

at times appear overwhelming, the book also acknowledges considerable convergence between the three countries as they struggle to equate rising expectations of social protection with labour market flexibilisation and casualisation born of neoliberal ideological pressures to retain global economic competitiveness.

Ultimately this is not a book that delivers a strong set of generalisations, nor does it offer a robust analytical framework that can readily be applied to other countries. Teichman concludes that the influence of welfare regimes on social outcomes is relatively small, that their efficacy depends on structural factors (including the size, political influence and ideology of elite, popular and state bureaucratic interests), and that serendipity in the alignment of these social forces with each other and global factors matters quite a lot – probably more than policy intentionality. To be thus reminded of the complexity and messiness of history may be neither surprising nor particularly inspiring, but it is no less wise and salutary for that.

University of Bath

JAMES COPESTAKE

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Stephan Palmié and Francisco Scarano (eds.), *The Caribbean: A History of the Region and its Peoples* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), pp. ix + 660, \$35.00; £22.50, pb.

History and geography have combined to create extremely complex societies in the Caribbean region. No other region of the world experienced the artificial demographic and ecological transformations that the Caribbean went through after the accidental arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492. During the succeeding centuries immigrants from around the globe generated unique and baffling hybrid cultural forms across the region. At the same time, imported fauna and flora completely revolutionised cultivation, ecology and culture. As a result, studies that treat the Caribbean as a unified region, although relatively few in number, have been of extraordinary importance in understanding the basic characteristics of the region's singularly unusual history and inordinately complex culture. Stephan Palmié and Francisco Scarano's large edited volume, divided into seven sections and with 39 chapters written by 40 authors, comprises a welcome contribution to the literature. The authors, primarily drawn from the fields of history, anthropology, sociology, political science, archaeology, geography and geology, are uniformly outstanding and are highly respected scholars in their fields.

Arranged thematically as well as chronologically, the narrative is presented in subsections that attempt to cover the regional history from the time of the indigenous societies until the present. As with any work of this nature, there is inescapable repetition not only within individual chapters but also across the sectional divisions. There is no obvious distinction, for example, between part III, 'Colonial Designs in Flux', and part IV, 'Capitalism, Slavery and Revolution'. Both address the unforeseen complications resulting from the progressive transformation of settler societies into exploitative socio-economic systems based on slave labour and plantation production. Nevertheless, the entire volume is written in a clear and eminently accessible style and overall is commendably representative of the latest research. The illustrations are a notable feature that strikingly enhances the text, and most chapters are amply supplied with citations and bibliographies, although four chapters dispense with these altogether.

In general the volume demonstrates the integral connection between Caribbean, Atlantic and European politics and economies especially after the seventeenth century, when the north-west European states successfully managed to breach the Spanish and Portuguese monopoly of the Americas. As the authors demonstrate persuasively, Caribbean societies were not marginal to the development of the modern world but rather were an essential contributing factor to modernity. A superb introduction provides an excellent context for Caribbean exceptionalism across time and geography. Despite their specificity, a number of the essays achieve an appealing combination of the local and the regional, while capturing the nuances of particular times, locales and specific circumstances.

Several chapters stand out. Reinaldo Funes Monzote describes brilliantly the multi-layered reconstitution of society, politics, bio-history, ideology and economics that accompanied the early phase of the Spanish integration of the Caribbean into the expanded Iberian sphere. Francisco Scarano's analysis of what he refers to as the 'long seventeenth century' focuses on the Hispanic Caribbean but never loses sight of the reciprocal relations beyond the Spanish realm. Hilary MacDonald Beckles insightfully recalls the complicated way in which the problem of labour was temporarily resolved in the initial period of constructing the Caribbean slave society. Similarly for the later period, Aisha Khan, O. Nigel Bolland, Anthony Maingot and Christine Du Bois examine with consummate skill the prevailing importance of interrelated themes such as migration, labour mobilisation and politicisation, nationalism, ethnicity and Caribbean diasporas not only for specific units but also for the region as a whole.

The strength of this volume rests on its rich thematic scope, its excellently chosen illustrations and its sound bibliographical references. Given the superb selection of contributors, this is to be expected. Throughout the volume, however, there remain some surprisingly questionable assertions. A few examples are illustrative. Ovando came to the Caribbean not to suppress slave rebellions (pp. 156–7) but to establish a settler colony, thereby deviating from the Portuguese Atlantic trading pattern with which Columbus was familiar. It is curious to describe the Spanish strategic retreat from the Lesser Antilles as an 'expulsion' during the seventeenth century (pp. 191–2) since those islands had not been effectively settled for decades. Similarly, warfare did not destroy the economy of Saint-Domingue (p. 257): while the plantation/slave-driven economy was drastically altered by the war and accompanying revolution, a diversified freeholder economy remained vital and viable until after the middle of the nineteenth century. Haitians did not become poor until the time of the Civil War in the United States. On p. 403 the etymological origins of the Spanish word *criollo* deserve a more sophisticated description; and Edward Seaga did not become 'president' of Jamaica (p. 507), as Jamaica is a constitutionally monarchical state. Yet these are minor blemishes in a large volume that should be genuinely attractive to a wide audience interested in the Caribbean.

From a practical point of view, the volume has two minor drawbacks. The first is that sheer size and weight inhibit recommending the paper copy as a textbook for undergraduate instruction, although this may be offset by a weightless electronic version. The second reservation pertains to the nature of the text. Despite the fine collection of authors, this is an awfully conventional narrative that follows too closely the linear chronology of Caribbean historical development which still views a region in binary terms of masters and slaves, oppressors and oppressed, exploiters and exploited, or immigrants and emigrants. The introduction tantalisingly refers to

Caribbean culture, but after 600 pages the reader gets very little sustained discussion of the nature and cultural accomplishments of these societies. Winston James looks at the intellectual dimension of culture, but one chapter and fleeting references in the introduction are woefully inadequate for a complex region distinguished for its relatively long history of exceptional creative and performing arts as well as architecture.

Johns Hopkins University

FRANKLIN W. KNIGHT

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Anke Birkenmaier and Esther Whitfield (eds.), *Havana Beyond the Ruins: Cultural Mappings after 1989* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. xiv + 329, £59.00, £16.99 pb.

A great deal of cultural studies research has looked at the Cuba of the post-1990 crisis years – usually focusing on notions of dystopia, collapse, disillusion, social fragmentation and so on – and, within that focus, has tended to concentrate on Havana, as the two editors observe at the start of this collection. However, little has actually been written exclusively about the city during that period. Instead, historians have often set contemporary Havana in a historical context of chaotic but luxuriant evolution but left out of their depiction any analysis of the city as it is currently, rather than as it was. Yet the fascination of cultural studies, and indeed of Cuban authors, with the dilapidated city that Havana seems to have become has created an orthodoxy that sees the ‘city in ruins’ as a metaphor for ‘the revolution in ruins’ after 1990. Indeed, that has also been the theme picked up by a flood of media visitors, certainly driven by the travel industry’s enticement to ‘see Cuba before it changes’.

Hence, the editors clearly intend this collection – based on a Latin American Studies Association symposium in 2007 – to address that imbalance, or at least question the underlying orthodoxy. Whether it does so is a moot point, perhaps inevitably in any such conference-based collection, where the convenors are at the mercy of the variable quality of the participants’ contributions. However, it has to be said that, despite such fears of unevenness in quality, the overall success of the book is positive, with many of the pieces addressing the basic issue with acumen, objectivity and subtlety.

The volume is divided into three parts. Part I (‘Mapping Havana: Citizenship and the City’) brings together six essays on different aspects of the physical and lived space of Havana. Without doubt the best of these six are Mario Coyula’s ‘autopsy of a utopia’ (his 2007 diatribe against the architectural dogmatism and cultural philistinism of the *quinquenio gris* and beyond, which finally created a ‘deterioration of civic culture’: p. 50), which stands out for its perspicacity as much as its caring passion; Patricio Del Real and Joseph Scarpaci’s fascinating study of informal self-construction through the prism of the *barbacoa* (the self-built, and often dangerously jerry-built, mezzanine floor that serves as a means of creating space in a woefully limited and overcrowded dwelling); and above all, Jill Hamberg’s magnificent and detailed study of the evolution and complex nature of Havana’s ‘slums’. The latter two essays both resist notions of Cuban ‘exceptionalism’ by setting Havana within a context of Latin American urbanisation and shanty town creation, but Hamberg especially gives us a revealing picture of ‘slums’ that can often be something other than