Doris Y. Kadish

Fathers, Daughters, and Slaves: Women Writers and French Colonial Slavery.

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Fathers, Daughters, and Slaves offers a feminist reflection that showcases French women's voices forgotten amid the praise of their more celebrated male counterparts. Doris Kadish questions the "historical neglect" of women in French and Francophone studies, investigating the French colonial empire and the Atlantic world before and after the French Revolution, from the 1780s to the 1820s. She interrogates the omnipresent father figure in the works and lives of three canonical writers—Germaine de Stael, Claire de Duras, and Marceline Desbordes-Valmore—and two lesser-known but important figures, Charlotte Dard and Sophie Doin. She probes their sentimental discourse around the search for a legitimate father figure to serve as a political tool following the French Revolution and contends that their empathy toward the oppressed, black slaves, or other subjected colonial subjects, breaks down patriarchal discourse through their representations of family life and slavery. Kadish connects these "women writers' sensitivity to broader issues such as memory, hybridity, creolization, identity formation, and the ideological implications of pity, paternalism, and sentimental discourse" (p. 7). They may not have directly challenged the patriarchal order, but their sentimental literature offers a counter-discourse to such colonial representations as those found in Victor Hugo's *Bug-Jagal* or Prosper Mérimée's *Tamango*.

These women faced the dwindling power of their biological fathers, and dealt in their writing with symbolic paternal figures through the notions of the benevolent and irresponsible patriarchs. Indeed, Rousseau's *Julie* and Bernadin de St Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* stand as the favored intertext in the feminine sentimental literature around paternal authority, women's autonomy, race relations, and abolitionism. Yet this empathy with the plight of black slaves, which echoes women's subjection, stems from a place of privilege. Eventually, Kadish wonders how these writers navigated social dictates to propose their own views of abolition and femininity and asks how their feminine subjectivity could organize itself around paternal figures. To answer this question, she contrasts white feminine authors to black writers in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries who address the same themes. This contrapuntal approach reveals the women's agency and commitment to both race and gender issues.

The book's introduction adopts a cross-disciplinary approach to questions of subservience and agency. Kadish draws on the work of feminist scholars such as historian Gerda Lerner to assert the historical links among slavery, patriarchy, and the subordination of women. Postcolonial critics such as Edward

Said influence her interrogation of discursive formations around race, gender, and agency, illustrating how cultures shape writers and writers shape cultures. Chapter 1, "Patriarchy and Abolition," puts Germaine de Staël's work and Isaac Louverture's defense of his father in dialogue. In their texts, the imagery of tyrannical patriarchs such as Napoleon Bonaparte that negatively affect the condition of women and slaves is at odds with good paternal figures. Chapter 2, "Fathers and Colonization," complicates interactions between father figures and their daughters in colonial Africa. Charlotte Dard's rehabilitation of her father in postrevolutionary French history destabilizes the literary representations of the sexual politics around *signares*. These African women, often biracial paramours of affluent European patriarchs such as Dard's father and husband, come to symbolize a problematic mixing of cultures that questions European colonialism and sexism.

Chapter 3, "Daughters and Paternalism," concentrates on Marceline Desbordes-Valmore's 1820s corpus about slavery. This actress who lives precariously empathizes with the oppressed slaves. Her praise of "maternal" fathers and her critique of despotic paternal figures construct a problematic feminine empowerment and subjectivity associated with the black condition. Here, Desbordes-Valmore's work and life enter into conversation with literary representations by Minette, a celebrated mixed-race actress from Saint-Domingue. Chapter 4, "Voices of Daughters and Slaves," opens with a discussion of Claire de Duras's life and novel *Ourika*, which Kadish compares to Henriette de la Tour Dupin's works. It closes with an examination of the way twentieth-century Caribbean writers have read Duras and underscores Aimé Césaire's lack of empathy toward this female writer, contrary to Maryse Condé and Daniel Maximin. Chapter 5, "Uniting Black and White Family," examines the theme of unity within the marital sphere through the association of women's conditions and black experience in Sophie Doin's abolitionist corpus and autobiographical writings. Then, Doin's texts are contrasted to those of black Caribbean artists Guillaume Guillon-Lethière and Juste Chanlatte to reveal the exclusion of women in their fight for equality. The postscript contrasts Anne-Louis Girodet's *Portrait du citoyen Belley, ex-représentant des colonies* to the painting *Mme de Staël à côté du buste de son père Jacques Necker*, attributed to Firmin Massot. This intriguing comparison denotes the textual power of painted representations and insists on the diversity of the literary constructions of fathers, daughters, and slaves.

Kadish's study proves that white women's sentimental literature contributed to the larger discourse about race, colonialism, and gender. The perspective of nineteenth-century black writers shows that their main concern was race and not gender equality, an issue white men also neglected. Envisioning the

story of slavery by accounting for white women writers' empathy alone might have led one to conclude that black voices were unable to talk about their own experience. Adding twentieth-century novels to this study allows Kadish to show how representations of fathers, daughters, and slaves have been revisited and how acknowledging feminine contributions remains problematic. Yet, the claim that "neo-slave narratives such as Maximin's are especially important since no authentic slave narratives have survived in the Francophone world" (p. 17) might be seen as contentious. Fictional narratives such as *L'isolé soleil*, no matter how enlightening in their promotion of gender equality and racial pride, should not overshadow other avenues through which black slaves and their descendants expressed their concern and agency in the nineteenth century, such as essays, pamphlets, or court proceedings, even if this means grappling with the alleged sexism of these documents. That said, *Fathers, Daughters, and Slaves* is a valuable contribution to scholars committed to illuminating the gender issues at play in the understanding of white and black women in the French and Francophone colonial and postcolonial world.

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