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## Free to Build an Empire

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comenzó a admitir a delincuentes juveniles y a inscribir a niños pobres como bajo el manto de la asistencia y la caridad. Precisamente este alcance, percibido más tarde como incompatible con la naturaleza penal de la institución, fue en cierta medida responsable de su corta vida, pero su mera existencia en cualquier caso es ilustrativa de su carácter moralizante sobre las clases pobres inculcándoles la disciplina para el trabajo. Al no haber sido nunca sólo una prisión, la *Casa de Correção* funcionó como espejo de las ideologías predominantes en el mundo atlántico y de su diversidad jurídica y racial.

Con estos méritos y envergadura, el libro resulta una lectura esencial para los estudiosos interesados en el nexo entre pena y trabajo en la experiencia jurídica brasileña del siglo XIX, aun cuando no integre –como sería oportuno– la historiografía ya existente sobre las tres leyes de arrendamiento de servicios promulgadas durante el Imperio. Unánimes en prever la pena de prisión en caso de incumplimiento de los contratos laborales, los debates parlamentarios en torno a ellas guardan relación con las discusiones tratadas por la autora,

pero permanecen al margen de los temas que el libro mismo confronta. Sin embargo, este volumen, como pocos, es capaz de restituir la complejidad y la pluralidad de la clase obrera en el siglo XIX y la centralidad de la población esclava en episodios de la historia jurídica brasileña, a la cual las narrativas tradicionales tienden a oscurecer. Al mismo tiempo, es capaz de relativizar la abolición de la esclavitud como punto de inflexión en la historia, señalando cómo un sistema penal responsable –hasta hoy– de producir puniciones racializadas fue madurado durante el inicio del siglo XIX, profundamente arraigado en el proceso de construcción de la nación poscolonial, en el escenario de lucha por la abolición de la trata y en la expansión de la esclavitud en Brasil. Si la categoría de «esclavo» desapareció de los archivos carcelarios después de 1888, el sistema penitenciario brasileño no perdió su vocación primaria de disciplinar racialmente a los individuos «indóciles» entre los pobres, especialmente los afrodescendientes, que se atreviesen a violar los términos –desde luego decimonónicos– de la libertad. ■

**Edward Jones Corredera**

## Free to Build an Empire\*

This book provides a clear-eyed exploration of two of the most intensely discussed historical topics of our age: humanitarianism and the slave trade. This is a study of how the 19th-century British Empire deployed moral discourses in strategic, self-interested, and soul-searching ways in order to develop an «antislavery state», an «antislavery diplomacy» and, finally, an «antislavery world system».

This book puts forth three main arguments: the first modern humanitarian form of governance emerged from the administration of liberated peoples in Sierra Leone. Second, compassionate mod-

els of governance legitimated the pursuit of British imperial and corporate interests. Third, on the back of this moral vision, Britain pursued the end of slavery and a monopoly on the legal and commercial definition of «free» labour: liberated slaves were free to build, defend and expand the empire. The first two chapters show how, in the early 19th-century, Sierra Leone was transformed into an experiment in humanitarian and extractive governance. Chapters three, four and five draw on a comparative perspective to study the application of this model in the British Atlantic world. The last two chapters study the migration of liberated slaves

\* MAEVE RYAN, *Humanitarian Governance and the British Antislavery World System*, New Haven (CT): Yale University Press 2022, XIII + 309 p., ISBN 978-0-300-25139-5

and their role in the development of humanitarian governance in the broader Atlantic world.

Ryan slowly but surely navigates the potentially tempestuous discussion around the meaning of humanitarianism. Current understandings of humanitarianism, we are told, share one particular trait with 19th-century abolitionism: the idea that power can be used without consent to improve the lives of the worst-off. Ryan refuses to draw a direct causal connection between abolitionist ethics and current definitions of humanitarianism; instead, Ryan settles on the concept of »humanitarian governance« to describe the lasting impact of the relationship between imperial ambitions and compassion for others. This model of governance, the author explains, continues to shape today's humanitarianism: a paternalised, often racialised vision of power informs global forms of intervention, development and aid.

One of the most interesting aspects of the first half of the book is the author's exploration of the many ways in which medicine, religion, and political and administrative incentives informed conflicting ideas of care and humanity. Ryan carefully traces the British civilising goals behind administrative reforms in the management of Sierra Leone in the face of epidemics and an influx of refugees. The book offers a short but brilliant exploration of the 19th-century redefinition of the refugee in Europe and the Atlantic world. Beyond the racial hierarchy embedded in European approaches to political exiles, refugees and liberated peoples, the British public saw European exiles as the drivers of their emancipation. Liberated slaves were, by contrast, not agents of their destiny. Rather, they were the object of British compassion: British society acted as the harbinger of moral reform. Nineteenth-century confessional praise and condemnation of the treatment of convicts in British prisons, as Ryan shows, informed changing attitudes towards the class status and the labour rights that were afforded to »liberated Africans«.

The middle chapters explore how liberated slaves navigated a global system of trade that relied on slave or unfree labour by hopscotching across Britain's »archipelago«. This migration facilitated the construction of what Ryan describes as Britain's »antislavery state«. British elites saw their task as redeeming liberated slaves by turning them into devoted and loyal subjects and guardians of the empire. This model of an »antislavery state« lay the ground for Britain's »antislavery diplomacy«.

During treaty negotiations, British diplomats subjected their counterparts to intense questioning about how their governments envisioned the implementation of legal protections for liberated slaves. This was, in Ryan's reading, a way to gain leverage over friends and foes by stipulating specific terms which British officials could enquire about in subsequent trade disputes. The British government then harnessed the statistical information drawn from these discussions to map out the risks and possibilities generated by these new laws and the migration flows they may create. This information empire deployed its vast chorographic and migratory knowledge to project its power and articulate its paternalistic moral authority to criticise and coerce other countries into reform. As Ryan notes, Henry John Temple, Lord Palmerston, who shaped British foreign policy over three decades, wrote to foreign ambassadors to address the plight of specific enslaved or unfairly liberated individuals.

The final chapters of this book focus on the organisation of new labour practices for the »liberated Africans« in Britain's humanitarian »archipelago«: the creation of apprenticeships and the rise of military recruitment in these communities allowed Britain to constrain and regulate their rights. Ryan carefully studies how contemporaries discussed what constituted a humane or inhumane form of exploitation of children, women and men. In a particularly insightful section based on a number of primary sources, including a series of official interviews of liberated Africans carried out in the 1820s, Ryan explores how childhood or the household economy could shape one's experience of these reforms. The book, on the whole, gives a comprehensive overview of the public debates, the diplomatic strategies and the labour practices that amounted to a British »antislavery world system«.

This book generates clear and insightful answers about the specific topics it addresses – and creates plenty of questions for scholars interested in the comparative study of humanitarianism. Indeed, the epilogue's analysis of the similarities and the differences between the British Empire and today's United Nation skips over an important point of comparison and a crucial stepping stone in the study of the rise of humanitarianism and empire: the rise of the United States' own civilising world system. The 19th-century USA – an emerging empire that closely emulated Britain – developed its own paternalism towards Central America that

harnessed the civilising vision of Manifest Destiny to bolster the rise of filibusterism in the region. Representatives in this nascent empire debated whether to make Texas into a state for the liberated slaves who populated the East Coast. Some worried, however, that the annexation of Texas would allow Catholic immigrants, who were depicted as lazy and backward, to tarnish the nation's Protestant work ethic. Since many of today's humanitarian institutions emerged from US efforts to coordinate aid, and to bolster the moral vision behind their interventions around the world, a comparative study of how the United States assumed the mantle of the world's moral police that, in the view of many Britons, once belonged to its empire, would be an enriching piece of research.

Secondly – as Mark Mazower's book *The Greek Revolution* has recently shown – the British and American dispute over the establishment of a favourable definition of the concept of intervention was an important theme in the foreign policy of both of these empires. Given the continued and controversial use of this term in the 21st century, policymakers and historians would benefit from further research on this topic. More broadly, those concerned with the history of ideas and interna-

tional law may consider the ties between this study of humanitarianism and recent interpretations that show that international law was seen as a gentle civiliser of nations.

Finally, in the context of British history, one may use this study to reconsider the relationship between this model of humanitarian governance and the historiographical concept of informal empire, which has recently elicited some debate. The study of the territorial and religious borders of compassion, to wit, the relationship between race and the exclusionary nature of charity on the basis of Protestant and Catholic differences, or the relationship between humanitarianism and philanthropy, are areas that would benefit from further research.

The fact that this book generates insights that can contribute to such a wide array of debates is a testament to the vigour, clarity and creativity behind its ideas. On the whole, this book is an exemplary work on the origins of legal reform and the moral challenges of its implementation. From a comparative perspective, it is perhaps the best single historical study of the 19th-century geopolitical uses and abuses of humanitarian reform. ■

**Michael Lobban**

## Indirect Rule in West Africa and the Paradoxes of Secular Imperialism\*

In March 1903, having conquered the Sokoto caliphate and incorporated it into the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria, Sir Frederick Lugard issued a declaration guaranteeing that his government would »in no way interfere with the Mohammedan religion«. By the end of the 19th century, British imperial policy was firmly committed to the notion that the secular power had to be neutral in matters of religion, a policy first announced by

Queen Victoria in her 1858 proclamation to the people of India. However, as Rabiya Akande shows in her important new book, *Entangled Domains: Empire, Law and Religion in Northern Nigeria*, there was something of a paradox in this system of imperial secularism. In Nigeria, under the stewardship of Lugard, the commitment to religious neutrality was accompanied by a system of indirect rule. This policy of governing through local elites

\* RABIYA AKANDE, *Entangled Domains: Empire, Law and Religion in Northern Nigeria*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2023, X + 317 p., ISBN 978-1-00-905210-8