews, and so on – all the things that properly trained social historians ought to do.

Though Anderson begins her book with an extensive theoretical justification, what she has to say is not about theory but about method. She takes issue, for example, with the fact that historians have a penchant for staying within the confines of a single nation or single colony. Since penitentiary systems connect the empire's most remote corners, it is only through patiently skimming through globally dispersed archives that the lives of convicts can be reconstructed. But other sources are needed as well. Individuals cannot be positioned without proper knowledge of their genealogy and, yes, their outward appearance. A key figure in Anderson's book, for example, is Amelia Bennett, a victim of a convicted rebel leader. Her name suggests sturdy Britishness. The book, however, carries a beautiful picture of this mid-nineteenth century young lady, which reveals her mixed European-Indian descent. Moreover, her genealogy conveys Indo-French roots. The picture and genealogical facts make us smile when we read that during the Great Mutiny, when Amelia was captured by rebels, she was able to pass as an Indian woman "tanned through the exposure" to the sun. Amelia's complexion was not something to be mentioned in texts, as that would have offended a woman of her class.

This brings me to the next point, namely that Anderson's book invites cross-imperial comparisons on the topics of race, class, gender, and education. In her highly original chapter on Amelia's abduction during the mutiny, entitled "Liaquat Ali and Amelia Bennett", Anderson explains that before 1857 the understanding of nationalism and race had not yet acquired the firmness it would acquire by around 1900. Through her meticulously researched examples she shows how this process took place. The rebel leader Liaquat Ali, once a sepoy soldier in the British colonial army, became enlisted in the anti-colonialist historiography of the early twentieth century, whereas by that time the Indo-French Bennett had acquired the status of an icon of pure British moral superiority. Without pictures, without genealogy and family history, we would not have learned how conceptions of race, class, and national belonging have been reworked over time.

Conversely, postcolonial approaches claiming that the "colonial mind" is locked up in texts run the risk of simply reiterating their own theoretical assumptions without being aware of it. In that respect the fact that Anderson has not revisited some of the positions of postcolonialism, and perhaps of the New Imperial History as well, in order to confront them with her findings, based as they are upon sophisticated social history, might represent a lost opportunity. Even without such an explicit confrontation, however, Anderson has written an important book that courageously crosses the Rubicon between theoretical approaches to colonial history and social history. *Alea iacta est*, I hope.

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MUÑOZ ABELEDO, LUISA. Género, trabajo y niveles de vida en la industria conservera de Galicia, 1870–1970. Icaria editorial [etc.], Barcelona 2010. xii, 340 pp. Ill. € 20.00. doi:10.1017/S0020859013000369

Analyses of the world of labour from a gender perspective have become a sphere that we can already consider as classical in social history. Since it became established in the