

canevas, voire d'un texte divin plus ou moins arrêté » (p. 210) dont ils révèlent l'intrigue.

Ouvrage touffu, d'une grande érudition, qui a le mérite de faire une analyse globale du genre, basée sur une dizaine d'ouvrages et non sur un texte spécifique. Malheureusement, le style est parfois déconcertant, sacrifiant la clarté au profit de l'éloquence. Ce livre analyse toutefois avec finesse les contextes intellectuel et politique de production des oeuvres ce qui permet à l'auteur d'insister sur leur caractère polémique, qualité déniée par plusieurs. Cet ouvrage s'adresse surtout aux chercheurs qui connaissent le genre des mémoires. Ils y trouveront de nombreux outils critiques.

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Juanita De Barros — *Order and Place in a Colonial City: Patterns of Struggle and Resistance in Georgetown, British Guiana, 1889–1924*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002. Pp. xii, 251.

Juanita De Barros's urban study contributes to several historiographies: that of Guyana, that of the British Caribbean in the century between the abolition of slavery and the rise of mass nationalist movements (1830s–1930s), and that of cities across the colonized worlds of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. De Barros draws widely on reports emanating from the Colonial Office, British Guianese administration, and Georgetown's municipal government, as well as on censuses, laws, newspapers, and secondary literature of the period. In so doing, she has written a pioneering full-length study of one Caribbean city that is both comparatively and theoretically informed.

The succinct introduction situates De Barros's study in the emerging body of cultural histories of colonial societies influenced by a Gramscian conception of hegemonic struggle and negotiation. It highlights the popular classes' deployment of cultural practices in public urban struggles, particularly the riots that bracket her period. It also emphasizes the Victorian racialized fear of urban filth, particularly in colonial cities, as a central force in shaping the elite and local middle-class "sanitarian" approach to Georgetown. Chapter 2 provides the economic and demographic context needed for non-specialists, including a very good section on the police and public health staff operating at the municipal level. It is somewhat less clear on the structure and evolution of colonial executive and legislative power. Chapter 3 convincingly argues that the legislature increased government responsibility for urban sanitation in the nineteenth century, but that local officials and property owners colluded to ignore the laws, especially in popular-class wards. The press then joined in the general condemnation of the poor for living with dirt and disease, specifically denouncing Indo-Guianese scavengers for poor work. Chapter 6 furthers the analysis of elite sanitationism by examining attempts to regulate the milk-vending sector, dominated by the Indo-Guianese. While the authorities were undoubtedly "informed

by a sanitarian and racist discourse” (p. 122), here De Barros gives rather short shrift to the ameliorative side of regulation, given that the adulteration of milk was evidently rife. One is struck less by government’s heavy-handedness than by its inability to control the urban economy.

Chapters 4, 5, and 7 — in dealing with popular life on the streets and in the public markets and with the riots of 1889, 1905, and 1924 — richly flesh out the picture of a non-elite urban population that strove to live according to its own needs, values, and evolving traditions. Chapters 4 and 5 make the clearest case for understanding Afro-Guianese women as central actors in this struggle. The labouring people of Georgetown used their creole language in festive and contentious ways, celebrated daily and annual events with noise and colour, and frequently responded to chronic unemployment and low pay by organizing “centipede” gangs that challenged the elite’s control of public space. De Barros presents Georgetown’s public markets as key sites in the wider struggles between working people and municipal authorities, as well as among ethnically defined groups of both vendors and consumers. She convincingly argues that Guianese riots — and West Indian riots as a whole — should be understood as “popular cultural forms” extending to a range of more quotidian but carnivalesque practices. Yet the complex interactions between routine subaltern oppositional culture and more dramatic political actions need further scrutiny. In particular, we cannot assume that more ethnically inclusive actions like the 1924 riot came out of a shared popular culture, though they may have fostered one.

Using “ethnicity” to avoid the elite, colonialist connotations of “race” (pp. 14–15), De Barros draws on Richard Burton’s and Nigel Bolland’s recent interpretations of creolization as comprehending tension and conflict to document evidence of popular inter-ethnic acculturation. One of her central arguments is that the history of “non-elite urban social and cultural life” (p. 6) in Georgetown challenges M. G. Smith’s cultural pluralist explanation of Guyanese history, in which ethnic groups remain separate if not hostile. Yet the evidence for urban “cultural miscegenation” (p. 5) or “cultural fertility” (p. 12) is frustratingly slim. Ward census data show no strict ethnic residential segregation, yet “Georgetown’s diverse ethnic groups ... tended to cluster in particular wards” (p. 33). East Indians seem to have been more concentrated in particular wards than most other ethnic groups and were of course vastly under-represented in the urban population as a whole. De Barros provides evidence of urban East Indians’ occupational specialization — as scavengers and milk vendors, for example — that tends to undermine her cultural miscegenation thesis. On the issue of whether the “centipede” gangs of unemployed or casually employed urban youth were ethnically mixed, she refers carefully to “intriguing hints” that they might have been (p. 93). Likewise, she suggests that both Afro- and Indo-Guianese “could have” drawn on each other’s traditions of stickfighting (p. 151). Some of her more certain evidence of cultural miscegenation comes from rural areas. She finds a “foo-foo” band — an Afro-Guianese term — accompanying a mostly Indo-Guianese plantation crowd in a protest. Tadjah, the Guianese version of a Shi’ia Muslim festival, attracted both Muslim and Hindu Indians and also Afro-Guianese, but does not seem to have been uniquely or even predominantly urban in character (p. 92). Finally, the chapters on public markets, milk vending, and riots

reveal significant ethnic divides, tensions, and conflicts among non-elites in Georgetown. Creolization was not only contention, but also the negotiated creation of a shared culture.

Nonetheless, De Barros's cultural miscegenation thesis is important and bears further investigation. For example, in the period covered, two generations of children grew up in Georgetown and the number of East Indians increased 56 per cent, to 11.7 per cent of the total urban population (p. 34). Did the multi-ethnic population of children share the experiences of colonial education and urban pastimes to any degree? Did rates of ethnic inter-marriage or births of mixed-race children increase between the 1890s and the 1920s? If such processes could be documented, De Barros's picture of a shared non-elite social world could be more vivid and persuasive.

Scholars of Guyana will find this book indispensable. As a historian of twentieth-century Belize, where much political action focused on Belize City, I found De Barros's book extremely thought-provoking. *Order and Place in a Colonial City* will also broaden the new comparative historiography of the British Empire, in which the Caribbean is too frequently marginalized.

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Roger V. Des Forges — *Cultural Centrality and Political Change in Chinese History: Northeast Henan in the Fall of the Ming*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. Pp. xxi, 422.

Roger Des Forges has told us everything we could ever want to know about northeast Henan during the final years of the Ming dynasty. In this feat of research Des Forges has mined an array of gazetteers, genealogies, memoirs, and biographies and cultivated a rich historical landscape peopled by noble scholars, profligate elites, virtuous women, vile bandits, and heroic rebels. One might ask whether these historical figures actually did justice to their romanticized biographies, and so question the accuracy of this account, but this would be missing the point. Des Forges argues that, beyond simply embroidering historical memory, narrative ultimately causes life to imitate art, and the present to imitate the past.

Des Forges builds his thesis around the idea of centrality in Chinese history and fittingly concentrates his study on northeast Henan — a region long associated with the heartland of Chinese civilization. Contrary to academic trends that have called for a decentering of master narratives and universal theories, Des Forges argues that China cannot be understood without reference to the many levels of centrality that define and sustain the Chinese state and civilization. In China, Henan has historically been regarded as the "Central Province", and Des Forges sets out to illustrate the truth of that perception by demonstrating factors such as the region's disproportionate number of resident Ming princes and accomplished literati. The sense of historical centrality is also supported through reference to the writings of these elites, who consistently represented their experiences in terms of Chinese tradition and sought