



SORIANO, Cristina, *Tides of Revolution. Information, Insurgencies and the Crisis of the Colonial Rule in Venezuela*, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 2018, 336 pp. ISBN: 9780826359872.

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Tides of revolution is the latest publication by Latin American historian, Cristina Soriano. Soriano's monograph reimagines a major transitional period in the political history of Venezuela and positions the nation as a fulcrum in the global Age of Revolutions. She does so by offering a fresh perspective on ways that literature and print media from abroad circulated within Venezuela, a unique region of Spanish America due to its absence of printing presses. These material's consumption linked the colony's local politics to foreign radical ideas emanating from the French and Haitian revolutions. Soriano's thesis argues that Venezuela underwent a series of social, political, and intellectual transformations during its violent War of Independence and revolutionary period of 1789 to 1808, which positioned the "backwater" colony as an intellectual vanguard of Latin American revolution (p.3). These transformative contributions, spawned by the diverse population and not just a few elites, contributed to Venezuela becoming "one of the first regions in Spanish America to declare independence from Iberia and turn into an influential force for Spanish American independence more broadly" (p.3). Soriano departs from traditional elite-centric historiography to show that Venezuelans of all statuses participated in the creation of communal spaces for discussion and political dialogue to spread restricted and sometimes prohibited ideas without the printing press. As Venezuelans spread these ideas by transcription or word of mouth, an emerging public sphere formed, where interests of the metropolis were subverted to local discontent with the Spanish Monarchy.

The book utilizes an exhaustive archival source base. Soriano primarily consults archives in Venezuela, Spain, and the United States. The book is divided into two main sections. The first section, "Media," contains the first three chapters. This section pertains to the circulation of both tangible (books, manuscripts, readings, rumors, pamphlets, stories, posters and manifestos) and non-tangible media (rumors, songs, etc.) that flooded late eighteenth-century Venezuela. It analyzes the role of this media in spreading censored ideas that were feared for their ability to introduce alternative forms of literacy that could "contaminate" consumers—especially *pardos*—and challenge the colonial order. The second half of the book, "Movements," contains the last three last chapters. Here Soriano demonstrates how this alternative literacy fed into two republican insurrections that developed in different locations and times: the rebellion of Coro in 1795 and La Guaira conspiracy in 1797. The third chapter of this section pertains to xenophobic policies in response to the 1799 Maracaibo revolt by Black French corsairs. This revolt is indebted to this environment of widespread literacy that Soriano terms "semiliterate forms of knowledge transmission." In this way, Soriano reveals ways that subaltern groups actively partook in Venezuela's revolution.

Soriano is trained both as Anthropologist and historian. Her interdisciplinary background enables a closer consideration of documents and movements, which she interrogates to consider the social, political, cultural, intellectual, and sociological environments that brought these documents into existence. For example, she analyses the mentalities of the authors implied by these works' production and their adaptation of revolutionary ideas from Europe, North America, and Haiti through manual replication. Specifically, the Haitian Revolution's influence in Latin America's Republic Era is a central idea consumed by Venezuelans. For Soriano, the Haitian revolution "became a common language used by both the rulers and plebeian groups to make demands and negotiate change" (p.5). After the rebellion of Coro (1795), the Spanish administrators, despite the successful repression of the revolutionary acts, realized that they could not maintain the colonial order in Venezuela if they did not accommodate some demands of minorities and subaltern groups.

All racial categories and social classes were represented in this public sphere. The discussion of a wide range of political debates fostered the political participation of a wide social spectrum through the inclusion in the political-intellectual debate of all the interests shared by all the social layers that made up the diverse and multiracial eighteenth-century Venezuelan society. The abolition of the hierarchical and stratified society, the dissolution of the slavery system, freedom of expression and commerce, were some of the ideas and values defended by the revolutionaries that united all classes and races to fight for the independence of Venezuela in pursuit of some identity ideals on which they wanted to base the construction of the new and free nation. Rebels accommodated and adapted political pamphlets to accommodate all social and racial communities to recruit the public to defy Spanish control.

The adaptability of revolutionary ideas to Venezuela's multiethnic, multiracial, and sociological diversity is a topic that impacted the greater Caribbean. The position of the Catholic Church in the revolutionary processes and on the horizon of the new republic was intensely debated. Considering that Catholicism continued to bond Venezuelans, rebels made their political materials overtly religious. Republicans made their ideas compliant with Catholicism despite that the Church would defend the interests of the Monarchy. This uniquely integrated the clergy into the national picture to unite Venezuelans in the fight for a national cause.

Soriano pointed out the role of the castes and underprivileged classes in constructing these spaces for political debate, the transmission of ideas, and the resistance against colonial tyranny. She indicates that most scholars who have studied the independence era of Venezuela "have minimized the important voices and participation of lower-working officials and people of African descent" (p. 163). However, Soriano states that rebellions in late eighteenth century Venezuela were not a phenomenon just led by white creole elite, but rather the resistance to the colonial regime was built based on broad social and multiracial support. The ideas that Venezuelans fought for were ideals that included all individuals who, correspondingly, took an active role in dispersing these ideas. The aforementioned *pardos* played a key part in this transmission in their spaces of work, including barbershops and workshops. In Soriano's words, these spaces "were an ideal place to share and discuss these readings: it was a place for socialization where people of different social statuses, education and ethnic backgrounds got together and shared ideas" (p.172).

Tides of revolution shows how Venezuelans created their own spaces for political debate, citizen awareness, and dispersal of revolutionary ideas by the spread of "semiliterate media and forms of knowledge communication". Additionally, Soriano breaks from archetypes defended by the traditional historiography of the South American country by pointing out how global Atlantic revolutions shaped the Spanish American republican horizon and created localized arenas for social and political change. This emergent revolutionary conscience started long before the crisis of the Spanish monarchy at the beginning of the nineteenth century. A growing desire for change inundated the minds of the Venezuelan masses who, by observing contemporaneous global events, took matters into their own hands and quickened the pace of unrest. Soriano effectively demonstrates the inclusivity of Venezuela's pre-revolutionary dispersion of ideas despite the lack of formal channels of transmission and communication. Most importantly, she obliterates the

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image of the Creole liberal revolution that would hold Miranda, San Martín, and Bolívar as the token protagonists. Her history welcomes the involvement of non-elite key figures, including Rusiñol, José Manuel del Pino, and Valle, whose contributions to Venezuela's independence have been too often overlooked.