

Plebeian Consumers

Plebeian Consumers is both a global and local study. It tells the story of how peasants, day workers, formerly enslaved people, and small landholders became the largest consumers of foreign commodities in nineteenth-century Colombia and dynamic participants of an increasingly interconnected world. By studying how plebeian consumers altered global processes from below, Ana María Otero-Cleves challenges ongoing stereotypes about Latin America's peripheral role in the world economy through the nineteenth century and its undisputed dependency on the Global North. By exploring Colombians' everyday practices of consumption, Otero-Cleves also invites historians to pay close attention to the intimate relationship between the political world and the economic world in nineteenth-century Latin America. She also sheds light on new methodologies and approaches for studying the material world of men and women who left little record of their own experiences.

Ana María Otero-Cleves is lecturer in the history of Latin America at the University of York. She was the winner of the Toynbee First Book Manuscript Workshop Competition in 2022. This is her first book.

CAMBRIDGE LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

General Editors

KRIS LANE, Tulane University
 MATTHEW RESTALL, Pennsylvania State University

Editor Emeritus

HERBERT S. KLEIN
 Gouverneur Morris Emeritus Professor of History, Columbia University and Hoover
 Research Fellow, Stanford University

Other Books in the Series

- 132. *Peopling for Profit in Imperial Brazil: Directed Migrations and the Business of Nineteenth-Century Colonization*, José Juan Pérez Meléndez
- 131. *Being the Heart of the World: The Pacific and the Fashioning of the Self in New Spain, 1513–1641*, Nino Vallén
- 130. *A Tale of Two Granadas: Custom, Community, and Citizenship in the Spanish Empire, 1568–1668*, Max Deardorff
- 129. *A Colonial Book Market: Peruvian Print Culture in the Age of Enlightenment*, Agnes Gehbald
- 128. *Veracruz and the Caribbean in the Seventeenth Century*, Joseph M. H. Clark
- 127. *We, the King: Creating Royal Legislation in the Sixteenth Century Spanish New World*, Adrian Masters
- 126. *A History of Chile 1808–2018*, Second Edition, William F. Sater and Simon Collier
- 125. *The Dread Plague and the Cow Killers: The Politics of Animal Disease in Mexico and the World*, Thomas Rath
- 124. *Islands in the Lake: Environment and Ethnohistory in Xochimilco, New Spain*, Richard M. Conway
- 123. *Journey to Indo-América: APRA and the Transnational Politics of Exile, Persecution, and Solidarity, 1918–1945*, Geneviève Dorais
- 122. *Nationalizing Nature: Iguaza Falls and National Parks at the Brazil-Argentina Border*, Frederico Freitas
- 121. *Islanders and Empire: Smuggling and Political Defiance in Hispaniola, 1580–1690*, Juan José Ponce-Vázquez
- 120. *Our Time is Now: Race and Modernity in Postcolonial Guatemala*, Julie Gibbings
- 119. *The Sexual Question: A History of Prostitution in Peru, 1850s–1950s*, Paulo Drinot
- 118. *A Silver River in a Silver World: Dutch Trade in the Rio de la Plata, 1648–1678*, David Freeman

Plebeian Consumers

*Global Connections, Local Trade, and Foreign
Goods in Nineteenth-Century Colombia*

ANA MARÍA OTERO-CLEVES

University of York





CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India
103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,
a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009435598

DOI: 10.1017/9781009435550

© Ana María Otero-Cleves 2025

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions
of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place
without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

When citing this work, please include a reference to the DOI 10.1017/9781009435550

First published 2025

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

*A Cataloging-in-Publication data record for this book is available from the Library
of Congress*

ISBN 978-1-009-43559-8 Hardback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence
or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this
publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will
remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-43559-8 — Plebeian Consumers
Ana María Otero-Cleves
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

Para Fanor

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
Introduction: A Global View on Local Consumption	i
1 Consumers, Citizens, and the Republican Project	23
2 From Ferias to Tiendas: Consumers and the Import Trade	52
3 Zarazas, Bayetas, and Bogotanas: Adapting Foreign Textiles to Popular Consumers’ Demands	83
4 Machetes, Axes, and Foreign Tools: Demanding Consumers, Active Citizens	118
5 Books, Hats, and “Foreign” Coats: The Paradoxes of Cosmopolitan Consumption	151
6 Soap, Pills, and Toiletries: Domesticating Foreign Goods	178
Epilogue: A Story of Global Capitalism from the Periphery	211
<i>Glossary</i>	223
<i>Bibliography</i>	225
<i>Index</i>	251

Figures

I.1	United States of Colombia, 1863	page 19
1.1	Henry Price, <i>Vista a la ciudad de Ambalema y de la Mesa de Herveo</i> , 1852	46
2.1	Nineteenth-century Colombian commercial ports, rivers, and cities	54
2.2	Letter sent to New York from Túquerres via Tumaco and Panama City to Lanman & Kemp, 1876	57
2.3	A traveler’s guide to commercial routes through Colombia, 1922	66
2.4	<i>Champán do Rio Magdalena</i>	70
2.5	<i>La Mesa, Market Day</i>	76
2.6	Trade routes between Europe, the United States, and Colombia (1870–1920)	81
3.1	Bale wrapping for 45½ yards of 100 thread, royal blue, second-rate bayeta manufactured by Edwards (England) for Francisco Vargas y Hermanos Ca., 1880. 37 × 98, 2 cm	105
3.2	Joseph Brown, <i>The interior of a store in the principal street of Bogotá with mule drivers purchasing</i> , ca. 1840	106
3.3	Henry Price, <i>Minero i negociante</i> . Medellín, 1852	110
3.4	Manuel María Paz, <i>Vista de una calle de Quibdó: Provincia del Chocó</i> , 1852	112
4.1	Manuel María Paz, <i>Aspecto exterior de las casas de Nóvita: Provincia del Chocó</i> , 1853	122
4.2	<i>Now they ask for a Collins</i>	128
4.3	Peregrino Rivera Arce, <i>Batallón “Libres de Ocaña.” Una carga al machete</i>	145

x	<i>List of Figures</i>	
4.4	Ramón Torres Méndez, <i>Matrimonio de bogas</i> , n.d.	148
5.1	José María Gutiérrez de Alba, <i>Indios cargueros conduciendo un piano de Honda á Bogotá</i> , 1874	152
5.2	José María Gutiérrez de Alba, <i>India carguera</i> , 1874	153
6.1	Order placed by Dr. Barreto (Bogotá) to Lanman & Kemp (New York), April 16, 1875	180
6.2	Advertisement of Agua de Florida (Florida Water)	191
E.1	Edward Mark, <i>Escena de mercado</i> , Guaduas, Cundinamarca, Colombia, ca. 1846	212

Acknowledgments

Over a decade has passed since I embarked on the journey of penning this book, or to put it bluntly, since I began “following things from the past.” Like many of the objects I stubbornly wished to understand, my quest carried me across the Atlantic. It was within these travels that this book came to life. It has been a long, challenging, and exciting journey that I would not have been able to undertake without the support of many wonderful and generous people.

I began my training as a historian at the University of York, where, under the guidance of Mark Jenner, I grasped the significance of the material world in understanding ideas and practices of the past. During my doctoral studies at the University of Oxford, under the supervision of Malcolm Deas, I discovered new ways of narrating the history of nineteenth-century Colombia. One of my most discerning critics, Malcolm taught me to question stereotypes, reject commonplaces, and uncover stories in the most unexpected places. I deeply regret that this book did not reach his hands. I am in debt to my professors at Oxford, for their continuous and generous support in particular Eduardo Posada-Carbó, Joanna Innes, John Robertson, and Alan Knight. During the final years of my doctoral studies, I was also fortunate to join Columbia University as a visiting scholar. I am grateful to the Latin American community at Columbia who welcomed me with open arms and gave me valuable feedback during the last stages of my PhD dissertation.

At the Universidad de los Andes, I found a generous community willing to engage with new ways of studying the past and understanding the present. My conversations with colleagues and students from the Department of History and Geography and the School of Law helped

me to gradually give shape to my ideas and turn my dissertation into a very different book. Constanza Castro and Catalina Muñoz Rojas became my most devoted allies, amazing colleagues, and unconditional friends. I cannot thank Catalina and Constanza enough for their endless generosity, for leading by example, and for believing in me more than I ever could. They and other colleagues and friends provided me with insightful feedback on various sections of this manuscript. For this, I want to express a heartfelt thank-you to Sandra Sánchez-López, Jorge González Jacome, Ingrid Bolívar, Daniel Gutiérrez, James V. Torres, and Matthew Brown. Many others had the patience to listen to and challenge my ideas in hallways, over a good cup of coffee or a nice walk. Special thanks go to Nancy Applebaum, Claudia Leal, Marixa Lasso, James Sanders, Carolina Alzate, Margarita Garrido, Ricardo López Pedreros, Esteban Restrepo Saldarriaga, María José Álvarez Rivadulla, María José Afanador-Llach, Marta Herrera, and Andrés Guhl for accompanying me on my intellectual wanderings. I also want to express my heartfelt gratitude to my students. I want to thank them for understanding (and tolerating) my love and enthusiasm for the nineteenth century. Their critical engagement with the past gave me the courage to continue a project that, on many occasions, seemed to have no end. In particular, I thank those who accompanied me to explore the power of archives and dared to think outside disciplinary boundaries. To the many students who reminded me that being a historian requires leaving the classroom and venturing into the streets to challenge the past, I do not have enough words to thank you.

Scholars offered important suggestions at several conferences, meetings, and workshops throughout the years. In particular, I am grateful to the Center of Latin American Studies (CLAS) at the University of Cambridge who welcomed me as a visiting scholar for one year. CLAS and the Latin American Center at the University of Oxford provided stimulating spaces to discuss my project and to challenge my ideas. I am also thankful to the Global History and Culture Centre of the University of Warwick and the Institute of Historical Research of the University of London. Other incredible opportunities allowed this book to become what it is today. In this regard, I wish to thank the Toynbee Prize Foundation. Their First Book Manuscript Prize allowed me to benefit from Jeremy Adelman's, Jeremy Prestholdt's, and Frank Trentmann's generous and encouraging feedback. I am immensely grateful for their comments and suggestions. Likewise, I want to thank Santiago Muñoz Arbeláez and Adolfo Polo y La Borda for the care with which they read and commented on the final draft of this book. Santiago's and Fito's

Acknowledgments

xiii

encouragement, in a moment in which I was undergoing many professional challenges, was priceless.

The financial support of the institutions that granted me fellowships for travel and research was crucial. I wish to thank the Clarendon Fund Scholarship, the Henry Belin du Pont Research Grant, the Centro de Estudios Estadounidenses Research Grant, and the Fondo de Apoyo para Profesores Asistentes of the Universidad de los Andes. Without the generous assistance of many devoted archivists in Colombia, the United States, and England, this book would have been impossible to write. In Colombia, I want to thank archivists and staff from the Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia, the Museo Nacional de Colombia, the Archivo General de la Nación, the Biblioteca Pública Piloto, the Universidad de Antioquia, and the Sala de Patrimonio Documental Centro Cultural Biblioteca Lev of Universidad EAFIT. My thanks also go to the archivists and librarians of the Connecticut Historical Society, the Connecticut State Library, the Hagley Museum & Library, and the National Archives in College Park, Maryland. The British Library and the National Archives at Kew were also paramount to my project. I also want to extend my gratitude to Sean Mannion, who gently and patiently edited the manuscript. Finally, I wish to thank the two anonymous readers of the manuscript for their valuable feedback, Cecelia Cancellaro at Cambridge University Press, and Kris Lane and Matthew Restall for their support of this project in the remarkable Latin American Series.

Last but not least, I want to thank my parents, Daniel and Patricia, and my sister Susana, for their unwavering support, love, and patience throughout this lengthy process. Without them, I am certain that this book would have not seen the light. And Fanor for whom mere words cannot suffice. Without him, this book (that I am sure he can almost recite by heart) would be unthinkable. This book is for you.