Víctor Figueroa

Prophetic Visions of the Past: Pan-Caribbean Representations of the Haitian Revolution. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2015. ix + 297 pp. (Cloth US\$69.95)

Prophetic Visions of the Past is a lucid exploration of mostly-familiar Caribbean texts on the Haitian Revolution, to which Víctor Figueroa succeeds in bringing considerable new insight. He engages with analytical scaffolds of a number of scholars whose work grapples with the production of difference. Walter Dignat's understanding of the production of colonial difference, for example, productively informs Figueroa's "synecdochal ontocolonialism," through which he describes how both colonized and postcolonial individuals have been understood as essentially lesser than a white, putatively "universal" subject. As a means of response to this willful devaluation, Figueroa calls on the ideas of Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Aníbal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, and others, as he exhorts a critical use of plural, nonhierarchical, and multivalent epistemological responses. Ontological justice and the omnipresent, productive tension between particular struggles and universal solidarities are driving imperatives of his text.

In Chapter 1, Figueroa considers theoretical complementarity and tensions between two very different texts, C.L.R. James's *Black Jacobins* and Alejo Carpentier's *Kingdom of this World*, which he convincingly argues engage a shared set of problems about the colonality of power in Haiti and by extension, the Caribbean. They offer, for example, diametrically opposed presentations of Toussaint Louverture's protagonism and the centrality of religiopolitical epistemology and practice. Figueroa highlights the way aspects of their different approaches reflect separate contributions to a fundamentally convergent interest, that of demonstrating how the Revolution disrupts narratives of colonial modernity. Figueroa gamely extends this consideration to Luis Palés Matos in Chapter 2, where he considers his "paradoxes and insights" as a Caribbean writer confronting these debates. He gathers multiple examples of Palés Matos's racism, through overt exoticism, crude imagery, and embrace of hierarchical theories of culture, and more subtly in his unsatisfactory "ironic aloof[ness]." While Figueroa offers useful contextualization of Palés Matos's intervention in narratives of Puerto Rican identity and points out his precocious invocation of performative identity, I think Figueroa himself finds the poet's ideological "tensions" overwhelming, as will most readers.

Chapters 3–5 consider how Aimé Césaire, Derek Walcott, and Édouard Glissant use early Haitian military heads of state to make points about the ideological dimensions and complications of overthrowing colonial order. Figueroa

carefully analyzes the way they seek a productive, delicate balance of universal and particularist epistemologies. And he demonstrates how Glissant resolves tensions between Louverture and maroon leaders, for example, by offering them equal value and leaving their philosophies in productive tension. Time folds onto itself in Glissant's play, a choice that is in itself a formal critique of the progressive and teleological temporalities of earlier accounts. Figueroa's consideration of Walcott's treatment of Jean-Jacques Dessalines highlights a nagging theme, the pitfalls of utilitarian invocation of the Revolution, as a "floating signifier" that has been "used, reinvented, or imagined" (pp. 1, 23). These functionally utilitarian discussions of a moment in time in Haiti directed to some other analytical purpose often demonstrate a need for more historical context. Walcott's worry that Dessalines needs some sort of vindication, for example, accepts contentious Eurocentric interpretations. Absolute survival and defense, not some sort of leisured or malicious "vengeance," were the imperative in the last years of fighting. Dessalines barely held power for two years, in conditions of incredible contest; the premise that he might have been "vain" in his tactics is abstract to the point of nonsense. Here, Walcott's own concepts of restoration, reconciliation, rebuilding, and love, directed to Louverture, might offer apt reassessment. In the wake of Dessalines's violent death, Haitian faithful welcomed the emperor into a pantheon of community and veneration.

There is no reason to single out any one scholar among this brilliant lot, but the moment for more specificity is overdue. The trope of "tragedy," of a Haiti collapsing into despotism from some revolutionary paradox, or perhaps under the fist of Christophe, is deeply vague, and demonstrates an aversion to considering the decades that followed. It leads, furthermore, to all sorts of impasses. The idea that monarchism was always facile "mimicry" is itself a Eurocentric assumption, one that elides the political salience of central African monarchies with which many combatants would have been familiar, as well as the sheer popular political salience of a potentially redistributive figure in postwar absence of stable administration. So is the debate of the relative impact of the French Revolution an echo chamber with no exit, as long as a discussion of other non-European political ideologies of the enslaved does not develop more richly. Even the alternative frameworks offered in Manuel Zapata Olivella's master opus, treated in Figueroa's final chapter, offer a more specifically Cuban vocabulary than a Haitian one. The point is not to divorce the two epistemologies—as Zapata Olivella and Figueroa both argue, interconnection of the diaspora is fundamentally articulated at many points—but rather to avoid admitting the continued elision of lesser known and lesser documented Haitian political languages, far from the docks of Havana and Matan-

zas. From the growth and specificity of these discussions, through substantive inclusion of Haiti's rural majority during the Revolution but also in years following, the "other knowledges" that Sousa Santos and Figueroa exhort will more fully develop.

Figueroa's work is as readable as it is generative. Although a number of scholars have grappled with these works, the genre of Haiti as "master narrative" (p. 171) for Caribbean history is far from exhausted. Figueroa heeds the directive of Maryse Condé, Jana Evans Braziel, and others, for example, as he explicitly moves to more gendered analysis of these tales of masculine heroism. Material for another chapter, considering Yette, Madame Christophe, Mama Dio, and female and nondimorphic *lwa*, is already present in his analysis. Better yet, new studies will engage with the ample field of Caribbean feminist and queer scholarship and will consider an expanded canon that includes the writing of Caribbean women. Finally, there is no reason to sustain an artificial divide between political accounts of the Revolution on the island from these outside narratives, even as joining them, as Figueroa notes, is a large undertaking. In the tensions and commonalities of those analyses, truly pan-Caribbean epistemologies deepen.

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