Pierre Force, *Wealth and Disaster: Atlantic Migrations from a Pyrenean Town in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016. xxi + 229 pp. (Cloth US\$ 45.00)

Wealth and Disaster has all the hallmarks of the multigenerational family biographies that numerous historians have put together in recent years, uncovering individual decisions and identity constructions, and illuminating the contexts in which these were produced. Unlike microhistories, which often anchor the research in a restricted place and time, the new approaches have proven useful for charting vast spaces over long periods of time. By combining case studies and connected histories, they are able to explore these relatively new historical entities: large continental or maritime regions.

Pierre Force follows several generations of two families from the same Pyrenean village who left to “seek their fortune” in the Americas without showing undue concern for the turbulences of the imperial conflicts that were wracking the Atlantic in the eighteenth century. He provides a detailed picture of these men and women as they made conscious adaptations to worlds whose complexities and contradictions they understood perfectly. Whether they resided mainly in Navarre or Saint-Domingue, their horizons were those of the empires they tirelessly traveled and they made clear through their actions the constraints and possibilities they faced.

Force goes well beyond historical discussions to engage sociological and anthropological debates with, for instance, Pierre Bourdieu and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Chapters 1 and 3 constitute an exciting analysis of systems of transmission in societies with a basis not in lineages but in “houses.” The expulsion of the youngest child has often been understood as a means of preserving the unity of inheritance, and expatriation to the colonies as a more profitable solution than the priesthood, the army, or celibacy. But this schema breaks down when it is the eldest child who leaves, unless we consider that a new logic is being established. This is precisely what was being produced by the enrichment opportunities of the colonial system, of which Saint-Domingue was considered the “pearl.” In the second half of the eighteenth century, coffee became the new Eldorado. Unlike sugar, it did not require great investments (the Crown offered new parcels of land and a dozen slaves sufficed to clear them) and the return was high. Here, there was a natural connection between the family structure of the “house” and the colonial world. The endowment of the youngest cost only a couple of hundred pounds to cover the price of passage and the system was so profitable that elder children sometimes passed up their turn and left their inheritance in the care of a brother or sister.

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Nonetheless, while the Basque family structure and its system of transmission were strangely stable (even surviving the Napoleonic Civil Code, which imposed the equal sharing of family goods), the colonial world was particularly fragile. Force, who is well acquainted with the classics of Enlightenment political economy, shows how the “jealousy of trade,” combining armed conflict and commercial monopoly, benefited a small group of people at the expense of the ignominiously exploited workforce (the slaves) and the European consumers who were paying high prices for addictive substances. In Saint-Domingue, the overexploitation of slaves, combined with the settlers’ attempts at unlocking the *exclusif*, reached such levels that the system’s instability could no longer be contained. Force revisits the great revolt of 1791, which his characters witnessed and participated in from the outset. He places us on the “colour” line, one of the front-lines of the conflict, and shows how each of them continually redefined it. (The Saint-Christophe-like image of the mulatto son carrying his white father on his back to escape from the massacre is as arresting as it is imaginary.) He also explains how the Haitian revolutionaries (from Toussaint Louverture to Jean-Pierre Boyer) were careful not to dispute ownership, even through the *séquestre* (and not the confiscation) of absent landowners’ plantations, and revisits the reasons for Haiti’s payment of the indemnity that would have a ruinous effect on the country’s economy.

The book ends with an interesting reflection on the possible “citizenships” of these travelers of the Atlantic. Force reminds us that (as Adam Smith put it) while the landowner must subscribe to a nation, the merchant knows only the World. Yet the heroes of *Wealth and Disaster* are landowners who act like merchants. In these still-evolving nation-states, he concludes, citizens did not shy away from choosing the citizenship that most suited them. It is surprising not to find any bibliographical reference to Laurence Fontaine’s classic works on the families of peddlers and migrants from the Alps who likewise conquered the Americas. Both Fontaine and Force managed to consider family structures, the credit economy, and international networks of movement all in tandem in order to give a fresh account of the complexities of emigration.

Wealth and Disaster is at once a fascinating family saga and a remarkable interrogation of a changing world in the Age of Revolutions.

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