

*Ports of Globalisation, Places of Creolisation: Nordic Possessions in the Atlantic World during the Era of the Slave Trade*, ed. Holger Weiss. (Leiden: Brill, 2015). 315 p. ISBN 9789004302785.

Research on the colonial history of the Scandinavian states is experiencing a resurgence. The anthology *Ports of Globalisation, Places of Creolisation* brings together key figures in this push and presents some of the issues that have been thematized. The main focus is on Danish-Norwegian possession on the Gold Coast and in the Caribbean. However, a single essay also touches on Swedish St. Barthélemy in the Caribbean. Thematically, the focus is on 'local articulations of proto-globalisation and creolisation' (p. 1). Underlining the collection is a view of colonial ports as entangled spaces in which different ethnic and religious communities interacted and produced hybrid spaces and identities.

The book's introduction argues against the 'straitjacket of national narratives' (p. 1) – though this ambition seems only halfway realized (symptomatically, only two contributions do not have 'Danish' or 'Swedish' in their title). The book also argues against a Eurocentric view of the slave trade. In the latter ambition, it sometimes succeeds. Its focus on creolization as a process of (cultural) exchanges and hybridization is its tool to avoid Eurocentric impositions. Largely, this prism allows the essays to present the history of colonization as a polycentric history of multiple intersecting cultures, both European, African and creole. In this way, the book's local studies contribute (with some caveats) to the on-going process of creating a more inclusive and nuanced Atlantic history. It is in this respect that this book will be of interest to scholars working on other empires as well.

The strongest essays in the collection are those that deal most squarely with human relations on the ground and bring specific people and their histories into view, thereby managing to show the complexities of what life in an Atlantic empire meant to the people who endured it. An absolute highlight in this regard is Louise Sebro's essay on the Danish West Indies around 1750, which revolves around a few individuals and manages to use their stories to show what creolization, but also freedom, actually means in the context of their lives. By focusing

on concrete life experiences, Sebro's essay brilliantly demonstrates the fissures of a racial hierarchy which in practice was 'not fully operational.' (p. 218) Another standout, the contribution by Gunvor Simonsen, looks at the magical practices of Obeah and manages to use it to describe the Danish colonies as nuanced cultural, legal and religious spaces. Both add valuable insight into the worlds, strategies and identities of African Caribbean people in the Danish West Indies and are must reads for scholars and students on the subject. While somewhat less focused and perhaps less fully-developed than the above-mentioned essays, Fredrik Thomasson's examination of law and its complicated workings in St. Barthélemy around 1800 makes key advances in the scholarship on the Swedish Caribbean which has been severely neglected by scholars.

Other contributions are less successful. For a collection with an introduction that argues against Eurocentrism and for a relational outlook on local articulations and hybrids, an awful lot of pages are spent on what are essentially European discourses on Africa and Africans. In this way, many of the essays are more or less void of actors besides Danish authorities. Quite symptomatically, the authors, except for the above-mentioned standouts, collectively fail to mention any enslaved persons by their names. Further, the issue of class is strangely absent from the collection's purview. Surely, an important driver of proto-globalization was capitalism, but this topic is not discussed in the volume. In general, the book focuses on the cultural aspects of globalization and neglects the social and economic dimensions. The emerging global labour history is forcefully ignored. I am similarly puzzled by the lack of references to maritime history; after all, the book has 'ports' in the title, but sailors play no meaningful part. Other European lower-class social groups such as soldiers and indentured servants are similarly absent, producing an unnecessarily limited notion of the social worlds of such proto-globalization.

Adding to this reader's frustration, some contributions appear unfocused in what they want to show, and several are unnecessarily lengthy. In general, the book could have benefitted from tighter editing as it at times feels repetitious. That said, by bringing together leading scholars working on the cultural aspects of Scandinavian, particularly Danish-Norwegian, colonialism, the volume will surely become a key point of reference in future research into Scandinavian involvement on the Gold Coast and in the Caribbean.

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