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Ana Crespo Solana. *Mercaderes atlánticos: Redes del comercio flamenco y holandés entre Europa y el Caribe.* Córdoba: Servicio de Publicaciones, Universidad de Córdoba, 2009. xiii + 352 pp. EUR 24.00 (paper), ISBN 978-84-7801-980-9.

Ana Crespo Solana, ed. *Communidades transnacionales: Colonias de mercaderes extranjeros en el mundo atlántico, 1500-1830.* Madrid: Doce Calles, 2010. 426 pp. EUR 28.85 (paper), ISBN 978-84-9744-097-4.

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Understanding the Nation in the Iberian Atlantic

In the past two years, Ana Crespo Solana has published two books that, to outward appearances, cover the same topic: trading networks in the Atlantic Ocean from the sixteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century. But the scopes of the two volumes under review are, in fact, quite different. In the first, a compilation of some of her previously published work along with a number of new contributions, Crespo introduces a much wider array of contexts than the work's title, *Mercaderes atlánticos*, suggests. She analyzes important moments in the political relations between the Spanish Empire and the Dutch Republic, as well as the evolution of their economic relations from a macroeconomic standpoint. Only in two of the eleven essays does the author study the Flemish-Dutch mercantile communities in Cadiz. The second book, an edited collection comprising sixteen essays, is the product of an ambitious project financed by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Research that Crespo coordinates. Their authors study, from diverse perspectives, different communities of foreign merchants within the Spanish Empire. Only Margrit Schulte Beerbuhl analyzes a case outside of this geopolitical context: Germans in London. Together, these two works offer readers a broad and comparative approach to the topic.

Among Crespo's more important findings are those concerning the *nación* or nation. In the Spanish Empire (and in a host of other Atlantic, Indian Ocean, and even East Asian contexts), during the second half of the eighteenth century, the term "*nación*" referred to a foreign cultural or ethnic community. It was usually utilized with an adjective: for example, Irish nation or French nation. Certainly, contemporaries used the term to stress the cultural differences that existed between the nation's members and the rest of the population. Crespo prefers the term "transnational community," which she defines in *Comunidades transnacionales* as a "dynamic microsociety trying to adapt to their new social environment" (pp. 16-17). She considers it as a "broader version of the family clan" (p. 61). Crespo also stresses the existence of some degree of national, linguistic, and religious solidarity among those who were part of the group, but she concludes in *Mercaderes atlánticos* that we cannot confuse it with modern nationalism (p. 137). Obviously, these groups did not have any kind of political aspirations within the Spanish Empire, other than getting the favor of its authorities. Nevertheless, the bonds that joined these migrants with their community are similar to those identified by European romantics at the beginning of the nineteenth century that became an essential part of their definition of "cultural nationalism." Crespo implicitly accepts this idea when she states in *Comunidades transnacionales* that these communities contributed to the consolidation of a multiethnic and multicultural Atlantic world.

As Bernd Hausberger claims in his essay in *Comunidades transnacionales*, these communities, acting as solidarity networks, helped to improve the situation of their members as well as that of the community itself. Crespo also stresses the socioeconomic importance of these communities. Their members, whether competing or collaborating, promoted the local economy and international trade (see the case of Dutch merchants in seventeenth- to eighteenth-century Cadiz in *Mercaderes Atlánticos*). In many cases, she claims, their bonds with their homeland remained strong. Sometimes these foreign merchants created opportunities for new generations of migrants, or they sent money to their relatives or *paisanos* still living in their homeland.

These volumes show that scholars are still trying to determine the significance of nations. Some contributors to *Comunidades transnacionales* (for example, David Alonso García in his essay on Genoese merchants in sixteenth- to eighteenth-century Castile and Catia Brilli in her piece on Genoese merchants in eighteenth-century Cadiz) question the existence of these national communities when understood as well-organized solidarity networks. In his study of early modern Portuguese migration to Spain, Juan Pulido stresses that these migrants did not even try to preserve their cultural identity, as evidenced by, he claims, how frequently they tried to fully integrate or assimilate, losing their national identity along the way .

But exogamic marriage or nationalization, strategies to fully integrate into the new societies, did not always result in the loss of a migrant's identity. Marriage and nationalization frequently were determined by the cultural or political conditions imposed by the new society. That is how Klaus Weber explains, in his contribution to *Comunidades transnacionales*, the differences between the German merchant communities in Cadiz and Bourdeaux during the eighteenth century; he notes that the closeness of the society in Cadiz required alternatives like marriage to integrate. Beerbuhl, in her analysis of the merchant community from Hamburg in London in *Comunidades transnacionales*, also underlines that the legal need to nationalize English made these migrants look for full integration through nationalization. But, being imposed by the environment, integration did not always give way to assimilation. To prove this controversial point, integration-assimilation, Arnaud Bartolomei suggests analyzing not only the process of integration, but also marital status, the nationality of merchants' wives, length of their stay in the country, social practices, and composition of their social environment.

Another area of intense discussion concerns the impact of social differences on the solidarity of merchant nations. Alonso, Brilli, and Pulido collectively assert that social differences within the group became the factor that undermined the cohesiveness of the nation. Brilli adds competition among mercantile houses, and finally Pulido stresses the cultural similarities between Spain and Portugal to justify the assimilation of Portuguese migrants.

Nevertheless, internal socioeconomic differences were not always factors that provoked the dissolution or at least the weakness of these communities, as argued by several contributors to *Comunidades transnacionales*. That is what one can conclude after reading the contributions of Vicente Montojo on the French, Dutch, and English migrants in Cartagena and Alicante during the eighteenth century, and of Hausberger on the Basque community in Peru. Moreover, the essays by Oscar Recio Morales on the Irish mercantile community in the Iberian Peninsula during the eighteenth century and by Bartolomei on the French merchants in Cadiz at the end of the eighteenth century confirm this picture.

These volumes collectively represent an impressive undertaking and greatly enrich our current understanding of the nation in the Iberian Atlantic. But there is more work to be done. Even though the two works cover a wide range of information, some communities in Spain are absent from the studies and merit inclusion. For example, there is no study on Madrid, one of the largest markets of the Atlantic economy, nor any work on the principal cities in the north and northwest of the Iberian Peninsula (such as Bilbao and Coruña). Despite their importance in this economic context, there is only one essay on Basque merchants and nothing about the Catalans. Only a few of the contributors to Crespo's edited volume study the dynamics of the transfers of capital that merchant nations enabled. There is evidence, for example, that proves that this transference of capital was important in the case of the community of Basque merchants in Madrid during the second half of the eighteenth century. Given the competition between both merchants and states over finance capital, knowing more about these transfers would be very useful.

Finally, it is necessary to be cautious in interpreting the scarce sources available to analyze these communities. For example, the lack of information about the relations between their members cannot be interpreted as evidence that solidarity networks did not exist, since most of these relations usually unfolded beyond any standard legal framework, and consequently did not generate a document trail. It is true that in some cases, these transnational groups created organizations in trying to defend their businesses (consulates), but we cannot conclude that an absence of these institutions is evidence of the lack of cohesiveness of these groups, since their origin also depended on the political and economic situation of the markets and societies where they settled. Sometimes it was just not necessary to create such a bureaucratic footprint.

Setting this cautionary note aside, though, these two books help us understand the historical importance of these transnational communities from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century in the Spanish Empire. It is therefore to be hoped that scholars will continue to pursue the necessary work on these communities.

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