

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

CATHERINE A. REINHARDT, *Claims to Memory: Beyond Slavery and Emancipation in the French Caribbean*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2006, 202 p., index.

In her introduction to *Claims to Memory: Beyond Slavery and Emancipation in the French Caribbean* Catherine Reinhardt promises to engage in a Foucauldian account of the counter-memory of slavery and emancipation in the French Caribbean. Reinhardt's framework is also inflected with the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari as she proposes to engage with "rhizome memories" (14). Rhizome memories are evidence of the past that are rootless, web-like memories with unfixed origins and thus "these testimonies of the past spread widely and are continuously exposed to the transformative influence of other testimonies" (14).

The methodology that emerges from this type of proposed memory work is a necessary engagement with a variety of sources of testimony. Reinhardt outlines a form of rhizome memory work engaging with the *philosophes*, fiction, the *Société des Amis des Noirs*, as well as texts representing the voices of slaves, white planters, and free people of colour. She suggests that it is from the dialogue amongst these texts, both fact and fiction, that a new understanding of the possibilities of articulating memory emerges. This introduction is inspiring as it suggests a project of memory that is interdisciplinary, conversant and expansive.

Reinhardt does not fail her ambitions. Using the theoretical antecedent of rhizomatic memory and reading across the multiple sources this method entails, Reinhardt succeeds in challenging our simplification of historical narratives of abolition in the Caribbean, and our assumptions about the interrelationship between abolition and the Enlightenment. In the following five chapters, Reinhardt engages with five different "realms of memory" offering a counter-memory of slavery in the French Caribbean. In her reading across genres and realms of memory, this text offers an excellent actualization of rhizome memory.

In chapter 1 Reinhardt interrogates the oft-cited argument that Enlightenment thinkers spurned the abolition of slavery. Reinhardt argues that "the Enlightenment embodies no unified momentum toward abolition but rather an erratic crisscrossing of forces that simultaneously destruct and augment one another" (25). In doing a close reading of some key

Enlightenment thinkers associated with abolitionist ideals, Reinhardt is able to expose their ideas as much more ambivalent towards abolition and slavery than previously thought.

In chapter 2 Reinhardt analyzes competing representations of “the maroon.” Maroons were fugitive slaves that became iconic figures in a variety of ways. In this chapter Reinhardt uses the imagery surrounding the maroon and maroonage to emphasize how, while Enlightenment thinking is often attributed with the abolition of slavery, there were long-standing, fierce forms of resistance from the slaves. Understandings of marronnage are also subject to various practices of public memory, with representations ranging from seeing maroons as the docile “‘civilized’ individuals who became mouthpieces for European values” (73) to maroons as a violent and vengeful threat to Western civility.

Reinhardt explores the abolitionist literature of the French *Société des Amis des Noirs* in chapter 3. In particular Reinhardt examines how the writings of the French society and the slave revolts in the French Caribbean are read most often as the former affecting the latter. Reinhardt counters that “a close reading of the political pamphlets of the *Société des Amis des Noirs* and of the two slave letters reveals that beyond the initial call for freedom, the two narratives bear little if no resemblances” (93). In chapter 4, “Realms of Assimilation,” Reinhardt looks at the tensions between slaves, free people of colour and whites. She exposes different forms of rhetoric exercised by these peoples for and against abolition. This chapter illuminates how race and slavery were both actively conflated and separated by different parties. She concludes that “the lack of solidarity between free coloreds and slaves strikingly demonstrates the instability of racial categories in the colonial world” (117).

This book actualizes its potential in chapter 5, “Realms of Memory.” Reinhardt returns to the inspiration guiding her project – the events in 1998 surrounding the 150th commemoration of the abolition of slavery in France. The purpose of Reinhardt’s text up to this point has been to identify multiple forms and sources of memory of slavery in the French Caribbean. In this chapter via an analysis of museum exhibits, monuments and public art in the French Caribbean, Reinhardt demonstrates both a form of dominant memory that writes slavery out of history, and the potentials for powerful, non-pitying forms of remembering slavery. Reinhardt looks at the reconstruction of former plantations as “sites of forgetting” (129). These are sites where slaves are euphemistically referred to as labourers and whose installations focus on the technicalities of rum production, with nostalgic references to the “West Indian soul” (131). In contrast, Reinhardt offers commemorations of slavery like the *Memorial de l’Anse Clifford*. This monument consists of fifteen, giant white statues that are positioned in a triangle, signaling towards the trade between Europe, Africa and the Americas. The colour white represents the sepulture of the Caribbean, while the enormity of the statues conveys a sense of reverence towards the lives lost. Reinhardt describes the monument in these words: “The communication between the fifteen, giant, white statues and the vast

expanse of water below the cliff creates a reverential quality about the memorial that is quite uncanny” (141). Reinhardt acknowledges early on that, limited by the historic record, she was forced to rely more on the texts of French thinkers. However, this last chapter, which explored ways of remembering that have developed more recently and spoke the most to black Caribbean forms of memory proved the most engaging argument in her book.

Throughout this book there is an underlying critique of the disjuncture between Enlightenment thought and the French principles of liberty and equality and slavery in the French Caribbean. While at some points this book reads more like a history text than the interdisciplinary text Reinhardt was striving for, in the end the five realms of memory in the five chapters work well together, weaving a powerful case of how counter-memory can be actualized.

Claims to Memory offers an historical account of slavery in the French Caribbean from a variety of sources ideal for scholars in the area of the history of slavery. *Claims to Memory* is also engaging reading for scholars in the more general areas of public memory and representation.

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