

BOOK REVIEWS

SEWELL, WILLIAM H., JR. *Logics of History. Social Theory and Social Transformation*. [Chicago Studies in Practices of Meaning.] University of Chicago Press, Chicago [etc.] 2005. xi, 412 pp. \$70.00. (Paper: \$27.50.); DOI: 10.1017/S0020859006012466

Over the past thirty-five years William H. Sewell has established himself as one of the leading social historians of his generation. One thing that makes him, as he notes, still fairly unusual as a historian is his willingness to reflect on the methods and assumptions of the forms of enquiry in which he engages and to cross the boundaries that institutionally separate history from social-science disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and political science. Sewell's methodological self-consciousness is expressed, among other things, in his authorship of two important articles that seek to rethink the relationship between concepts that are frequently counterposed in theoretical debates – social structure and historical event.¹ The present collection brings together revised versions of these articles with other pieces to offer a lucid and stimulating set of reflections on the present state of play in history and the social sciences.

One major theme of the collection is the implications of the so-called “cultural turn” – the shift in many disciplines during the 1970s and 1980s from the study of social structure, usually conceived as a set of objective relationships, to tracing the ways in which representations of different kinds help to constitute the identities of social actors. Sewell was a participant in this intellectual reorientation, as is indicated by the titles of his doctoral thesis, “The Structure of the Working Class of Marseille in the Middle of the Nineteenth Century” (1971), of probably his best-known book, *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labour from the Old Regime to 1848* (1980), and of a more recent work, *A Rhetoric of Bourgeois Revolution: The Abbé Sieyès and What is the Third Estate?* (1994).

In a fascinating long essay, “The Political Unconscious of Social and Cultural History”, that frames the present book, Sewell mixes autobiography and intellectual history in reconstructing the process that led social historians like him of the 1960s generation to abandon the quantitative methods in which they had been trained for the conceptions of language they found in structural anthropology and poststructuralist philosophy. He stresses the particular significance of feminist scholars such as Joan Scott and Lynn Hunt, who both helped to open up new domains of enquiry for historians and brought to the “new cultural history” a political energy that survived the decline of the other radical movements of the 1960s.

Sewell does not regret the “cultural turn”, but he worries now whether it may have gone too far. Resolving social structures into discursive forms allowed historians to forget capitalism: “we need to take notice of the elephant in interpretive social science’s parlour: the constant presence of economic constraints and pressures on semiotic practices of all kinds – not only in the present, but at least since the beginning of the capitalist era, some

1. William H. Sewell Jr, “A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation”, *American Journal of Sociology*, 98 (1992), pp. 1–29, and “Historical Events as Transformations of Structure”, *Theory and Society*, 25 (1996), pp. 841–881.

half a millennium ago.”² One particular reason why the oblivion of economic structures characteristic of the “new cultural history” has been damaging is that Sewell now believes there to have been “a secret and troubling affinity between the cultural turn and the emergence of contemporary flexible forms of capitalism” amid the ruins of the hitherto dominant Fordist regime of accumulation in the 1970s and 1980s.³ Fordist mass production and consumption fitted easily with the determinism and positivism that Sewell attributes to traditional social history; the former’s breakdown encouraged him and his contemporaries to abandon the latter as well: “The experienced decline in the regularity and predictability of life has surely made ‘social structures’ seem far less solid and determining, and the progressive relativization of ‘majority’ cultures and the ever-increasing role of information and aesthetics in economic production have surely made it plausible that our world might profitably be understood as culturally constituted.”⁴

Sewell remains “a determined advocate of the cultural turn”. Nevertheless “[c]ultural history’s lack of interest in, indeed effective denial of, socioeconomic determination seems to me potentially disabling in an era when such determinations are so evidently at work in the world, including, it would appear, in our own conceptualizations of historical process.”⁵ Accordingly, the bulk of the book is devoted to an effort to reconcile what Sewell regards as the achievements of the “cultural turn” with this acknowledgement of the explanatory significance of “socioeconomic determination”. The results are generally very impressive: they include a very thoughtful and judicious essay, “The Concept(s) of Culture”, that I would happily commend to anyone seeking a guide through this very tangled area; fine critical appreciations of the work of Clifford Geertz and Marshall Sahlins; and a piece on the dockworkers of Marseille between 1814–1870 whose general guidelines on how to approach labour history seem to me exactly right.

Where Sewell is less successful is in the most philosophically challenging topic that he addresses – of how to integrate the apparently antithetical discourses of structure and event while remaining faithful to the “cultural turn”. This is a demanding agenda and it’s not particularly surprising that Sewell doesn’t bring it off. His approach is nevertheless intriguing. He seeks an “eventful sociology” that finds a place for “path dependency, temporally heterogeneous causalities, and global contingency”.⁶ But he isn’t interested in just any old events, conceived simply as occurrences in space and time – what Braudel famously dismissed as “surface disturbances, crests of foam that the tides of history carry on their backs”.⁷ Rather, for Sewell, “[a] historical event [...] is (1) a ramified sequence of occurrences that (2) is recognized as notable by contemporaries, and that (3) results in a durable transformation of structures.”⁸ He illustrates this conception with a detailed account of how the storming of the Bastille inaugurated the modern conception of revolution through the novel fusion it effected of national sovereignty and popular violence.

2. William H. Sewell Jr, *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago, 2005), pp. 347–348.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 62, following David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford, 1989).

4. Sewell, *Logics of History*, p. 59.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

7. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 2 vols (London, 1978), vol. 2, p. 21.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 228.

Plainly, since this account makes events and structures interdependent, much hangs on how Sewell conceptualizes structures. He seeks to modify Anthony Giddens's influential notion of the duality of structure, according to which social structures consist in rules and resources that are both the conditions and consequences of actions.⁹ Sewell preserves the interrelationship of structure and action but argues that structures must be conceptualized as "mutually reinforcing sets of cultural schemas and material resources".¹⁰ This theory of structure effectively privileges the role of culture in social transformations. Thus, Sewell defines agency as "the capacity to transpose and extent schemas to new contexts. Agency, to put it differently, arises from the actor's control of resources, which means the capacity to reinterpret or mobilize an array of resources in terms of schemas other than those that constitute the array."¹¹ Notice how control of resources is immediately redefined in terms of symbolic skills of reinterpretation and how resources themselves are said to be constituted by schemas. Consistently with the explanatory priority that Sewell gives to cultural schemas, he argues that social change happens because "[s]ocieties must be conceptualized as sites of a multitude of overlapping and interlocking cultural structures", which allow actors at moments of crisis to reconfigure existing schemas – as, for example, the storming of the Bastille and its aftermath allowed participants to transform prevailing structures by coming up with "the new *concept* of revolution".¹²

How can Sewell square this effective equation of structures with cultural schemas with his concern to find a place for "socioeconomic determinations"? Only with great difficulty, as becomes clear in the long concluding essay, "Refiguring the 'Social' in Social Science: An Interpretivist Manifesto". Here he seeks to escape a narrowly discursive definition of the social by adopting a broader conception of "semiotic practices" modelled on Wittgenstein's concept of language game (or, more accurately, on a typical misunderstanding of this concept).¹³ This then encourages Sewell to subsume "socio-economic determinations", and indeed "macro relations" more generally under semiotic practices. Thus "the state, in both its military and civil guises, is a network of semiotic practices whose scope is very wide and whose power is very great. In this respect it resembles the collection of language games we call capitalism."¹⁴ All that is left, after this outburst of culturalist imperialism, of Sewell's initial concern to open out to the traditional structural concerns of social history is an acknowledgement of the legitimacy of quantitative methods because aspects of "the language games of capitalism present themselves phenomenally as a complex of quantitative fluctuations in prices", though we mustn't lose sight of the fact that we are confronting "a reality ultimately made up of complexly articulated semiotic practices".¹⁵

Sewell seems, rightly, a bit uncomfortable with all this, since he concludes with a long riff proposing we replace the "language metaphor" as a way of understanding the social with that of the "built environment", which would encourage us to explore "the reciprocal constitution of semiotic form and material embodiment".¹⁶ But this merely restates one of

9. For example, Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory* (London, 1979).

10. Sewell, *Logics of History*, p. 205.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 142–143.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 209, 255 (italics added).

13. Colin McGinn, *Wittgenstein on Meaning* (Oxford, 1984).

14. Sewell, *Logics of History*, p. 344.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 349, 355.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 365.

the disabling presuppositions that prevent him from developing a more robust theory of structure – the opposition of the cultural and the physical that is reflected also in his definition of structure as schemas and resources. (Another such presupposition is Sewell’s persistent tendency to associate the study of social structures with the use of quantitative methods, one of the points where he seems to have fallen victim to a certain parochialism, since, as he notes, the great Marxist scholars such as Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm, and Edward Thompson who dominated the development of social history in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s “had none of the [American] new social historians’ programmatic enthusiasm for quantitative methods”.)¹⁷

In any case, the slide from resisting linguistic reductionism to baptizing everything social a language game is both unnecessary and disabling. Sewell says semiotic practices are “any practices that communicate information by means of some sort of signs and are therefore open to all interpretation”.¹⁸ This very abstract definition plainly applies to all human practice: there is no action performed by humans that does not communicate by means of words or other kinds of symbol that of necessity require interpretation. But it doesn’t follow that that all human practice is to be understood solely in terms of its symbolic aspect. One critical issue here concerns the *relations* between both isolated acts and practices. Sewell rightly highlights the problem of the articulation of practices but assumes that this must be conceptualized in semiotic terms. But this is a mistake. He says: “A moment’s reflection makes it clear that the currency futures market is also a language game”.¹⁹ It’s true that traders in currency futures have to communicate in order to operate, and that they deal in contracts, that is, in written utterances, ultimately based in complex ways in currencies that are themselves symbols. But this doesn’t exhaust the practice of currency futures trading. The interactions of the traders and those between their markets and others, financial and non-financial, unleash chains of consequences that, for example, transfer wealth among different categories of actors and may damage entire economies – think of the great financial crashes of the neo-liberal era. Sewell acknowledges “the problem of unintended consequences of action”: it is this context that he asserts that social reality is “ultimately made up of complexly articulated semiotic practices”.²⁰ But this remains just an assertion: he offers no account of how the relations and mechanisms constituting financial markets might be reduced to “semiotic practices”.²¹

Reflecting on the relationality of social structures invites us to consider also the problem of power. Sewell defines structures as schemas and resources, but largely ignores the critical question of *access* to resources. Who gets to play the “language game” of currency futures trading? You have either to be very rich yourself or (more typically) to work for an investment bank, hedge fund, or the like. That means that just about everyone is dealt out of the game. Conceptualizing modes of access to resources requires us to think in relational terms because typically some persons are allowed and others are denied access in ways that are non-contingently connected. The Marxist concept of the relations of production (defined by G.A. Cohen as relations of effective power over productive forces) is a paradigmatic example of how analytically to address this kind of issue, but it is by no

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 335.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 343.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 352, 355.

21. For a critical realist account of financial markets, see Heiki Patomäki, *Democratizing Globalization* (London, 2001).

means the only one – Michael Mann’s theory of power networks is another, praised by Sewell.²² Sewell himself skates very quickly past the question of power in his first article on structures (1992). In the original version of his somewhat later discussion of historical events (1996) he says, in a footnote: “I would now modify this definition [i.e. of structure in the first article] by specifying modes of power as a constitutive component of structures.”²³ Bafflingly, this note has vanished in the version of this essay published in the collection under review. But it is hard to take seriously a theory of social structure that does not thematize the question of power: in this respect Sewell’s theory represents a step back compared to Giddens’s theory of structuration, which, for all its many faults, focused on power and domination.²⁴

These criticisms are not intended to deny the value of historical and social-scientific research that is sensitive to the ineliminable role played by language and symbolic representation more broadly in human social life; to do so would be to seek to roll back the great “revolution of language” that is one of the main achievements of twentieth-century Western culture. But recognizing the significance of language and representation doesn’t require one to conclude that they exhaust the social. Sewell’s desire to remedy cultural history’s occlusion of capitalist economic structures without giving up the “cultural turn” is understandable and legitimate, but he needs a much more robust conception of social structure to achieve his goal. He could do worse than engage with the critical realist theorists – among them Roy Bhaskar, Margaret Archer, and myself – who have sought to develop such a conception.²⁵ This collection is, in any case, evidence of the fertility of the project Sewell has undertaken, even if it doesn’t have all the conceptual resources needed to carry it through.

Alex Callinicos

THORNTON, ARLAND. *Reading History Sideways. The Fallacy and Enduring Impact of the Developmental Paradigm on Family Life.* [Population and Development.] University of Chicago Press, Chicago [etc.] 2005. x, 312 pp. \$39.00; £27.50; DOI: 10.1017/S0020859006022462

By “reading history sideways”, Arland Thornton means an approach that uses information from a variety of societies at one point in time to make inferences about change over time. He attacks this method as both pervasive and pernicious, influencing scholars, past and present, as well as ordinary people and governments around the world today.

A well-known demographer and sociologist, Thornton first set forth his critique to a larger audience in his 2001 presidential address to the Population Association of America (PAA). In his intellectual history of the approach, he absolves Scottish and English writers

22. Compare G.A. Cohen, *Karl Marx’s Theory of History* (Oxford, 1978), esp. ch. 3, and Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, 2 vols (Cambridge 1986, 1993), vol. 1, ch. 1.

23. Sewell, “Historical Events as Transformations of Structure”, p. 879, n. 4.

24. Alex Callinicos, “Anthony Giddens: A Contemporary Critique”, *Theory and Society*, 14 (1985), pp. 133–166.

25. For example, Roy Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism* (Brighton, 1979); Margaret Archer, *Realist Social Theory* (Cambridge, 1995); and Alex Callinicos, *Making History* (2nd edn, Leiden, 2004).

of the Enlightenment of much blame. Lacking reliable information about the distant past of their own society, authors such as John Millar, Adam Smith, and Robert Malthus seized on data pouring in from European visitors to non-European worlds as a substitute for genuine historical information. Nevertheless, they launched an enduring and fatally flawed perspective. In this book, Thornton concentrates on subjects from his areas of expertise – demographic and family studies – as he criticizes the application of the traditional-to-modern paradigm.

In my opinion, Thornton's reading of the Enlightenment founders is not so much inaccurate as single-minded in its emphasis and vague in its documentation. Perhaps because of his narrow, relentless focus, Thornton does not bother to cite page numbers for his sources. In my view, these writers were not principally concerned with setting forth a historical account of change over time. They were, as they claimed, comparativists, men who were much more precursors of academic disciplines in the social sciences than of history. They sought to develop typologies and laws of society – and the more parsimonious, the better. Thus, Malthus seized on the inherent conflict between the arithmetic path of growth in the food supply and the exponential potential of population increase. Change over time in typologies was more implicit than explicit, as with the stages of societal development: hunting and gathering, pastoral, agricultural, and commercial. Empirical data were cited for heuristic purposes rather than as an analysis of transitions from one stage to another.

Second, these writers were generalists and not specialists in any particular field. They discussed a range of topics to illustrate one generalization or another. They certainly did contribute to what Thornton labels the developmental paradigm, which is nearly the same expansive concept as the idea of progress. Recently, Harvard economist Benjamin Friedman has provided a more complex and complete treatment of the sources of belief in the possibilities of progress than does Thornton.¹

According to Thornton, reading history sideways has distorted the historical study of the family in north-western Europe, now recognized by specialists as a unique region in the broad context of world history. Demographically, for example, it is characterized by late marriage, especially for females, with a large proportion never marrying. This nuptiality pattern results from an adherence to a norm of newlyweds forming new households. There are two distinct schools regarding the dating of the “great family transition” in north-western Europe. As noted above, Thornton emphasizes that writers of earlier centuries used evidence from the non-Western world to claim that there had been a great transition from extended to nuclear families somewhere in the far distant past. Certainly, this was implicit in their work even, if they did not focus on the dynamics of a shift from, say, an agricultural to a commercial society. Given the absence of empirical data, nothing could really be said about the precise dating of this great transition.

By the middle of the twentieth century, social scientists had firmly adopted the expectation that industrialization (better formulated as “modern economic growth” by Simon Kuznets) broadly conceived was, or should have been, the cause of great transitions in the family and in all other areas of society. This definitive placement of the hinge-of-history in the nineteenth century had several sources. Nineteenth-century social observers were keenly aware of the quickening of the pace of urbanization and industrialization. In

1. Benjamin M. Friedman, *The Moral Consequences of Economic Growth* (New York, 2005), pp. 19–78.

the field of economic history, the Industrial Revolution emerged as a key concept in the early twentieth century. After World War II, the need for a “take-off” in economic development in what became known as the Third World was a pressing policy matter for governments as well as academics.

However, beginning in the 1960s, historians of the family, particularly Peter Laslett and the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, vigorously refuted the notion that any such transition could be discerned in the empirical record of household structure in England or north-western Europe during industrialization or, for that matter, at any time in post-medieval history. Instead, they emphasized the essential cultural distinctiveness of their region. This was something of a straw man in intellectual history, as analysts such as Locke, Smith, Malthus, and Alfred Marshall had concurred with the Cambridge Group before it even existed. In household studies, it also unfortunately steered attention away from the century – the twentieth – in which the most substantial change in living arrangements in recent centuries actually happened. In this book, Thornton reviews and endorses the essentialist perspective of these revisionist historians of the Cambridge Group.

In his brief chapter on European fertility decline, Thornton cannot be as critical of the notion of a fertility transition. It is well documented that birth and death rates in European societies have radically declined since the eighteenth century. Women bearing fewer than two children on average by age fifty really is a very substantial difference from having five or six children. So, too, is the difference a life expectancy at birth of eighty years compared to forty. The “demographic transition” succeeds better as a factual phenomenon than as a theory. Whether narrowly demographic as a homeostatic model, in which prior mortality decline causes fertility decline, or drawing on the entire list of changes that differentiate modern social history from traditional, the demographic transition fails as a theory, if by that is meant an invariant route from past to present powered by a constant causes or set of causes.

The most sweeping assertion of Thornton is that the practice of reading history sideways profoundly influences the thinking of people around the world who are far removed from academia. He lists four propositions that comprise the concept of developmental idealism (p. 136): modern society is good and attainable; the modern family is good and attainable; the modern family is as cause as well as an effect of a modern society; and finally, individuals have the right to be free and equal, with social relations based on consent. These propositions, most notably the last, are all-encompassing. The first two likely should have lower priority than the belief that “modern economic growth (sustained increases in per capita income) is good and attainable.” That is, a higher standard of living matters to people more than their familial preferences. The third proposition – “the modern family is a cause as well as an effect of a modern society” – is the most interesting for the study of the role of the family in history.

Overall, *Reading History Sideways* might have been better left in the shorter form of the PAA address as an inquiry into the sources of the traditional-to-modern framework in family studies. In the twenty-first century, it is hardly novel to criticize modernization and other frameworks of unilinear social evolution. Beginning with anthropologists such as Franz Boas in the early twentieth century, such critiques are commonplace. Since the 1960s, modernization theory has had more detractors than proponents. Stages-of-societies notions are out of fashion, so another such critique can make only a marginal contribution. Unfortunately, the rejection of the modernization approach has led historians in the

United States away from trying to understand change, especially over the long run. Instead, they endeavor to capture and evoke the context of past societies.

Since major changes, such as sustained declines in mortality and fertility, have occurred, the study of these transitions should not be neglected. Two questions are of particular interest to me. First, can the variation in paths to the present among societies be systematically conceptualized? In the field of economic history, for example, Alexander Gershenkron developed the proposition that the more backward the economy, the greater role major institutions played in industrialization. In England, individuals and family firms created modern economic growth. In Germany, banks played a large role, while in Russia the state played this role. Second, is it possible to distinguish Westernization from modernization? That is, does the fact that nearly the entire population residing in urban areas with most of the adult population working in jobs that require substantial schooling, and so forth, lead to a “modern” mentality or family values? Or is the content of a modern world view only a result of these developments first taking place in the West and then imported from that region? In a brief postscript on the use of terms such as “development,” Thornton sacrifices such questions because of a desire to avoid concepts that lack scientific rigor and are normatively laden. This is a high price to pay in terms of intellectual content.

Daniel Scott Smith

RAHIKAINEN, MARJATTA. *Centuries of Child Labour. European Experiences from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century.* [Studies in Labour History.] Ashgate, Aldershot [etc.] 2004. xi, 272 pp. £45.00; DOI: 10.1017/S0020859006032469

These days, books on child labour have a problem with definition. The inclusive view regards all children not in school as child labourers, particularly when they are engaged in household work. The exclusive view focuses on those children who are economically engaged and exploited. Rahikainen takes an exclusive view. Boys and girls helping out on the farm and girls helping their mothers in the household are excluded from the purview of this study with the argument, which has some validity, that household chores were a feature of daily family life. Rahikainen argues that extending the concept of child labour to all possible forms of work, including domestic work, would dilute the concept and make it analytically blurred. Child labour has thus been assessed primarily in terms of a labour relationship contributing to economic output, rather than in terms of work that engaged the child for too long at too young an age. In that sense, she deals with only one group of the deprived children of Europe’s poor in the past, but it at least enables her to maintain an analytical clarity.

Rahikainen combines her vast knowledge of the field with a tendency to polemicize, but without pushing her argument too far. It enables her to hold the reader’s attention and stimulates reflection. The author is an opinionated historian in the true sense. At the very beginning of her book, she takes issue with the theories of Ariès, which have been widely repeated in studies on the history of childhood and which tend to suggest that child labour was associated with the culture of the poor. That culture, Ariès argued, made no distinction between adults and children, between the public and the private. Child labour was natural. Rahikainen is indignant at such assumptions. The

bourgeoisie, she argues, took the children of the poor as a resource to be disciplined and mobilized. Whereas the elite were obsessed with the pedagogy of modern education for their children, the children of the poor continued to work and be exploited by their parents.

One quote from the early pages of this book (p. 4) is important in understanding the author's basic position: "Our knowledge of the ideas, attitudes and practices prevailing among the lower orders in past times is sporadic and biased by the perspectives of the middle and upper orders, who produced virtually all of our early modern sources. They were to prove, say, that in *ancien régime* France the lower classes were almost by definition the last to show signs of affection for children." The author takes exception to such aspersing thoughts and argues throughout the book that child labour was a necessity, a coercive choice on the part of the children and their parents; indeed, sometimes, it was the result of pure coercion.

There is a problem with this book, and it lies with the first part of the quotation. There is hardly enough material to write a history of child labour in Europe, covering, as this book aims to do, early household manufacturing, factory labour, the multifaceted urban labour market, and the vast use of children in agriculture and related fields such as herding and fishing. However, it should be added that the title of the book is not pretentious. Rahikainen's aim was to collate experiences of child labour over four centuries and across a geographical region larger than the present-day European Union. In a laudable departure from usual practice, child labour in (for example) Russia and Spain receive as much attention as child labour in the British textile mills. But given the patchy nature of the evidence, conclusions remain equivocal. The author is upfront about this and warns that without proper data many questions will remain unanswered.

The problem of child labour was a serious one throughout the European pre-industrial and early industrial periods. But how serious? Rahikainen takes a position reminiscent of the argument introduced by Nardinelli. Episodic evidence, particularly when recorded by commissions investigating the worst cases of child labour, has been at the root of the mainstream view that child labour was the weft and warp of early industrialization, in the same way that child labour today is often seen as the backbone of economies in developing countries. There is quite a lot of evidence in this book that the incidence of child labour was less than often assumed and that employers did not always find it easy to recruit child labourers. In agriculture, farmers, who, apart from engaging their own children for specific activities, had to bring in outside children, had to rely mainly on farmed-out parish pauper children. In nineteenth-century manufacturing industry, demand, it is argued, was concentrated in just a dozen industries and "in some places pauper children may have been about the only labour force available" (p. 216). Rahikainen's overview of the history of European child labour shows that the demand for and supply of child labour was not massive, but also that it meant a dreadful existence on the margins of society and the verge of destitution.

Many studies have focused on the supply side. The question has always been posed, and it continues to be posed in present-day studies on child labour, as to why parents and children choose a life of labour rather than a childhood of education and leisure. The approach in this book is different. Child labour in agriculture is looked at from the supply side; but in the context of industrial child labour Rahikainen is also interested in the demand side and so includes more evidence on the organization of production, changes in technology, and the shifting relationship between labour and capital.

The book ends with a brief chapter on the twentieth century. The author would have been wise to omit it. The source material for this period is abundant and diverse, and Rahikainen fails to do it justice. On the basis of her material the author concludes that by the 1970s child labour was a bygone phase in European history but that the 1980s saw a resurgence. In just a few pages, this is explained rather mechanically as a consequence of the flexibilization of the labour market. The author is right to point out that many European children do out-of-school work, but conceptually that work cannot be compared with the type of child labour common in Europe's past.

Kristoffel Lieten

LANGKAU-ALEX, URSULA. *Deutsche Volksfront 1932–1939. Zwischen Berlin, Paris, Prag und Moskau. Erster Band: Vorgeschichte und Gründung des Ausschusses zur Vorbereitung einer deutschen Volksfront.* Akademie Verlag, Berlin 2004. xix, 358 pp. € 39.80.

LANGKAU-ALEX, URSULA. *Deutsche Volksfront 1932–1939. Zwischen Berlin, Paris, Prag und Moskau. Zweiter Band: Geschichte des Ausschusses zur Vorbereitung einer deutschen Volksfront.* Akademie Verlag, Berlin 2004–2005. xvii, 590 pp. € 59.80.

LANGKAU-ALEX, URSULA. *Deutsche Volksfront 1932–1939. Zwischen Berlin, Paris, Prag und Moskau. Dritter Band: Dokumente zur Geschichte des Ausschusses zur Vorbereitung einer deutschen Volksfront, Chronik und Verzeichnisse.* Akademie Verlag, Berlin 2004–2005. xvi, 544 pp. € 59.80; DOI: 10.1017/S0020859006042465

After the Nazis took power in January 1933, almost half a million Germans were forced to leave their country. Among them were leaders of the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (KPD) and the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD, or Sopade, as it called itself in exile), as well as activists from small socialist groups, such as the anti-Stalinist KPD Opposition, the Socialist Workers' Party (SAP), and the Neu Beginnen (New Beginnings) group. The refugee activists migrated to Germany's democratic neighbours – mainly Czechoslovakia and France – to continue their struggle against Hitler.

The Seventh Comintern in August 1935 called for unity “from above” and thus brought about official approval for a Popular Front against fascism. Before the congress, German communists had aimed for a “Soviet Germany”. Now, they decided to ally with all anti-fascist social forces in and outside Germany in order to establish a Popular Front. They hoped that a non-fascist section of the German bourgeoisie would become a partner in that Popular Front. Such an alliance would unify the various factions of the labour movement inside Germany and in exile abroad. All revolutionary goals were explicitly discarded: the KPD's official aim became a parliamentary democracy.

Prominent among those scholars who have recently examined these political developments is Ursula Langkau-Alex, Senior Research Fellow at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam. Since the 1970s she has published many books and essays on the German labour movement in exile. This three-volume work on Popular-Front initiatives within the German labour movement in exile is her magnum opus. The first volume deals with the foundation of the Ausschuss zur Vorbereitung einer deutschen

Volksfront (Commission for the Preparation of a German Popular Front); the second discusses the Ausschuss itself. Volume 3 is a collection of documents and includes a bibliography.

Few historians outside the small circle of experts in the field probably know that in Germany the term "Popular Front" was coined as early as 1932. At that time, the social democrats and other pro-republican forces supported Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg's re-election as Germany's president against the Nazi candidate, Hitler. In February 1932, Hindenburg's electoral committee adopted a resolution calling for a "Popular Front", a broad coalition of non-Nazi and non-communist forces, to support Hindenburg (vol. 1, p. 11). The eighty-five-year-old former military leader was praised as "the last protective wall against Hitler". It was only a year later that *Reichspräsident* Hindenburg appointed Hitler German chancellor.

Langkau-Alex shows that it was ad hoc initiatives by both the communists and social democrats that marked the start of joint activities in exile, preceding consideration by the KPD and SPD leadership (vol. 1, p. 87). However, the decisive move towards a Popular Front was taken in France, where in July 1934 French communists and social democrats signed a joint pact aimed at combating fascist attempts to take power.

Hitler first tested his expansive policy in Saarland, which, after World War I, had been put under French control by the League of Nations. The Nazis orchestrated a campaign that intended to re-integrate this region into Germany. Communists and social democrats in the territory agreed to wage a joint campaign to support keeping Saarland under the administration of the League of Nations. Against the will of the SPD *Vorstand* (the party's exiled executive committee) in Prague, the Social Democratic Party under Max Braun went as far as to propose joint action committees to the communists. However, the plebiscite of January 1935 restored Saarland to Germany by an overwhelming majority and provided Hitler with his first foreign-policy triumph.

On 20 March 1935, the Central Committee of the KPD sent a letter to the SPD *Vorstand* in Prague urging a joint appeal to German workers. The SPD executive committee argued that, as long as the communists insisted on "submission" to unity, joint action of any kind was out of the question. However, two executive members, Siegfried Aufhäuser and Karl Böchel, demanded that the SPD seek an agreement with the communists – a demand that led to their expulsion from the executive committee. Together with other SPD dissidents, they formed the Revolutionary Socialists, a group that was more open to communist overtures. However, by 1936 the group had begun to disintegrate and most of its members rejoined the SPD.

While the KPD in exile maintained its party structure throughout the years of suppression, the SPD split into a multitude of groups, each with different ideas about the conduct of the party's work in exile and about future politics. The party executive felt that its task was to organize and lead a revolutionary movement against Nazism. The leaders of the party, now in exile, had not espoused a revolutionary platform before then. Now, circumstances forced the SPD leadership to become revolutionaries. They believed that the economic and political difficulties would contribute to a spontaneous mass uprising against the Nazi regime. The SPD leadership (as well as KPD officials) had not yet understood that the majority of the German population supported the Nazis.

In contrast to that over-optimistic opinion held by both communists and social democrats, the independent leftist group *Neu Beginnen* exhibited a more pessimistic

attitude, as Langkau-Alex shows. Its leader, Walter Löwenheim, assumed that the resistance movement against Hitler inside Germany was doomed. He proposed to suspend most activities inside the country until such time as conditions were more favourable for an anticipated socialist revolution. Most of the Neu Begonnen members rejected this idea and forced him to retire as leader. While parts of Neu Begonnen sympathized with the idea of a United Front, and even with a Popular Front, the group's new spokesman, Richard Löwenthal, was firmly opposed to the idea if it had to be realized under KPD guidance. He envisaged a communist-dominated front soon falling under Stalin's personal tutelage.

The issue of a Popular Front overshadowed all other problems dividing the exiled social democrats. The majority of the SPD executive remained opposed to any official agreement with the KPD and characterized the Popular Front idea as a hypocritical manoeuvre to split the ranks of the social democrats. Most SPD leaders insisted that the two elements – communist and social democratic – of the German labour movement were incompatible. However, in October 1935 the leading social democrat, Victor Schiff, decided to contact Willy Münzenberg, the KPD's master networker in Paris, who was regarded as more open-minded than the average communist party official. The two of them issued a preliminary appeal (reprinted in vol. 3, p. 14) for the political activities of the KPD and the SPD to be coordinated.

In February 1936 a Popular Front Committee was set up in Paris under the chairmanship of the writer Heinrich Mann. He had taken part in the 1935 International Congress of Writers, which supported the idea of a Popular Front against fascism. A skilled orator and writer, even in French, Mann was highly effective. Regular meetings of the Popular Front Committee were held at the Hotel Lutetia. The committee included social democrats, communists, representatives of splinter groups, and liberal intellectuals. Among the leading figures who helped Mann were Münzenberg, Rudolf Breitscheid, a leading SPD functionary, and the liberal journalists Leopold Schwarzschild and Georg Bernhardt. The committee issued a newsletter *Deutsche Informationen*. In the second volume of her trilogy, Langkau-Alex shows how the participants sought to draw up a programme that would unite the opposition against Hitler.

The electoral victory of the French Popular Front and the installation of a left-wing government under Léon Blum in May 1936 raised hopes among German refugees. However, while the Left was celebrating its triumph in France, the Spanish Civil War was breaking out. Thousands of communists, social democrats, independent Marxists, and liberals went to the aid of the Spanish Republic, whose very existence was being threatened by fascism. While backing the communist volunteers in the International Brigades, the Soviet Union also persecuted – through GPU officers in the background – anarchists, Trotskyites, and KPO members behind the front lines of the war against Franco's forces. These events overshadowed and virtually paralysed the work of the Popular Front Committee. Walter Ulbricht, the key figure among Paris's German communists, made senseless demands, defamed individual members of the committee, and launched a witch-hunt against the supposedly ever-present "Trotskyites". These practices alienated virtually all the other committee members (vol. 2, pp. 200–205). By the following summer, the committee's activities had run aground. Its newsletter *Deutsche Informationen* was now published under the auspices of the KPD journalist Bruno Frei. Max Braun and Georg Bernhard published a paper entitled *Deutsche Informationen vereinigt mit Deutsche Mitteilungen* that criticized the communists and their fellow travellers (vol. 2, p. 425). The

break was largely the unwanted result of Ulbricht's work, but even more so of the Stalinist "purges" in the Soviet Union and Spain. Despite several attempts to revive the committee, it ceased operations in January 1938.

The merits of Langkau-Alex's work are not confined to her detailed narrative of the controversies within the German exile communities. In these three volumes she also analyses these debates within the context of international diplomatic developments, the changing political situation, especially in France, and the relationship between the Communist and the Labour and Socialist Internationals. In short, these three volumes may well become the standard work on the subject for many years to come. Further research should clarify to what extent the underground movement in Germany, but also the Gestapo's apparatus, were able to monitor the work of the Popular Front Committee in Paris.

Mario Kessler

LOZANO, IRENE. Federica Montseny. Una Anarquista en el Poder. Espasa, Pozuelo de Alarcón 2004. 430 pp. Ill. € 24.75.

TAVERA, SUSANNA. Federica Montseny. La indomable (1905–1994). Temas de hoy, Madrid 2005. 352 pp. Ill. € 22.00; DOI: 10.1017/S0020859006052461

Federica Montseny Mañé was the first female minister in the history of Spain. She joined the Republican government on 4 November 1936, in the middle of the Civil War, together with her companions Joan Peiró, Juan García Oliver, and Juan López, all anarchists. This event is highlighted in the biographic studies of Lozano and Tavera, both published around the centenary of her birth. From different perspectives and styles, these studies propose to unravel this and other "contradictions" (Lozano) or "paradoxical aspects" (Tavera) of this historical figure.

The daughter of the anarchists Federico Urales (the pseudonym of Juan Montseny) and Soledad Gustavo (Teresa Mañé), Federica soon stood out in the libertarian propaganda media. From the pages of the *Revista Blanca*, published by her parents, and other publications of the Spanish anarchist movement, she began at a very young age to write short novels in which the protagonists, humiliated and offended in Dostoyevskian style, personified the author's ideological principles and concerns. In time, these stories were joined by articles of opinion in *Redención*, *Solidaridad Obrera*, and *El luchador*. From these platforms she took part, with an incisive and often virulent style, in the struggles that during the Second Republic became radicalized within the libertarian movement between the more unionist sectors, which supported the growth and strengthening of the National Confederation of Labour (CNT), and the more anarchist sectors, which defended the utopia of libertarian communism. Her support was for the latter; her attacks, against Ángel Pestaña and other "reformists". The popular reaction against the attempted coup d'état by general Sanjurjo strengthened her faith in the spontaneity of the people, a category that she chose as the revolutionary subject above the peasants or the working-class masses. Closing the Republican period, she defended, in the Congress that the CNT held in May 1936 in Zaragoza, the tougher, more orthodox, positions, proposing for approval that they should overcome the obstacles of the union's classical decision-making procedures (Lozano, pp. 165–166).

These same procedures, which in "normalized" periods were never perfect, became even more burdened with the onset of the Civil War. Federica, a recognized public speaker and

propagandist, obtained increasingly high positions on the committees until she was appointed as a minister, together with three companions. The scarce months she spent in the position would be a compendium of contradictions: from the defence of classical anarchist isolationism she changed to moderation and unity against fascism; the call to revolution became a message to overthrow the struggle against internal reaction in May 1937; a woman always against possibilism let herself be carried along by the circumstances, without being able to take charge. With her departure from the Republican government and the defeat in the Civil War, she took refuge in the press bodies of the anarchist exile, leaving the position on the committees to her companion, Germinal Esgleas. Both watched over the legality of the CNT in France, the organization which gave their existence meaning. This immobilism clashed with the conspiratorial work that young people proposed in the 1960s as a tactic to attack the Franco regime. For more than three decades, Montseny and Esgleas held important positions in the organization, either in the press, or on committees or secretariats. Their long terms of office were unprecedented in libertarian circles, as was the fact that they were paid.

Irene Lozano writes the complex biography of this controversial figure in a fictionalized style, which provides the text with fluency and agility, but which conditions a specific use of the sources. For example, she excessively reproduces romantic images of memories. Partial reconstructions exaggerate the skills of the character in what is also an exaggerated context, with pictures such as that of a vibrant Barcelona where in 1917 numerous “assemblies, meetings, gatherings and rallies” were held (p. 52), or that of committees which decided on the political fate of the country, controlling the electoral abstention or participation of their members (p. 158).¹ This use is more restrained after the initial chapters, giving the study greater soundness in criticizing or correcting these exaggerations. Without leaving the sources, the incorporation of recent research which has expanded on some of the texts used by Lozano on the 2nd Republic, the internal repression against the CNT on the Republican side, and the development of the Civil War itself, would have been welcome. These failings are made good by the use of interviews of around forty people and an exhaustive trawl through the archives in Spain, accompanied by access to two important unpublished collections: that of Helenio Molina and, above all, that of Juan Sans Sicart, deputy of the Egleas-Montseny couple in exile. This is an extensive, interesting, and to a large extent unknown period that Irene Lozano skilfully reveals to us.

Exile, however, takes up much less space in Susana Tavera’s study. This shortness takes away precision, for example, in the declarations on the militants who remained in the country (p. 266) or in the description of the disavowals prior to the split of the confederation in 1945 (p. 269). Apart from these passages, Tavera’s biography is that of a historian with a broad knowledge of the context of Primo de Rivera and the Republic, and includes a very wise use of local history studies to construct genealogies of situations and people. She thus describes the life of the parents and other heroes of Federica, links the creation of the *Revista Blanca* to similar enterprises of the time (pp. 54–63) and studies in depth the militant *infra-literature* and anarchist publicism (ch. 2). She also skilfully dissects the complexity of the anarchist “affinity groups” (pp. 117 and ff.) in which

1. Cf. Mercedes Vilanova, *Las mayorías invisibles. Explotación fabril, revolución y represión* (Barcelona, 1996); Anna Monjo, *Militants: participació i democràcia a la CNT als anys trenta* (Barcelona, 2003).

Federica will move throughout her life, from the family phalanstery of the early years to the continuance of these closed circles in exile.

In addition to the difference of perspective, questions of style and editing separate these two books. Lozano's style is easier to read but conceals the visibility of the author and of the problems encountered on reconstructing the biography. In Tavera's text, denser but also more meticulous, the author appears frequently to acknowledge the insufficiency of the data and the absence of certainty when required. As for the editing, paradoxically, the sources used by Tavera are more difficult to follow and to verify than in Lozano's work. The notes are at the end of the book, the format of the bibliography is confusing and, moreover, it lacks a clear and adequate index.

Finally, a few words on perspectives. Lozano's work is more essentialist, as she focuses on the subject, highlighting her exceptional nature in relation to the context. Tavera describes this context with more nuances and details thanks, in part, to the use of the type of genre. This perspective increases our knowledge of the historical and social complexity of a figure who confronted a patriarchal political and militant structure, with well-defined roles and limits. However, the "woman" variable occasionally monopolizes the explanation of some actions in which other factors intervene, such as power struggles within the movement or personal ambition. Two examples are her time in the ministry and her relations with the *Mujeres Libres* (Free Women) anarchist organization. In the former, according to her biography, gender arguments won against her ideological resistance and led her to accept a position that she did not want as a militant. In the latter, her militant loyalty led her to be absent from the media and actions of *Mujeres Libres*, because this organization was competing with her union and endangered the unity of the anarchist movement. In both situations Federica's ambitions to go down in history together with her childhood heroes (Francisco Ferrer y Guardia, Teresa Claramunt, her own father) are forgotten. An intense desire for historical importance which broadens the possibilities on interpreting the above-mentioned situations: her position as the first female minister would give her a place in history; *Mujeres Libres* was competing with the CNT, but also with her in her role as a militant woman.

The books by Tavera and Lozano are excellent descriptive works and are the richest and most exhaustive biographies of Federica Montseny to date. Our knowledge of this figure can continue to go deeper into her most personal conflicts and experiences, exploring her inner decision-making processes and her struggles for recognition, both on the public and on the private plane: how she handles her condition as a woman and how her intervention modifies the political network, but also how this intervention creates problems in the private circle (affinity groups and family roles). This work could begin by examining the private correspondence with close friends and companions, a good part of which is still in unpublished collections. This task is always difficult, and in the case of Federica Montseny may be impossible, she being a woman who was sure that she was going to go down in history and that history would judge her. It is not too much to suppose that Federica jealously guarded her most intimate thoughts, only letting the social figure, the militant Federica, speak.

Eduardo Romanos Fraile

LAW, ROBIN. *Ouidah. The Social History of a West African Slaving 'Port' 1727–1892.* [Western African Studies.] James Currey [etc.] Oxford [etc.] 2004. xi, 308 pp. Maps. £50.00. (Paper: £18.95.); DOI: 10.1017/S0020859006062468

The history of Ouidah is tightly intertwined with that of the Atlantic slave trade. The transformation of African societies as a result of their incorporation into the global market economy of the Atlantic is hotly debated, and for decades has been a field of growing interest among historians. Robin Law's recent book builds on that tradition to examine how Ouidah emerged and grew as Atlantic commerce expanded. Ouidah developed first as part of the polity of Hueda from the 1660s onward, a period that coincided with the beginnings of European trade in the Bight of Benin (also known as the Slave Coast), and later (from 1727) as part of Dahomey, until it was conquered by the French in 1892.

According to Law, Ouidah was an important nerve centre of the slave trade, surpassed only by Luanda in terms of slave exports. In addition to the considerable human toll of the slave trade, Ouidah's contributions to Atlantic history are immense, and include a place name in Jamaica, a bird genus, and the worship of its principal deity, the goddess Ezili in Haiti. Commemorations of Ouidah's role in Atlantic history take place in several continents, and are multiform, ranging from museum exhibitions, historical novels, monuments, to television programmes.

Law focuses on Ouidah's merchant community and the rise and decline of this urban settlement. He guides us through a series of changes in the organization and operation of Atlantic commerce, the impact and magnitude of which are appreciated locally. The classic historical landmarks of these global processes include the illegitimate slave trade, legitimate trade (marked by the development of palm oil and nuts), and the imposition of colonial government. Local manifestations and responses to all these processes highlight variability and offer possibilities of comparison with other settings on the West African coast.

According to Law, most studies of West African coastal communities tend to target whole states or city-states and offer only a general and diffuse perspective that does not permit one to unravel the development and functioning of urban life (p. 5). Ouidah's experience in the Atlantic system shows similarities but also fundamental differences from other settings in coastal West Africa. While the concept of a "middle-men" community applied to Douala by Austen and Derrick works for Ouidah, Law opines that concepts such as "enclave-entrepôt" used for Elmina by Feinberg, or neutral "port of trade" by Karl Polanyi for Ouidah, are not supported by empirical evidence in his case study (p. 6). Like other middle-men communities in West Africa, Ouidah organized overseas trade, mediated between its port and hinterland, and consequently experienced demographic growth. But it was also subject to major political and social changes, and a difficult transition from slave exports to agricultural exports.

Unlike many other coastal settlements involved in the Atlantic system, the European presence in Ouidah was successfully controlled and managed, first by Hueda, and later by Dahomey. Part of this strategy involved confinement of European settlements, free trade, and the prohibition of conflicts between European nations (p. 123). This allowed Dahomey to play off the Europeans against each other and to limit their ability to interfere in local affairs.¹ In addition to these measures, the Dahomian monarchy appointed powerful state officials and established a military garrison in Ouidah.

1. For a similar argument see K. Kelly, "The Archaeology of African–European Interaction:

Dahomey owed much of its success in slave-trade operations to its martial values as well as its sophisticated administration.² Law convincingly demonstrates that Ouidah's merchant community was able, despite state control, to accumulate a tremendous amount of wealth out of the slave and palm-oil trades. Ouidah grew rapidly as an urban settlement, succeeding Savi, the former capital of the Hueda kingdom, after 1727. The town entered a period of decline following the imposition of French colonial rule, which diverted the trade eastward toward Cotonou and Porto-Novo. The urban and economic history of Ouidah was profoundly marked by the changing patterns in Atlantic commerce.

Ouidah's commercial success made it a strategic site coveted by Dahomey, whose power base was located 100 kilometres inland but which was in dire need of coastal outlets to exchange its slaves for European luxuries. Law's book is a critical examination of the complex and uneasy relations between the Dahomian monarchy, a growing group of private merchants in Ouidah, and European representatives. Although it included local traders, Ouidah merchant's community was reinforced in the nineteenth century by the arrival of Brazilian and Afro-Brazilian immigrants, including former slaves who returned to play a prominent role in the operation of the Atlantic system as businessmen, but also as vectors of social and cultural novelties.

The book is organized in eight chronological chapters, which retrace the historical trajectory and patterns of trade in Ouidah from the mid-seventeenth century to the French conquest in 1892. Chapter 1 explores the history of pre-European settlement, which is related only in contradictory oral accounts. Ouidah is located four kilometres inland at some distance from a complex of lagoons, and it was neither a "lagoon-side" nor an "Atlantic port". Initially, Ouidah developed as a farming, fishing, and salt production settlement, whose growth paralleled the expansion of European commerce in the Bight of Benin. European cultural influences were limited as their settlements were segregated from the African quarters; they were also under the gaze of Dahomey's military garrison and the powerful state official in charge of relations with the Europeans, the *Yovogan*.

In the next three chapters, on the Dahomian conquest, Dahomian Ouidah, and the operation of the Atlantic slave trade, Law examines the imposition of Dahomian rule over Ouidah. The unsuccessful resistance of Hueda and Popo was followed by the consolidation of Dahomian administration, whose martial ethos was counterbalanced by the community of private merchants. From a mere storage and transit site for slaves and goods under Hueda, Ouidah grew to become an important commercial and urban centre with a heterogeneous population, expanding its political influence over its neighbours. Law explores the changing patterns of trade, including the adoption of the ounce, notes of credit, the arrival of canoe-men from the Gold Coast, and the expansion of business transactions in private residences. He also provides useful insights on the treatment of

Investigating the Social Roles of Trade, Traders, and the Use of Space in the Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Hueda Kingdom, Republic of Benin", *World Archaeology*, 28 (1997), pp. 351–369.

2. For a recent analysis of Dahomey's administrative and political organization see J.M. Monroe, "The Dynamics of State Formation: The Archaeology and Ethnohistory of Pre-Colonial Dahomey" (Ph.D., Department of Anthropology, University of California, Los Angeles, CA, 2003).

slaves, the local memories of the slave trade, and how the small but wealthy class of merchants made a fortune from it.

Chapters 5 and 6 deal with the local impact of major global changes in the Atlantic economy, including the banning of the slave trade, and the development of the palm-oil trade. This period was marked by the abandonment of European forts, the banning of the slave trade, and the arrival of unofficial agents, including the Brazilian Francisco Felix de Souza, who became a prominent figure in Ouidah's history. A transatlantic community, including Brazilians, Afro-Brazilians, and returned African ex-slaves, developed in Ouidah at this time (p. 187). This community was distinct due to its Christian religion as well as dress styles, craft skills, architecture, and food habits. By the mid-nineteenth century the palm trade was expanding, supplementing the slave trade but also posing new challenges to the Ouidah merchant community as conflicts with the Dahomian monarchy became endemic. This period was marked by the destruction of de Souza power, the emergence of a new generation of traders, the depreciation in the value of cowry shells, increased use of cash in business transactions, the extension of cultivation lands around Ouidah, greater demand for slave labour in the local economy, and accentuated European interventions in Dahomian affairs. The last two chapters, "Dissension and Decline", and "From Dahomian to French Rule", explore the decline of Ouidah both as a trading centre and as a town in the second half of the nineteenth century.

This book is an excellent case study on the formation, growth, and decline of Ouidah's Atlantic merchant community, and of the town itself. However, its title is misleading, as it announces a social history of Ouidah's populations while actually dealing only with the history of its merchant community. This community had wealth, and wealth conveys power. Traditionally marginalized groups, including slaves, are omitted. Although Law draws on oral traditions, European written sources constitute his primary evidence. Yet, these not only dictate perspectives, they also favour European agency, too often charged with Eurocentrism and racism, which inheres in debates on the Atlantic impact, the slave trade, and memories of it in the present – certain aspects of which Law seems ill at ease with (pp. 12–13).

The scope of this work is also limited by the lack of consideration of African cultural change as a result of interaction with Europeans, as well as by the dearth of analysis of the internal social dynamics between the different identities and social forces within Ouidah itself. This makes us believe that the European cultural impact on Dahomey's Hueda and Fon cultures was, unlike Elmina, rather limited.³

Overall, this is a very informative book. It provides a detailed analysis of the formation and growth of Ouidah's trader community and its relations with Dahomey in the era of Atlantic commerce. It also represents a major blow to Karl Polanyi's thesis and an important nuance for perspectives that too often overgeneralize the nature, impact, and consequences of Atlantic commerce in Western Africa.

Ibrahima Thiaw

3. For a comparison of the cultural impact of European contact on Elmina and Hueda see K. Kelly, "Indigenous Responses to Colonial Encounters on the West African Coast: Hueda and Dahomey from the Seventeenth through Nineteenth Century", in C.L. Lyons and J.K. Papadopoulos (eds), *The Archaeology of Colonialism* (Los Angeles, CA, 2002), pp. 96–120.

LYONS, TANYA. *Guns and Guerilla Girls. Women in the Zimbabwean Liberation Struggle*. Africa World Press, Inc. Trenton NJ [etc.] 2004. xxiii, 338 pp. Ill. \$29.95; DOI: 10.1017/S0020859006072464

According to the publisher's description, *Guns and Guerilla Girls* is the first "comprehensive analysis of the role of specifically women as guerilla fighters" in the Zimbabwean liberation war of the mid-1960s through 1980. This is not correct. In 2000, a Zimbabwean historian, Josephine Nhongo-Simbanegavi, published a ground-breaking survey of the disparities between the documentary record and the nationalist rhetoric on the treatment of women guerillas.¹ Nhongo-Simbanegavi's book only appears as an entry in the bibliography of *Guerilla Girls*; one wishes that the two studies could have dovetailed to a greater extent. Presumably the fact that they do not is simply due to the difficulties and delays of publishing.

Guns and Guerilla Girls was written by an Australian Africanist, and is based on a year of fieldwork conducted in Zimbabwe in 1996–1997. The obvious issues of the author's position as a white woman and as a foreigner are exhaustively dealt with in the first chapter. Lyons's stance in dealing with these difficult issues is to insist that if her book projects the voices of the women fighters themselves in an era of social silence about their plight, then the privileging of her own authorial voice becomes a moot point. This strikes me as incongruous for two reasons. First, Zimbabwean historiography has been relatively free of tensions between expatriate and indigenous historians – generally there has been friendly and supportive collaboration in many areas of feminist and nationalist history production. Secondly, despite the claims about the exceptionalism of this book, in the end its primary research material is treated quite straightforwardly. The terrain of legitimacy and perspective of oral history projects in women's history has been quite well-mapped, for Zimbabwe and elsewhere, so Lyons's earnest analysis of this matter in her own work seems overdone.

One of the strengths of this book is that it emanates from outside the specialist community ranged along the USA–Oxford University–University of Zimbabwe historiographical axis. As such it brings a new voice to a generally competent survey of the intersections of women's history and military violence in Zimbabwe. As such a survey, however, with two exceptions, the book has little to offer to the specialist.

A reader seeking an in-depth monograph on gender and the Zimbabwean struggle will not find it here. This is exemplified by the way that *Guerilla Girls* treats the word gender as if it were synonymous with women. One can certainly legitimately write a history of women and armed struggle but it is important not to regard this as a fully gendered history. For example, on p. 93, Lyons writes, "It was during the armed struggle that the traditional gender roles between men and women became increasingly blurred. When whole communities are involved in a war, when they are submerged in the depths of turmoil and crisis, often without choice, there is seldom time for gendered distinctions to be made." An assertion like this contradicts much of the contemporary understanding of gender and violence: it is surely at such times that gendered distinctions are not only made, but forged; and in fact can become the raw fuel, if not the *raison d'être* of war itself.

Guerilla Girls is divided into four parts. The first, "Feminism, Nationalism and the

1. Josephine Nhongo-Simbanegavi, *For Better or Worse? Women and ZANLA in Zimbabwe's Liberation Struggle* (East Lansing, MI [etc.], 2000).

Struggle for Independence”, reviews the literature pertaining to Lyons’s research methodology and the various rhetorical stances that have been fashioned in different political eras either to explain or explain away women’s anti-colonial militance. The second section, “A Woman’s Place is in the Struggle”, rehearses the by now familiar tales of the involvement of African women in anti-colonial violence from the 1890s to the 1980s. A welcome aspect of this section discusses the work of white women in the Rhodesian war effort. Their roles are compared and contrasted with those of black Zimbabwean women. This section, then, does begin to sketch the preliminary outlines of a racially gendered portrait of the war. This is an important contribution to the as-yet fledgling historiography of race, gender, and violence in southern Africa.

Halfway through the book, the third section takes up the subject of the book’s title: the tale of “guerilla girls” in the 1967–1980 war. Like Nhongo-Simbanegavi, Lyons points out that the 1970s rhetoric of Zimbabwe’s “new fighting women” was produced for the front-line states and other international patrons but was only rarely matched by any reality of equality between fighting men and women in the guerilla armies. In fact, women inside the country and behind the lines continued to bear the paired burdens of unacknowledged labour and the dangers of being stereotyped as either guerilla supporters or Rhodesian collaborators.

The fourth section offers an interpretation of the way the histories of fighting and supporting women in the liberation struggle have been represented in the Zimbabwean media and popular culture. The chapter gives a detailed account of the production and local reception of the feature film, *Flame*, in 1996. Lyons’s account, based on her first-hand observations of the film’s trajectory during her fieldwork year, will interest historians of African film and of popular culture. The defining moment of *Flame* is the depiction of the rape of a Zimbabwean woman guerilla by a male army colleague. Breaking the social silence on this issue has ensured the film’s notoriety and staying power, as it was the first time that the projection of rhetorical certainty of the probity of the guerilla men was publicly questioned. Lyons provides interesting details on how local controversies around the threatened censorship of the film developed, and of audience reactions to it when shown in Zimbabwe. This section will interest specialists in Southern African film and media studies and of the complexities of public/popular representations of women’s rights and violence.

Telling the story of *Flame* also enables Lyons to present other contemporary articulations on the mistreatment of women guerillas at the hands of their male colleagues. This sets the scene for the threatened confrontation in 1997 between senior women in the former army of the ruling party and their struggle comrades over allegations of rape, followed by threats of naming and shaming, and of demands for compensation by the women.

The logical market niche for this book is first- or second-year university courses where students are being introduced to some of the empirical studies and debates of recent Zimbabwean historiography. On the whole, *Guerilla Girls* is a reasonable choice for pairing with others in undergraduate-level study of the Zimbabwean liberation struggle.

Teresa Barnes

FRENCH, JOHN D. *Drowning in Laws. Labor Law and Brazilian Political Culture*. The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill [etc.] 2004. xviii, 233 pp. Ill. £40.50. (Paper: £16.95.); DOI: 10.1017/S0020859006082460

Brazilian labor laws certainly pose a number of perplexing questions. How, for example, has a corporatist system of evident fascist inspiration, implanted between 1931 and 1943, persisted into the twenty-first century? After all, most such arrangements elsewhere did not long survive the fall of the dictatorships that implanted them, but the Brazilian version has passed through two “democratic transitions” and a wide variety of political regimes with its essential features still intact. John French’s question is similar: “What is it about the Brazilian labor law system that simultaneously produce [sic] deep bitterness and cynicism on the part of working-class labor activists as well as an unprecedented hopefulness and utopian militancy?”

This is the first book-length treatment of the history of Brazilian labor law in English and presents a number of important contributions. French’s central argument, which accompanies some recent Brazilian scholarship, is that labor law became an important field for struggle as workers sought to oblige the state to enforce its own laws in the face of political hostility and employer intransigence.¹ Or, as French nicely puts it: “In the end, the labor laws became ‘real’ in Brazilian workplaces only to the extent that workers struggled to make the law as imaginary ideal into a practical future reality.”

The origins of these measures remain controversial. French thinks that they derive from a variety of sources, and it must be admitted that those of us who see their inspiration as fascist, with few if any qualifications, have yet to locate a smoking gun that would convince skeptics. Nevertheless, all the key elements of the Brazilian trade-union measures appeared initially in the Italian law of 1926, “On the Juridical Disciplining of Collective Labor Relations”.

More interestingly, as Zeev Sternhell and others have shown, important elements of fascist doctrine originated with the political Left. Many of those who drafted the original legislation in Brazil had been active socialists before joining the Vargas government, and French regards this as an argument against any purely fascist inspiration for the Brazilian laws. On the other hand, many interwar socialists defended such corporatist solutions as a way of using state power to control the chaos of the capitalist market and the waste caused by the class struggle.

In fact, we know relatively little about the internal disputes behind the Vargas regime’s labor policies.² Certainly the government encountered difficulties in imposing its system of state-controlled unions, and French’s affirmation that factory workers supported the system probably needs qualification.³ There were some reverses, delays, and changes of direction, but by 1943 the regime codified its various measures in the monumental *Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho* (CLT), whose essential features remain in force to the present.

1. For some recent examples from different periods and regions, see Antonio Luigi Negro, *Linhas de montagem: o industrialismo nacional-desenvolvimentista e a sindicalização dos trabalhadores* (São Paulo, 2004), and Alexandre Fortes, *Nós do quarto distrito: a classe trabalhadora porto-alegrense e a era Vargas* (Rio de Janeiro, 2004).

2. There are important suggestions in Vanda Maria Ribeiro Costa, *A armadilha do leviatã: a construção do corporativismo no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 1999).

3. Ângela Araújo, *A construção do consentimento: corporativismo e trabalhadores nos anos trinta* (São Paulo, 1998) provides the best account of the process in São Paulo. On the resistance of the textile workers’ union, see pp. 207–208, 260–261.

Drowning in Laws focuses primarily on the labor court system, designed to reduce both collective and individual disputes to judicial decision-making procedures. French, citing the judgments of a number of militants, labor leaders, and other observers, reaches very critical conclusions regarding the operation of the labor courts. The Vargas project, however, involved a wide variety of social welfare programs as well. The official unions administered some of these services, although public health measures as well as retirement and survivor pensions operated through other parts of the state apparatus. While these programs undoubtedly suffered from numerous defects, they brought major concrete and symbolic benefits for the first time to a substantial part of the Brazilian population.

French treats briefly and skeptically some of these social programs. He is particularly critical of the operations of the Pension and Retirement Institute for Industrial Employees (IAPI). However, this Institute may not have been as badly administered as French and his sources claim, and its public housing plan, while including some sinister aspirations for control over workers, provided real improvements for those included in the program.⁴ In any case, it is hard to understand the wide appeal and political longevity of the Vargas tradition without detailed attention to the social welfare measures of the regime.

Even the labor court system may have functioned somewhat more effectively than its numerous critics (French included) are inclined to recognize. A study of the city of Juiz de Fora shows that workers secured judgments against abuses by major textile firms even during World War II, when the government had suspended much of the CLT in order to increase production.⁵ Research carried out in Rio de Janeiro in the mid-1990s discovered that the public had more confidence in the labor courts (6.47 on a scale of 1 to 10) than in the regular judiciary system (5.0). Moreover, among those who had direct experience of the labor courts, the score rose slightly (6.71), while confidence fell in the case of those who had used the regular courts (4.46). Nor did those interviewed regard the system as wholly biased. Of the 1,551 respondents, 39.7 per cent thought the labor courts treated employees more rigorously, but 27.6 per cent replied that employers were treated more rigorously and 26.5 per cent considered that the two were dealt with equally. Perhaps not surprisingly, 55.6 per cent of the employers surveyed thought that the labor courts treated employers more rigorously than employees. While almost half the respondents criticized the labor justice system as slow, 28.8 per cent cited as positive the fact that “common people have great chances of winning their cases”. (The comparable statistic for the regular courts was 15.5 per cent.)⁶ While hardly an unqualified endorsement, such results suggest that, despite all its notorious shortcomings, the labor court system has enjoyed some real legitimacy in the eyes of those directly affected by it.

One of the many virtues of *Drowning in Laws* is that it documents the close relationship between the labor laws and police repression. The problem is to understand why the

4. Gilberto Hochman, “Os cardeais da previdência social: gênese e consolidação de uma elite burocrática”, *Dados*, 35 (1992), pp. 371–400, and Wilma Mangabeira, “Memories of ‘Little Moscow’, 1943–64: Study of a Public Housing Experiment for Industrial Workers in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil”, *Social History*, 17 (1992), pp. 271–287.

5. Jairo Queiroz Pacheco, “Guerra na fábrica: cotidiano operário fabril durante a segunda guerra, o caso de Juiz de Fora” (M.A. Universidade de São Paulo, 1996). But see also Paulo André Anselmo Setti, *Merecimento e eficiência: a performance de advogados e juizes na Justiça do Trabalho em Campinas* (Campinas, 1997).

6. José Murilo de Carvalho et al., *Lei, justiça e cidadania: direitos, vitimização e cultura política na região metropolitana do Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro, 1997), pp. 46–53.

Brazilian state has directed such intense violence against what has been, for most of its history, a relatively fragile labor movement.⁷ French attributes much of the repression to the persistence of attitudes and practices developed during slavery, abolished only in 1888. While political culture probably has much to do with extensive repression, it is far from clear that the level of violence in Brazil exceeded that of countries in Latin America and elsewhere that had little or no experience with slavery.

Since capitalist industrialization has proceeded historically under a variety of legal arrangements, the question arises as to what difference the specific features of Brazilian labor law have made for the country's political and economic development. *Drowning in Laws* provides some elements for an answer. Clearly, by helping to ensure a relatively tractable trade-union movement, the measures provided an inestimable service for employers, though one with complex ramifications. In political terms, social and labor rights have depended less than in many countries on open struggles or on legislative victories led by political parties. Since the Vargas period, much of the Brazilian population has come to regard such rights as central to their notion of citizenship and as an obligation of the State. As Angela Castro Gomes notes, this has not necessarily contributed to the advancement of democracy in Brazil.⁸

Industrialists probably benefited from the way the CLT reduced competition among firms by standardizing such matters as working hours, child labor, vacations, and factory conditions. Whether or not the law aided industrialists by explicitly formulating terms for labor relations or by providing significant predictability is difficult to say. In any case, the CLT seems clearly Fordist in its intentions and may have helped the formation of a market for consumer goods. Perhaps surprisingly, the standard of living of the typical working-class household in São Paulo appears to have improved between the mid-1930s and the mid-1970s.⁹

In addition, while the law has hardly fulfilled the aspirations of its founders for class harmony, it may have reduced the impact of strike action. Strikes remained illegal for long periods, and even when not formally banned, their incidence was relatively low, since the labor courts handled most disputes, although there have been some periods of considerable strike activity (1945–1946 and 1978–1980 in particular).

The labor laws have few open defenders these days. Even so, recent governments, while highly critical, have been unable or unwilling to modify the laws significantly. Many trade unionists and employers, despite their criticisms, remain ambivalent about the abolition of the labor laws since the political and economic consequences seem difficult to predict. The laws provide important guarantees, financial and otherwise, for the unions, at the same time that they restrict their autonomy. Many employers are similarly unenthusiastic about the risks and uncertainties of direct collective negotiations. It seems quite possible that Brazilian workers will continue drowning in laws for some time to come.

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7. For evidence of the close surveillance and ready repression in one key state during the early Vargas period, see Diorge Konrad, "O fantasma do medo: o Rio Grande do Sul, a repressão política e os movimentos socio-políticos, 1930–1937" (Ph.D., Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 2004).

8. Ângela de Castro Gomes, *Cidadania e direitos do trabalho* (Rio de Janeiro, 2002), p. 46.

9. John Wells, "Industrial Accumulation and Living Standards in the Long Run: The São Paulo Industrial Working Class, 1930–75 (Part II)", *Journal of Development Studies*, 19 (1983), pp. 145–169.