

CURRENT DEBATES

Wiebke Beuhausen, Miriam Brandel, Joseph Farquharson, Marius Littschwager, Annika McPherson, & Julia Roth (eds.) (2018)

Practices of Resistance in the Caribbean: Narratives, Aesthetics, Politics.

London: Routledge, 290 pages.

Reviewed by Luz Angélica Kirschner

South Dakota State University

The present volume of fourteen interdisciplinary essays engages “asymmetrical relations of power in the Greater Caribbean in historical and contemporary perspectives” (p. 1) to examine the ways colonialism, racism, and sexism have shaped resistance in the region. The compilation continues the tradition initiated by J. Michael Dash in *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (1998) in so far as it engages the heterogeneous Caribbean from global and hemispheric perspectives while avoiding the temptation to apply an all-encompassing Third World theoretical framework that may blur particular historical and ideological circumstances. Although the Caribbean has witnessed the most extreme features of European colonialism (e.g., the subjugation of aboriginal populations, the implementation of plantation economies) and has been affected by natural disasters, capitalist commodification, and corruption, the articles similarly question reductive Eurocentric media representations of the region and present it as more than just an assembly of victimized cultures lacking agency.

Following C.L.R. James’ approach to the islands, the book renders the Caribbean as a dynamic space of resistance that engages with global cultures in interactive and creative ways. From this perspective, the book similarly joins recent publications such as *Transatlantic Caribbean: Dialogues of People, Practices, Ideas* (2014) that foregrounds the global interconnectedness of the region and its ongoing prominent role in world history at a historical juncture when Eurocentric scholarship too often continues to treat the Caribbean as peripheral to (modern and present) global developments.

The papers of the volume were delivered at the international conference “Cultures of Resistance? Theories and Practices of Transgression in the Caribbean and Its Diasporas” held in January 2015 at Bielefeld University, Germany. The Society for Caribbean Research (Socare) and the Center for InterAmerican Studies (CIAS) sponsored the event that took place at Bielefeld University’s Center for Interdisciplinary Research (ZiF). The contributions focus on the theorization and contextualization of resistance

taking into consideration the historical and ongoing “colonial condition” (p. 2) of the region while emphasizing the perspective of “the Caribbean as a space of entanglements” (p. 2) with a longest and unabated history of political and cultural practices of opposition to marginalization and subjugation. As the volume displays, today the struggle continues through, for instance, the CARICOM Reparations Commission, activism, religious syncretism, and oral histories as various peoples from the region confront tenacious (local and global) colonial structures of power that continue to engender and perpetuate socioeconomic inequity. The interdisciplinary volume contains articles on the topics of linguistics (Paula Prescod), literary studies (Geoffrey McDonald, Patrick Eser, Sarah Gröning, Marius Littschwager), activism (Alessandra Rose), (cyber) feminism (Sandra Abd’allah-Álvarez Ramirez, Andrea N. Baldwin and Marva Cossy), critical race theory (Roberto Zurbano Torres), cultural studies (Ilja Labischinski), postcolonial and decolonial theory (Marita Rainsborough). Due to restrictions of space, however, I respond to contributions immediately related to my research. Yet, the selection of papers does provide an insight into the sophisticated and non-reductionist manners that peoples in the Great Caribbean and scholars of the region work towards articulate social change and transformation.

The editors of the volume thematically organize the essays in two sections. “Part I Narratives of/as resistance: Languages,

poetics, and politics in Caribbean literatures” offers essays that analyze Caribbean narratives as “alternative ways of understanding or narrating history and society” (p. 9) with the awareness that inherent to the colonizing project “is the intrinsic and inevitable suppression of local epistemologies and ways of knowing” (p. 9). Signifying the centrality of children’s education to processes of resistance and reform, Giselle Liza Anatol’s essay “Using folklore to challenge contemporary social norms: Papa Bois, Mama D’Lo, and environmentalism in Caribbean Literature” launches the collection of essays with a critical study of the children’s novel *The Protector’s Pledge* (2015) by the Trinidadian author Danielle McClean. Calling for the need to be attentive to “the embedded values within” (p. 27) this genre, Anatol welcomes the novel’s promotion of Trinidadian folklore and environmental message. However, Anatol contends, the relationship between Papa Bois and Mama D’Lo may unconsciously press readers to doubt women’s “trustworthiness” and “accept society’s demands on women to value themselves first and foremost for their physical beauty” (p. 33). “Part II Resistance in/as activism: From theory to practice and back” continues to disclose the profound scope of Caribbean resistance and includes essays that unsettle the divide between theory and activism by bringing “into dialogue academic and activist voices” (p. 14). For instance, focusing on Jamaica and the detrimental impact of British colonialism on the island, Claudia Rauhut’s essay “Caribbean activism for

slavery reparation: An Overview" traces the historical trajectory of the reparation claims of people of African descent for the long-term damages caused by the transatlantic slave trade. Since 2014, in the Caribbean context the CARICOM Reparations Commission (CRC) strives to engage European nations that actively participated in the slave trade in reparatory measures to amend "the historical debt inherited" (p. 139) from slavery. More significant, Rauhut provocatively proposes that, considering the disastrous conditions in which European colonial systems left societies in the Caribbean, reparation claims and aid "can no longer be framed in terms of morality or charity, but rather as reparation for historical injustice" (p. 143). Moving to Costa Rica, in "Debated existences, claimed histories: Black Indigenous women's diasporic lives in Costa Rica," Christina Schramm studies the interracial subjectivities of four Costa Rican Black Indigenous women to complicate the commonplace in academia to study "constructions of Blackness and Indigeneity" separately (p. 163), silence their oral histories, and barely explore "the bonds between Blacks and Indigenous peoples" (p. 163). Although Indigenous and Black peoples can also participate in the reductive practice, Schramm also points at the problematic colonial origins of this well-established methodology in international academia. Questioning persistent colonial structures in research and the production of knowledge, Schramm underlines the need to rethink disciplines such as "Anglophone Caribbean Studies, African

Diaspora Studies, Indigenous Studies, Hispanic Central American Studies and Latin American History" (p. 163).

Taking Schramm's cue, the volume *Practices of Resistance in the Caribbean: Narratives, Aesthetics, Politics* is a significant contribution to the abovementioned fields but also to Critical Race and Latin American Studies, Postcolonial and Decolonial Theory. The interdisciplinary dialogue that the collection promotes will enrich "the ongoing discussion of conceptual challenges, problems and ambivalences related to past and present Caribbean practices of resistance" (p. 8) and stimulate a more multilayered, relational, and complete understanding of the Greater Caribbean and the Americas.