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Review of *Slavery and Salvation in Colonial Cartagena De Indias*, by Margaret M. Olsen

Ignacio Gallup-Diaz

Bryn Mawr College, igallupd@brynmawr.edu

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Although Newcomer asserts that he has adopted a cultural approach to Mexican state formation, the book lacks a clearly articulated thesis and a coherent analytical argument. Many of the most basic concepts, such as the “current state” in Mexico and the “official story” told by León elites, remain quite obscure throughout. In the introductory chapter, a somewhat confusing discussion of the historiography on 1940s Mexico is followed by a quite distorted characterization of recent scholarship on state formation in post-revolutionary Mexico, very little if any of which, contrary to Newcomer’s assertions, claims that popular sector groups simply accepted the revolutionary state’s authority as legitimate or implies that Mexico was a democracy throughout the second half of the twentieth-century (p. 16). Furthermore, it has been quite a long while since anyone has seriously suggested that motives for political behavior could be read off of “objective social categories such as class” (p. 15).

Newcomer’s empirical work is the saving grace of the book. He has a great deal to say about daily life in 1940s León, based on his research in local, state, and national archives. Of particular interest is his depiction of the UNS and its leaders, popular base, unions, women’s organizations, and public celebrations. In other respects, Newcomer travels some fairly well-trodden ground. A great deal of recent and not-so-recent scholarship has focused on revolutionary efforts to modernize and secularize urban areas by renaming streets and erecting monuments, as well as on Catholic efforts to underscore the centrality of religion to Mexico’s national identity. The extent to which secular and Catholic elites, since the early independence era, shared similar views of the masses and the need to thoroughly reform them prior to their inclusion in the political system has also been well documented, as has the resistance of popular sector groups to elite notions of how they ought to live, worship, and otherwise behave themselves.

While there is much to be learned about the Sinarquistas of 1940s León from this book, it does not, given its analytical weakness, make a significant contribution to any emerging cultural approach to state formation.

JENNIE PURNELL
Boston College

MARGARET M. OLSEN. *Slavery and Salvation in Colonial Cartagena de Indias*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida. 2004. Pp. xii, 189. \$59.95.

Margaret M. Olsen’s book provides a study of a single early modern text, the Jesuit Alonso de Sandoval’s *De instauranda Aethiopia salute*, a treatise on religious conversion published in Seville in 1627. In the introduction, Olsen argues for the importance of Sandoval’s book, stating that it “stands alone as the earliest Spanish American document that seeks to make historical, philosophical, and cultural sense of the African/European encounter in a New World context.” Sandoval’s interesting work clearly merits the scholarly

attention that Olsen provides in this thought-provoking literary analysis.

Olsen argues that the Jesuit’s book “presents readers . . . with a missionary figure who was as vigorous an advocate of African humanity and dignity in the seventeenth century as the well-known Dominican Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484–1566) was for Amerindian moral integrity” (p. 2). The reference to Las Casas immediately situates Sandoval’s text within the spectrum of disputatious opinion regarding the nature of European engagement with the peoples of the world who were categorized as targets of religious conversion. Las Casas advocated what might be termed a more humane attitude toward the indigenous people of the Americas, and Sandoval shares that emphasis in the guide he provided for missionaries engaged in the conversion and pastoral care of enslaved Africans. While recognizing the variety of contemporary European intellectual opinion on this question, Olsen also notes the limits of Las Casas’s approach: the missionary’s interest was in the proper way to transform the indigenous Americans from pagans into hispanicized Christians.

The Jesuit order was a major player in the slave trade, and “[b]y the time of their expulsion in 1767 . . . were the largest . . . slaveholders in the Americas” (p. 14). Jesuit haciendas were also some of the most successful, and in Sandoval’s time the order’s college of Cartagena managed several, including one called La Ceiba, where 111 slaves were working at the time of the expulsion. When he wrote the book, Cartagena was the main port of entry for African slaves into the Americas. It is estimated that, in the last half of the sixteenth century, 15,445 slaves passed through Cartagena, and the resident population was close to one thousand. Cartagena contained two thousand inhabitants of European descent.

Sandoval’s *De instauranda* provides readers with a historical and geographic compendium of the known world and Africa, a description of the suffering of the slaves with an admonishment of cruel owners, a practical guide for Jesuit missionaries, and a call for Jesuit service among Africans in the Americas. Two works by the Jesuit José de Acosta were major influences on Sandoval: *De procurandam Indorum salute* (1588) and the *Historia Natural y moral de las Indias* (1590). In these texts, Acosta delineated the Americas as a region of heterogeneity and flux, with a missionary’s success dependent upon his ability to be flexible, pragmatic, and adaptable in his interactions with targeted converts. Sandoval followed Acosta’s example in his own manual for missionary activity.

Olsen makes three major claims for Sandoval’s work. First, she argues that the “intellectual autonomy of the Jesuit order provides . . . an alternative to the monolithic, colonial project of Spain in the New World.” Second, “the missionary enterprise in the Americas provides a textual aperture for those religious workers willing to approach the Other in a radically new way that is more intimate and culturally

accommodating.” Third, Olsen argues that “the very specific objective of African valorization that Sandoval devises . . . generates the possibility for African perspectives to arise therein” (p. 26). The first two propositions are not controversial, and Olsen makes an effective case for them. The third is the boldest claim, and the nature of Sandoval’s text makes it difficult to establish.

Sandoval arrived in Cartagena from Lima in 1605, one year after the Jesuit college had been established. His text was aimed at other Jesuits, and through its dissemination Sandoval hoped to stimulate conversion efforts among Cartagena’s least valued human inhabitants and sojourners. One powerful way of doing this was by linking missionary activity among the slaves with the overseas conversions carried out by the order’s founding generation. In an interesting feat of categorization, *De instauranda* places natives of India and Pacific islands under the rubric of “Aethiopians,” a move that places the peoples missionized by Francis Xavier in the same category as the enslaved Africans of Cartagena de Indias.

Olsen nearly matches Sandoval’s innovativeness in categorization when she describes the Africans who appear in works such as Sandoval’s as “textual maroons.” Like the escaped slaves who were called *cimarrones* and maroons by colonial officials, Olsen argues that Africans appear, vanish, and reappear under several guises in colonial texts. They could be depicted as slaves, militia soldiers, or as rebels. Manumission might change their status, or they might force change on their own, becoming maroons. Through this changeability, Olsen argues, “the African subaltern avoids a complete colonial inscription” (p. 128).

Colonial slaves could indeed avoid interpretive fixity because of their limited ability to change their status. However, a different emphasis may be placed upon the point that Olsen makes. Researchers of early modern colonies can only describe the experiences of subject peoples, recognizing them as slaves, rebels, maroons, or loyal subjects of color, insofar as those individuals and groups were embedded within, subjected to, or in rebellion against colonial administrative systems. Rather than exploring subject peoples’ existence outside of the colonial system, ethnohistorical research in colonial archives allows for the presentation of a more complete picture of the imperial reality by including Africans and Indians as central, integral actors on the colonial stage.

The Africans who appear in Sandoval’s book are mediated through the Jesuit’s perceptions and are subject to considerable distortion due to the missionary’s transformative aims. When the Jesuit elaborates on how the Africans construe their baptisms, for example, his descriptions are crafted to provide an image of them as malleable, child-like, and unable to resist a European’s skilled presentation of his (superior) faith. Even after taking into account the applicable notion of Bakhtinian polyphony, it must be admitted that the agency that the Africans exercise in

Sandoval’s text is that which has been allowed to them by the author. Sandoval’s act of writing provides the Africans with a textual existence, and in interpreting the descriptions of Africans in the *De instauranda*, readers are primarily left to explore Sandoval’s motivations, interpretations, and modes of representation rather than those of the Africans about whom he wrote. While Olsen’s study is least convincing in its attempt to establish how enslaved Africans might have written themselves into the Jesuit’s text, the work does provide an interesting guide through Sandoval’s important early modern book.

IGNACIO GALLUP-DIAZ
Bryn Mawr College

ROBERT H. HOLDEN. *Armies without Nations: Public Violence and State Formation in Central America, 1821–1960*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2004. Pp. x, 336. \$55.00.

The crises and civil wars of the 1980s brought unprecedented scholarly attention to Central America. Books published at the time were useful in suggesting the historical roots of contemporary problems, especially as they concerned the role of U.S. policy, but they were frequently repetitious and superficial. Time was needed to produce more reflective work, based on more extensive archival research. In the first of two projected volumes, Robert H. Holden provides the necessary background to such a study. Covered here is the story of violence in Central American public life to 1960. The volume yet to appear will extend the account to the time of the regional peace accords of the 1990s.

Holden distinguishes usefully between “public violence”—that is, violence employed in public arenas for public purposes, regardless of the actors who perpetrate it—and “private violence,” which, for simplicity’s sake, may be described as common criminal activity. The author also makes a distinction between, on the one hand, the generally accepted notions in any given society of where the permissible limits to public violence lie, and, on the other, the question of how much material capacity exists to deploy public violence and who in society controls that capacity.

In the specific case of Central America, Holden argues that the failure since independence from Spain in 1821 to develop a coherent sense of nationhood, and, with it, effective nation states, has resulted in the persistence of “improvisational” states characterized by an extraordinarily ample latitude for recourse to public violence. The permissible scope for such violence has, to be sure, been broad throughout Latin America, but in this study Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua are seen as places where it has been especially so. A possible exception has been Costa Rica, but Holden offers a convincing corrective to the many accounts that emphasize that country’s distinctiveness. True, in Costa Rica the limits to public violence have historically been more restrictive than elsewhere on the isthmus, but the popular image of