Jennifer L. Palmer, *Intimate Bonds: Family and Slavery in the French Atlantic*.

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. 267 pp. (Cloth US\$ 45.00)

Intimate Bonds analyzes how gender and race were both constructed and contested in daily life within families and households that moved back and forth from one side of the French Atlantic to the other. It focuses on La Rochelle and the Western province of Saint-Domingue where many people from the Protestant city settled over the eighteenth century. The book stands out among Anglophone works on the French Atlantic, which have multiplied recently, for three reasons. First, it adopts a genuinely imperial framework, dealing with both the metropole and the richest French colony of the time, whereas most monographs focus on either the kingdom or one colony. Secondly, instead of following the perspective of a single social category, it pays attention to a variety of social actors—men and women, masters and slaves, and both enslaved and free people of color. Finally, this social inclusiveness allows for consideration of all kinds of close connections rather than the more usual focus, in works about intimacy, on sexual and family relationships.

Jennifer Palmer uses a large range of primary sources: law dealing with the presence of enslaved and free people of color in the kingdom, the Admiralty records of the enslaved and free people of color who entered La Rochelle, family papers, sacramental records, and notarial deeds. Exploitation of the Admiralty records, the only archival series that has been collected *in extenso*, helps her focus on several individuals and families, using their singular life histories to take part in the debate about the chronology of racial formation and to demonstrate that race remained a flexible category until the French and Haitian Revolutions. She also looks at the way race and gender intersected and operated differently in the metropole and in the colony. The book illuminates, in a balanced and nuanced way, both the constraints that an increasingly discriminative law imposed on social actors and their agency to negotiate their racial categorization and social status or those of their relatives. Still, its primary emphasis is on the power of patriarchy in defining social identifications and relationships.

Despite its chronological argument, *Intimate Bonds* is structured thematically, examining successively various kinds of close connections depending on the social actors involved and their locations. Yet it ends as if it has taken the form of a narrative, with an epilogue describing what happened during the revolutionary era. As a result, readers are left to draw lessons from the mosaic of singular individual and family stories in the book; a genuine conclusion could have better underscored the book's contribution to important debates

on the role of racial slavery in constructing the empire and the divide between metropole and colonies, the variety of slave systems and racial regimes according to time and space, the interplay of master-status and whiteness, or the impact of racial slavery on the way intimacy took on new significance throughout the eighteenth century.

Palmer does not reflect on the underpinnings and limitations of her methodological choices. First, the metropolitan side is more thoroughly scrutinized than the colonial one, and the focus on transatlantic families circulating between La Rochelle and Saint-Domingue Western province and on interracial intimate bonds leaves aside all the social actors who were stuck in Saint-Domingue and who could not or would not develop intimate connections with people of European descent. These included the enslaved majority who lived on plantations and the numerous free people of color who, by the second half of the eighteenth century, owned coffee plantations but did not have the means to travel to France. How is it possible to propose a general chronology of racial formation without taking them into account? What does the crossing of racial lines for a minority of social actors who were able to move back and forth between the kingdom and Saint-Domingue both reveal and obscure about the way race operated throughout the empire? Did cross-racial ties ever imperil white supremacy? Such a discussion raises the question of how to measure, circumscribe, and comprehend the process of racialization in all its multiple dimensions, tensions, and contradictions.

Even if *Intimate Bounds* cannot not answer all the crucial questions it raises, the book sheds light on the degree to which the slave system informed the metropole. At a time when France is celebrating the 170th anniversary of the 1848 abolition of slavery and creating a national foundation on the memory and history of slavery in order to better integrate the history of colonial slavery within national history, this monograph is a much welcome addition to the history of the early French Empire.

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