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Guy Brunet, ed., *Mariage et métissage dans les sociétés coloniales: Amériques, Afrique et Îles de l'Océan Indien (XVI^e-XX^e siècles)/ Marriage and Miscegenation in Colonial Societies: Americas, Africa and Islands of the Indian Ocean (XVIth-XXth Centuries)*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2015. 367 pp. \$106.95 (pb). ISBN 978-3-0343-1605-7.

Review by Saliha Belmessous, University of New South Wales, Australia.

At the heart of this volume lays the ambition to assess the research in historical demography on colonial societies conducted in the last decades and set up a new research agenda. The editor Guy Brunet has brought together demographers and social historians working on several European empires (the French empire mainly, but also Spanish, Portuguese and Italian) and produced a study covering a wide sweep of time and place. Unfortunately, there is no general argument supporting the volume, no thread connecting the sixteen chapters other than the overall theme that is “marriage and miscegenation in colonial societies.”

The volume is introduced by an interesting assessment of the methodological pitfalls faced by demographers. Guy Brunet states that to study colonial populations, one has first to distinguish them by creating analytical categories. The first category includes settler populations (“populations pionnières”) that could be distinguished further between those who settled definitively and those who eventually went back to the metropolis (“migrants” according to Canadian demographers). The second category includes native peoples, whether they are called Indigenous, Aborigines, Amerindians, and so on. Brunet argues that behind those various designations, we find groups who were economically and politically inferior, groups who suffered from various discriminations, were marginalized and whose number decreased dramatically primarily because of the epidemiological shock. The third category includes slaves coming from Western Africa (he overlooks indentured labourers, mainly from China and India, whose input is discussed in other chapters). Brunet makes sure to remind his reader that both settlers and natives were heterogeneous peoples, borne out of early migrations. The categories of “European settlers” and “natives” should therefore be understood as useful tools despite their lack of veracity.

Miscegenation, and the formation of new populations, resulted from the encounter of these three groups. In this introductory chapter, Brunet also reminds the reader of the complicated colonial taxonomies created to account for human diversity and rule over various colonial populations. For example, though race is an invalid scientific concept, scholars use it as an analytical tool when they look at societies whose order was dependent upon that idea. According to Brunet, the term *métissage* could also be problematic since it is dependent upon the idea of race. *Métissage* results from the encounter of different races and a *métis* is born of parents of different races. Since race is not a valid scientific argument, the same applies to *métissage*. We are all born of different parents, that is, of parents with different DNA.

In their large majority in these colonial societies, those relations involved a European man and a native or slave woman. To account for that pattern, Brunet and all the contributors mention the demographic gender imbalance that prevailed in most colonial societies. Another pattern characteristic of colonial

miscegenation is its localisation in the borderlands. In Canada for example, trappers and traders, not farmers living within the limits of colonial settlements, had relationships with native women.

Relationships between settlers and natives and slaves rarely took place within the European matrimonial system (what the authors understand by “marriage”). To account for these matrimonial alliances, Brunet and his colleagues talk therefore about “concubinage.” They do not, however, define its meaning. This can be problematic for several reasons. Firstly, “concubinage” was, until recently, a derogatory term. In early modern French, “concubinage” meant “toute conjonction illicite, & comprend les adultères, les incestes & les simples fornications, on restreint quelquefois la signification de ce mot, & alors il veut dire habitation d’un garçon & d’une fille, qui vivent ensemble comme s’ils étoient mariez.”^[1] Secondly, when distinguishing marriage from “concubinage,” the authors endorse an apparently European conception of matrimonial alliances approved by the Church. Yet, it would be useful to see how native and African peoples understood those relationships. Some historical explanations of indigenous conceptions of marriage would have been useful. On the European side, much can be said about the changing attitudes of the civil and religious authorities towards those relationships.

In many contexts such as New France, these authorities were often in tension. In eighteenth-century Detroit, French officials condemned intermarriages whereas the missionaries allowed them in order to combat moral disorder. There is also much to say about the attitudes of the religious authorities themselves and historians have highlighted the tensions amongst missionary orders: the Catholic Church, for example, required that a marriage included two baptised spouses. Colonial clerics and missionaries were, in certain contexts, willing to bend the rules (the Jesuit being keener to accommodate Church regulations to local contexts than the Capuchins, for example) whereas the Holy See forbade that.

Finally, the use of “concubinage,” even as an analytical tool, is not consistent throughout the volume: in his chapter on colonial families in sixteenth-century Mexico for example, Bernard Grunberg includes “concubinage” in his discussion of celibacy. The author counts as celibates men who had “des concubines indigènes et des enfants naturels” (p. 93). Obviously these men were not celibates, neither in the eyes of the native population nor in the eyes of their countrymen. Yet, Grunberg opposes marriage to “concubinage” and polygamy to marriage. He writes that “[A]près la licence sexuelle des premiers temps, le concubinage sembla entrer dans les mœurs de la colonie; les Indiens ne s’en offusquaient pas car la polygamie avait été une des bases de leur société; et les Espagnols y voyaient la réalisation de vieux fantasmes” (p. 93). Was polygamy considered unregulated sex? Information on the role of sex in Indian societies and its strategic use by both groups, native and European, to establish or consolidate bonds (economic, political, cultural, social) would have been more useful to understand colonial encounters in Mexico.

Miscegenation between natives and newcomers was not necessary the result of colonial expansion or a colonial strategy of peopling and there were contexts such as French Algeria where strong reasons, amongst which was religion and racial prejudice—on both sides—prevented it from happening. In Algeria, Kamel Kateb writes, Frenchmen intermarried European rather than indigenous women.

Colonial authorities sought to regulate sexual relationships between European men and non-European women, whether it was to legalize or forbid them. In contexts when those relationships, and their offspring, challenged social regulations and social values, colonial governments sought to increase the migration of European women and ban intermarriage. One of the most interesting chapters in this volume concerns twentieth-century Eritrea. Gian-Luca Podesta focuses on the impact of the demographic development of the colony on racial politics and vice versa. The efforts conducted by the Italian Fascist regime to regulate sex between Italian men and African women and deal with their children were particularly striking.

Most chapters examine the stigmas attached to *métis* children. They faced social hiddenness such as in Madagascar where they had to fight hard to have their birth registered. *Métis* children were living testimonies of the porosity of colonial social boundaries. They also acted as intermediaries between their paternal and maternal societies and could play a significant role in bridging the gap between both worlds. In contexts such as Angola and Western Africa where those boundaries were not very rigid, *métis* managed to rise to high-ranked offices.

Despite the individual worth of the chapters, there are several problems with this volume. Critical notions such as “concubinage” and “métissage” are not defined and the contributors do not use them coherently. The organisation of the volume is problematic too: there is a chapter on pre-1700 Canada, followed six chapters later, with another one on the nineteenth-century Canadian Prairies (Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba). There are also two different chapters on the Bourbon Island and two others on Martinique separated from one another. I understand that their chronological timespan is different (pre and post-abolition) but this jumping backward does not allow a smooth reading. The content of the chapters is questionable too. Some essays are synthetic reviews (Etemad, Livi Bacci, Charbonneau, Kateb), others look more specifically and precisely (with facts and figures) at particular contexts. Frédéric Régent (on Guadeloupe and Bourbon Island), Vincent Cousseau (on Martinique) and Marie Polderman (on Guyana) have authored the most interesting essays on the construction of racial and social categories, and the way the authorities negotiated, through legislation, the various statuses attached to these categories. One wonders whether there are not two volumes in one: a textbook—hence the surveys—and a more scholarly volume based on original research. The editor’s choice to give a free ride to his contributors resulted ultimately in a volume of uneven quality and interest.

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Guy Brunet, “Logique classificatoire et métissage dans les sociétés coloniales, XVI^e-XX^e siècles”

Bouda Etemad, “Populations coloniales (XVI^e-XX^e siècles) : une pesée globale”

Massimo Livi Bacci, “Catastrophe and Success: Indios, Africans and Europeans in America”

Hubert Charbonneau, “Les populations française et amérindienne de la vallée laurentienne avant 1700”

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Violaine Tisseau, “Le métissage entre Européens et Malgaches à Antsirabe (Madagascar) sous la colonisation (1896-1960) : des liens entre ouverture et fermeture”

Kamel Kateb, “Assimilation et exclusion des populations dans l’Empire colonial français : le cas de l’Algérie (1830-1962)”

Gian-Luca Podesta, “Race as a Myth. The Empire, Mixed-blood people, Apartheid, Fascist Racism”

Mbala Lussunzi Vita, “Métissage et relations sociales en Angola”

NOTE:

[1] *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* (Nancy: Édition Lorraine, 1738-1742).

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