

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

Sandra Lauderdale Graham, *Caetana Says No: Women's Stories from a Brazilian Slave Society*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2002.

Graham offers a unique perspective on plantation life in nineteenth century Brazil, focusing on the master-slave relationship, the permeability of its boundaries, and the ways gender intersects to further complexify slave society. Graham does a wonderful job of demonstrating how boundaries between master and slave are neither as rigid nor as clear-cut as previously thought. She uses archival data, including an ecclesiastical petition for annulment, a will, and various testimonies, to resurrect the histories of two women, Caetana and Ina?cia, both of whom stand as polar opposites in terms of power, privilege and wealth.

The first story involves Caetana, a slave woman, who refused to marry despite demands and threats from her owner, Tolosa, who arranged for her to marry another of his slaves, Custo?dio. Caetana relented and married Custo?dio, but her motivations are not entirely clear (we can only suspect it is because of the dangers involved). Nevertheless, she then refused to consummate the marriage. Several male members within her slave family then began threatening her as well, since a woman cannot refuse her husband. Caetana's continued acts of defiance show that, despite her lowly status (both as a slave and woman), she nonetheless had agency and power to act on her own behalf. It is Tolosa, her master, who finally gave in and proceeded to get the marriage annulled. Again, because Graham relies on archival data, the ultimate motivations behind Tolosa's behavior are unknown. Yet, such discoveries are welcome additions to the typical one-dimensional analyses that focus on the heteronymous aspects of life, particularly when considering hierarchical aspects of society like that of the master-slave relationship.

The second story involves Ina?cia, a woman of privilege and wealth, who came from one of the great founding families of the Parai?ba River Valley. Upon her death Ina?cia bestowed money, land and freedom on some of her former slaves, albeit on a conditional basis. Her nephew and the executor of her estate, Francisco Peixoto de Lacerda Werneck, found it difficult to execute her desires as stipulated in the will since her estate could not pay all that was owed. Ina?cia, who was illiterate largely because of her gender, never handled her own accounts, and thus never knew her financial standing. She did not know or foresee that the only way out of debt was to sell the slaves, the exact opposite of what she wanted for them. The story takes the reader through the events that follow from Werneck's attempts to handle Ina?cia's financial affairs and the decisions he ultimately made.

Although rich in detail, the minutiae of these stories take away from the central characters, Caetana and Ina?cia. As pointed out by the author, because these stories rely exclusively on documents pertaining to judicial matters, much of what we want to know about these women is difficult to surmise and impossible to say with certainty. In essence, much is left out and we do not know how the stories end. In addition, so much other detail is brought in relating to kinship ties, historical dynasties, and lineages, that it is not until well into the first story before Caetana really enters the scene. Likewise, we learn little about Ina?cia herself, but know a lot about her family and other sisters. Because of the tangential evidence and facts, it is easy to lose the main focus of the stories. In addition, it is often difficult to figure out why these two women are headliners for these stories, seeing that so many other actors are pivotal players in the determination of events, i.e. history. Despite these limitations, Graham's book is a worthy read and lends a perspective that provides depth and complexity to the existing literature. Such complexity renders a reality that approximates the human condition, where agency, dependency, brutality and kindness simultaneously co-exist in human relationships. Students and scholars interested in Brazilian slave society, as well as those interested in gender and patriarchal relations as they relate to Brazil's planter culture will find this book quite interesting.

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