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Nancy E. van Deusen. *Global Indios: The Indigenous Struggle for Justice in Sixteenth-Century Spain*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015. 336 pp.

<https://www.dukeupress.edu/Global-Indios>

We often tend to think that globalization is the sign of our own times, the key to characterize the contemporary world in contrast to earlier historical periods. Nancy E. van Deusen's *Global Indios* makes us reconsider this assumption with its interesting analysis of the play between the global and the local in sixteenth-century Castile. The aim of this volume, as the author makes clear from the beginning, is to give voice to the voiceless, more particularly the indigenous people who were imported as slaves into sixteenth-century Castile from America. As part of the massive inter-American forced migration in the period—at least 650,000 indigenous people were victims of the lucrative transatlantic indigenous slave trade that started in the 1490s—van Deusen discovers that more than two thousand indios reached the Spanish kingdom of Castile. After Charles V's New Laws were passed in 1542 stating that indios from the Spanish domains were free and could no longer be enslaved, and due to ambivalence and loopholes in the understanding and application of the law, a number of indigenous men and women decided to initiate lawsuits in order to acquire a piece of paper from the Spanish courts—la Casa de la Contratación or the Council of the Indies—saying that they were free vassals. Many of them became what van Deusen calls “trans-imperial” subjects with complicated identities (2) because of their forced crossing of Spanish-Portuguese borders. This is the side of the story that the author is set out to tell by studying the varied cases of 184 indio litigants between 1530 and 1585, and as she does so, she calls the readers' attention to the process of construction of these and other identity-related borders.

Van Deusen goes beyond the master narrative of the invasion period by focusing on the survivors rather than on the often studied disintegration and extermination of the indios. She is not particularly concerned with heroes either, although she acknowledges the role of Bartolomé de las Casas as well as of heroic indigenous individuals like Hatuey, Enriquillo or Manco Inca Yupanqui (18). She focuses instead on the stories of litigants, studying their cases in detail for excerpts of narrative that she then reconstructs in order to offer a wider view on the several thousand indio slaves living in Castile and how they made sense of themselves as they endured bondage. Because of the way she constantly emphasizes dialogues between America and Castile, the global and the local, the past and the present, her reflections on the scale of human bondage and the contradictions and meanings of slavery go beyond the sixteenth century Spanish context to acquire a much wider and contemporary relevance.

One of the expressed objectives of the text is to recognise the multiplicity and complexity of *indios*, “to argue against the sameness of those individuals called indios” (28). As van Deusen explains, over the course of the sixteenth century, the term *indio* “referred to people from the East and West Indies, China, the Moluccas, India, Brazil, Hispaniola, Mexico, and Peru. [...] From its inception, *indio* was a homogenizing label that constituted difference based on unequal power relations” (11). Evoking Arjun Appadurai's neologism *ethnoscape*, van Deusen coins the term *indioscape*, which refers

to the high mobility of indios and their lack of connection to a given place in order “to argue that indio identities were no longer spatially bound or culturally homogeneous, but rather transimperially present in the imaginations of those slaves and masters whose own ‘local’ experiences [...] were mirrored against the experiences of other slaves and masters” (12). Appropriately, she refers to how the notion of an indioscape includes both a sense of rootedness, “of belonging to places and cultures other than Castile *and* in Castile” (13), and rootedness, “or a distinct sense of time and space based on experiences of bondage and deracination” (13). The account of indios in this text underlines their mobile and dynamic nature and addresses their characteristic tensions between enslavement and vindication, deracination and newly formed connection, conquest and survival. The creation of indioness is understood as a series of global interactions which illuminate the process of construction and reformulation of self in relation to the other and it is precisely the dialogue between the local, transatlantic and global dimensions of indigenous slavery, which van Deusen constantly emphasises, that contributes to an understanding of identity politics with a relevance beyond the period she analyses.

In chapter 1 the author centers on the globalized Castilian village of Carmona, near Seville, to explore “how the four parts of the world could inhabit Carmona” (35). She studies the litigation suits of two indigenous women, who did not precisely embrace their transimperial identities but on the contrary, searched for a fixed definition as *indias* that would allow them to be free. Village and imperial politics are at play here, and the chapter offers a good view on transculturation without resorting to this useful term. Chapter 2 centers on the transition from free self to commodified object, the forced Atlantic crossing of slaves, their entrance into Castilian households and their reconnection into new communities of indios. Van Deusen’s study of this dynamics of mobility, disruption and reconfiguration, together with her account of several acts of litigation, offer a good perspective on the intricacies of bondage and the fine line between freedom and slavery. Chapter 3 deals with the effects of the two royal inspections by Gregorio López Tóvar (1543) and Hernán Pérez de la Fuente (1549) in Seville. Of special interest here is the account of the changes in the discourse on slavery and the new meaning of the word *libertad* (freedom). Chapter 4 goes beyond the mere analysis of the narrative contents of documents or witness depositions and centers on the physical evidence used in the courtroom as an active site of power: bills of sale, travel documents, brands on the bodies of slaves, or the typology of witnesses are studied as what Hayden White would call “plot elements” in the metanarrative of bondage (126). Van Deusen also comments on the relevance of the strong belief in “papereality” and the difficulty to revert it by means of oral testimony. In Chapter 5 she centers on legal vocabulary—terms like *naturaleza*, *rescate* or *just war*—their relevance in the definition of indios, and the slaves’ attempts to revert them. Chapter 6 studies the conventions, mainly physiognomic and linguistic, used to identify indios, and carefully examines the specific understanding of color in the sixteenth century. Chapter 7 focuses on transimperial indios and deals with litigations related to three distinct imperial sites which van Deusen characterizes as borderlands: the Moluccas (today the Maluku Islands), the borderlands of Brazil and Río de la Plata, and Pegu (now called Bagu, in Myanmar). In this chapter we get a good view of the broad conceptualization of indios, the tenuous nature of colonialism due to limited dominion over those territories and people, and especially, the disputes over the meanings

of sovereignty. I have found the introduction and conclusion particularly clear and useful. These, together with the opening and closing chapters, are the parts of the book that will probably be more useful to readers who are interested in extrapolating some of van Deusen's theoretical conclusions to other periods or contexts, for it is there that we can find the key to the theoretical framework of the text, whereas chapters 2-6 are more focused on the detailed analysis of the period.

Van Deusen adopts the methods used in microhistorical analyses, as she compares evidence from over one hundred litigation suits with other records "to access the global and local dimensions of slavery in individual lives" (14). Part of her merit lies in the way she uses information from the litigation suits and an outstanding amount of records from local and imperial archives in Spain and Latin America, extracting the narrative fragments in all of them. She also draws on a number of scholars who have studied indigenous slavery. In fact, van Deusen uses a rich variety of sources, which, apart from the extensive number of archives, includes a thorough bibliography of printed sources that covers the Hispanic world as well as some colonial and postcolonial theories from the Anglo-speaking world. I personally think the work might have benefitted from establishing some relations to US Native American studies, which would have positively illuminated the definition of Indianness. However, the author's familiarity with references on slavery and indigeneity is wide-ranging and authoritative.

As part of her analysis, Van Deusen offers a clear and pertinent discussion of relevant vocabulary: the definition, study and implications of "just war," "rescate," "naborías," "naturaleza," and others are particularly illuminating. Of special relevance in this respect is the fact that she is never afraid of facing complexity or ambivalence; on the contrary, part of the strength of her work derives from the way she addresses them directly. As a result of this critical attitude, the reader can extract several particularly useful theoretical implications from the text: By examining the changes of the global movements in the local practices, and the changing way Europeans looked at themselves and the world, van Deusen offers a relevant view on the construction of the self in relation to the other; Her attention to the constant complication of borders—geographical, like those between Portugal and Spain, or conceptual, like those between slavery and bondage—draws the reader's attention to the constructed, interested nature of those and other borders or rhetorical markers of difference; Her study of the journey into and out of slavery narrative counters the view of slavery as the natural order of things and emphasizes its process of construction. Last but not least, her appreciation of the textual structure and logic of the cases, their storytelling frame, her interesting study of the struggle for control of representation and the relevance of positioning—indios vs. masters—and the perceptive view of the invention, re-creation and revision of history provide a very useful reflection on representation. Needless to say, all of these are relevant issues which still require our critical attention at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Van Deusen is not only a skilled historian and critic, but also a talented story finder and teller. I especially value her effort at tracing and extracting previously hidden stories and giving them back to us organized as solid, at times even gripping narratives. For example, the Preface tells the story of the slave Catalina de Velasco and her encounter with

Bartolomé de las Casas, who identified her as an india from the Spanish empire, after which she was freed. The anticipation that some stories of injustice could have a happy ending and the reflection on the complications of race definitions and relations makes the reader eager for more from the very beginning. The reading is especially gratifying when van Deusen focuses on the different stories of indios and indias struggling for their freedom, as in the cases of Beatriz and Felipa. One of the very few imperfections that I can mention about this text is that, because of the author's emphasis on her intention to give voice to the voiceless, I expected to hear more indios voices in the text, more quoted lines than the ones that are offered. In spite of this, it is obvious that van Deusen's narrative is the result of a careful job of research and reconstruction and its merit needs to be acknowledged.

*Global Indios* will be of interest to scholars in the areas of legal history, 16<sup>th</sup> century history, and civil rights history. It will also be welcome in the field of indigenous and postcolonial studies for its view on the diaspora and its pertinent observations on the process of race and ethnicity construction. All in all, this is a necessary study, and it tells a story that still needed to be told. As we learn here, the indios' talking-back voices were filtered and silenced, but that does not mean they were not there. Their words, like van Deusen surely proves with her own, "are not empty words" (29).

*Silvia Martínez-Falquina, University of Zaragoza, Spain*