

Karahasan, Devrim: *Métissage in New France and Canada 1508 to 1886*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang/Frankfurt 2009. ISBN: 978-3-631-58975-5; 313 S.

**Rezensiert von:** Leslie Choquette, Assumption College Worcester, Mass.

This book is an earnest but unsatisfactory survey of four centuries of French-Indian contact in North America. Originating as a doctoral dissertation, it seems to have been published without significant revisions (the abstract on p. 7 refers to „This thesis“). As a monograph based on familiar sources (primarily the correspondence of missionaries and government officials), it breaks little new ground. Moreover, the enormous topic leads to superficial analysis. The author’s conclusion that „métissage was neither a consistent or linear policy, nor a straight process toward Indian assimilation to Frenchness“ is self-evident (p. 15). A study of this kind could provide a useful overview of the scholarly literature; however, this one ignores several recent, important works and is further marred by factual mistakes, infelicitous prose, poor translations from the French, and abundant typographical errors.

The author dates contact from 1508, the year a French sea captain brought seven Beothuk men from Newfoundland to Rouen. Her first chapter deals with the 16th through 18th centuries and presents familiar background about French colonization. Unfortunately, it is rife with errors and anachronisms. Acadia was not „largely settled by Scottish families“ by 1628 (p. 45), as John G. Reid has amply shown.<sup>1</sup> French authorities did not sponsor the migration of filles du roi beginning in 1634 but rather from 1663 to 1673. Governor Vaudreuil could hardly have addressed a letter to Minister Colbert in 1755 (p. 66), Colbert having died in 1683. Finally, there is no excuse for using an antiquated source like Stanislas Lortie (1903) to provide migration statistics (p. 54) given the flowering of historical demography in Quebec since 1970. Yet significant works on the population of New France by Marcel Trudel, Hubert Charbonneau, and Gervais Carpin, to name a few, do not appear in the author’s bibliography.<sup>2</sup>

The second chapter, which focuses on religious missions, correctly notes the diversity of education and conversion strategies (p. 108), but there is no in-depth discussion of syncretism, which is essential to an understanding of cultural métissage. There is also no attention to Native cultures, which varied enormously across New France in terms of subsistence strategies, religious beliefs, kinship structures, sexual mores, and so forth. The author fails to mention two of the most important case studies on Native conversion to appear in recent years: *Mohawk Saint* by Allan Greer and *The Betrayal of Faith* by Emma Anderson.<sup>3</sup>

Chapters 3 and 4 discuss mixed marriages in policy and in practice, arguing that they produced a separate and unequal „social and legal category,“ the Métis (p. 150). Chapters 5 and 6 examine the emergence of Métis communities and Métis nationalism in western Canada in the early 19th century, developments culminating in the Métis’ exclusion from Canada’s Indian Act of 1886 and their subsequent recognition as an aboriginal group in the 20th and 21st centuries.

The question of how and why a distinct Métis identity emerged is a good one, but it can only be answered fully by comparing western Canada to the more numerous places where mixed marriages led instead to assimilation into either French or Indian worlds. Both Acadia and the Illinois Country are cases in point. In these chapters as elsewhere, factual errors abound. For example, there were no Montagnais (Innu) in Louisiana (p. 172), and Aimé Césaire was not a Senegalese writer (p. 266)! Sources remain a problem, with the au-

---

<sup>1</sup> See „The ‘Lost Colony’ of New Scotland and Its Successors, to 1670“, in: John G. Reid with contributions by Emerson W. Baker, *Essays on Northeastern North America. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Toronto 2008, pp. 53-68.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Gervais Carpin, *Le Réseau du Canada. Étude du mode migratoire de la France vers la Nouvelle-France (1628-1662)*, Paris 2001; Hubert Charbonneau u.a., *Naissance d’une population. Les Français établis au Canada au XVIIe siècle*, Paris 1987; Marcel Trudel, *Catalogue des immigrants, 1632-1662*, Montreal 1983).

<sup>3</sup> Emma Anderson, *The Betrayal of Faith. The Tragic Journey of a Colonial Native Convert*, Cambridge, MA 2007; Allan Greer / *Mohawk Saint*, Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits, Oxford 2005.

---

thor relying on outdated authors such as Rameau de Saint-Père (1859) and ignoring crucial modern studies like those of Sylvia Van Kirk, Susan Sleeper-Smith, and Lucy Eldersveld Murphy.<sup>4</sup>

The author's English prose is marred by awkward formulations and vocabulary, and her French translations are dreadful. *Propriété immobilière* (real estate) is rendered as „immobile propriety“ (p. 147), and „Sa Majesté—with reference to Louis XIV—as „she“ and „Her Majesty“ (pp. 128-129).

To conclude, *Métissage in New France and Canada, 1508-1886* represents a conscientious effort on the part of the author, but it should not have been published in its current state. Readers interested in the topic would do better to refer to more reliable studies.

Leslie Choquette über Karahasan, Devrim: *Métissage in New France and Canada 1508 to 1886*. Frankfurt am Main 2009, in: H-Soz-u-Kult 24.02.2012.

---

<sup>4</sup>For example, Lucy Eldersveld Murphy, *A Gathering of Rivers. Indians, Métis, and Mining in the Western Great Lakes, 1737-1832*, Lincoln, NB 2001; Susan Sleeper-Smith, *Indian Women and French Men. Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes*, Amherst, MA 2001; Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties. Women in Fur-Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870*, Winnipeg 1999.