Clinton A. Hutton

Colour for Colour, Skin for Skin: Marching with the Ancestral Spirits Into War Oh at Morant Bay. Kingston: Ian Randle, 2015. xv + 259 pp. (Paper US\$ 24.95)

Colour for Colour, Skin for Skin is an innovative study that distinguishes itself in an already saturated field of inquiry on the October 1865 Morant Bay rebellion, or as Clinton Hutton notes, the Morant “war” in the longtime parlance of the souls of Jamaican folk (p. xiv). Its publication coincides with the 150th anniversary of the uprising that, between the Haitian and Cuban Revolutions, marked the other salient moment where Caribbean revolution almost materialized.

Gad Heuman, Swithin Wilmot, Diana Paton, Matthew Smith, Anthony Bogues, and Thomas Holt are noteworthy authors of recent examinations of Morant Bay. The bulk of their scholarship explores the rebellion/war solely in terms of historicism. However, Hutton shares with Bogues the less conventional objective to document and refashion not merely historical facts of war, but also interconnections between political theory and history in order to expound the implications of this analytic synergy for modern Jamaica, anticolonial nationalist projects, postemancipation societies, models of enslavement after abolition, and conceptions of sovereignty, freedom, and agency.

One observes this methodological commitment in Hutton’s previous writing: a monograph on the revolution in Saint-Domingue, articles and a collaborative book on Rastafari, essays on philosopher and artist LeRoy Clarke, and meditations on the Afro-Caribbean contributions to the black radical tradition. We also see this in the aesthetic sphere, for Hutton is not only a political philosophy lecturer at the University of West Indies, but also a leading Jamaican visual artist whose paintings capture the rebellion zeitgeist. The book is a complement to his installation art on the uprising in St. Thomas-in-the-East.

Two elements underscore the text’s deftness: its assessment of numerous primary documents and eyewitness accounts from the mid-1800s, and its emphasis on the spiritual domain, ancestors, 1860s Great Revival, and rise of the Native Baptist religion, among other creolized worship forms, espoused by leaders and members of the Morant Bay movement.

The book’s jacket depicts a circular assemblage of seven cutlasses, seven candles, rum libation, and basin with water, leaves, and related ritual items, behind which is a recreated flag of the movement led by Paul Bogle. Hutton demonstrates relationships between religiosity, ritual, and critiques of white supremacy that were bulwarks for mass resistance against the Carlylean anti-black philosophy of the elite plantocracy, who rendered the predominantly Afro-Jamaican ex-slave population effectively unfree. Controversies over squatting, taxes, racism, inequalities, and the divine in Stony Gut, a microcosm

of issues across the island, catalyzed the war. Hutton provides quite possibly *the* best contemporary Caribbean account of what we may call the “metaphysics of rebellion.”

The book includes twelve chapters preceded by an introduction locating the onset of Morant Bay within an “emerging national complex” that reevaluates the psychological, emotional, ideational, linguistic, spiritual, and political moorings of black and brown Jamaicans dissatisfied with unrealized promises and aspirations (p. xiii).

Chapters 1–5 describe the economic and sociopolitical background to the Morant war. Integral are discussions of the land question and conceptualizations of freedom by both persons and collectivities. Hutton also examines vital newspapers that published protest opinions; key secular and religious organizations leading up to the rebellion; and discourses on legality inclusive of colonial courts’ operations. Fascinating is his exegesis of how, with bold political imagination, “organised opposition to the legal system took the form of the creation of a parallel, or people’s court” in which the “people set up their own court because they lost confidence in the formal [colonial state] court system” (p. 72).

Chapters 6–7, which catalogue the intellectual foundations of the Morant Bay war, are among the book’s strongest contributions. Leaders examined are well-known figures Paul Bogle (from whose rebellion ballad the book draws its title) and George William Gordon, as well as lesser-known activists such as John Willis Menard and Samuel Clarke. The Gordon chapter is brilliant. The eighth chapter deals with the metaphysics of rebellion. Hutton outlines the cosmological roots of Jamaican freedom. Compellingly, he also describes “oath-taking” ceremonies including Bogle’s, issued to his followers, and frames them within wider African diasporic oath traditions. He argues that Bogle’s oath ritual was outwardly Native Baptist and inwardly Poko-Kumina.

The remaining four chapters survey Jamaica’s black population in 1865 during Governor Eyre’s infamous regime, explain black women’s suppression, and rationalize how white elites, with the assistance of the Maroons and their Janus-faced freedom, crushed the rebellion. The “racist epistemology of ‘Negro rebellion’” drives planters’ war animus, but its effects never eradicate Jamaicans’ spirit of resistance after the uprising’s quelling (p. 229).

Despite a couple of quibbles (analysis of Bogle merited a chapter, not a subsection, and Thomas Holt’s influential *The Problem of Freedom* should have been cited), Hutton’s *Colour for Colour, Skin for Skin* is a stunning achievement that will likely be debated well into the future.

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