maps and they are very relative. They've all developed over time as a result of various factors and changed over time.'

And a large later section of the book encompasses what we might consider the tricky symbolisms of the Tarot, astrology, chakras, acupuncture, body auras and physical symptoms as themselves signs. She suggests methods to explore such symbolism. She leaps into the gap between the hard realisms of the left

and the vague mysticisms of the New Age right, asserting the modern necessity of seeing the spiritual 'in the physical'. The West's traditional mind/body split, following the period she researched, has its limits, she argues, while herself not transcending political dualism, addressing a reader she assumes to be of the left.

Marsha Rowe

Slave Women in Caribbean Society: 1650–1838

Barbara Bush

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Slave Women in Caribbean Society is an ambitious and important work. In a single volume, Barbara Bush attempts to redress the inequities of nearly two hundred years of a neglected history, in a geographical area covering five million square miles, and peoples separated by at least four major European languages. It can be argued that during the period of study, the commonality of enslaved societies linked black women and men throughout the region. However, it should be no longer acceptable to treat African-Caribbeans as if they were a homogeneous group. This is particularly true for women.

The book is significant because it attempts to dispel the mythologies of black women's deculturalization, promiscuity, passivity, fecundity, and collusion with the white male Establishment in the oppression of their fellows. Inevitably, too much of what is stated applies equally to both genders. But evidence relating to male slaves is often stretched beyond the bounds of serious historical research to encompass women also. Examples abound, but in dealing

with the Quashee/Quasheba stereotypes, and the role of women in organized and individual acts of rebellion, Bush aptly demonstrates how little scholarship has been undertaken in this area. More importantly, she is able to illustrate the inadequacies of contemporary records and that some of these were deliberately tampered with, in support of the prevailing ideologies of the plantocracy.

That she succeeds at all is in part due to the basic tenet of the book, that the history of slave women in the Caribbean has received little scholarly attention to date. It is due also to the challenges Bush poses to a Caribbean historiography dominated by male historians and Eurocentric perspectives.

Apart from Lucille Mathurin's seminal work (1975), little has indeed been published about black women's lives in any part of the Caribbean before the abolition of slavery. As a consequence, black women in the West Indies have been consistently ignored or relegated to the footnotes of history – except, of course, for occasional references in a number of modern publications cited by Bush, notably Brathwaite and Handler.

So much the more reason for giving serious attention to the histories of these women, positive, dynamic and participatory, as told through their own words. Whilst

most of the standard, contemporary white writers, such as Carmichael, Dallas, Long, Nugent and Stedman have been quoted, often Bush has to place their observations in parentheses, in acknowledgement of their Eurocentrism. By relying almost exclusively on secondary sources, Bush finds herself, on the one hand, unable adequately to substantiate her very reasonable hypothesis and, on the other, without the concrete evidence to support this type of 're-buttal' history.

It is clear what needs to be proven – the power of black women to challenge the moral, socio-economic, cultural, physical and psychological deprivation created for them by a white, male hegemony, and the triumph of some of these women against legal, social and sexual oppression – but there are too few credible examples to sustain many of the arguments. The many and frequent unsubstantiated generalizations only serve to accentuate the paucity of the evidence. Worse still, in some minds, the cursory level of relevant data will discredit the whole study.

The main problem, therefore, centres on the fact that the women under discussion are almost exclusively seen through the eyes of pro-slavery white Creoles, Abolitionists, and official recorders. None of these have the legitimacy of the writings of black women themselves. Yet Mary Prince, for example, is never mentioned. Her story is graphically told in *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself* (Ferguson, 1987). And don't her free black and mulatto sisters have any contribution to make to the debate? Surely Nancy Prince (1988) and Mary Seacole (1984) can shed some light on the thesis of Bush's work?

Interestingly enough, Bush accepts the reminiscences of the African Abolitionist, Olaudah Equiano, by quoting his rather romantic recollections of the chastity of African womanhood (p. 94). This is no more worthy of the term 'evidence' (of the lack of promiscuity among slave women) than is Edward Long's comment on black women's bestiality. Long's 'evidence', rejected by Bush, seeks to prove that 'Hottentot' women would not be 'dishonoured by having an orang-outang husband' (p. 15).

The result of these inconsistencies is to render invalid many of the interesting points which would otherwise challenge long-established views about black women. Having said this, the book still provides excellent background on Caribbean histories and African retentions during the period of slavery, and an invaluable insight into the gender and sexual politics of the time. If it does nothing else, it should inspire future feminist historians to pursue extensive research in this area.

Ziggi Alexander

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