J. Lat. Amer. Stud. **39** (2007). doi:10.1017/S0022216X06312345

Katherine E. Browne, *Creole Economics: Caribbean Cunning under the French Flag* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2004), pp. xvi + 271, $22.95, pb.

This engaging and welcome book brings the insights of a skilled anthropologist to the informal economy of the Caribbean. Katherine Browne's focus is the inventive, widespread practices used in Martinique to generate off-the-books income, known there as *débrouillardise*. Once a thriving sugar island with a population that was 85 per cent African slaves, Martinique is today politically integrated as a French overseas *département* and depends heavily on imports and subsidies from the metropolis. In this rather prosperous economy, Browne observes, people do not so much cheat the state in order to survive but rather to enhance their personal autonomy and social prestige. As an anthropologist, she argues that behaviours such as *débrouillardise* have more to do with 'the social fabric of a particular society' than with the rational pursuit of gain. Economists drawing up public policies would do well to take into account not just how much people earn informally but how they think about their illicit economic activity.

Martinique became an overseas *département* in 1946, capping a century of measures in private and constitutional law, following the abolition of slavery in 1848, that aimed to put 'old' French colonies and their people on the same foot as metropolitan France. Although *départementalisation* was considered an advanced form of political integration, the costs of an assimilationist policy became palpable in the 1950s and 1960s. Martiniquais intellectuals – Frantz Fanon and Édouard Glissant foremost among them – produced brilliant, incisive analyses of what Glissant called *le malaise antillais*. Although creoles assimilated French cultural values and way of life, they experienced an underlying anxiety about their 'dual' or 'fragmented' identity. Assimilation had produced a subtle form of dependency.

To understand the working of the Martinique creole economy and what it delivers to different people, Browne employed a questionnaire to ask people about their livelihoods, how much they earned and owned, how they enhanced their incomes, and why. She asked these questions in a sample of one in every five households in three neighbourhoods (upper, middle and lower-income) in the capital of Fort-de-France. As could have been anticipated, Browne found that *débrouillardise* means different things to different people. Those of lower income see combining declared and undeclared work as a necessity. For middle-income professionals with secure, well-paid professions, it is a way to generate extra income for fun and adventure. Individuals of the highest incomes have different practices: rather than working for others or selling to them, they hire construction workers and craftsmen illegally or buy smuggled luxury items from petty merchants. Browne's findings also reveal gender differences. Women put a premium on stable declared employment which can then be supplemented, primarily for the benefit of their children. Men, in contrast, enjoy the illegal income and activities for the sense of defying authority and getting away with it. The scale of men's operations tends to be more ambitious than women's.

From all this Browne paints a rich and convincing picture of 'creole economics', with a whole informal structure parallelling the official economy that bonds buyers and sellers across classes. It exhibits a pattern of behaviour that she summarises as '(1) seeking autonomy and being one's own boss and (2) pursuing mixed

economic strategies or "multiple livelihoods"' (p. 55). For each of the three groups a series of vignettes convey the range of activities practised – a variety of arrangements, mostly small-scale and generally involving creative thinking about how to circumvent the regulating mania of the French state, requiring time and connections to arrive at maximum advantage and minimum risk – as well as how people allocate their time to juggle both declared and illicit activities. Resourceful personalities and individual strategies come alive in these portraits, which are also illustrated by evocative graphics.

Browne's attempt to explain creole economics by history – 'Caribbean histories at work in economic behaviour' – is only partly convincing. She argues for 'striking continuities in the slave-born longings to be one's own boss' (p. 10). Broadly speaking, it is hard to deny the legacy of an exploitative labour system and social organisation. But the author's depiction of slavery is too stereotyped and general to bear strongly on the informal urban economy she has documented. Simplistic assumptions also appear in other parts of the book, for example 'the Islamic-influenced Catholicism introduced by Spanish colonisers was more restrictive for women than the traditional Catholicism brought by the French' (p. 183).

Browne leaves out two characteristics that distinguished the slave colony of Martinique from the rest of the Eastern Caribbean. One is an unusually large urban sphere (by 1790 the port-city of St. Pierre had probably attracted as much as a third of the island's population into its orbit), and the other the early emergence of a distinctive community of free coloureds with a sense of its own identity. Several of Browne's findings do suggest continuities with this early colour-stratified, urban Martiniquan society, for example a female creole economics of petty trade and small business (such as seamtresses), a creole hierarchy parallelling the colonial order with the light-skinned on top. Browne would have been better served by greater use of Martinique's historiography (Émile Hayot, Léo Elisabeth, Jacques Adélaïde-Merlande, among others) and less eclectic borrowing of historical visions from novels, economics and cultural studies.

Browne is more convincing when she pictures creole economics as one way out of the post-colonial dependence of a slave-society and *débrouillardise* as an outlet for cultural alienation, a way to reclaim control over one's life. To make sense of the 'post-colonial tensions' which she sees she turns to Fanon and Glissant, whose views she finds useful and presents clearly, without jargon. One wonders why, however, she did not search for explanations in the half century of *départementalisation* or even the 150 years that have elapsed since 1848. This history frames the emergence of the Martiniquais' form of identity within the decline of the sugar economy, the shrinking of occupational options, and the rise of the heavily-assisted and unproductive economy of Martinique today. In fact Browne demonstrates a good grasp of the island's recent history, beginning with the virtually self-sufficient economy that people still remember fondly when Martinique was cut off from France during World War II. She should be encouraged to explore it in greater depth, to complement the way her solid and imaginative research has opened up a needed field of enquiry in post-colonial societies.

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