Rachel L. Mordecai

Citizenship Under Pressure: The 1970s in Jamaican Literature and Culture. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2014. 282 pp. (Paper US\$ 40.00)

The 1970s are considered a turning point in Jamaica, as aspirations of the recently independent nation eroded into political conflict and economic struggle that continue into the present. In *Citizenship Under Pressure*, Rachel Mordecai seeks to understand what the 1970s represent to Jamaicans—"what happened" even within what she describes as a "dynamic of irreconcilable accounts" (p. 3).

The book interrogates the meaning of the 1970s through the familiar Caribbean terrain of postcolonial struggles over citizenship, grappling with identity formation and subjectivity revolving around race, class, and gender. Though the subject seems familiar, Mordecai's fresh approach takes it in valuable and unanticipated directions. Her sources are an innovative assemblage of literary and cultural texts including fiction, memoir, newspaper articles, lyrics, blogs, and interviews. Each text provides insight into a period in which identity and civic engagement are contested and entangled within struggles to control and define what it means to be a Jamaican citizen. The curation of these texts provides a multiperspectival conversation situating competing accounts of the time from a range of subjectivities.

The five chapters that follow the introduction are divided up topically with interweaving themes of community, identity, and citizenship. The book continually circles around social fault lines, borders, and subjectivities that fall between established social divisions of race, class, and gender. The 1970s are shown to be a period of transition and fragility, marked by a longing for wholeness. Chapter 1 contends with Jamaica's "hetero-masculinist" definition of citizenship in relation to the politics of creole multiracialism and black nationalism. It makes innovative use of cultural texts describing Prime Minister Michael Manley, who typifies the politics of Jamaica during the 1970s. Mordecai links narratives conflating Jamaica with Manley, with particular constructions of Jamaican citizenship rooted in Manley's racialized and gendered identity. She asks, "How does the nation want to imagine its leader, and by extension itself?" (p. 16).

Chapter 2 focuses on black citizenship by juxtaposing two black working-class sources of cultural production—the revolutionary Ras Tafari perspective of Peter Tosh and the critical dramatic works of the Sistren Theatre Collective—to pick apart "what was at stake in the urgent attempt to press for the full inclusion of black Jamaicans within the category of *citizen*, and the complexity and internal contradiction that characterized that effort" (p. 68). Chapter 3 then

shifts from examining texts of the 1970s to include contemporary literary works that utilize that decade as a backdrop. By focusing on Maroons, Mordecai is able to dig deeply into constructions of racial identity that are linked to ideas about authenticity and postcoloniality. The main characters, light-skinned creole women grappling with their relationship to the “homeland” and their own blackness, drive the novels of Margaret Cezair-Thompson and Michelle Cliff. The symbolic placement of Maroon characters in each text allows Mordecai to unpack the ways race and citizenship intersect as the women encounter figures representing modern blackness depicted as both threatening and damaged. The Maroon characters, by contrast, symbolically represent what Mordecai calls “prelapsarian blackness,” untouched by the brutality and degradation of slavery, or an “ancestral blackness” that can be claimed as a part of the creole multiracial subject’s politics and identity (p. 122).

Chapter 4 analyzes three works by Jamaican men to discuss nostalgia in writing about the 1970s—novels by Brian Meeks and Garfield Ellis, both set in Kingston, and Morris Cargill’s memoir, originally published in 1978, which contributes a planter-class white perspective to the discussion of race, belonging, and postcolonial desire. Mordecai theorizes nostalgia not as a mere longing for an idealized past, but also as a critical approach highlighting failures and unaddressed needs of the present. She examines the way these failures are identified in each text as nostalgia for the time before political conflict versus nostalgia for a time before Manley. She highlights ambiguities in Cargill’s memoir, which demonstrates nostalgia for both a time before his contemporaries emigrated and for the debased workforce living on his estate. Chapter 5 departs from the book’s focus on the 1970s by using contemporary fiction, memoir, blogs, and essays as well as interviews to analyze sexuality and Jamaican citizenship. Though the Gay Freedom Movement that originated in the late 1970s is only briefly discussed, the chapter closes the circuit that began with the analysis of Manley and his hetero-masculinist representation of citizenship by focusing on the way same-gender-loving Jamaicans are excluded from citizenship, deliberately perform their identities, and engage in subversive enactments of inclusive citizenship.

The complexity of Mordecai’s subject is matched by the richness of her work and the careful curation of her sources, leaving readers with a nuanced and innovative window onto the meaning of the 1970s for Jamaica as a nation in formation.

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