

## FEATURE: HISTORIES OF RADICALISM

### Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Canarian Imagination: the Missing Flag *by Enrique Galván-Álvarez*

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In *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (2005),<sup>1</sup> Benedict Anderson explores the transatlantic networks of resistance that, at the turn of the twentieth century, brought together anarchists and anti-colonial fighters from the Spanish colonies. Although he discusses in great depth the independence movements of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines, Anderson does not mention the Canary Islands and their role in these struggles, regarding them as a natural part of the Spanish mainland. This obscures the peculiar history of the Canary Islands and of Canarians and Americans of Canarian descent who were deeply involved in anti-colonial and anarchist movements at both flanks of the Atlantic Ocean. This omission becomes particularly problematic in Anderson's discussion of Cuban independence, whose iconic leader José Martí (1853–95) was of Canarian descent, as were numerous fighters in the various incarnations of Cuba's Mambí army, which fought the Spanish for most of the second half of the nineteenth century. Canarians were not only the product of a colonial history that resembled, in many ways, that of America, but were also subject to various regimes of slavery, bonded labour and legal discrimination (in Spain, the Canaries and America) throughout the history of the Spanish empire.

Challenging Anderson's historical myopia, the aim of this paper is to highlight the relevant role of Canarian subaltern consciousness in the anti-colonial and anarchist struggles of the late nineteenth century. To understand how and why Martí and the Canarian Mambises, not unlike the *isleño* descendants Simón Bolívar (1783–1830) and Francisco de Miranda (1750–1816) a century before, rose against the Spanish empire we need to reassess their position within Spanish racial and social hierarchies. And for that, understanding their Canarian-ness is crucial.

This paper will first assess the colonial history of the Canaries and its significance in the colonial histories of Latin America, and then it will focus on Secundino Delgado (1867–1912), a Canarian anarchist who also fought under three flags. Delgado’s short but eventful life involved joining Cuban independence and labour movements in the US (1890s) and then articulating a Canarian anti-colonial project from Venezuela (1896–8) before returning to the Canaries and being imprisoned in Spain (1902). Delgado’s little-known history is an instance of the transatlantic networks of anti-colonial and anti-authoritarian resistance that Anderson discusses, but casts the Canaries in a central role. As the first Canarian known to have articulated an openly anti-colonial discourse, Delgado is celebrated in the Canary Islands mainly as the pioneer and patriarch of Canarian national consciousness.<sup>2</sup> This can be seen in the graffiti illustrating this paper, which portrays Delgado surrounded by pre-colonial and modern national symbols, quoting his motto ‘*Todo por y para la libertad de los hombres y los pueblos*’ (All for the freedom of men and peoples), and emphasizing the freedom of peoples, and the Canarian people in particular, over the freedom of individuals. In Delgado’s writings, however, national liberation goes hand in hand with social liberation and his critique of colonial power is largely articulated through libertarian themes. Thus, Delgado can be said to be the most articulate exponent of a certain Canarian subaltern consciousness that inhabits and haunts the transatlantic routes of anti-colonial and antiauthoritarian resistance.

When introducing José Martí, Anderson refers to him as ‘a first-generation creole’ or ‘*criollo*’, which is not entirely accurate since his ‘father came from Valencia and his mother from Tenerife’.<sup>3</sup> In the racial hierarchies of the Spanish American Empire, Canarians were neither considered *peninsulares* (the ruling Spanish elite) nor necessarily *criollos* (Spanish descendants born in the colonies). They were often called *isleños* (Islanders) and placed below the Spanish and their descendants and above indigenous Americans and African slaves; the name ‘marginal whites’ or ‘white slaves’ was also used at certain times and places.<sup>4</sup> Although Martí’s relatively privileged existence was somewhat removed from the oppression experienced by other Canarians in Cuba, and most significantly in Venezuela or Uruguay, his consciousness of disaffection with Spanish colonialism, like that of many other *isleños* who joined the fight, can be seen to be rooted in their ethno-social identity.<sup>5</sup> The fact that Martí’s parents were from Valencia and Tenerife, two territories that are an integral part of the modern Spanish state today, should not make us forget the radically different historical processes by which they came to be part of ‘Spain’.

The invisibility of Canarians in discussions of American or transatlantic history is by no means exclusive to Anderson’s work. Much English and Spanish language scholarship,

though often mentioning the spatial in-betweenness of the Canaries in the routes of the Spanish empire, fails to mention the consciousness of in-betweenness that characterizes the Canarian experience of those routes. The significance of Canarian consciousness in the history of American emancipation is largely confined to scholars and researchers in the Canary Islands, with some exceptions in Latin American scholarship.<sup>6</sup> Although, for example, Kirwin Shaffer discusses Secundino Delgado and his involvement in the anarchist and Cuban independence movements, he does not discuss his peculiarly subaltern identity and also regards the Canaries as a natural part of the Spanish mainland.<sup>7</sup> To understand the inadequacy of these generalized assumptions it is necessary to reassess the history of the Canaries and its unique relationship with Spanish America.

### COLONIAL HISTORIES

The Canary Islands are an archipelago off the north-western coast of Africa, situated at roughly the same latitude as the currently non-existent border between Morocco and Western Sahara. The island closest to the African continent is within one-hundred kilometres of the Moroccan coast, while the distance between the northernmost Canarian islet and the Spanish mainland is more than 900 kilometres. The archipelago consists of seven major islands (Lanzarote, Fuerteventura, Gran Canaria, Tenerife, La Palma, La Gomera and El Hierro) and a number of minor, mostly uninhabited, islets. The population is currently concentrated on the islands of Tenerife and Gran Canaria. At the time of Secundino Delgado's birth in 1867, the overall population of the islands was roughly 250,000. It is estimated that in the second half of the nineteenth century one in every four islanders migrated, mostly to the Americas. The proportion of migrants had been even higher in previous centuries. Nowadays, the population of the islands is above two million, of which about three-quarters are Canarian. The size of the Canarian diaspora in Europe and the Americas is difficult to ascertain but if Canarian descendants were to be included it could easily reach ten million. It's not just geography that sets the Canaries apart from Spain and Europe; it is their singular history within the Spanish imperial expansion that highlights their position as a subaltern other.

Whereas mainland Spain and the Balearic Islands share a common history that goes back to prehistoric times and that experienced, like many other Mediterranean territories, Greek, Roman, Germanic and Arabic influences, the Canaries enter Spanish history only in the fifteenth century, by means of conquest. Before the European invasions and the Castilian conquest, the Canary Islands were inhabited by Berber peoples who had been neither

Christianized nor Islamized and who had been living in the islands for at least a thousand years before the European 'rediscovery'.<sup>8</sup> The conquest and early colonization of the islands has been hailed as a rehearsal for the Spanish conquest of the Americas, which began before the islands of Tenerife and La Palma were officially brought under Castilian rule.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the conquest of the Canaries might be seen as a European colonial laboratory that foreshadows the age of discoveries.

The Islands were initially granted to conquering lords who ruled through a combination of Castilian law and feudal autocracy. A small portion of the indigenous population was enslaved and sold in Spain and Italy, though many managed to earn their freedom, and some were even able to return to the Islands in old age.<sup>10</sup> In 1511, only fifteen years after Tenerife was officially brought under Castilian rule, the Catholic monarchy banned the enslavement of indigenous Canarians, though the Castilian authorities on the Islands did not always observe the royal ordinance. The ban came partly through Church intervention, which in its Biblical racial genealogies considered indigenous Canarians 'old Christians' (that is, savages who had not a chance to hear the 'word of God', unlike Jews or Muslims), and partly due to the indigenous Canarians' own mastery of the Castilian legal system, which enabled them to argue with their colonial masters in their own terms.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, there were still Canarian slaves or indentured labourers as late as the nineteenth century, though not necessarily or exclusively of indigenous descent.<sup>12</sup> Most of the indigenous populations succeeded in infiltrating and reaching an accommodation with the Spanish colonial regime, which in turn prompted the shipping of Black African slaves and of North African slaves or indentured workers ('*moriscos*'), to the Canaries. While the influx of Black African slaves spanned from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, the shipping of *moriscos* to the Islands largely stopped in the seventeenth century. A small community of enslaved Native Americans seems also to have been present in the early decades of colonization.<sup>13</sup> Along with Spanish colonists came many Portuguese settlers (who in the sixteenth century outnumbered the Spaniards on the islands of Tenerife and La Palma). French, Flemish, Genovese and, from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Irish and British settlers also contributed to the melting pot that was Canarian colonial society.

As this brief outline demonstrates, the social history and ethnic make-up of the Canaries shares more with the newly discovered and colonized territories of the Americas than with European Spain. Canarians were, however, present in the Spanish conquest of the Americas from Columbus's first journey, often as free 'marginal whites', less often as enslaved or indentured workers of various racial backgrounds. They were seldom conquistadors in their own right, but rather in a subservient position to their Spanish counterparts. Migration from the Canaries to the other Spanish colonies persisted from the sixteenth century onwards, at times enforced through a 'blood tax' but often a voluntary means of escaping the poverty and semi-feudal oppression experienced back in the Islands. For a full century from 1678, the Spanish authorities taxed Canarian trade with the Americas by demanding that

for every hundred tons of goods exported from the Islands, the islanders had to send five families to colonize areas of the Spanish empire. This arrangement benefited the Canarian commercial oligarchy and the Crown, which used the families as pieces on its imperial chessboard. Most Canarian families who migrated through 'blood tax' were sent to the Dominican Republic, to Texas and to the marshes of Louisiana, which were regarded as undesirable for Spanish settlers but which had strategic importance.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, the peasantry of countries such as Cuba, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Uruguay and Venezuela was largely made up of Canarian immigrants and the descendants of Canarian slaves or indentured workers.<sup>15</sup> Confined to an in-between caste which was neither fully part of the colonial establishment nor it at its very bottom, Canarians developed a peculiarly ambivalent subaltern consciousness. This oscillated between an aspiration to be recognized by the Spanish elite and the wish to rebel against it by allying with other victims of its oppression such as indigenous Americans, *mestizos*, African slaves and those of African descent.

The peculiarly hierarchical and multi-ethnic character of Canarian society not only binds the Islands with the Spanish American colonies, but also makes the study of the Canarian presence in the Americas very complex. While Canarians are generally considered 'white' in America, unless they had visibly black African ancestry, their whiteness was not synonymous with social privilege. The term '*blanco de orilla*' ('marginal white') came into use to differentiate them from the ruling 'white' Spanish or Spanish-descended elite. Even though it was never spelled out in colonial America, I suggest that the category 'marginal white' implied 'African white', since the few Canarians who could prove to have an exclusive European ancestry were often accepted in *criollo* social circles. Canarians of exclusive Spanish descent were considered *criollos* (second generation Spaniards born outside Spain) rather than as Spanish. The Canaries were seen not as an integral part of Spain but as one of its colonies – even though in legal terms the Canaries were not a colonial territory, as they were part of the *Consejo de Castilla* rather than the *Consejo de Indias* which ruled most overseas Spanish colonies.

The white population of the Canaries (the overwhelming majority throughout their history) was perceived to be the product of not only of the European/Spanish settlement but also of white North Africans – such as indigenous Canarians and the *morisco* indentured labourers. This meant that they were regarded as not entirely European, despite their white skin. Neither indigenous Canarians nor Canarians of North African descent were, ethnically speaking, significantly or visibly different from their colonial masters, since many Spanish

and Portuguese settlers also had North African ancestors. Indigenous Canarians and *moriscos* strove from the early days of the colonization of the Canaries to blend in with the European settlers and their descendants. As most of the early European settlers were men, and married indigenous women, as early as the eighteenth century there are few traces of socially distinct indigenous communities in the Islands.<sup>16</sup> The *morisco* community also merged into the 'white' underprivileged Canarian classes through the same practices of marrying European settlers or islanders who had become hispanicized by taking Castilian or European names and converting to Catholicism.<sup>17</sup> By the time that 'white' Canarians started migrating to America, they were already a hybrid product of a colonial history and were perceived by the Spanish as subaltern others, despite their ethnic similarities. The racialization of Canarians in America was also facilitated by their social identity and their association with a (perceived or real) lack of education and the performance of undesirable, 'low', manual work. This socio-ethnic identity of Canarians was further perpetuated by the fact that in America *isleños* often married within their communities, and often those from the same ancestral island or even village.<sup>18</sup>

The segregation and legal discrimination of Canarians was nowhere as articulated as in colonial Venezuela, where Canarians had to prove they had sufficient generations of pure Spanish blood (free from African or indigenous Canarian influences) in order to be accepted into the Spanish-*criollo* social circles. Separate churches, neighbourhoods and military regiments were specifically created for Canarians and their descendants who were called '*blancos de orilla*'.<sup>19</sup> Because of their underprivileged position, these *isleños* often mixed and lived together with Afro-descendants, forging solidarities across the imperial Spanish racial hierarchies. Some of these Canarians, especially those with black African ancestry, were slaves or lived under various regimes of indenture. However, a very small elite of Canarians and Canarian descendants who could prove their European credentials were accepted into local aristocratic circles and considered authentically Spanish. Moreover, other 'white' Canarians who were not judged fully European or Spanish became affluent businessmen and constituted a rising bourgeoisie in colonial Venezuela.<sup>20</sup>

Even before the age of American independences, it is not surprising that many challenges to Spanish colonial rule came from the Canarian underclass, as they enjoyed sufficient privilege but also suffered enough oppression to articulate a resistant consciousness. In Venezuela, Canarians and Canarian descendants were the first to rebel against the Spanish colonial regime. As the author V. S. Naipaul eloquently puts it, in his recounting of Francisco de Miranda's story, 'a Canary islander [...] is, neither a proper

Spaniard nor someone accepted by the creole Spanish aristocracy'.<sup>21</sup> However, Miranda and his family were also 'rich enough to get a notary in Spain to prepare a genealogical account of the Mirandas proving their Castilian purity and nobility through seven generations'.<sup>22</sup> Miranda's anti-colonial and Pan-American consciousness, inspired by the French and American revolutions, came out of his peculiar experience of both privilege and disenfranchisement. His eventual rejection of Spain followed years of frustrated attempts to be recognized and accepted in Spanish circles of power, from which he was excluded because of his Canarian ancestry and low social extraction.

The social division between Spaniards and Canarians is clearly indicated in Simón Bolívar's 1813 *Decreto de Guerra a Muerte* (Decree of War to the Death), which ends with a threat to 'Españoles y canarios'.<sup>23</sup> Bolívar, like Miranda, does not identify as Canarian or Spanish (though he had both ancestries) but as American, a new liberal and enlightened identity that subsumed the racial categories of the old empire. His address to 'españoles y canarios' speaks both to how distinctly separate these groups were and to how many Canarians were perceived to be allied to the colonial establishment. At the time of Venezuelan independence, many Canarians sided with the Spanish reaction, not out of a sense of loyalty towards Spain, but out of fear, suspicion and hostility towards the *criollo* class, who were deeply involved in the independence struggles. The most underprivileged Canarians in particular, saw in the ambitions of the *criollo* class (and *criollo*-allied Canarians) a neo-colonial enemy that was, in their eyes, worse than the old Spanish rulers. In any case, the power relations of the colonial hierarchies seem to have shaped the early years of independent Venezuela (1810–30), with a divided and embattled Canarian community that was often moved not by lofty ideals of loyalty or emancipation, but by a thirst for revenge against the Spanish, their descendants and those few privileged Canarians allied with them. It needs to be noted that both Spanish and Canarian descendants fought on both sides, in favour of independence and against it, largely defending their class interests. Canarians were thus caught between 'insurgency and loyalty'.<sup>24</sup>

The in-between and ambiguous non-belonging of Canarians in America made them not only more ready to rebel against the Spanish establishment and its post-Independence *criollo* reincarnations, but also to adopt or even create modern and hybrid identities that aspired to overcome their formerly subaltern position in the imperial order. This is clearly seen in Cuba, where Canarian immigrants and their descendants made up large sections of the Cuban peasantry and the early industrialized tobacco proletariat. There is also evidence of Canarians being shipped to Cuba as bonded labourers in a regime of semi-slavery as late as the 1830s,

which caused the (little studied) forging of solidarities and common struggles with African slaves and Irish political prisoners working on the railways.<sup>25</sup> The subaltern and disenfranchised position of most Canarians in late Cuban colonial society, although not legally articulated as formal discrimination, explains the readiness of Canarians to join the various insurrections against the Spanish in the second half of the late nineteenth century and to identify with the narrative of Cuban identity along with that island's other underclasses, most notably Afro-descendants.

Throughout these examples of oppression and resistance, however, it is remarkable that Canarians never fully articulated a political consciousness of their own. It's not that Canarians lacked a sense of being Canarian; but politically they were either aspiring to be fully acknowledged as Spaniards or joining new emerging consciousnesses in the Americas. Despite often being acutely aware of their in-betweenness, Canarians rarely took pride in it or articulated a consciousness of their own, always being eager to be accepted by larger groups. This is powerfully reflected in the words of Antonio Ascanio, a Canarian involved in the early institutions of independent Venezuela:

I abhorred La Orotova [a town in Tenerife], where I first saw the light of day, and I decided to adopt as my fatherland the country where I stood, remembering that the place where one enjoys legal freedom and finds substance is one's true country. I abhorred the Canary Islands, but I abhorred Spanish institutions still more.<sup>26</sup>

This ambivalent approach to identity by Canarians has contributed to their relative invisibility in much scholarly literature. This in turn might explain why Canarian consciousness does not figure in Anderson's *Under Three Flags*.

Although Canarian independence was close to being achieved alongside the independence of the Spanish American colonies, it was only some decades later in the late nineteenth century that a fully articulated Canarian political consciousness developed. This consciousness was crafted in the writings of Secundino Delgado and it highlights the colonial and subaltern nature of Canarian experience through an anarchist analysis of Spanish power.

#### ANTICOLONIAL AND ANTIAUTHORITARIAN THOUGHTS

Delgado's national consciousness is not an inward-looking, essentialist or insular reflection on Canarian identity. As a man who travelled the traditional transatlantic routes of the



Canarian diaspora (to and between US, Venezuela, Cuba, Argentina, Uruguay), his articulation of Canarian consciousness is transnational and cosmopolitan. Rather than articulating his anti-colonial project through race and folklore, as in many Romantic nationalisms, Delgado's formulation, while not devoid of Romantic elements, rests in a critique of Spanish colonialism and a self-reflective and strategic formulation of identity. Surprisingly, despite the history of racialization experienced by Canarians, Delgado does not make race a central theme in his narrative, using racial themes in a very strategic and rhetorical fashion. Being Canarian is largely defined as being part of a social underclass with shared ethnic ties and certain narratives of origin and belonging, but not necessarily belonging to the same, unique race. Delgado wanted to bring back home the struggles he took part in across the Americas, and these were, as Anderson describes, movements of national and social liberation. His Canarian identity emerges out of his routes, not his roots, and is therefore deeply embedded in the transnational solidarities and networks of resistance of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The cornerstone of Delgado's anti-colonial critique was the mutual dependence of Canarian submissiveness and Spanish domination, which matched each other in a manner which facilitated oppression. For the young Delgado, being Canarian was synonymous with being subaltern and being Spanish was synonymous with being powerful and overpowering. But he also suggested that Canarians could emulate their indigenous ancestors (*Guanches*) and fight their oppressors, the Spanish invaders or conquerors.<sup>27</sup> Becoming *Guanche* means becoming a rebel, acquiring a new resistant consciousness, regardless of indigenous ancestry. Canarian history and its racial dynamics are, in this way, fully turned into a metaphor for insurrection.

At other times, however, Delgado reclaims his Spanish ancestry, calling himself a 'colonist' or 'settler'.<sup>28</sup> Though never self-identifying as Spanish, he uses the blood ties that link him to Spain to demand equal treatment and to ridicule the arbitrary nature of Spanish prejudice. This telling ambiguity haunts Delgado's rhetoric, just as it pervaded the identity politics of earlier *isleños* in America. The aspirational attitude of the Canarian descendant in America or the American *criollo* is not entirely absent in Delgado, who sees the Cuban wars of independence as fratricidal and the Spanish not so much as foreign invaders but as bossy siblings with an illegitimate pretension to rule all Hispanic territories. Thus, when Delgado is encouraging Canarian soldiers conscripted to defend Spain's colonial interests in Cuba to resist conscription or change sides once in Cuba, he writes: 'no Canarian accepts joining the fight in Cuba [on the Spanish side]; without much thinking, they [Canarians] instinctively

understand the motives of those colonists [Cubans] and the analogy that entwines them'.<sup>29</sup> Also when addressing *hispano-americanos* or Spanish Americans (that is, *criollos*), Delgado underlines their common heritage: 'Canarians are and wish to continue to be your brothers. History, *race* [my emphasis], traditions and a common future constitute the foundation and guarantee of our sincerely fraternal feelings'.<sup>30</sup> The discourse of Hispanic-ness (*Hispanidad*) underlies and haunts Delgado's construction of Canarian-ness, which sees Canarians as equal and independent family members but wants to avoid severing ties with other Hispanic nations, including Spain.<sup>31</sup> He does not highlight what is uniquely Canarian, the African element, but rather the links of solidarity with former or current Spanish colonies and sometimes, towards the end of his life, with oppressed Spaniards.

Manuel Hernández explicitly links Delgado's negotiation of Hispanic-ness to that of the American *criollos*: 'Secundino regards Canarians as distant settlers/colonists who are far removed from the Motherland [Spain]; they are in a different continent, like the American *criollos*, removed both by distance and indifference'.<sup>32</sup> Though Hernández's analysis oversimplifies Delgado's formulation of identity by assimilating it to the American *criollo* struggle, it certainly captures his aspirational mentality. Delgado is at times not so much bothered by difference, by proving or reclaiming what makes him non-Spanish, as by Spain's indifference. Like many other colonial subjects, he wishes, at some level, to be acknowledged by the colonizer, to have Spain recognize him as a legitimate son. Nonetheless, to reduce Delgado's project to a desire for recognition is to ignore the deep anti-colonial impulse which pervades his writings, resulting in a peculiarly Canarian double consciousness. In contrast to aspirational *criollo* mentality, a radical separation from any form of Spanishness or Hispanic-ness is also apparent, as when Delgado issues the following threat to the colonial authorities:

Well, Spaniards, we know you well. If you would like to prevent the sound of the cannon from resounding throughout the Canaries, even though you consider them weak, if you do not shortly want to find yourself with new enemies, grant our Fatherland the independence it deserves. Otherwise, you will witness the awakening of the African Canarian, you will witness how quickly the revolutionary fire spreads and how easily the meek doves turn into lions. ... If Spain does not pay heed to our petition the fight is on ... If she looks down on us it is because she considers us weak. We will become strong through the strategy of the famous Bakunin. Strength must be fought with equal strength. The slave is assisted by every right in order to break his yoke and confuse the tyrant.<sup>33</sup>

Through this diatribe, Delgado not only sets himself and Canarians fully apart from Spain, by identifying as African, but also articulates the need to fight through anarchist methods and rationale. Whereas the aspirational Delgado is in tune with the *criollo* settlers, the more combative Delgado pioneers the anticolonial thinking that decades later, in the Canaries and across the globe, tried to articulate decolonization through difference. Delgado's usage of the term 'African' here resembles his strategic use of the word '*Guanche*' and is similarly complex. The 'African Canarian' is not just a Canarian who has reconnected with African ancestry or who identifies with the geo-historical Africanness of the Canaries. 'African' was used in Delgado's time as synonymous with wild, strong, uncivilized and unyielding. As with the word '*Guanche*', Delgado appropriates colonial discourse to resist colonialism. Canarians had been constructed as 'African' and, therefore, as uncivilized in the racial hierarchy of the Spanish empire. Instead of aspiring to be recognized as the colonizer's equal, as a *colono*, in this case Delgado reclaims the negative identity ascribed to the Canarian subaltern. By being 'African' Delgado not only becomes Spain's and Europe's radical other, but also comes to embody the threat that the uncivilized subject poses, by its mere existence, to the civilized order. Yet both the estranged settler and the African/*Guanche* identities are rhetorical and strategic positions to combat colonial power rather than essentialist forms of belonging. Fundamentally, he regards Canarians as hybrid subjects that need only consciousness of their condition and the will to fight oppression:

The Canary Islands host a new race, which was, so to speak, the result of the mix brought about by the invasion. The people have not awoken yet to the struggle, whether through coercion or colonial education, and to this day they have, perhaps unaware, only sung the praises of their master.<sup>34</sup>

The ambiguity and anarchic quality of his double consciousness is perhaps most apparent when he describes the Canarian peasantry, which in his eyes embody both an internalization of colonial power and a latent spirit of resistance. Delgado came from a peasant family although he spent most of his life as an industrial worker. He sees in Canarian rural workers 'the second *Guanches*' – a consciousness and way of life that predates, survives and refuses to submit to the institutions of colonialism. This spirit of resistance offers a counterpart to the more aspirational side of Delgado's project as well as embodying many

anarchist values such as mutual aid, contempt for the law, direct action and the absence of leaders:

The charity practised by the Golgotha's martyr is the beacon of our peasantry. ... Their demeanour, kind and respectful, appears to be at times too humbling, though it is merely the habit of expressing themselves with excessive politeness. Solidarity among them seems innate, both at work and in the face of adversity. Sociologists should admire the altruistic heart of our brothers. As the rural Canarian proverb goes: 'A bad agreement is better than a successful lawsuit', and so they only turn to the law as the very last resort. They hate the law as their worst enemy –their peaceful character does them a disservice somewhat. ...

However, the cruel taxes leave them with just a handful of *gofio* [flour] or take away their houses if there is a bad harvest ... and so they have to abandon their country, as a whole family, like the Jews of yore and yet, as we say, they are slow in rising up.

But, alas, when they resolve to fight!

In a single impulse, as a united and threatening mass, fearing nothing and no one, without leaders or instigators, they all as one want the same. Where one goes, even the most insignificant of them, all go. There have been cases in the islands, when the *fathers of the fatherland* [colonial authorities] sent one of the parasites that inhabited the court [Madrid] to levy taxes and as soon as the peasants found out about him, they all denied him food and water, as if his presence and intentions had offended a single family.<sup>35</sup>

Although Delgado celebrates here the latent spirit of resistance of the Canarian peasantry, there are also plenty of references to the excessive politeness, passivity or goodwill that enables their oppression. These second *Guanches* seem at once to be victims of a colonial mentality that has almost succeeded in destroying their resistance yet also inheritors of a resilient spirit of rebellion based on commonality, generosity and consensus that coexists and subverts colonialism. Such an articulation of colonial double consciousness is by no means unique to Delgado or the Canarian experience, but its formulation through the conceptual language of anarchism is far less common. Anarchist themes pervade his imagining of the Canarian nation, the oppression it suffers and the means of emancipation. However, unlike the references to Jesus (Golgotha's martyr) or the Jewish diaspora – Biblical references stripped of religious significance that featured frequently in the anarchist literature

of the time – the use of anarchist concepts is more than a rhetorical device. Delgado admits in his autobiographical novel *Vacaguaré* that he is ‘first libertarian, and then nationalist’.<sup>36</sup> Thus his anarchism crucially informs the way in which he looks at himself and his community as colonial subjects.

For Delgado, to be Canarian is to experience discrimination: to be subject to various forms of state oppression, such as enforced lack of education, high taxes, conscription, enforced migration, foreign rule or lack of free speech. Consequently, national and social liberation are mutually necessary processes. In his early writings, he describes the subaltern Canarian condition, and its connection to the larger struggle of the international ‘proletarian family’ in the following terms:

You will note that I speak of the proletarian family and nonetheless in *El Guanche* I also say that our motto is only everything for the Canaries and the Canarians. Let me explain[:] The [Canarian] people, lacking ideals, drifts clumsily, letting the foreign assassins tear apart its flesh. Brothels, taverns and dens are wide open, with the blessing of those who are vested in making us vile. The press, sold out, divides the people through Machiavellian local politics, making brothers from different islands hate each other, limiting access to education, forbidding big ideas. The word freedom if it is ever used is mystified, the people are never allowed to understand its meaning. The instinct of rebellion, the engine of progress and freedom, has almost been snuffed out in those unfortunate islands.<sup>37</sup>

In other words, Canarians, as a colonized people, are natural members of the proletarian family and, consequently, their struggles and aspirations are aligned. These ideas emerge out of Delgado’s active involvement in various struggles on both sides of the Atlantic. His Canarian subaltern consciousness, articulated as a strongly anarchist and anticolonial impulse, is expressed as much in his rhetoric as it is in his actions. A brief look at Delgado’s life story sheds light on his writings and in the development and expression of his political thought.

### A LIFE OF STRUGGLES

Born in 1867 in Tenerife in the Canary Islands, Delgado migrated at the age of fourteen to the United States. Little is known of his early years in America; he may have stopped in Cuba on

his way to New York where he married Mary Tiffit and had two children. At some point he seems to have become naturalized as a US citizen. In Florida, Delgado worked in the tobacco industry, and became involved in the anarchist trade union movement, which was largely made up of Cuban, Canarian and Spanish workers. By 1894 Delgado was the editor of the newspaper *El Esclavo* (The Slave) which published articles by such renowned anarchists as Kropotkin, Reclus and Malatesta and drew attention to the living conditions of tobacco workers in Tampa. He encountered the idea of Cuban independence, supported by many anarchists but also feared by many Cuban workers as a reinvention of bourgeois privilege through the ascent of the Cuban *criollo* elites.<sup>38</sup> While in Florida, Delgado was imprisoned for the first time, because of his writings and his prominent role in the organization of a major strike. This was when he first became receptive to anarchist and anticolonial ideas and started reflecting on his Canarian identity. While he campaigned and organized alongside his Cuban and Spanish co-workers, at this stage he wrote nothing of substance about Canarian identity.

In 1896 Delgado travelled to Cuba to support the insurgency then under way. He was later accused of involvement in the bombing of the colonial military headquarters in Havana. The bomb, planted by a Spanish anarchist supportive of Cuban independence, did little damage but brought attention to the anarchist and insurreccional movements. Delgado left for the Canaries later in 1896, accompanied by his family, but he moved on after less than a year to escape the prospect of imprisonment at the behest of the infamous governor of Cuba (and former military governor of the Canary Islands), Valeriano Weyler. This time his destination was Venezuela, where he would not be under Spanish sovereignty. The purpose of his trip was largely revolutionary. He met up with other Canarian émigrés and in 1897 began publishing the newspaper *El Guancho*, where he started articulating his Canarian consciousness. (Most of the quotations from Delgado used in this article come from that period.) While there were anarchist themes, *El Guancho* was more notable for its trenchant critique of Spanish colonial power in the Canaries and elsewhere, notably Cuba. He developed an analysis of the Canarian condition as subaltern and colonial and called for an anticolonial insurrection in the Canaries and for Canarians to join other anticolonial struggles across the globe.

*El Guancho* was funded by the Caracas-based Canarian petty bourgeoisie and that led Delgado to tone down his anarchist rhetoric and emphasize Canarian identity as a way to galvanize both small-scale entrepreneurs and workers. *El Guancho* never reached the Canaries, but was widely read and discussed in Venezuela, where the Canarian and Canarian descendant community was (and still is) very large. It was controversial despite its short

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editorial life – under two years: it pitted the Canarian émigré community against the Spanish expatriates and, in turn, divided the Canarian community. Eventually the Spanish government intervened by pressuring the Venezuelan authorities to censor *El Guanche*, even though Delgado had observed the press laws forbidding foreigners from publish political commentary on Venezuelan matters. Delgado was briefly exiled to Curacao, where he carried on writing.<sup>39</sup>

In 1898, as the United States joined the fight in Cuba, Delgado decided to stop publishing *El Guanche* and radically changed his political strategy. Wary of a Cuban-styled American invasion of the Canaries and unwilling to accept a new colonial master, he came to a personal truce with the Spanish state. After a short stay in independent Cuba, where he became a Cuban national, he travelled back to the Canaries in 1900. In Tenerife he created a trade union and a political party that campaigned for workers' rights and for Canarian autonomy (but not independence). He collaborated with Spanish liberals and anarchists. After disappointing electoral results for his political party in Tenerife, Delgado adjusted his strategy once again. He joined the Spanish Republican party and advocated both autonomy for the Canaries within the Spanish state and labour rights for the working classes. In 1902, Weyler, now Minister of War, pushed for Delgado's imprisonment, accusing him of involvement in the bombing in Havana several years earlier. Delgado insisted on his innocence but was imprisoned for eleven months in Madrid. The legal action against him was flawed as he was a Cuban national and not a Spanish citizen. The American consul in Madrid intervened on his behalf (and on behalf of the nascent Cuban government) and in 1903 he was released.

During this period, Delgado received much support and assistance from Canarian and Spanish politicians and activists such as Nicolás Estévanez or Fermín Salvochea. In 1903 he joined the emerging Tenerife-based newspaper *Vacaguaré*, which criticized the oppression of Canarian working classes. He did not entirely abandon a colonial analysis of the Canarian condition. However, as he was writing under Spanish sovereignty, any overt pro-independence or anarchist statement had to be disguised. *Vacaguaré* and the Delgado of this period advocated self-management and self-rule, both for workers and for the Canaries as a territory, both acceptable goals in the political discourse of the Spanish Restoration (1874–1931). Delgado's understanding of the Canarian/Spanish dichotomy became more nuanced, expressing appreciation for the support of Spanish intellectuals sympathetic to his cause and the prominent role of Canarian elites in perpetuating the colonial establishment. He strategically started hinting at concepts such as 'hispanic-ness' but never considered himself

Spanish and kept a clear conceptual distinction between Canarians and Spaniards in his writings. In 1904 he wrote and later published – in Mexico, to avoid censorship – an autobiographical novel, which described his return to the Canaries in 1900 and his subsequent imprisonment and release. This work is in some form a political testament and was confusingly entitled *Vacaguaré (Via-Crucis)*. In 1905 he left the Canaries again, this time for Argentina and Uruguay, where few details are known about his activities. He seems to have visited the Canarian communities in Buenos Aires, and in the Uruguayan cities of Montevideo and Canelones. He appears to have lived for a while in Cuba and in Mexico before returning to Tenerife in 1910. Shortly afterwards both his children died; he himself succumbed to tuberculosis in his home town of Santa Cruz de Tenerife in 1912.

In his last work, *Vacaguaré (Via-Crucis)*, Delgado frames his story as that of a modern and cosmopolitan *Guanche* engaged in the struggles of his time. The narration has a confessional tone and contains both personal stories as well as reflections which summarize his political thought:

Like Bakunin, who preached the great political, social and economic revolution and at the same time never abandoned the regions conquered and subjugated by foreign powers ... I am a revolutionary but never a partisan. Words also enslave, even the words republic, socialism, anarchy. No, I am just a revolutionary, a rebel – no more than that.<sup>40</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Canarian consciousness, despite its absence in much historical scholarship, is an important element in the history of Latin American independences, from the early rebellions of the eighteenth century up to the independence of Cuba and Puerto Rico in 1898. The role of Canarians and their descendants in these processes was both substantial and significant. Without understanding their socio-ethnic identity, rooted in transatlantic histories, there is a risk of oversimplifying the narrative of American emancipation as a mere rebellion of *criollos* or Spanish descendants against their imperial forefathers. As a people who had a colonial experience that in many ways foreshadowed and resembled that of Spanish America, Canarians brought a different consciousness to the Americas, a particular way of being, and not being, Spanish and American.



At the end of the nineteenth century, this ambiguous and in-between consciousness was for the first time fully articulated as a distinctly subaltern and revolutionary identity. The life of Secundino Delgado resembled that of many Canarians of his time. His complex sense of belonging and non-belonging resonated with that of many *isleños* who joined the Cuban independence and labour movements across the Atlantic. Given its spatial and temporal coordinates, the Canarian national consciousness crafted by Delgado was expressed in the language of anarchism, which was arguably the most popular emancipatory narrative of the time, both in Europe and America. This highlights the relevance of Canarian consciousness to the movements and histories analysed by Anderson and reveals a missing flag in his book: that of the many transnational and ‘invisible’ Canarians who actively participated in the anarchist and Cuban independence movements. Delgado’s life and writings made explicit not only the significance of Canarian consciousness in the transatlantic networks of anticolonial and anti-authoritarian resistance of the late nineteenth century but also how the birth of Canarian national consciousness is inextricably tied up with the anarchist imagination.

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anticolonial Imagination*, London, 2005.

2 For recent examples in which Delgado is discussed in contemporary Canarian politics exclusively as a nationalist pioneer see Antonio José Fernández, ‘La otra patria de Secundino Delgado’, *La Provincia*, 3 Nov. 2012 ;Haridian Mederos, ‘Pedro Quevedo: “Parece que Secundino ungió a CC como los únicos nacionalistas”’, *La Provincia*, 27 Nov. 2015; and Alonso Goretti, ‘El padre del nacionalismo canario’, *La Opinión de Tenerife*, 30 March 2016.

3 Anderson, *Under Three Flags*, p. 131.

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4 Manuel de Paz Sánchez and Manuel Hernández González, *La esclavitud blanca*, La Laguna, 1992.

5 José Martí, *Ni 'siervos futuros' ni 'aldeanos deslumbrados': Documentos*, ed. Miriam Herrera, La Habana, 2010; and Manuel Hernández González, 'La identidad canaria recreada por Martí', *Bienmesabe*, 10 Jan. 2012.

6 A recent example of Latin American scholarship that assesses the significance of Canarian subaltern consciousness is the work of the Venezuelan scholar Ricaurte Bohanerges Carrero Mora, 'Los blancos en la sociedad colonial venezolana: representaciones sociales e ideología', *Revista Paradigma* 32: 2, 2011, pp. 107–123; or the Uruguayan historian Néstor Hormiga *Colonos canarios y negros esclavos en el origen del Estado Oriental del Uruguay (1830–1852)*, Montevideo, 2015. A rare example of English-language scholarship that touches, albeit marginally, on the experience of Canarians in America is Bertrand Westphal, 'Between Mythical Space and Global Drift', in *A Comparative History of Literatures in the Iberian Peninsula*, ed. Fernando Cabo Aseguinolaza, Anxo Abuín Gonzalez and César Domínguez, vol. 1, Amsterdam, 2010, pp. 290–308.

7 Kirwin Shaffer, 'Tropical Libertarians: Anarchist Movements and Networks in the Caribbean, Southern United States and Mexico, 1890s–1920s', in *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1870–1940*, ed. Steven Hirsch and Lucien van der Walt, Leiden, 2010, p. 288.

8 It is likely that indigenous Canarians settled in the islands in various waves from the seventh century BCE up to the early centuries of our era. Medieval Europe 'rediscovered' the Canaries in the thirteenth century through the travels of Genovese, Portuguese, Catalan and Basque sailors. For a history of the various theories about early settlements see Augusto José Farrujia de la Rosa, *An Archeology of the Margins: Colonialism, Amazighity and Heritage Management in the Canary Islands*, New York, 2014.

9 The legal similarities and dissimilarities of the Canarian and American colonial processes have been explored by Agustín Guimerá Ravina, '¿Canarias, ensayo de la colonización americana?: el repartimiento de la tierra en La Española', in *América y la España del siglo XVI*, ed. Francisco de Solano and Fermín del Pino, vol. 2, Madrid, 1983, pp. 175–90.

10 Manuela Marrero, *La esclavitud en Tenerife a raíz de la Conquista*, La Laguna, 1996; Ana Viña Brito, *Esclavos: Documentos para la historia de Canarias*, ed. Ana Viña Brito and Manuel Hernández González, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 2006.

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11 Fray Alonso de Espinosa, *Del origen y milagros de Nuestra Señora. de Candelaria que apareció en la isla de Tenerife, con la descripción de esta isla*, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 1848; Eduardo Aznar Vallejo, *La integración de las Islas Canarias en la Corona de Castilla (1478–1526)*, La Laguna, 1983.

12 Margaret Brehony, 'Mavericks or Misfits? Irish Railroad Workers in Cuba – 1835–1844', *Revistacanaria de estudiosingleses* 68, 2014, pp. 55–70.

13 Jack Forbes, *Africans and Native Americans: the Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples*, Chicago, 1993.

14 Manuel Hernández González, *La emigración canaria a América*, La Laguna, 2007, p. 27.

15 Though most Canarians in America were white, whether of European, indigenous or non-indigenous North African descent, there were also Black Afro-descendants among them. For a brief sketch of the history of this Afro-Canarian community, both in the Islands and in America see Manuel Hernández González, 'La otra emigración canaria a América: mulatos y negros libres y esclavos (1670–1820)', *Revista de Historia Canaria* 184, 2002, pp. 181–98.

16 Sergio Baucells Mes, 'El "pleito de los naturales" y la asimilación guanche: de la identidad étnica a la identidad de clase', *Revista de Historia Canaria* 196, 2014, pp. 139–60.

17 Manuel Lobo Cabrera, 'Indígenas canarios, moriscos y negros', *Un juego de engaños: movilidad, nombres y apellidos en los siglos XV a XVIII*, ed. Gregorio Salinero and Isabel Testón Núñez, Madrid, 2010.

18 Manuel Hernández González, *Francisco de Miranda y Canarias*, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 2007.

19 The in-between and marginal socio-ethnic identity of the Canarian community in Venezuela is thus explained by de Paz and Hernández:

Canarians are 'marginal whites' [*blancos de orilla*] who live together with the lowest social classes. They were discriminated against both ethnically and socially. Their livelihoods were regarded with contempt by those of noble origin. Canarians were often regarded as *pardos* [tri-racial people of low social extraction] or mulattoes by the American social elites. ... Canarian society was ethnically hybrid. It was the result of a racial melting pot where mixing was the rule. (*La esclavitud*, pp. 22–3)

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Carrero also explores the historical and spatial significance of the use of the term ‘marginal’ for referring to Canarians or *blancos de orilla*, literally ‘whites from the margin’.

20 Hernández González, Manuel, *Los canarios en la independencia de Venezuela*. Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 2011, pp. 75–86.

21 Naipaul, *A Way in the World*, London, 1994, p. 244.

22 Naipaul, *A Way in the World*, p. 244.

23 For the full text of Bolívar’s proclamation, ‘Texto del decreto de guerra a muerte’, *El Cronista del Tucutucu*, 3 Aug. 2009:

<http://elcronistadetucutucu.blogspot.co.uk/2009/08/texto-del-decreto-de-guerra-muerte.html>.

24 Manuel Hernández González, *Entre la insurgencia y la fidelidad: Textos canarios sobre la Independencia venezolana*, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 2010.

25 These alliances have been explored by Brehony, ‘Mavericks’, and de Paz and Hernández, *La esclavitud*.

26 Hernández, *Los canarios*, p. 94.

27 In this paper I have deliberately used the phrase indigenous Canarians to refer to the pre-colonial, pre-European peoples of the Archipelago. However, in the Canary Islands and in the rest of the Spanish-speaking world indigenous Canarians are most commonly referred to as *Guanche*. *Guanche* refers exclusively to the people of Tenerife, ignoring or assimilating the other indigenous peoples. Since Tenerife was the island that resisted conquest and colonization for longest, its indigenous population came to represent the overall indigenous Canarian community. However, not only is the term historically inaccurate and representative of a Tenerife-centric basis, but it has been used in colonial discourse to draw an artificially solid boundary between the pre-colonial past and the colonial present. Thus *Guanche* stands for the uncivilized, the past and an era of noble savagery that allegedly became extinct with the European invasions. Though the term is by no means always used pejoratively, and indeed many have reclaimed it through the centuries as synonymous with bravery, independence and resistance, it often reflects a semi-legendary and symbolic dimension that obscures the actual histories of Canarian indigenous peoples. Indigenous Canarians constitute one of the many cultural and genetic legacies that coalesce in the current Canarian people and not a radical other that is temporally and ethnically separate. However, when Delgado uses the term *Guanche* I reproduce it verbatim, as he is more often than not referring to the idea of the *Guanche* as a legendary anticolonial warrior rather than to the history and experience of indigenous peoples.

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28 Secundino Delgado, *Canarias libre*, ed. Manuel Hernández González, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 2006, pp. 187, 220.

29 Delgado, *Canarias libre*, p. 205.

30 Delgado, *Canarias libre*, p. 192.

31 Delgado never uses the term *hispanidad* himself, though his implicit idea of brotherhood among Spanish-speaking peoples hints at a sense of common identity. Although the word had been in use since the middle ages, it was employed politically only from the 1920s onwards when Spanish nationalists reinvested the term with political significance.

32 Manuel Hernández González, *Secundino Delgado: El hombre y el mito. Una biografía crítica*, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 2014, p. 211.

33 Delgado, *Canarias libre*, pp. 213–14.

34 Delgado, *Canarias libre*, p. 176.

35 Delgado, *Canarias libre*, pp. 168–70.

36 Delgado, *Canarias libre*, p. 453.

37 Delgado, *Canarias libre*, pp. 179–80.

38 Manuel de Paz Sánchez, 'Secundino Delgado y la emancipación cubana', in *El 98 canario-americano. Estudios y documentos*, ed. Manuel de Paz Sánchez, La Laguna, 1999, pp. 149–59.

39 These events are discussed in far more detail in Hernández, *Secundino*, pp. 65–79.

40 Delgado, *Canarias libre*, pp. 453–4.

## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the under-represented political experience of Canarians in transatlantic networks of anti-authoritarian and anti-colonial resistance in the late nineteenth century. Much of the relevant historiographic literature, both in English and in Spanish, treats the Canary Islands as an integral part of mainland Spain. This obscures the colonial history of the Islands and the subaltern position of Canarians in Spanish imperial and racial hierarchies. In order to counterbalance this absence, I discuss the life and writings of Secundino Delgado (1867–1912), a Canarian who travelled across North, Central and South America and became involved in a number of interconnected struggles: labour rights, anarchism, and Cuban and

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Canarian independence movements. Delgado's peculiarly in-between consciousness resonated with that of other Canarians and Canarian-descendants who had joined liberation struggles against Spanish imperialism across the Americas. As the first Canarian thinker to articulate a national consciousness which is also decidedly libertarian and anti-colonial, Delgado offers valuable insights into the singular history of the Canaries, their place in the transatlantic networks of resistance of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and anti-colonial anarchism at large.