Postcolonial Repair and Afro-Descendant Resistance: How Guadeloupeans Reclaim the Terrain of History

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Abstract: Through the recent opening of the Memorial ACTe in the French Caribbean island of Guadeloupe, a “center for the expressions of the memory of the slave trade and slavery,” the French government offered a symbolic gesture while continuing to evade the question of material and infrastructural reparations. Guadeloupean activists counter the claims that the historical violence of colonialism and slavery has been repaired and lies in the past. They defend a practice of history from below, stemming from eroding sepulchers and sites of resistance. In this talk, Rabanes foregrounds postcolonial repair as community-based and community-centered to demonstrate the ways Guadeloupeans respond to the afterlife of slavery. Her talk analyzes the government discourse on symbolic reparations and its countering by memorial activists. She argues that repair requires an intentional engagement with the past as presence, through collective and embodied relationships with the land, ancestors, and each other.

Bio: Raphaëlle Rabanes is completing her Ph.D. in Medical Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, and currently holds a Pre-Doctoral Fellowship in Black Studies at UC Santa Barbara. Her work investigates how Guadeloupeans in three sites (health-care providers and patients; choreographers and dancers; and memorial activists) wrestle with Guadeloupe’s continuing structural relationship with France, and respond to health and racial inequality through movements of embodied repair.