

# E3W Review of Books



Spring 2020

Volume 20

**Self-determination, Resistance, and the  
Dissentient Body: Sovereignty in the  
Aftermath of Colonization**

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Reviews should be of texts relevant to Ethnic and Third World Literatures, their history, and/or culture. Reviews of fiction or poetry should be 500-800 words; non-fiction, 1000-1250 words; featured alumni texts, up to 2000 words; interviews and review essays (multiple texts) 1500-1750 words.

Submission inquiries should be addressed to [e3wsubmit@gmail.com](mailto:e3wsubmit@gmail.com).

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# **SELF-DETERMINATION, RESISTANCE, AND THE DISSENTIENT BODY: SOVEREIGNTY IN THE AFTERMATH OF COLONIZATION**

**Co-Edited by Aris Moreno Clemons  
and Xuan An Ho**

Last night, a friend called. A Black man of Caribbean descent, one who rarely displays emotions if he can help it, through tears he said the words: “My father has COVID, and they are telling me he only has fifteen minutes of life left.” Immediately questioning the level of care given based on his father’s status as elderly, Black, and poor, his words cried out against the institutionalized systems of inequality inscribed on his father’s body. He understood that his father had heightened precarity due to the aforementioned embodied factors; and while the fact of racism and classism cannot be underestimated, it is also true that his father was actually hospitalized, a tragic reminder that deaths like his father’s point to the overwhelming deficiencies in our privatized healthcare system, and our ability and/or desire to care for our vulnerable. We grieve this loss, and the losses of the future.

If there is anything this experience and the last few months have taught us, it is that the body is still the battleground where skirmishes over geopolitics, nationalism, borders, trade, and science and medicine, play out to devastating effect. We use the word “devastate” in its original meaning—to lay waste. As we write this introduction now, a wasteland grows; globally, almost two million people are infected by COVID-19, over a hundred thousand have died, and an innumerable amount are reeling as entire social and economic infrastructures have frozen or fallen in the virus’s wake. A pandemic of this magnitude has not occurred since the Spanish Influenza of 1918. Looking at the current administration’s response to the crisis, we can see a version of Achille Mbembe’s

“banality of power” at work—power that arises from formations of memory, will, fantasy, and desire; power that is chaotic, pluralistic, and at times, arbitrary; power that controls lives.

While the virus reminds us, all too emphatically, that all humans are susceptible to disease and death, it also clarifies that systemic inequalities lead to an unequal dissemination of bodily injury. In the United States, the vulnerable—Indigenous, Black, Latinx, poor, elderly, the unhomed, and the immunocompromised—suffer disproportionately from the virus. Microbes do not discriminate, but we do; our institutions, our discourses, and our epistemologies lay bare the architectures of domination and oppression that determine and decide which lives matter, which should be protected, and conversely those that can be expended, those that can be exposed to death in the dual name of nationalism and capitalism. And of course, the virus also reminds us that we are nothing but human; a whole other world of animate life looks and lives on.

Emerging from quarantine, a nightmarish simulation that seems to come straight out of Foucault’s lectures on biopolitics, the twentieth edition of the *Ethnic and Third World Literatures Review of Books* poses “Self-determination, Resistance, and the Dissentient Body: Sovereignty in the aftermath of colonization,” as a theme to interrogate the politics of the body in both its material and immaterial manifestations. We aim to celebrate scholarship that pays particular attention to the ways that minoritized populations have resisted colonial formations of power in their respective communities. Central to this year’s review is work emerging from E3W alumni Naminata Diabate and Kirby Brown who discuss and problematize notions of sovereignty in emancipatory moments.

As we are currently in the throes of what some have posed as a critical moment for structural change and what many of us hope to be an emancipatory moment, our community of scholars calls on work that disrupts colonial formations of power, recognizes revolutionary ideals, and radically



imagines other ways of living in the world. Our general section attempts to read this moment from a variety of vantage points—indigeneity and race, labor practices, black feminist epistemologies, feminist activism, gendering politics, and reformulating methodology and discipline in order to achieve sovereignty in the aftermath and afterlife of colonization(s).

Signaling the current reincarnation of a strain of xenophobia (spearheaded by the President's insistent repetition of the phrase "Chinese virus"), we begin with Kerry Knerr's review of Simeon Man's *Soldiering Through Empire: Race and the Decolonizing Pacific*, which discusses a key, underrepresented chapter in the narratives of US empire—the interrelation between the war-making project of the US and its race-making project. Knerr's accentuation of the making of "good" versus "bad" Asians, "model minorities" versus "subversives," to support US geopolitical desires during and post-WWII, provides a crucial reminder to not forget histories of racialization lest we forget their instrumentalization for war and domination. We are reminded that domination takes several forms and lives on the body. Joshua G. Ortiz Baco looks to Daina Ramey Berry's *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh* as an example of historiography that seeks to put the human back in narratives of enslaved bodies. Berry's work actively protests its title, and the author fashions two terms, "ghost value" and "soul value," to underpin that a body is more than flesh and to challenge us to quantify something as abstract as a soul.

Jesse Ritner's review of *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* allows us a glimpse into Audra Simpson's goal of restructuring anthropological thought, which generally privileges the voice of the outsider in the telling of a cultural story—"exterior orientation of anthropology." Ritner's review points to the ways that the author refocuses attention on the indigenous populations themselves, particularly their act of "refusal," denying dominant definitions of sovereignty. Emily Harring's review of Kim Tallbear's *Native American DNA* extends debates over defining sovereignty, particularly the obsession with tribal affiliation by blood quantum.

Diana Leite reviews Jennifer Nash's *Black Feminisms Reimagined*, a love letter to intersectionality from its

optimistic critic, one who believes in the potential of intersectionality to create new visions in the world. These new visions often require new writing practices, as seen in Hershini Bhana Young's *Illegible Will*, reviewed by Joshua Kamau Reason. Indebted to Saidiya Hartman's notion of critical fabulation, Young listens closely to the silences in Black archives, and imagines what conversations may have taken place and what radical thought may have emerged from those elided words. Rosy Mack's review similarly highlights innovated methodologies employed by Kristen Ghodsee in *Second World, Second Sex*, which traces feminist activism through a rigorous review of United Nations projects "crisscrossing between the historical record, personal testimony and out-of-the-way archives." This attention to new forms of knowing is taken up in Margaret Mendenhall's review of *Animate Literacies*, a beautiful homage to the success of Nathan Snaza's argument that literacies move beyond the boundedness of textuality into the realm of affect, nature, and the spiritual.

We end the general section with two reviews of work that demand attention to be paid to the vulnerable. Mariana Rivera's review of *Courage, Resistance, and Women in Ciudad Juárez: Challenges to Militarization* provides an account of the ways that Kathleen Staudt and Zulma Méndez successfully gender narratives on resistance; and Ipek Sahinler's review of Matt Brim's *Poor Queer Studies* allows us entry into the ways that institutions dictate stratifications along long established class lines, causing a rupture between liberatory work and the places where it is allowed voice.

Our special sections take up the task of illuminating self-determination, resistance, and the dissentient body. The first section, "Be/Longing: The Flight and Fight for Home," edited by Alhelí Harvey and Hartlyn Haynes, stages a conversation about our current conditions as raced, gendered, and classed individuals living at the break of a global crisis. Contextualizing their reviews through the lens of COVID-19, the special section editors introduce varying forms of resistances as discussed in the works reviewed.

Jessica Sánchez Flores and Juan Tinay Chirix's section, "Rethinking Cultural and Political Spaces: Intersectional Indigenous Hemispheric

Dialogues,” notes the ways that Indigenous and black bodies have routinely been the subjects of study; however, in this section the editors ask us to problematize knowledge productions of Indigenous and Black scholars, and follow Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s mandate to situate “the importance of Indigenous scholars to fight, and resist the perpetuation of colonial legacies by (re) membering, (re) connecting, (re)writing, and (re) righting our histories.” In an effort to walk the talk of decolonizing academic practices, this section offers, for the first time in E3W history, a review written in Spanish.

In the section, “Blackness, the Body, and Ontology,” Nicholas Bloom and Gaila Sims ask us in light of the “ontological turn” in critical race studies, “who is capable and who is responsible for imagining a world unencumbered by the structures of racial dominance?” The reviews in this section as well as the following sections work through the difficulties of even attempting to hypothesize answers to this question. In “Catastrophe, Contradictions, and Decoloniality: Caribbean Perspectives for a Global Scale,” Sophia Monegro and Wilfredo Burgos map a “written geography of possibilities”: diasporic works that take up the resignifying and re-imagining of the complex aftermaths of colonization in the Caribbean.

Rhya Moffitt Brooke and Iana Robitaille introduce their section, “Figuring Futurity: The Body as Speculative Frontier,” by questioning the politics of the speculative, especially when complicated by the materiality of the body. Their provocative query—“What power do we have to chart the future when the body is compass?”—suggests that we still have much to discover about the form of the body and what it can express.

We end the review with Jeremy Goheen and Claudio Eduardo Oliveira’s section, “Infrastructure in the Aftermath of Colonialism,” a culmination of desires to move disciplinary theories into the realm of practice. Introducing reviews that take up the material—ships, trash, railways, roads, bridges, telegraph wires, etc.—the editors ask us “if Bruce Robbins is right in saying that the project of making infrastructure visible is a ‘materialist version of the politics of human rights,’ then how might we mobilize it in the service of decolonization?”

Reviewers in this section highlight the possibility of mobility in the unlikelyst of sources.

By ending our review on this idea of movement, we would like to insist that the work done *in* these pages is not contained *to* these pages. If we believe that crises bear opportunities for meaningful change, if only because many are unsure about how to move in the dark, then this review of books is our attempt to hold up the voices we would like to see at the fore of that change. We, like many intellectuals faced with the impending collapse of superstructures, ask where do we go from here? Contrary to pervasive feelings of panic and pessimism, we feel strengthened and emboldened by the collected works and the collaboration that made this review possible. We hope to share this unlikely but welcomed affect with you by offering the following voices and visions of those who have been mired in questions of liberation, sovereignty, and self-determination for many years.



**Simeon Man**

*Soldiering Through Empire: Race and the Making of the Decolonizing Pacific*

**University of California Press, 2018**

**191 pages**

**\$29.95**

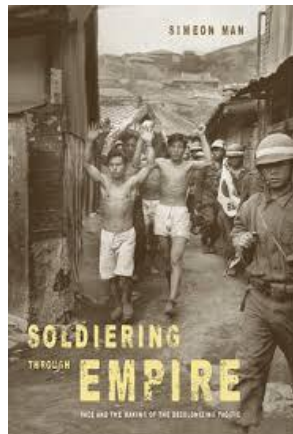
**Reviewed by Kerry Knerr**

Simeon Man's *Soldiering Through Empire: Race and the Decolonizing Pacific* offers a clear and incisive transnational framework for the racialization of Asian and Asian-American subjects in global US empire. This study follows the labors of transnational soldiers and military service workers from the conclusion of WWII through the Vietnam War. Drawing on sources ranging from the US National archives and anti-imperial activist publications to novels and personal testimonies, *Soldiering Through Empire* follows the labor circuits of military service workers to illuminate a history of war-making that cannot be captured by nationalist and other chronological frameworks.

The decades after WWII in the United States prove something of a paradox in terms of racializations: a formal rhetoric of racial inclusion touted integration and diversity as essential American values, while the promise of civil rights for racialized and colonized peoples—within and outside the US state—remained unfulfilled. Indeed, during the middle of the twentieth century, the ability of the US state to criminalize and make war on targeted groups only expanded and increased the formalization of processes of inclusion and exclusion from the state. Man captures the indeterminate function of US imperial power through his geographic scope, what he terms “the decolonizing Pacific.” “a term that names the historical conjuncture when anticolonial movements in the United States, Asia, and the Pacific became intertwined with the US militarization drive to secure the global capitalist economy.” Anticolonial movements originated

from both state powers and local activists, although for widely divergent reasons. For some in the decolonizing Pacific, inclusion in the US war state offered economic mobility, while others rightly identified the insidious influence of capitalist markets. ‘Sub-empires’ of the US state including Japan and South Korea permanently suspended the project of national self-determination in exchange for US military support. Man traces the infrastructures of US military efforts in the Pacific from the suppression of Filipino independence struggles during WWII, through US conversion of ‘liberated’ Japanese imperial holdings, through the US-led war in Vietnam. Man’s chronology and scope show that WWII was not a boundary event for the US imperial state, but one moment in an ongoing war effort.

Ultimately, Man finds the power of the US state to make war was built through the power to make race. In myriad fora, the development of the transnational US security state demanded the differentiation of “good” Asians from “bad” Asians, between those to be incorporated into the postcolonial state and those to be expelled from it. Racialized anti-communist sentiment furthered these processes while offering a seemingly race-neutral guise. Man deftly shows how domestic American racial constructions of Asian Americans as subversives and as model minorities occurred within and through geopolitical projects. For example, Man argues that the US-backed deployment of Filipino medical staff to South Vietnam effectively imbricated US military power into decolonizing national structures. Doctors, nurses, and medical staff from the Philippines provided essential affective care to Vietnamese refugees fleeing communism, embodying both inter-Asian filial fellowship (“Operation Brotherhood”) and American exceptionalism, as recently emancipated imperial subjects. In this way, Filipino medical staff operated within the US psychological warfare apparatus. Similarly, in his analysis of military infrastructure in Hawai‘i through the 1950s, shows how the inclusion of Native Hawaiians into the racial category of ‘Asian/Pacific Islander’ elides Chinese and Japanese settler practices in the islands and disavows pressing demands for Native sovereignty. Hawaiian statehood under the rhetoric of racial liberalism is a direct usurpation of Kānaka Maoli sovereignty and a violent act of empire. Man



illustrates this point vividly through vignettes of military training exercises conducted in faux-Vietnamese villages in Oahu in preparation for war in Vietnam. For Chinese- and Japanese-descended kama'āina, those born and raised in Hawai'i, statehood offered political ascendancy; for Kānaka Maoli, statehood was a continuation of the settler state, meant to naturalize imperial violence and naturalize indigenous dispossession. The power of the US military state to reward "good" Asians with military contracts and punish "bad" Asians with military intervention supported global and domestic constructions of Asian racialization.

This work clearly and brilliantly brings together several disparate and important themes: the circuits of American empire, the labor history of war, the transnational construction of race, geopolitical histories of the Cold War, and ongoing resistance to imperial power. Man shows how Asian American veterans centered a critique of US empire in post-deployment Asian American radical activism. Scholars working in US empire, racial formations, labor history, political and diplomatic history, postcolonial studies, and Asian and Asian American studies will find *Soldiering Through Empire* both a useful source and a model for effective and original scholarship. One point that needs clarification is Man's exclusion of Pacific Island nations from his geographic scope. Without taking away from the transnational circuits clearly explored in this work, the absence of analysis of colonized nations in the Pacific itself (beyond Hawai'i)—particularly US colonial holdings in the Pacific, such as the Mariana Islands, the Marshall Islands, or American Samoa—seems odd given emphasis on the US imperial state. How would this argument be augmented by the inclusion of nations currently experiencing direct US colonization, in addition to the self-effacing structures Man describes along the Pacific Rim? Given the history of militarization in the US-colonized Pacific, such a study would add substantially to the historiography of these areas.

Man's work in *Soldiering Through Empire* concretely shows the indeterminate nature of US empire. Scholars of US empire such as Lisa Lowe and Aloysha Goldstein remind us that the US national project is constantly in a state of failing forward, that it remains unfinished and incomplete. Asian subjects emerged as a force essential to the

construction of postcolonial states and the furtherance of US empire. As Man writes, "soldiering through empire brought formerly colonized peoples into proximity, spurring fleeting alliances that exposed—if only briefly—the limits of these state endeavors and the horizons of their unfinished struggles for democracy." From the lives and works of transnational Asian military laborers, Man creates an exemplary analysis that resists the magical realism of the imperial state.





**Daina Ramey Berry**

*The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation*

**Beacon Press, 2017**

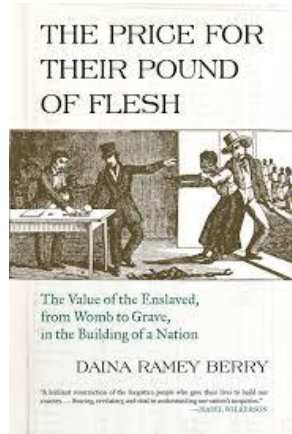
**282 pages**

**\$18.00**

**Reviewed by Joshua G. Ortiz Baco**

As with many economic histories of slavery, terms like sale, appraisal, and value appear throughout *The Price for their Pound of Flesh*. Daina Ramey Berry, however, proposes a rearrangement of our understanding of familiar terms and figures. Berry organizes her chapters “around the life cycle of an enslaved person’s body” and not within the chronological order often used to explain the development of slavery in the United States. In a clear contrast to trends like cliometrics, interpretation guided by big-scale statistical analysis, the book diverges from accepting fiscal values literally or utilizing a macro analysis to understand individual elements in the lives of the enslaved. Rather, the appraisal and sale price ranges that appear at the beginning of each chapter become a starting point to probe the values assigned to each individual presented in the book, generating questions that the official record leaves unanswered. As the title suggests, the six chapters cover the justifications used to monetize human beings before they were born and long after they had passed away. Berry presents these justifications but overlays them with a keen awareness of the moments that reveal how the enslaved valued themselves.

Often buried in the record of the enslavers or cast aside as unverifiable details, voices of the freed and enslaved Blacks in the archive are reintroduced by the author’s demonstration of the possible correlations between the internal and the external values attributed to their bodies. That is to say, the



appraisal price based on future production, the sale price determined by the market, and the ‘ghost value’ conferred at the time of death are external metrics which are influenced by the internal qualities Berry terms ‘spirit’ or ‘soul value.’ This last concept, coined by Berry, is inferred from an array of actions by the enslaved that affirmed their personhood. In the attempt to discover this intangible value and how it informed the price placed on the bodies of the enslaved, the author draws from a trove of well-known sources like auction records or newspapers alongside less traditional documents in the form of poems and songs. This combination of sources results in more than 88,000 individual records that attempt to disassemble the system of slavery into its human parts.

In Chapter 1, Berry discusses the differences in estimation of procreating enslaved women from the Revolutionary era until emancipation through a combination of slave ads, abolitionist songs, and second-hand accounts of auctions. Beyond the physical attributes and work skills recorded in their sale, she finds that ‘breeding women’ were considered financially advantageous because they could procreate, thus commanding a higher price, but were also seen as a potential burden for owners unable to sustain additional enslaved offspring. To further support her findings, she presents abolitionist depictions of mothers separated from their children to demonstrate that there were other considerations that went into the calculations of slave owners, like the increased risk of escape to reunite with family or the effect that the trauma of separation could have on women’s productivity. These narratives, according to Berry, “clearly recognized the health and the humanity of the enslaved” and provided a glimpse of the ‘soul value’ of mothers by recording and substantiating instances in which they attempted to influence their fate. Evidence of concrete acts like escape attempts, and more internal strategies such as fantasizing about their children’s lives, individuate the different embodiments of motherhood under slavery while also supporting Berry’s contention, to the contrary of previous research, that child separations were in fact a common practice.

Building on the evidence of child separation, Berry explains in Chapter 2 how sex was rarely a metric for the prices set on children up until the age of ten,

at which point, “enslavers could determine that their investment in human property was [...] beginning to materialize. They had a better understanding of the strength and skills of growing children at age ten and began valuing them accordingly.” Hence, child separation was not a particularly significant transaction for enslavers, especially considering the high mortality rates and the uncertainty about enslaved children’s future value. Berry finds, however, that at age ten many enslaved children became aware of their status through sale or initiation into forced labor, and were attributed monetary value through their sale, appraisal, and insurance policies meant to protect the enslavers investment. As Berry explores in Chapter 3, the accumulation of traumas associated with these experiences along with the innate personalities of the enslaved make up “the spiritual value of their immortal selves” or their ‘soul value.’ Family and peers cultivated the recognition of this irremovable value during adolescence and young adulthood in the form of kinship and spirituality. This self-perception, according to the author, helped the enslaved fight against their commodification in different ways. In some cases, the enslaved were able to purchase themselves and family members, or they negotiated their own sales.

The last three chapters deal with a series of test cases in which Berry contrasts the prices in life of various members involved in different enslaved uprisings and their postmortem values or ‘ghost values.’ In the process, she finds that enslavers received reparations during slavery when their enslaved died or were killed. The loss and mourning of the families of the enslaved were also affected by the cadaver trade through which their loved ones could be exhumed without their knowledge or consent. Along with the varied archival materials that illustrate the weight of familial and romantic relationships between the enslaved in life and death, Berry’s strongest arguments come from findings about the use of Black bodies in this trade and how the practice further highlights the lingering shortcomings of economic histories of slavery and the slave trade. Her thorough analysis of the practices involved in the exhumation of bodies for medical research and training reveals the inextricable role of Black bodies in the development of modern medicine in the US. This study accentuates the glaring contradiction in dehumanizing the enslaved while at the same time

using their bodies to further the study of human anatomy.

To explain this almost inconceivable practice, Berry develops an analogy of the cadaver trade with the cycle of the cultivation of crops through the seasons in the year, demonstrating the level of complexity and forethought that went into the market of dead bodies as comparable to the agricultural industry. Her abstraction of the topic seems to recognize the impossibility of modern readers to imagine such a ghoulish practice and its relation with its modern counterparts in the trafficking of people and organs. This last connection of slavery’s contemporary relevance drives home the fact that spiritual reunification or peaceful rest in death was often beyond the realm of possibilities for the enslaved because their bodies continued to hold value in death. This new dimension, as Berry describes it, reveals as much about the commodification of Black bodies and about the impact of slavery beyond the physical lives of the enslaved. Nevertheless, by recovering ‘soul values’ she also proposes a way to humanize the record and thus dialogue, even if one-sided, with those we remember.



**Audra Simpson**

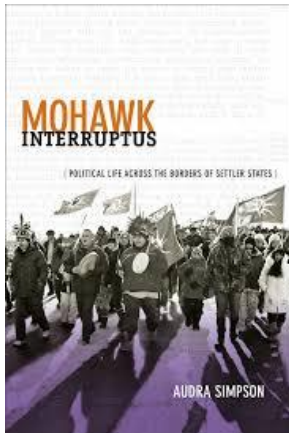
*Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*

**Duke University Press, 2014**

**280 pages**

**\$26.95**

**Reviewed by Jesse Ritner**



What if the settler-colonial project is incomplete? The question may seem bizarre. After all, decolonial critique argues that settler-colonialism is not an event, but a process that continues to function today. And like all processes, it is liable to disintegrate due to the tensions within a system of power. And yet, settler-colonial critiques too often presume that issues of political authority and sovereignty have been resolved, and the settler-state has won the day. This is due, in part, to a major intellectual and material problem that has by and large gone unanswered. What is a sovereign Indigenous nation, and how does it function within the settler-state? The general consensus is that the settler-governments of the United States and Canada bestow certain levels of sovereignty on Indigenous nations. Audra Simpson's goal in her monograph *Mohawk Interruptus* is to overthrow this notion and demonstrate the centrality of Indigenous action in defining Indigenous sovereignty. Simpson strives for a new set of anthropological questions, forgoing how Indigenous nations may fit within settler-theories of politics. Instead she asks us to consider how Indigenous people themselves understand their sovereignty. To this end, her book is as much a methodological treatise as it is a theoretical one. Simpson offers her own nation, the Kahnawá:ke as a case study. In the end, she demonstrates that it is Indigenous discourse which functions as the material foundations to Indigenous sovereignty.

Simpson critiques the methods of both political science and anthropology as part of the reason that

Indigenous sovereignty is so undertheorized. Inverting what she sees as the exterior orientation of anthropology, *Mohawk Interruptus* offers readers an ethnography from the inside. She contends that the Kahnawá:ke theorize their own conceptions of sovereignty through acts of refusal. Take for example, the idea of human rights or citizenship as a gift. The language of gifts presumes a universality of "goods" people should want. However, the Kahnawá:ke actively refuse the legitimacy of universal goods. Rather than presuming the Kahnawá:ke wrong, Simpson interrogates this refusal, and finds in it a radical rejection of settler-liberal-democracy. In her terms, the Haudenosaunee "refuse the 'gifts'" of settler-citizenship. They don't vote or pay taxes – they simply won't stop being "*politically*" Iroquois (7).

Simpson divides her book into six chapters. Chapter one introduces her claims, providing readers an overview of relevant arguments within various fields. The chapter is devoted to laying out her three driving themes. The first is 'nested sovereignty,' which claims that sovereignty can exist within sovereignty. The second is that 'refusal' is the political alternative to 'recognition,' or the idea of a universal liberal 'good.' Third, she contends that the culture and politics necessary for the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples has not yet been provided by either political science or anthropology. Her book's central claim is wound through these three contentions. Not only is *Mohawk Interruptus* a powerful example of ethnography from within, it also contends that ethnography from without asks the wrong questions. By trying to theorize culture in specific ways, it has tended to obscure rather than reveal. In its place, Simpson provides a "cartography of refusal" which stretches from precolonial invocations of sovereignty into the present (33).

Chapter two turns from theory to history in order to explore the membership debate around Kahnawá:ke citizenship. Membership and citizenship revolve around historical circumstances in which the Kahnawá:ke were and still are forced to define who is legally a part of the nation. The debate has two sides within the community. The first, which she deems the culturalist approach, determines membership through kinship ties based in clans, meaning that anyone whose mother is Kahnawá:ke is a tribal member. The second, which

she calls the “geneologic-cum-’racialist’ definitions,” determines citizenship through a type of racialized logic in which a citizen is anyone with at least four Mohawk great-grandparents (44). The debate marks a continued conflict with settler-colonial regimes, where the need to both culturally and politically defend their independence requires partaking in an action which limits Mohawk society in likely undesirable ways. Despite their contradictions, Simpson argues that both internal viewpoints regarding Kahnawá:ke citizenship serve as acts of refusal toward what she suggests is a very American sensibility of identity defined by family origin stories based in European emigration and largely devoid of cultural, political, or social connection. Yet, making sense of this debate also requires historicizing the conditions which govern it.

Chapter three offers an intellectual history of both anthropology as a discipline and of anthropology surrounding Iroquois identity, starting with Ely Parker and Lewis Henry Morgan. Throughout she offers two themes. First she questions the desire of those writing ethnography from without, and second, she contests the geography of anthropology which has historically focused on the Handsome Lake band of Iroquois with the underlying presumption that they are representative of all Iroquois peoples. By thinking of the ways in which ethnography and captivity narratives overlap in style, content, and scope, she shows that culture – as a topic of study – is “the ontological endgame” of a variety of material-colonial encounters. These encounters include warfare, trade, and sex, to name but a few (97). As such, it follows that the study of culture, in its functional sense, serves as a continuation of the imperial project. In response to the history she lays out in chapter three, chapter four lays out an alternative ethnography, one that refuses difference and instead centers on the voice of the people being studied. The result is a narrative which refuses the idea that a hierarchical colonial past is necessary to true or enlightened work. She listens for the moments in which people do not speak and when they ask for the recorder to be turned off. Rather than presuming these moments are underlying expressions regarding the functionality or dysfunctionality of culture, she looks to what they may tell us of politics and subjectivity within the historical contradictions of the present. Chapter

five then acts as her proving ground. Using in large part autoethnography, Simpson looks at border encounters at the U.S.-Canada border. She explores how people perform acts of refusal on a daily basis. Central to her analysis are the quotidian moments when Kahnawá:ke at the border refuse to provide material identification associating themselves with either Canada or the United States, instead insisting on the legitimacy of their Mohawk given identification. She argues that this is an insistence on the nested sovereignty of their own Indigenous nation. These actions are not an expression of cultural function, but rather are actions which through their identifying capacity become political action.

Simpson’s book is at times a challenging read, yet her clear writing and engaging ethnographic details offer moments of empirical evidence to help the reader through a larger theoretical claim. Rather than sitting on her theory and then explaining at the end through an example, she effectively interweaves evidence throughout, allowing the reader to digest more limited claims before moving on to the next. Simpson’s concept of “refusal” is an essential contribution to Native American and Indigenous Studies, as well as to decolonial projects. That said, her powerful critique of cultural functionalism and the ways in which it disguises historical pretense should prove useful to a variety of disciplines within the humanities and social sciences, including anthropology, political science, history, sociology, cultural studies, and obviously Native American and Indigenous Studies. The value of this book is hard to overstate.





**Kim TallBear**

*Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science*

University of Minnesota Press, 2013

256 pages

\$25.00

**Reviewed by Emily Harring**



In 2018, senator Elizabeth Warren underwent a DNA test to “prove” the indigenous ancestry she has claimed for decades (a move she thought would aid her presidential campaign but has since proven to have done more harm than good—particularly amongst Native voters).

Tribal leaders and citizens spoke out against this move, reiterating that Native kinship has nothing to do with DNA testing and blood quantum and everything with tribal affiliation and kinship. This conversation has been ongoing for years, growing in popularity since the release of *Native American DNA* by Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate scholar Kim TallBear. Though written in 2013, TallBear’s book remains relevant, echoing and exploring the need for settler recognition of Indigenous self-determination and agency, topics that outside of the academy tribes and nations continue to advocate for.

TallBear makes it apparent to the reader that her book uses multiple disciplines to frame her argument, its assemblage one that appeals to readers from different fields (anthropology, Indigenous studies, and many others). Her methodology in *Native American DNA* moves through “multiple disciplinary, national, and ethnic cultural spaces” and “hybrid writing styles that enable self-reflexivity and polyvocality in ethnography.” This ethnography follows that of other Native scholars (such as Kahnawake Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson in her monograph *Mohawk Interruptus*). In light of the book’s roots in an indigenous writing methodology, it is noteworthy that Tallbear makes the decision to

include only a few interviews from Indian Country. She writes, “Putting that informed-consent form between me and other tribal members felt wrong, like making an object of Indian Country rather than ‘routing’ me in and through it. I could not bring myself to write about my fellow tribal citizens, our family histories having been entwined for centuries, especially if that writing took place largely outside a shared or community-based project.” Thus, the project is not about Native perspectives on DNA or blood and their roles in forming Indigenous citizenship; rather, it positions its gaze to non-Native subjects.

The first chapter, “Racial Science, Blood, and DNA,” introduces the history behind the correlation of blood, DNA, and tribal enrollment. TallBear moves effectively and efficiently through the beginnings of racial science in the nineteenth century and how it carried through the twentieth century, ultimately leading to racial categorization in the US’s laws and politics. From this, TallBear moves to a discussion on genetics, laying out for the reader what makes DNA and how these genetic markers came to be used as evidence of one’s Native ancestry. While the scientific jargon behind these genetic markers could have easily become overwhelming for readers, TallBear moves through it clearly, taking the time to explain in multiple ways what the science means regarding tribal enrollment of the past and present. Ultimately, this chapter asks: Why do concepts of blood still permeate throughout discourses on race and identity—especially in regard to Native peoples—when it is no longer “fashionable” in government policies? Blood acted as a symbol for inheritance, deciding who is allowed to inherit, sell, or buy land. Blood, then, became one’s identity, and continues to be seen as such in our present day. Historically, settler colonists aimed to dilute Native culture (and ‘blood’) in order to eventually take their land, while simultaneously desiring to possess their own drop of Native blood—a central component “to constructing moral legitimacy and a uniquely American identity.” TallBear ends the chapter noting how “tribes have increasingly moved away from the racial mechanism of total ‘Indian blood’ to a genealogical mechanism of ‘tribe-specific blood,’” making DNA or ancestry tests incompatible with tribal enrollment.

Once TallBear has established the necessary history behind her argument, she then shifts her attention to the DNA-testing companies, providing textual analyses of their practices and advertising strategies. She focuses on six companies: DNAPrint Genomics, DNAToday, Genelex, GeneTree, Niagen, and Orchid Cellmark, examining their work “in relation to two categories of conceptual and social organization, ‘race’ and ‘tribe,’ that are fundamental to how Native American history and identity gets understood and regulated.” TallBear questions whether or not DNA testing will cause more racialization of Native Americans through its promotion of the notion that “the tribe is a genetic population” rather than one of tribal kinship and lineage. Readers interested in learning more about the rise of genealogical research in online communities may find “Genetic Genealogy Online” compelling as Tallbear studies one Listserv in particular, corresponding with individual ‘listers’ and thousands of posts. TallBear ends the book looking at The Genographic Project, which aimed to trace the history of human’s global migration, an attempt to argue that we are all related, genetically. She explores how this project may or may not lead to a genetic (re)articulation of indigeneity.

*Native American DNA* is a well-crafted, well researched book unpacking the issues surrounding racial science, DNA, and tribal sovereignty and self-determination. It is critical to its field, a must read for those who study Indigeneity—in all fields. As we see in the case of Senator Warren, conversations surrounding the illegitimacy of DNA tests to determine Native belonging are not over, as this testing and its results still remain popular.



**Jennifer C. Nash**

*Black Feminisms Reimagined: After Intersectionality*

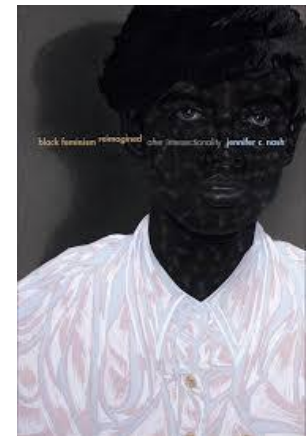
**Duke University Press, 2019**

**170 pages**

**\$24.95**

**Reviewed by Diana Silveira Leite**

In her second book, *Black Feminisms Reimagined*, Jennifer C. Nash examines the complex institutional and intellectual history of black feminisms in the age of what she calls “the intersectionality wars” and proposes an armistice through affect theory, particularly through



the concepts of care and a call for “faithful reading.” She locates her project in US universities, particularly the field of women’s studies, where, she argues, the affect of “defensiveness” has “come to mark contemporary academic black feminist practice.” She attends particularly to the institutional life of intersectionality, as it has become the “ethical orientation” of women’s studies programs, even as the theoretical framework of intersectionality turned out to be largely disregarded as an analytical tool. Here, Nash positions intersectionality at the epicenter of the fraught relationship between women’s studies academic institutions and black feminists. *Black Feminisms Reimagined* is particularly concerned with the semantic erasure of the term “intersectionality.” According to Nash, as the general concept transcended academia and entered popular discourse, intersectionality became “emptied of specific meaning.” Nash suggests that women’s studies programs are currently engaging in “intersectionality wars,” which she traces in relation to the “sex wars” of the 1980s, during which feminist scholars became polarized along the issue of sexual pleasure and its dangers. The “intersectionality wars,” as Nash proposes, are not battles over sexual culture (and its censorship), but over the following question: “will black women ‘save’ so-called white feminists with an insistence

on intersectionality as the analytic that will free feminism from its exclusionary past and present?”

Nash’s institutional theory hinges on black feminists’ “defensive position” and their role as analytical “disciplinarians” of intersectionality. This theory proposes that, through “defensiveness,” black feminists become stewards of intersectionality “as territory that must be guarded and protected through the requisite black feminist vigilance.” Instead of the affect of defensiveness, or “holding on,” Nash elaborates a relationship between black feminist theorists and their intersectional praxis that liberates scholars from this defensive position, which she considers a hinderance to black feminism’s “visionary world-making capacities.” Nash posits that the “larger project of [her] book is to practice an ethic of letting go and to disrupt the claims of territoriality and defensiveness that...have come to animate black feminist academic practice.” Nash believes that the unravelling of black feminism from its defensive position will allow for an expansive and generative understanding of intersectionality. Chapter One, “A Love Letter from a Critic,” explores the possibilities for an affective relationship between “we—black feminists” and intersectionality’s critics. She unironically suggests that black feminists consider such critics as “figures who lovingly address,” as a way to foster black feminism’s work-making potential.

*Black Feminisms Reimagined* is particularly concerned with the slippages between intersectionality, black feminism and black women. Nash describes such slippages as moments when these three distinct concepts—intersectionality as a theory, black feminism as a field of study, and black women as individuals—become conflated. According to Nash, this careless construction halts discussions of intersectionality’s limits and possibilities, as critiquing intersectionality becomes synonymous with opposing black feminism’s field of study and black women’s bodies. This conflation is particularly significant with regard to the suggestion that that “criticism is a violent practice,” one that Nash wishes to dismantle. In this context, any criticism—that is, violence—against intersectionality would imply violence against black feminists and black women’s bodies. Nash notes that the language used to describe intersectionality’s critics is often one of violence, “disappearing,

commodification, colonization...” In this context, US universities in general and women’s studies in particular become the site of a Manichean debate over the meaning and generative power of intersectionality as an analytical tool. “Black feminists” become its defenders, and “critics” its destroyers. While Nash maintains that scholars have raised important questions about intersectionality and its limits, she recognizes that criticism is the law of the land in academia. Institutional practices and the pressure to publish reward dissent rather than generative discussion. The result of this confrontational environment is black feminists’ “defensive position.” Nash notes that she occupies both these positions as “a scholar invested in a robust black feminist theory” and “a scholar whose name is often included in the list of ‘critics.’” Her claim, therefore, is for a generative relationship between these two positions, instead of an endless tug-of-war for the future of intersectionality. For Nash, the critic of intersectionality does not simply herald the doom of intersectionality, but proposes new directions and “other ways to *be* and *feel* black feminist.”

In Chapter Two, “The Politics of Reading,” and Chapter Four, “Love in the Time of Death,” Nash engages with Christina Sharpe’s concept of “wake work,” particularly as it relates to care. Wake work, according to Sharpe, provides a way to think care as generating meaning for “Black non/being in the world.” Nash aptly notes that care is an affective practice deeply rooted in loss and/or loss avoidance, particularly in the context of Black non/being. This care, she notes, is particularly relevant as it generates strategies of “resisting antiblack sexist violence.” She warns, however, that “care, love, and affection” may also “mask a pernicious possessiveness” and a refusal to let go, to allow intersectionality to “move and transform in unexpected and perhaps challenging ways.” Nash also engages with Sharpe’s “wake work” in relation to her conception of “black feminist love-politics,” which she relates to two key commitments, “mutual vulnerability,” a strategy for mutual dependency and survival, and “witnessing,” the naming of the daily violence perpetrated against black women. Witnessing, Nash notes, builds on “wake work” as part of black feminists’ engagement with survival.

Despite—or perhaps because of—Nash’s engagement with afropessimism and Sharpe’s theorization of Black non/being, “Love in the Time of Death” ends with a call for a black feminism “rooted in love rather than territoriality and defensiveness.” For Nash, the strategy of “letting go” of intersectionality provides a risky avenue for the evolution of its analytical potentials. But the risk is worth taking, since letting go presents the only way forward for intersectionality, allowing for the creation of new possibilities for black feminism beyond territoriality. *Black Feminisms Reimagined* ultimately argues for a more diverse and dynamic form of intersectionality through the revival of “the notion of ‘women of color’” and renewed “connections between transnationalism and intersectionality.”



**Hershini Bhana Young**

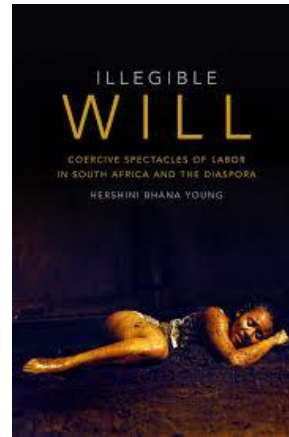
*Illegible Will: Coercive Spectacles of Labor in South Africa and the Diaspora*

**Duke University Press, 2017**

**280 pages**

**\$26.95**

**Reviewed by Joshua Kamau Reason**



*Illegible Will: Coercive Spectacles of Labor in South Africa and the Diaspora* is a performative reading of the colonial archive that traces Black women’s assertion of will (and its effacement) in South Africa and throughout the African Diaspora. Indebted to the work

of scholars such as Saidiya Hartman, Diana Taylor, Joseph Roach, and Rosemarie Garland Thompson, Young conceptualizes Black women’s acts of refusal as “a diasporic repertoire of shifting creative and embodied responses to imperialism that exceed the textual and the verbal.” The introduction sets the stage for the larger work with a number of assertions, including the affirmation of Black performance as knowledge production, the corporeality of the Black body, diasporic contacts throughout the Black Atlantic, and the institutionalization of sexual violence during chattel slavery. The central purpose of her monograph is to make “(black) will” legible through “performative critical engagements with absence” in the historical archive, interrogating how Black women are remembered in post-apartheid South Africa by centering the deviant, non-normative, unintelligible Black body in her analysis.

Each chapter of the book analyzes a performance, novel, or historical narrative that, in the absence of direct acknowledgement, presents the will of Black women. Chapter One problematizes the repatriation of Saartjie (Sarah) Baartman’s remains to South Africa, arguing that the event was a symbolic articulation of post-apartheid nationalism rather than an act of justice and reverence for the



dead. Chapter Two considers the murder trial of Tryntjie of Madagascar as an example of performative ritual, an act that, in lieu of gaining justice for the enslaved, “cement[s] the link between an increasingly racialized slave agency and criminality.” In Chapter Three, Young reads an Angolan beauty pageant for landmine victims as a “performative *spectacle*” in which Black disability is evoked to obscure the lines between coercion and consent. Chapter Four examines a variety of South African literature to explore the racial-gendered-sexual dimensions of labor within South Africa, promoting “a more nuanced discussion of free and unfree labor that centers on questions of will.” To conclude, Young uses Chapter Five to unpack the harrowing tale of Sila van der Kaap, as told in the historical novel by Yvette Christianse, by offering performative vulnerability as a corrective to unsympathetic readings of Black women’s choices around life and death.

Young’s monograph contributes to our understandings of Black will, slavery, and the transmission of historical knowledge by centering Black performance in her work. As with Diana Taylor, Young defines performance broadly both as onstage and quotidian forms of embodiment, arguing that *fictional* accounts can have as much to offer us as the colonial archive. Her refusal to give up on enslaved Black women and girls, similar to Saidiya Hartman’s *Venus in Two Acts* (2008) and Omise’ke Tinsley’s *Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic* (2008), presents new possibilities for not only knowing Black women’s histories, but also their assertions of will in the face of colonial domination. More than a compilation of literary texts and case studies, *Illegible Will* is a reflection on the erasure of Black women’s will, the mechanisms of domination that facilitate this erasure, and the repertoire of actions and gestures that allow us to know how they might have resisted these impositions on their freedom.

With the growing body of literature on the afterlives of slavery, Young provides a timely analysis of racialization, labor, and relationality between colonial subjects. In lieu of drawing false equivalencies between transatlantic slavery and Indian indenture, Young positions them as concomitant histories that can tell us more about “imperial labor schemes” in South Africa. In exploring how colonial contacts (between oceans

and peoples) shape embodied practices of will, Young opens a nuanced conversation about imperial legacies that honors the specificity of ethnoracial experiences without the romanticization of “belonging through suffering.” Her take on the afterlife of slavery grapples with both Afro-pessimism and critical race theory by cross-reading, rather than subsuming or essentializing, the overlapping histories of non-consensual labor in South Africa.

The discussion of death (by suicide, murder, and more) throughout *Illegible Will* also complicates discourses on slave agency and necropolitics in Black studies. Young argues that, in contrast to the repertoire of willful practices that she assembles throughout the chapters, suicide “obscured the quotidian violence of plantation labor.” Rather than a release from the conditions of chattel slavery, suicide represented a slow death that both preceded and exceeded the event of the suicide itself; even in death, the body performed the coercive labor of serving as spectacle to disincentivize other slaves from killing themselves. Young’s discussion of mothers who killed their children provides a similar take on murder and suicide. When we attend to the physical and psychological atrocities committed under chattel slavery, it becomes understandable that an enslaved woman would attempt to take her life, and the lives of those whom she loves, into her own hands. By analyzing the historical conditions under which enslaved people committed suicide and murdered their kin, Young encourages the reader to engage the repetitious acts of violence that produced these deaths, for attending solely to the event elides the subjectivities and desires for freedom that enslaved people enacted whenever and however possible.

An interdisciplinary work that reimagines Black freedom, *Illegible Will* leverages Black performance studies to think through the silences of the colonial archive around Black women’s assertions of will. Young’s expert examination of Black women’s relationships to labor, nationalism, and imperialism make this work a key contribution to the fields of performance studies, Black studies, history, and decolonial thought. Furthermore, Young provides a theoretical framework for understanding not only the histories of Black women, but those of Black LGBTQ+ folks, Black disabled persons, and other diasporic subjects who exceed the limits of formal

histories. *Illegible Will* is another phase in the ongoing project of dissident knowledge production that centers new ways of knowing those communities who were never meant to survive, be found, or live beyond that which was ascribed to them in the annals of colonial history.



**Kristen Ghodsee**

*Second World, Second Sex: Socialist Women's Activism and Global Solidarity during the Cold War*

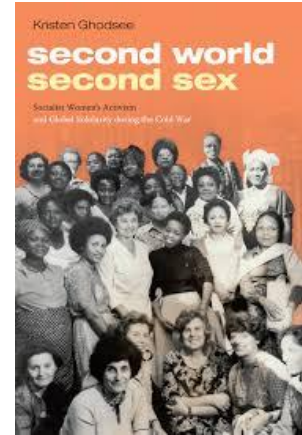
**Duke University Press, 2018**

**328 pages**

**HB \$104.95 PB \$27.95**

**Reviewed by Rosy Mack**

If you love to learn about incredible networks of transnational solidarity between activists, this is the book for you. If you geek out to hybrid methodologies, crisscrossing between the historical record, personal testimony and out-of-the-way archives, you're sure going to like this monograph. If you have yet to be persuaded that movements for women's rights were doing powerful work outside of the West, add this to your reading list. In short, Kristen Ghodsee's *Second World, Second Sex* successfully addresses all of these constituencies with her thoroughly researched, reflexively argued, new book.



*Second World, Second Sex*, in a sentence, recovers a history of collaborative labor between women from state socialist and G77, “Third World” countries, through their shared United Nations organizing. She states that the purpose of her book is to “recapture some of the energy and enthusiasm that infused socialist women’s activism,” which has heretofore been erased. But also, she wishes to record their “different vision of activism” in opposition to the dominant liberal feminist strand in Western capitalist societies, which “couched women’s issues within broader issues of social injustice, even as the liberal feminist strand became more dominant in the advanced capitalist countries.”

Ghodsee devotes the first part of her book to establishing the context for the momentous women’s assemblies of the 1970s and 80s in the run up to, and during the course of, the UN decade of

women (1975-85). She begins by reviewing the literature on the “global women’s movement,” persuasively showing that state socialist women’s rights organizing has been omitted from historical narratives. After the fall of the Berlin wall, Ghodsee shows, feminists from “advanced capitalist countries” had control of the means of historical knowledge production – funded archives, accessible travel and academic publishing infrastructure – meaning that the perspectives of US and other capitalist states these events has had much more of an airing (11). In her reading of this scholarly literature, Ghodsee points out that women activists in state socialist contexts are read as “dupes” and lackeys of male communist leaders.

This reading is unsettled by Ghodsee’s two subsequent chapters, in which she introduces her two main case studies, the national context and women’s organizing in Bulgaria and Zambia. Close reading policy documents and personal testimony, she demonstrates that women’s activists in these states effectively mobilized rhetorical strategies amenable to their single-party governance structure to achieve movement goals. In the case of Bulgaria, the women’s committee, through extensive research and use of Leninist argumentation, was able to achieve the most comprehensive childcare provision and reproductive freedom of any Eastern Bloc country. Second in the world, in fact, only to Scandinavian states. Her exploration of exigency does not end here, however. In order to contextualize the conflicts between G77, Eastern Bloc and capitalist states, Ghodsee also devotes a chapter to the history of Cold War anti-communism in the US, elucidating the predicament of women’s rights activists for whom any allegiance to radical left politics risked ideological discrediting of the movement, in addition to personal sanctions from the state.

The remainder of *Second World, Second Sex* centers on the key events leading up to and within the UN decade of women, beginning with the Mexico conference in 1975, and ending with the Nairobi in 1985. Ghodsee shows how women’s activists, particularly from the Bulgarian and Zambian delegations, shared skills, resources, and tactics which strengthened their internal organizing. She clarifies that whereas US delegates, and colleagues aligning with them, saw the UN women’s events as

spaces to explore issues *unique* to women, delegations from the G77 and the Eastern Bloc approached such conferences as a means by which women could access the political platform granted by the UN – believing that “feminist struggles could not be separated from issues such as national independence and economic development.” The context of Cold War superpower rivalry, in combination with this difference in perspective, thus set the stage for historically momentous disputes over the language, aims, and content of resolutions during these conferences. Disputes in which Bulgarian and Zambian women, in collaboration with other delegations, used the power of their networks to achieve common goals.

Methodologically, Ghodsee successfully interweaves a vast amount of multi-modal material within each chapter. In her opening paragraphs, she starts with a self-reflexive account of an oral history interview conducted over the course of her research. These narratives describe the venue of the meeting, her first impressions of her participants, as well as reflecting on the occupational challenges of human-based research: establishing trust, eliciting memory, and attempting to retain some “objective” distance. Ghodsee then integrates the archival documentation at her disposal, offering readings of minutes, policy documents and correspondence to produce vivid accounts of the meetings and behind-the-scenes machinations.

When I started this book, I was rather puzzled about why Ghodsee had chosen to focus on the United Nations as the organization through which to trace these activist networks. Because I work primarily on extra-governmental feminist organizing and production, I was a little suspicious of how this nation-state-oriented body could be the site of any kind of radicalism. However, as Ghodsee persuasively argues, such a preference for non-state or “independent” women’s rights work is rather a parochial position. For the women she centers in her account, performing their work in the context of single-party states, government aligned women’s organizations, were the means by which goals could be struggled for and accomplished. From this exigency, the UN’s conferences on women provided a ground for such activists to meet, form bonds of practical solidarity, and strategically align in order to pass mutually beneficial resolutions in the context of opposition

from western capitalist countries. At times, I found myself contesting Ghodsee's version of US feminism, which occasionally allowed Betty Friedan's vision of liberation to stand in for the heterogeneity of action and strategy. However, given Ghodsee's argument, that US "independent" feminist movements and the more mainstream delegations to the UN gatherings have already received a comparative plethora of scholarly attention, to criticize a lack of nuance here would be unfair. All in all, Ghodsee's *Second World, Second Sex* is an incredibly well-researched, accessibly written monograph, which offers an original and persuasive intervention within feminist historiography. The personal narratives and movement stories she draws out are compelling and informative. For a reader interested in feminism, global politics or the potential of solidarity, or anyone with a penchant for archives or oral history, this book is a great read.



**Nathan Snaza**

*Animate Literacies: Literature, Affect, and the Politics of Humanism*

**Duke University Press, 2019**

**232 pages**

**\$25.95**

**Reviewed by Margaret Mendenhall**



According to Nathan Snaza, it matters that I read most of *Animate Literacies* on the bus, lurching forward and backward in stop-and-go traffic, inhaling traces of exhaust and other people's perfumes. The scene of my

morning commute was part—and a very small part, at that—of what Snaza calls the “literacy situation,” which he defines as “scenes of pre- or aconscious collision and affective contact” in which “intrahuman politics of race, class, gender, sexuality, and geography shape the conditions of emergence for literacy events that animate subjects and the political relations with which they are entangled.” That is, as I read terms like “literacy situation” and “assemblage” and “affective modulation” and “Man” out of Snaza’s book, there is much more shaping my literacy than the words. It matters that my pencil wobbled unsteadily against the rumble of the engine. It matters that I listened to music through my headphones. It matters that a stranger grabbed my attention to ask about the club out the window, and that I replied standoffishly, preferring to be left alone. Those things more than matter, in fact: they became part of my reading, part of my very ability to read.

According to Snaza, literacy inheres not just in the interaction of a reader and a text, but also in rocks, plants, dirt, wasps, sheep, and innumerable other nonhuman agents as they move through space and time—some transforming by long processes into ink or paper, others shaping the reader’s experience by way of affect. This almost magnanimous

reconceptualization of literacy lays the groundwork, rather surprisingly, for Snaza to indict educational institutions on political grounds. Humanist education is not an idyll where instructors use literature to improve students' minds, Snaza argues, but a state-sponsored project that marshals disciplinary boundaries to funnel thinking individuals into a narrowly conceived, politically fraught mold of "Man" (a term he borrows from Sylvia Wynter)—a mold by which so many are contrasted into categories of Other, and thus dehumanized. Ultimately Snaza hopes to rethink literacy as a phenomenon that "subtends and overspills the state's restriction of it."

I would outline the way each chapter of *Animate Literacies* builds toward this larger argument, but that would do little justice to the mesmerizing meander of ideas that makes Snaza's project so interesting. Rather than four or five mostly-discrete essays welded together by an introduction, he offers sixteen short chapters whose arguments, critical engagements, and textual analyses constantly loop through and recall one another—rather like the woven nests he discusses in Chapter Ten. The best I can do here is enumerate some of the strands by which that nest is woven.

Most significant, perhaps, is the contrast between plan and improvisation—between power and play—that mobilizes Snaza's critique of the "statist capture of literacy." The state binds individuals to a pattern of Man—who is white, male, cisgendered, straight—at the expense of anyone who does not fit that pattern. If that's true, Snaza suggests, then the way out of that capture is to disregard pattern altogether. As readers, we should release our attention from the quest for answers and solutions, embracing instead the possibility of being bewildered. Practicing what he preaches, Snaza wants us to be bewildered by his book. "Like the stoner alone in her room who says a word so many times it loses its ability to signify," he writes memorably, "I try to look at these things over and over from different directions and distances so that they lose solidity, become uncertain, start trembling. Answers don't really interest me, but questions can disperse energy."

Bewilderment can happen in a lot of ways: by allowing the ghosts of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* to haunt you (Chapter Three); by following Edna

Pontellier's disorientation in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (Chapter Nine); by noticing the "affective capacity" of smell in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Chapter Twelve); by recognizing the ways a text can generate physical pleasure (Chapter Thirteen); by getting a classroom full of students to love Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (Chapter Fourteen). Haunting, noticing, recognizing, loving—Snaza's close readings are variations on the theme of attention, another important strand in the woven nest of *Animate Literacies*. For Snaza, attention is the mechanism by which bewilderment can take place: we unfasten our attention from discipline, from statist interpretations of literature and humanity, and instead let it range among the vast expanse of that literacy situation which "humanizing assemblages" (like schools) are normally so happy to let us ignore.

A third major strand at work—though one which, surprisingly, Snaza does not theorize outright—is animation. All of those affects and entities that collide with us and draw our attention in the literacy situation do so precisely because they are animated, always moving through space or time. Thus, "orientation" becomes a crucial keyword in Snaza's theory of literacy. The "violence of humanization" is not so much a binding or molding to Man (as I've oversimply characterized it above) but a "reorientation, redirection, or disciplining" of our otherwise free movement through the world. Bewilderment is a *disorientation* of attention, and that's what makes it liberating.

Dovetailing feminist and queer new materialism, posthumanism, affect theory, ecocriticism, and a touch of Marx and Foucault, *Animate Literacies* demands a lot of its reader, though it almost always rewards strenuous attention with its rich and energizing combination of love and critique. The book's primary gift, I think, is its foundational assumption that loving something is not the same as accepting it unequivocally—whether it's a book you read or the humanities department you scramble to resuscitate (even as it suffocates you).

That said, Snaza's gift is ultimately not for me, because the literature I love and critique—at the risk of disciplining myself—was mostly written before 1700. In Chapter Eight, Snaza outlines a brief history of academic disciplines as the basis for his critique of educational institutions: though this

“de-partmentalization’ of knowledge” goes back “at least as far as Plato’s *Republic*,” it “undergoes a particular intensification during modernity, one that passes a particular threshold between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries and takes on its present form, more or less, in the nineteenth.” Thus, though some of Snaza’s approaches are operative “even” in eighteenth-century novels, his literary engagements here don’t precede *Frankenstein* in 1819. Later, in Chapter Fifteen, Snaza highlights the “subjunctive capacity” of play, which “opens the present toward unknown and unknowable futurity” and thus allows us to expand our sense of what politics can do. I wonder: can we also expand our sense of politics by opening the present toward the unknown and unknowable past? What happens when we trouble that all-but-arbitrary temporal border of “modernity” that Snaza uses to circumscribe his critique of humanization? Perhaps a necessary first step toward escaping the confines of discipline is to dissolve the borders *within* the discipline, to find bewilderment by playing with texts across huge distances of time and expertise. In the meantime, *Animate Literacies* offers an impressive web of techniques for teaching ourselves to read—not because of our humanity, but in spite of it.



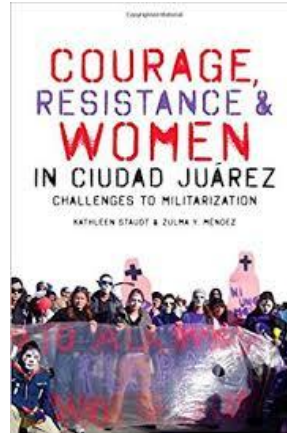
### Kathleen Staudt and Zulma Y Méndez

*Courage, Resistance, and Women in Ciudad Juárez: Challenges to Militarization*

216 pages

\$24.95

### Reviewed by Mariana Rivera



In the face of an egregious culture of violence and an apologetic state that both perpetuates and erases this violence, community resistance is often the only option. From the femicides that took place in the 90’s to the militarization under Mexican president Felipe Calderon’s “war on drugs”, such is the case in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. *Courage, Resistance and Women in Ciudad Juárez: Challenges to Militarization* by Kathleen Staudt and Zulma Y. Méndez narrates this resistance and enriches scholarship on resistance by gendering it. Their examination of *Juarese* activism on a grassroots level spotlights the idea that gendering resistance sutures together “the private/public divide, corresponding to female and male space.” It is this private/public divide that Staudt and Méndez seek to mend. They argue that it is women activists in Juarez making the hidden (at the hands of state erasure) public that has “laid the groundwork for the collaboratives and networks of current anti-militarization.” Using anthropologist James Scott’s work on “‘hidden and official transcripts’ that shape people’s lives”, Staudt and Méndez spend seven chapters providing vignettes of women activism and leadership, thereby creating a third transcript: a *gendered* hidden transcript.

Staudt and Mendez begin their more-than-a-decade-long trek through Juarese community activism by “historicizing and contextualizing the place” – quite literally the title of Chapter Two. In 1960 both Mexican and US policies cleared the path for production in northern Mexico and in the two decades that followed, “young women – about 80



percent of the workforce – constituted the vast majority of globalized assembly-line workers.” In this chapter, Staudt and Mendez illustrate the industrialization and subsequent militarization along the border in Juarez by vacillating between state displays of misogyny and hypermasculinity. Industrial decline is examined relative to the “‘first stage’ of protests” that followed the atrocious 1993 femicides. Their assessment of the femicides genders Scott’s “hidden and official transcripts” by providing vignettes of women “[unearthing] the hidden and [making] violence visible along with demands for justice.” Staudt and Mendez operate in the same manner in 2001 and 2004 with vignettes of protesters – mainly mothers of victims being targeted for speaking up against impunity – police brutality and impunity, and the Mexican state’s official transcript. The Mexican state official transcripts treated the 1990’s femicides as isolated events, not as methodical misogyny; the official transcripts treated the murder victims as either being gang-affiliated or “related to drugs and addictions and women’s nightlife.” Protesters both in the 1990’s and 2000’s rejected this gaslighting by the state, and the mothers of the victims carried torches of justice for their daughters. With the subsequent military occupation of Juarez under then-president Felipe Calderon the militarization of Juarez performed the hypermasculine erasure of femicide. Here, Staudt and Mendez successfully challenge the official transcripts of the state and perform their own counternarratives. Their argument agilely corroborates that the hypermasculine solution of militarization is a strategy “that induced high levels of insecurity instead and resulted in horrific numbers of murdered men and women.”

In Chapter Three, Staudt and Mendez center the 2000’s mothers’ protests honoring the memory of their daughters who are no longer with us as the leaders of resistance in Juarez. Two vignettes—the Villas de Salvatcar protests and Marisela Escobedo Ortiz’s unrelenting demands of justice for her murdered daughter—offer the public hidden transcripts which the Mexican state suppressed indiscriminately. When fifteen people were gunned down at a birthday celebration, this prompted a state public transcript, or “discourse that casts light on subordinates’ formerly contained voices in the presence of authority or the dominant”. It claimed that the victims were gang-affiliated and the

incident was a gang conflict. This transcript was bolstered by president Calderon himself in a visit to Juarez after the harrowing homicide. A mother of two of the victims, Luz Maria Davila, interjected at a public forum led by Calderon, resentful of her sons being portrayed as criminals, instead citing “dereliction of duty of local, state, and federal authorities” as both contributors and perpetrators, thus making the hidden transcript public. Marisela Escobedo Ortiz’s daughter, Rubi Frayre Escobedo, was murdered by her abusive husband. Ultimately, Sergio Barraza, the murderer, faced no criminal charges due to a supposed “lack of evidence.” Since this act of impunity, Marisela Escobedo wearing only a banner with Rubi’s face printed on it, protested every day outside of several government offices contesting the state’s official transcript and pressing that the case dismissal was actually a result of Barraza being affiliated with the powerful Zetas Cartel. These two protests sparked a wildfire of protests that even the Mexican government couldn’t stamp out. Both vignettes flipped the official transcripts that “this was a war where the casualties were drug lords or cartel members exclusively...[dismantling] the notion that militarization and maintenance of the police state in Juarez were occurring to safeguard the city.” Acts of heinous violence can easily desensitize an audience based on how the publication of these stories are framed, which is exactly what happened when Juarens media outlets would frame the news and the victims according to official transcripts. Instead, Staudt and Mendez also repudiate the official transcripts and properly honor the memories of murdered daughters and their mothers. Their documentation of the mothers’ protests once again genders hidden transcripts, thus centering women’s courage and making them the source of hegemonic contestation. The evidence Staudt and Mendez provide robustly supports their argument that “women in Mexico...break the façade established in hypermasculine regimes that pretend to protect people through militarization and what activists see as the criminalization of social life.”

Chapter Four introduces the internet and social media’s traction in contesting official transcripts throughout the 2000’s into the 2010’s. Facebook became a hub for community grassroots efforts, alerts, and discourse. Social media quite literally brought hidden transcripts to the public via

grassroots efforts to inform community members. With each activist publishing new information on social media, another community member was informed. With each day, the official transcripts began to crack and to crumble. The fissures created by this active contestation guaranteed that hidden transcripts could no longer stay hidden. Staudt and Mendez's documentation of social media organizing, and their discourse on the militarization of Juarez, are important contributions to scholarship on the relationship between resistance and agency. The government and Juarese gangs were silencing voices, but as the saying goes, "nothing ever goes away on the internet". As community members gained their agency back through social media discourse, their hidden transcripts could no longer be obscured.

Chapters Five and Six focus on national and transnational solidarity with Juarez. Both chapters reject rhetoric of the border as a place only of chaos and violence. Staudt and Mendez present events of cross-border solidarity as evidence that the resistance taking place was not consigned to women leaders and activists, but rather that many efforts were made on both sides of the border to facilitate the leadership of Juarese women. Staudt and Mendez reserve Chapter Seven as a space of reflection. They reflect on their findings and their goals for this ethnographic project. They wanted to comprehend the relationship between "violence against women, hyper-homicide, and militarization." In a city in which violence seemed endemic on an official transcript, a community led by women found its voice and made the hidden public, "with their no-longer hidden transcripts, Juarenses creatively and persistently resisted official discourses, frequently with game-changing women leaders and/or the organization of activists around the deaths of women and children."

*Courage, Resistance, and Women in Ciudad Juárez: Challenges to Militarization* is an important contribution to a growing scholarship on resistance because its challenge to official transcripts displays communities as multidimensional, resilient, and lived experiences. Its dedication to gendering resistance holds space for readers to appreciate resilient agency in the midst of monolithic erasure. The recounting of the community organization that took place in Juarez is an invaluable example for grassroots resistance against a subversive state that

relies on intimidation, subversion, and erasure to graft together an apparatus of hegemony.



**Matt Brim**

*Poor Queer Studies: Confronting Elitism in the University*

**Duke University Press, 2020**

**264 pages**

**\$26.95**

**Reviewed by Ipek Sahinler**



*Poor Queer Studies* opens up with two contrasting images. The first is Virginia Woolf's famous maxim about the relationship between the intellect and the Oxbridge-nourished gut—"One cannot think well, dine well, sleep well, if one has not dined well." The second comes from Matt Brim—a half-

empty vending machine representing the day's dinner at an underfunded night school in a "forgotten borough" of New York. It is right before the queer studies class starts, and Matt Brim asks us: "how and where are meals turned into androgynously—or queerly—incandescent minds in higher education today?" These scenes sketch the contradictions between the upper-class positioning of the discipline and the poor, working-class realities of institutions. From this opening, *Poor Queer Studies* signals that it will be a *query* about this overlooked spot within today's already-ossified queer studies. *Poor Queer Studies* announces that it aims to tackle the field's current role within the process of stratification that divides the field from itself along the lines of class and institutional status. This fresh work on queer studies declares its "difference" as it emphasizes its self-queering nature and questions its own ability to galvanize interclass and cross-institutional queer formations that do not rely on a unidirectional or aspirational model of progress.

Among the many questions Brim raises in his introduction, the inquiry at the core probes the ways we are able to rethink the work of queer studies in the context of students' relative material need and raced or gendered precarity. Meanwhile, he considers how academics' professional liminality

and underclass institutional identity inform and potentially enrich the field, its pedagogies and theories. To answer this loaded and challenging question, Brim locates queer studies within the broader context of higher education. Brim's point of departure is always his workplace, the College of Staten Island, which he uses as a case study for the production of queer knowledge in other places of otherness. He argues that the field cannot be separated from the large-scale institutional production of racialized class stratification. No doubt Brim is looking to needle the conformist positioning of some upper-class or well-established scholars in the discipline, who, unlike Brim, teach in privileged institutions or Ivy League schools.

The first chapter of the book is neither a sophisticated argument on queerness, nor a theoretical analysis of its scholarly literature. Rather, the author tries "to convince" the reader of the existence of Poor Queer Studies as a distinct field that "they [the readers] should care" about. To achieve this, Brim departs from his own case study of College of Staten Island and makes his case by presenting an inventory of what he refers to as Poor Queer Studies: a long list of scholars, books, articles, films, exhibitions and performances. This long list is a queer counter-archive vis-à-vis the canonical Archive of Queer Studies. When Brim writes "this whole chapter, in fact, is an acknowledgement in naming and thanking [his] colleagues" (66), it is a strategic move to make the author and his comrades visible as the precursors of the already-existing but yet-to-be-acknowledged field called Poor Queer Studies.

In the second chapter "You Can Write Your Way Out of Anywhere: The Upward Mobility Myth of Rich Queer Studies," Brim takes a pause to examine certain queer studies workplaces, or in his words, "rich queer studies" schools. He attracts the reader's attention to the ways that status both propels and divides the field. Meanwhile, the author is visibly bold and clear about his belief that thinking about status is also thinking about academic mobility and stasis. Within such a framework, the chapter questions how some professors move around the "places" of queer studies, how some rise and how some do not. The chapter also enacts the emotional, class-based vicissitudes of writing about all queer studies people, poor or rich, weak or strong, visible or

invisible. In the following part “The Queer Career: Vocational Queer Studies,” Brim unpacks his ideas by focusing on issues such as queer classroom pedagogies, the field’s relevance to students’ future employment, the current “hyperresponsibility” for creating a more diverse campus climate, and the queer career of the “poor queer studies professor.”

While it must be admitted that the third chapter—and the work in general—does a good job in addressing these highly crucial and urgent matters, how Brim understands *queer* here might jeopardize the potential value of his arguments. This is mainly because he conceptualizes queerness within the limited—and limiting—framework of male and female homosexuality as he states that “[he is] interested in what Allan Bérubé calls ‘queer work,’ defined as ‘work which is performed by, or has the reputation of being performed by, homosexual men or women’” (100). This makes me question whether *Poor Queer Studies* is truly invested in expanding the remit of queerness, as it remains unclear how the newly proposed field plans to move beyond the mainstream LGBT+ discourse within queer studies, and emphasize class as a core element of queerness, without falling into slippery traps of homonormativity.

A unique part of the book is the fourth chapter titled “Poor Queer Studies Mothers” which is a nouvelle experimentation with a highly overlooked perspective within the field. The addition of “mothers” as a bookend, prompts a necessary, open-ended bracketing of the field. Thus, the work argues that a “poor queer studies mother” discursively queers the reproduction of the field in a class-gender-embodied key. But who are those queer studies mothers? Single queer mothers, female students with queer kids, or pregnant students who are not necessarily non-heterosexual. If so, what are their common ground? Brim notes that it is their shared will to earn a degree to attain social mobility, or otherwise, their struggle to postpone their graduation in order to escape familial pressures to sign the heterosexual coupledness contract. Along this line of otherness, Brim closes his panorama of *Poor Queer Studies* by drawing attention to black queer literature. This chapter called “Counternarratives” is also the title of John Keene’s 2015 work, which is one that

exposes states of black queer illiteracy. Here, Brim uses literary production to offer a flashpoint for illuminating and addressing the systemic failure to teach black queer reading practices. This is also a means of radical formal experimentation in crafting literacies of black human beings in the New World that help us to read anew.

Today, where queer theory just turned thirty years old since Teresa de Lauretis first adapted the term’s colloquial usage to academia, *Poor Queer Studies* not only questions the institutional evolution of the field, but also raises concerns about class that have not been addressed throughout the elitist razzle-dazzle of the discipline; or in other words “rich” queer studies. Even though the work has contradictory sides, as it tends to base its worlding on dichotomous thinking, mainly expressed through the frequent use of adjectives such as rich versus poor, white versus black, non-gay versus gay, it overall does a successful job in questioning what is and what should be one’s affective attachment to queer studies today. In this sense, *Poor Queer Studies* is a courageous text that dares to speak with, in Jack Halberstam’s words, “low theory,” and harks back to Judith Butler’s 1990 plea that “we should let queer take on meanings” (*Bodies That Matter*, 28)



## BE/LONGING: THE FLIGHT AND FIGHT FOR HOME

Co-Edited by Alhelí Harvey and Hartlyn Haynes

**AH:** So, we started this project—and really thinking about these ideas—at a time when if someone had said “there will be global pandemic in six months” I would’ve thought it was an aggressive marketing campaign for a new Matt Damon led sci-fi thriller. I haven’t let my apartment in two weeks, and I’m lucky. But I can’t help but feel that now my notion of home will forever be inside of quotation marks. I don’t own this space; my security is a weird precarious balance as a student. But I’m finding that in the 362 square feet of where I exist daily, I’m being forced to answer some of the questions of our prompt. I think about your research on memorials and the shadow of HIV a lot right now. Maybe a good place to start would be to explain how we were thinking and what has or hasn’t changed for us. Talking to you, I think we can both say that we’re seeing the ramifications of what we’re critiquing—these large-scale inequalities—playing out in real time.

**HH:** Yes, it’s surreal to be living during a watershed, under conditions that lay bare not only flagrant systemic inequities but the lies we are told about them. I wonder if we might add “a world coping with a pandemic” to our list of places we can truly experience the “Present.” The “present” in which we are living is a contact zone that escapes easy categorization yet absolutely provides justification for the rigidifying of “Here” and “There,” “Us” and “Them,” and “Past” and “Future.” And, yes, the specter of HIV/AIDS looms large over the COVID-19 pandemic; I think about the ways viruses are ascribed race, gender, sexuality, and a sense of morality; I think about the ways government response has been grossly inadequate in both cases, though in quite different ways; I think, most clearly, about the ways that capitalism, ableism, and racism leave marginalized communities—low-income people, disabled people, people experiencing homelessness, people detained in ICE detention centers, among many others—the most at risk as we free-fall through this

crisis without a strong social security net to catch us.

What’s critical to remember is that quarantine and public health management, while invaluable actions for slowing the spread of COVID-19, have also transhistorically served as modes of control and surveillance, as factors that are used to determine the “Us” allowed in and the “Them” kept out, as measures of who is fit for “Here” and who must be sequestered “There.” When I think of these tactics in terms of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, then, I immediately think of Andi Remoquillo’s review of A. Naomi Paik’s *Rightlessness: Testimony and Redress in U.S. Prison Camps Since World War II*.

**AH:** Totally—your point about the lies we’re told about places, the event of the past and the present, and what’s “realistic” or “possible” for the future are also really prevalent in *Rightlessness*—which seems even more relevant now. Like: how do you contain a virus when the tradition of the State has been to contain people as a way of negotiating that “Them” and “Us”, “Here” and “There” boundary enforcement? I was also thinking about Nick Estes’ work reviewed by Annie Bares.

**HH:** Yes, Estes’ *Our History is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* about Indigenous traditions of resistance is a really useful way to think about this pandemic (and its resultation “contact zone” of the present) within a longer arc of settler-colonialism. Estes’ imagining of Indigenous history as the future also pairs nicely with Erin Yanota’s review of Mark Rifkin’s *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination*.

**AH:** I was so taken by the possibility of working towards what Yanota describes as Rifkin’s description of “becoming” and “being-in-time” for contributing to Indigenous efforts to assert sovereignty.” Rifkin’s work is definitely something to read alongside Estes, but I also think that what I like about all the texts that have been reviewed is that we see these themes of rupture and tension and the contact zone come up in works like Carmen Maria Machado’s *In the Dream House* reviewed by Camila Torres Castro. Considering how Rifkin frames “becoming” as “experiencing the past and of determining... futures that “encompass Native stories of both fragmentation and reinvention on

their own terms” makes me think about how the contact zone is sometimes a place, but also it can be an intimate relationship and the people (and dreams) that can get bound up in the parameters of someone else’s sway. In this way queerness, and the process of feeling like a ghost, if very aligned with some of Native “becoming” in that they are both rejections of a settler-colonial project—in Machado’s it’s the abusive relationship that grows into this microcosm of domination and control.

**HH:** What struck me about Castro’s review of Machado’s work was how it really probed one of the themes of this section—“the flight and fight for home”—because the contact zone for Machado is certainly intimate queerness, but it’s also the notion of home itself. We asked in our call for reviews what it means to be “home” when the very environment you inhabit is designed with someone else’s identity in mind. These questions are salient when thinking about Emma Train’s review of Toby Beauchamp’s *Going Stealth: Transgender Politics and U.S. Surveillance Practices*. Beauchamp’s work explores transgender as a category, asks how it’s imbricated with post-9/11 surveillance practices and, as Train points out, tackles the “boundaries between fugitivity, freedom, and entrapment that all gender non-conforming people must constantly navigate.”

**AH:** I think what I find most appealing about these texts our reviewers have detailed is how they disrupt my assumptions about certain categories—that’s fruitful to me. There’s this push towards reworking the places that have been previously “closed off” or that we could have maybe gotten used to seeing in only a utopian sense: being at “home” in your identity, body, even dreams. And sometimes, these stories vary in their ability to be told; fragments are a big part of this section too. Alex Norris’s review of Maria Frederika Malmström’s *The Streets are Talking to Me: Affective Fragments in Sisi’s Egypt* presents the challenges of working with these kinds of political shards. For all our conceptual efforts there still exist real boundaries between hope, loss, memory, and the physical need to move on. How we negotiate those boundaries opens up methodological terrain. Wanting to balance all of these fragments (literal objects, memories, perspectives) is something we’ve seen mentioned in multiple reviews.

**HH:** What’s so illuminating about your review of C.J. Alvarez’s review of *Border Land, Border Water: A History of Construction on the U.S./Mexico Divide* is how it answers one of the questions we originally asked of this section: how might we slice at the structures of the world to unravel silences? Alvarez’s work slices at structures—the built environment, the infrastructure—of the U.S./Mexico border to destabilize it as natural (and silent) and reveal its longevity in projects of control and extraction. The region Alvarez details is also exploited as a site of political exceptionality; what seems the most quotidian about the border turns out to be deeply intertwined with that exceptional status and explodes familiar colonial histories we’re used to seeing and uni-directional stories about power.

Yet it’s precisely in these revelations that the fight for the “Home” we imagine can begin.

**AH:** I’m biased, but I tend to agree with you there. To me, all of these works revolve around the fact that what we tend to imagine as being stable, is more often than not, a very tenuous place. Sort of like a house of cards, they require so many devices to keep them propped up. And that is what interests me. There is constant contradiction, but I think that’s what keeps me coming back and looking for what could be a “Home”—the dream and the nightmare always coexist. It’s just a matter of which one we think we’re living in.



**A. Naomi Paik**

*Rightlessness: Testimony and Redress in U.S. Prison Camps since World War II*

**The University of North Carolina Press (2016)**

**269 pages**

**\$29.95 (paperback)**

**Reviewed by Andi T. Remoquillo**

According to A. Naomi Paik, “rightlessness” is a state-facilitated condition in which racialized Others are organized and confined to camps, stripped of their political rights, denied the basic necessities that uphold human dignity, and represented as threats to US security (Paik 2-5).

Therefore, rightlessness becomes “the condition that emerges when efforts to protect the rights of some depend on disregarding the rights of others.” (4) Meanwhile, the neoliberal nation state maintains and defends its false benevolence through the guise of protecting “real” Americans by containing those that are deemed to be ‘dangerous.’ Paik disrupts this flawed notion and unapologetically demonstrates how the imprisonment of Japanese Americans,

HIV-positive Haitian refugees, and Muslim “enemy combatants” was, and continues to be, propagated by white supremacy.

*Rightlessness: Testimony and Redress in U.S. Prison Camps since World War Two* is a critical, historical overview of US prison camps dating back to the 1940’s when Japanese Americans were systematically collected and detained after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Through her analysis, Paik meticulously pieces together an original and well-documented argument that unveils the imperialist-laden politics of US neoliberalism and what she deems as the false humanitarian missions of the state via prison camps. In less than 300 pages, Paik breaks down Japanese internment camps and draws connections to



detention centers situated in Guantanamo Bay by skillfully working through various court documents, camp records, official correspondences, and individual testimonies. In so doing, Paik argues that each camp is connected through the state’s racial politics and refusal to address them. Paik asserts that the remnants of each prison camp lives on through the emergence of each new camp in the 1990’s and early 2000’s, particularly in the ways that these spaces continued to be racialized and regarded as distinct from ‘normal’ US society (83).

The organization of *Rightlessness* is effective, as Paik moves chronologically while maintaining that each camp does not exist in isolation, but rather as part of an expansive legacy concerning US imperialism and racism. Furthermore, Paik’s analyses within each chapter stays true to her main objective of presenting a corrective history by centering the voices and struggles of the rightless themselves. This is a stark difference to the ways in which the rightless undergo the “epistemic violence of erasure” in both imprisonment and redress (35). The book is divided into three parts: the internment of Japanese Americans across the United States from 1942-1946; the detainment of HIV-positive Haitian refugees at the naval base at Guantanamo Bay from 1991-1993; and finally, the imprisonment, interrogation, and torture of the “enemy combatant” at Guantanamo Bay from 2002-present. Paik begins each discussion by detailing the emergence of the camps, who was detained in them, and the political and racial climate in the US at the point of each camps’ establishment. She identifies camps as “institutions of removal” which “frees the state from the constraints of right recognition and enables the subjection of camp inmates to systemic control over their existence.” (7) General background information on the actual camps, however, is only supplementary to Paik’s main discussion on how people are turned into prisoners, deprived of rights, and removed from a political community. I found this point to be most salient in Part Three, where Paik describes the ambiguous yet highly racialized creation of the “enemy combatant” under the Bush administration at the turn of the



twenty-first century. According to Paik, the “enemy combatant” was an entirely new category of people purposefully made unintelligible and ambiguous for the sake of justifying the mass-detention of Muslim men at Guantanamo Bay (166).

In order to shatter the widely accepted belief that the prison camps were necessary, Paik spends most of her time focusing on the rightless themselves by positioning testimonies collected from redress and protests as central to the book’s argument. Additionally, Paik presents testimonies as invaluable evidence that not only challenges the position of the US government as the ultimate guarantor of rights (34), but also highlights the ways in which testimonies are “at once highly particular and yet situated and communal.” (14) Meaning, testimonies show us that while the rightless are stripped of political rights in camps, their refusal to remain quiet is a form of collective action that disrupts the state’s attempt to control them. For example, Paik reframes Japanese Americans’ refusal to be silenced during redress trials when their testimonies went over the allotted time (37), and the hunger strikes at Guantanamo Bay when Haitian refugees were indefinitely detained under unsanitary conditions (135), as key moments for understanding how rightlessness is challenged.

However, Paik also points out the limitations of testimonies and resistance within an imperialist, neoliberal state. When discussing HIV-positive refugees, the author uncovers the fraught nature of “choice” when living in an indefinite state of rightlessness; the hunger strikes lead to severe dehydration and starvation, while other detained refugees opted for suicide to remove themselves from rightlessness altogether (132). Additionally, although testimonies represent a “counterarchive of struggle,” (13) the rhetoric of redress oftentimes functions as a way for the state to relieve itself from guilt while still justifying the camps’ existence. Paik asserts that this does nothing to prevent similar “mistakes” from happening again. She first establishes this critique in chapter one, “Internment Remains: The 1988 Civil Liberties Act and Racism Re-Formed,” when analyzing the ways in which the state justified Japanese internment as an “isolated” event that occurred only after the US experienced its first

foreign attack and made no reference to the racism that mobilized imprisonment. Therefore, while redress movements occurred in the 1980’s, the state still failed to acknowledge the already existing anti-Asian sentiments which made internment so quickly executable and widely accepted (30). Throughout the book, Paik showcases how racist sentiments pervasive during the second World War made the xenophobic treatment of the Haitian refugees and Muslim men so widely accepted by the American people.

*Rightlessness* is a provocative critique of the state that is accessible and relevant to all readers, in and outside of academia. Paik excavates the testimonies of those made politically voiceless and re-presents US prison camps since World War II as xenophobic, interrelated, and directly indicative of neoliberal US politics, not the exception to them. Moreover, in order to restate the importance of testimonies, Paik brings the book full circle by referencing Paul Gilroy who argues, “our conduct must be closely guided not just by this terrible history but by the knowledge that these awful possibilities are always much closer than we like to imagine” (229). In the last pages of her book, Paik delivers her final and most urgent point: “If we see the direct predicament of rightless people as heralding our collective future, then the struggle against rightlessness and the forms of power that produce it is motivated not by charity for these others, but by solidarity organized around a shared vision of a future that we fight for together.” (229) *Rightlessness* is therefore more than just a critique against prison camps, but a call for action to combat rightlessness and the wrongful, state-sanctioned containment of racialized groups.



**Nick Estes**

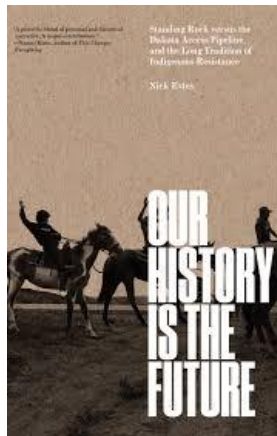
*Our History is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance*

**Verso, 2019**

**320 pages**

**\$26.95**

**Reviewed by Annie Bares**



*Our History is the Future* begins and ends with scenes of radical struggle and of possibility at Oceti Sakowin, the largest of several camps formed near the Standing Rock Reservation from 2016-2017 in opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline. Estes, who is a citizen of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe and an Assistant Professor of American

Studies at the University of New Mexico, participated in the activism and analysis that came to be associated with Water Protectors. However, as Estes reiterates throughout *Our History is the Future*, Water Protectors “weren’t simply against a pipeline; they also stood for something greater: the continuation of life on a planet ravaged by capitalism.” Taking #NODAPL and Mni Wiconi (“water is life”) as its animating premises, *Our History is the Future* chronicles the long history of Indigenous resistance to settler colonialism.

Part history, part work of contemporary political analysis, part collective memoir, and part manifesto, *Our History is the Future* narrates various scenes of violence and Indigenous resistance that arise in their wake in what came to be known as the United States. Estes’s style and the book’s non-linear structure emphasize the circularity of these histories, disrupting traditional narratives of incremental, progressive social change. Each of the book’s seven chapters weaves together histories of Indigenous oppression and resistance with scenes from the present and implications for the future. In doing so, the book resists settler-colonial chronology, instead structuring its narrative in keeping with Indigenous revolutionary

epistemologies that “aim to change the colonial present, and to imagine a decolonial future by reconnecting to Indigenous places and histories.”

Grounded in Indigenous (particularly Lakota) understandings of relationality, Estes theorizes what he refers to as “the tradition of Indigenous resistance.” Estes defines Indigenous resistance as accumulation, “one that is not always spectacular, nor instantaneous, but that nevertheless makes the endgame of elimination an impossibility: the tradition of Indigenous resistance.” Indigenous resistance is both a “radical consciousness and political practice” that persists in spite of the slow violence of environmental racism, extraction, and warfare. Estes centers Indigenous epistemologies, cosmologies, and practices of relationality, both amongst humans and between humans and “other-than-human kin,”—Estes’s term for nature, animals, and other matter—as both historical and future-oriented sites of anti-colonial struggle.

*Our History is the Future* begins with Estes’s account of his experience at Standing Rock conceived of as a prophecy that diagnoses the condition of the present and aims to shape the future. From there follows “Siege,” a chapter on the conditions of extractive racial capitalism, militarization, and dispossession that culminated in #NODAPL. Estes traces these conditions of the present to forms of violence, warfare, and dispossession rehearsed in early encounters between European settlers and Indigenous people. “Origins” connects contemporary oil extraction to early histories of settler-colonialism’s violent project to extract natural resources from Indigenous nations and to spread capitalism and its ideologies of private property and individualism.

In “War” and “Flood,” Estes uses the history of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century policies of the U.S. toward Indigenous nations to reframe the notion of historical agency. Key to his argument is that unlike settler-colonial or liberal humanist understandings of sovereignty, Indigenous people are “sovereign nations—not simply cultures” or individuals. In “War” he contends that “the founding of the United States was a declaration of war on Indigenous peoples.” He describes how the forceful imposition of capitalism onto Indigenous nations, broken legal treaties, enforced individual citizenship, flooding of tribal lands, and supposedly

benevolent undertakings like federal ward programs, boarding schools, humanitarian aid, and land management programs degrade Indigenous sovereignty. The final three chapters, “Red Power,” “Internationalism,” and “Liberation” describe twentieth and twenty-first century movements for Indigenous liberation.

In describing how traditions of resistance arose from this state of permanent warfare and the constant threat of genocide, Estes offers a particularly generative analysis of The Ghost Dance and its recurrence across history as an example of an Indigenous strategy for survival in the present that ties history to the future. Arising in the 1880s in the wake of mass dispossession, the formation of reservations that acted like concentration camps, boarding schools, and the near extermination of buffalo herds, The Ghost Dance was a prophecy that foretold the end of the current world, along with the end of settlers, and colonialism at large that would usher in a new existence, marked by renewed relations between humans and other-than-human life. In recounting how The Ghost Dance has been misinterpreted by Western historian and anthropologists and how it has been criminalized by the U.S. government, but has, nonetheless, reappeared throughout U.S. history, including at Standing Rock, Estes demonstrates the extent to which Indigenous liberation and futurity is tied to history.

As the term “Indigenous tradition of resistance,” might suggest, in addition to grounding its analysis Indigenous epistemologies and theories of relationality, *Our History is the Future* also draws on the Black radical tradition. In particular, Estes cites W.E.B Du Bois, Cedric Robinson, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, along with the Movement for Black Lives, as interlocutors in relating settler-colonialism to racial capitalism and defining resistance as an ongoing history. In addition to bridging the Indigenous and Black radical traditions, *Our History is the Future* also intervenes in the environmental humanities in its insistence that Indigenous knowledge of and relation to the natural world has for centuries recognized the agency of other-than-human life. Due to its ambitious historical scope, clear, powerful prose, and emphasis on forms of knowledge that exist beyond traditional academic registers, *Our History is the Future* would be of

interest to broad, public audiences, as well as students and scholars of Indigenous, environmental, and radical history and culture will find it useful.

In delineating the Indigenous radical tradition, Estes argues that while Indigenous resistance is tied to the traumas of colonialism and genocide, it is also rooted in the success of these survival tactics and the forms of collectivity across generations that they gave rise to. Moving beyond frameworks that see “Indigenous peoples as perpetually wounded,” Estes’s accounts of The Ghost Dance, along with the Red Power movement, Indigenous Internationalism, and #NODAPL also emphasize how Indigenous people “formed kinship bonds and constantly recreated and kept intact families, communities, and governance structures” and “how they remain, to this day, the first sovereigns of this land and the oldest political authority.” Estes stakes these claims not in acts of individual agency, but instead in notions of sovereignty that move beyond liberal humanist subjectivities. He uses the organization of the camps near Standing Rock based on principles of care, kinship, and hospitality as evidence of the continuity of Indigenous survival and political power, noting that “it was Indigenous generosity--so often exploited as a weakness that held the camp together.” Even in the wake of the approval to construct the Dakota Access Pipeline, Estes holds that “the fort is falling.” He ends by suggesting that with Indigenous leadership that privileges relationships outside of capitalism, “we are challenged [...] to demand the emancipation of earth from capital.”



**Mark Rifkin**

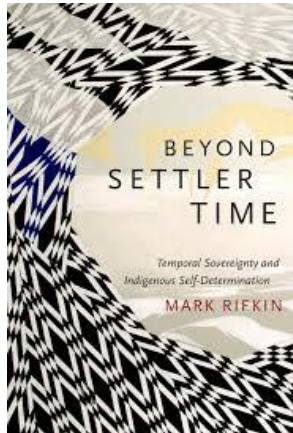
*Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination*

Duke University Press, 2017

296 pages

\$26.95

Reviewed by Erin Yanota



Mark Rifkin's *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination*

reveals the possibilities of thinking through Indigenous ways of “becoming” and “being-in-time” for contributing to Indigenous efforts to assert sovereignty. For Rifkin, failure to recognize Indigenous

peoples’ “temporal sovereignty” perpetuates settler-colonial state violence toward Indigenous groups. Such failures might involve treating indigenous peoples as aberrations or ruptures in Western modernity, or as vestiges of an authentic Native ‘tradition’ in a modern world. Indigenous peoples might likewise be seen as inhabitants of a (nominally Native) cyclical temporality rather than a (nominally non-Native) linear temporality, or even as inhabitants of a shared, so-called ‘universal’ temporality that nonetheless orients one through settler-colonial “frames of reference.” Instead, Rifkin explores ways of understanding Indigenous “processes of becoming”—of experiencing the past and of determining their own futures—that “encompass Native stories of both fragmentation and reinvention on their own terms (rather than in terms of a settler frame of reference).”

The stakes of Rifkin’s argument are broad and political, and the scope of the argument mirrors such breadth. The dominant cultural products in Rifkin’s archive include film and Native-authored fiction from the decades surrounding the turn of the twenty-first century. But Rifkin also attends to nineteenth- and twentieth-century US-American histories of state violence against Indigenous groups, as well as contemporaneous Indigenous

responses to that violence. It is worth noting that the violence Rifkin considers operates both overtly, through “exceptional events of spectacular violence” like military conflict, and covertly, through “mundane, state-sanctioned processes” like treaties and other forms of US-American government policy.

The book’s argument is organized in a broadly chronological, four-part structure. The first chapter, “Indigenous Orientations,” outlines the understandings of time and temporal experience upon which Rifkin’s project rests. This outline situates Rifkin’s study at the intersection of several fields of scholarship, such as indigenous studies, postcolonial theory, phenomenology, and queer theory. Drawing on the resources of Philip Deloria, V.F. Cordova, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Henri Bergson, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Sarah Ahmed (among others), Rifkin establishes that the human experience and perception of time is fundamentally multiple; each person’s experience of time, moreover, is predicated on their specific “orientation” and “frame of reference.” In other words, present experience depends on both one’s past and one’s position relative to future events. Furthermore, the experience of events within time will differ from person to person and group to group. The various nodes in this theoretical network come together to reveal, in Rifkin’s view, the as yet unarticulated historicity of peoples indigenous to the land we now call the United States, as well as their orientations toward and processes of determining their own futurity.

Rifkin begins Chapter 2, “The Silence of Ely S. Parker,” with the 2012 film *Lincoln* (dir. Steven Spielberg) as an example of the ways in which US-American history positions the Civil War as a “caesura” in the nation’s history: a necessary event that enables “the becoming of national history in its increasing materialization of liberty.” From such a settler frame of reference, many have conceived of the Civil War as a decisive ‘break’ from a national past of institutionalized white supremacy. This manner of structuring history, for Rifkin, “normalize[s] U.S. national jurisdiction as the de facto container in which time happens” and elides the complex temporalities of contemporaneous Indigenous histories that destabilize the division between the ante- and post-bellum periods of US-American history. In Rifkin’s reading, the silent

character of Ely S. Parker in *Lincoln* exposes such Indigenous temporal orientations by indexing what remains absent from settler accounts of US-American historical progress during and after the Civil War. For Rifkin, these absences include the Dakota War (1862), the historical Parker's involvement in Indian Affairs throughout the treaty period, and the writings of Charles Alexander Eastman, a prominent Native intellectual during the early twentieth century.

The final two chapters of *Beyond Settler Time* mark a shift in the book's approach, turning toward literary representations of Indigenous experiences and perceptions of time over against Natives' forced "translation" into "an account of time defined by the coordinates of settler governance and sociality." Chapter 3, "The Duration of the Land," takes up the allotment period by way of John Joseph Mathews's 1934 novel, *Sundown*. This novel, for Rifkin, reckons with "the effect and legacy of settler policy"—Osage allotment, specifically—by highlighting what he calls the "density" of Osage experience rather than its "difference." Attending to the novel's form as well as its political and philosophical investments, Rifkin argues that the novel's central character, Chal, figures for the incommensurability between different temporal frames of reference, when settler-colonial allotment policy layers a settler frame over (but does not displace) an Osage frame. For Rifkin, Chal's felt experiences of queerness throughout the novel bespeak his positionality at the threshold of two frames of reference. Indeed, at the same time as he struggles to "engage with the landscape in ways not scripted by economic development," he "deviat[es] from the trajectory of 'straight time' toward privatizing (and conjugally directed) individualism"—the orientation toward futurity that allotment policy sought to instill in the Osage.

The final full chapter of the book, "Ghost Dancing Century's End," continues to consider Indigenous deviations from and exceedances of settler frames of reference (or "chrononormativity"). Reading Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer* (1996) and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999), Rifkin argues that such deviations and exceedances can be attended by acknowledgments of "Native realities in which the dynamics of settler colonialism exert force but do not define the limits of Indigenous possibility, placemaking, and perception." As

Ghost Dance narratives, both texts engage Indigenous frames of reference that demonstrate adaptation and response to the material conditions of settler colonialism, as well as "reinvention on their own terms," instead of nostalgic return to an 'authentic,' Native past. Both novels, that is, "reconceptualize *historicity*" to "theorize temporal sovereignty" through affective, quotidian experience of time and to articulate possibilities for Indigenous self-determination through prophecy, vision, and spirit. To conclude the monograph, Rifkin uses a coda, "Deferring Juridical Time," to gesture toward ways in which one might trouble the central concepts of his argument, not limited to "temporal sovereignty" itself.

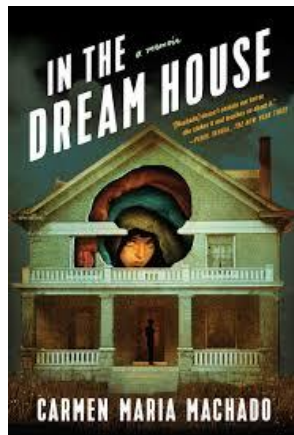
Rifkin's writing throughout the book is compelling, careful, and nuanced. His argument could have benefitted either from a more sustained and consistent engagement with queer theoretical notions of futurity or from a clearer articulation of his critique of queer temporalities and the stakes of that critique. Rifkin's point that queer theory is insufficient for theorizing Indigenous temporalities because of its potential implication in settler frames of reference is well taken. But he arguably undermines that point by returning periodically to queer theory throughout the study, with little indication of how he has adapted or modified that theory to suit the terms of his argument—if at all. In addition, as Krista L. Benson has noted in her review of *Beyond Settler Time* in *Feminist Theory* (vol. 19, no. 3, 2018), Rifkin's engagement with decoloniality could (and perhaps should, given the book's investment in indigenous sovereignty) be more substantial. Nevertheless, the study will be valuable for scholars of the various fields Rifkin engages as well as newcomers to those fields. *Beyond Settler Time* contains careful theorizations, while it provides important indigenous counterhistories to challenge the self-evidence and 'universality' of settler time, historicity, and futurity. Though the philosophical underpinnings of the first chapter may be unapproachable to some, Rifkin generally achieves an admirable balance between theory, historicizing, and close reading throughout the study to produce what is arguably a powerful expression of settler solidarity in *Beyond Settler Time*.





**Carmen Maria Machado**  
*In the Dream House: A Memoir*  
**Greywolf Press, 2019**  
**247 pages**  
**\$26.00**

**Reviewed by Camila Torres Castro**



*"You pile up associations  
the way you pile up bricks.  
Memory itself is a form of  
architecture."*

Cuban American author Carmen Maria Machado starts her third book, *In the Dream House: A Memoir*, with this quote from renowned artist Louise Bourgeois. Epigraphs have the possibility of foretelling the path a text will take; in Machado's *Dream House*, memory and architecture serve as foundations for the scenario she is trying to rebuild. The book is an exploration of the author's own abusive relationship with another woman, one that starts on an idyllic note and becomes a deep fog that invades every space of the eponymous house. Machado twists genres in order to tell a brimful yet coherent tale that sheds light on the reality of violent relationships.

Carmen Maria Machado was shortlisted for the US National Book Award in 2017 for her anthology of short stories, *Her Body and Other Parties*. The eerie atmosphere that characterizes said collection seeps into this memoir, effectively positioning Machado as a master of the gothic. In her memoir, body and house get interwoven in a power dynamic that displaces her from her own self-control. The result is a terrifying aura that resembles Dario Argento's body horror in *Suspira*, where it seems that the very thing you desire most is out to get you. With *In the Dream House*, Machado's arc as an author so far becomes evident: bodies, the built environment and an ingenious darkness surround her narration and exploits traditional fiction to evoke the real.

*In the Dream House* is divided into small chapters that resemble exercises of style. One chapter lets you *choose your own adventure*, another is a made-up story about a squid and queen, and so on. Each chapter showcases a different aspect of the relationship's course, whether it be a particular moment or an event from her past that somehow resonates with the present. Machado's virtue, however, is that it *makes sense*. There is a candid effort to demonstrate the many shapes that violence can take and how differently it can be perceived, articulating the things that can't be said through fictional tropes. If anything, this memoir is living proof that *forma es fondo*. The structure of each chapter is a medium that allows her to dissect the intangibility of certain forms of abuse. While some are clear (the cruel words, fingers digging into soft skin) others are more subtle (a sharp look, the inferred tone of a text). Through her witty, raw prose and the cartography of the text it becomes clear that the dream house is nightmarish.

Machado's prose feels like many doors are opening all at once. In a way, that is what she does by using a number of literary tropes to construct a story that at times seems fragmented. Probably that is the point: a series of small nightmares that together become a dark dreamscape. This is how she builds the dream house and simultaneously constructs an archive through ephemera, effectively channeling late José Esteban Muñoz's ideas into a creative exercise. Machado points out how difficult it is to prove the existence of abuse when there is no physical evidence: no actual bruises, no saved pictures or texts, no broken glass anywhere to be found. This dreamscape exposes the lack of an archive that illustrates domestic abuse in queer relationships, a space that has been otherwise regarded as a wonderland that violence can't pollute. There is also a declaration of principles in this book, one that underlines the importance of having conversations about how gay relationships can also fall into violent dynamics that are usually tied only to heteronormativity. What makes domestic abuse so parasitic is its ability to mutate and adapt to any circumstance.

Unlike other memoirs, *In the Dream House* does not quite follow a linear timeline. It is hard to pinpoint when Machado's relationship turned upside down. The build-up is not as visible as one would think. There is no dramatic tension that eventually leads



up to an explosion. But maybe this is because domestic violence (and life itself) is like that: it does not respond to a bigger script; it does not stick to a particular narrative trajectory. It is not a movie or a fairy tale. It happens. Was the bad always there? It is not entirely clear. Violence seems to come in waves: right after an abusive episode there is a moment of calm. It all sounds distorted, almost absurd if we think that the abuser is, paradoxically, the one that brings comfort as well.



### **Toby Beauchamp**

*Going Stealth: Transgender Politics and U.S. Surveillance Practices*

**Duke University Press, 2019**

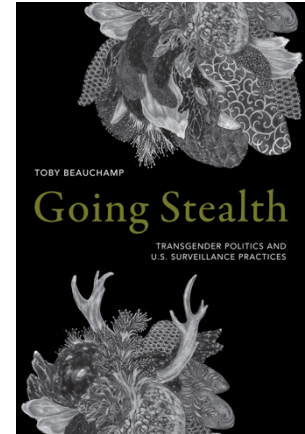
**208 pages**

**\$24.95**

### **Reviewed by Emma Train**

In *Going Stealth: Transgender Politics and U.S. Surveillance Practices*, Toby Beauchamp argues that transgender as a cultural category is produced and policed by post-9/11 US surveillance practices. These practices are pervasive and diffuse, delimiting the most bureaucratic and state-mandated of practices,

such as the regulation of vital documents like ID cards and birth certificates, as well as the most seemingly quotidian aspects of daily life, like using a public restroom or walking down the street. The category transgender is “produced, regulated, and contested” through contemporary surveillance while it also “simultaneously coheres and further fractures through surveillance.” In this way, transgender becomes a dynamic site of struggle where “new political possibilities can emerge.” Beauchamp therefore effectively negotiates between both discursive and material analyses. Using a Foucauldian lens, Beauchamp demonstrates how transgender functions as a conceptual category produced by discourses and by (often militarized) state procedures while also demonstrating how the US surveillance state coercively polices and violently regulates actual transgendered bodies, in particular, and all nonconforming bodies, in general. This latter point is at the heart of Beauchamp’s argument as *Going Stealth* reveals how the category transgender intersects and interacts with racialization, citizenship, xenophobia, disability, militarism, and medicalization as much as it interacts with gender and with heteropatriarchy. In general, Beauchamp’s argument is nuanced and subtle, as he makes clear that his book “aims not to clearly define the



category of transgender or to perfectly trace the workings of surveillance practices, but rather to refocus our energies on the fraught negotiations between them.”

Beauchamp’s text is divided into what we might call ‘case-studies,’ which form *Going Stealth*’s four central chapters. Chapter One examines government identification documents, particularly the introduction of the Read ID Act in the wake of 9/11 and in the shoring-up of American nationalism against the racialized specter of the terrorist. Chapter Two examines X-ray screening and airport security in the context of bodily technologies and prosthetics. Chapters Three and Four examine the government regulation of public bathrooms and the trial of Chelsea Manning, respectively. In the first chapter, Beauchamp outlines a brief history of gender categories on identity documents and demonstrates how the titular phrase “going stealth” encompasses the deep paradox of legalized gender identification. These tensions between visibility and concealment, between gender ‘passing’ and gender deviance, are maintained by the often competing and inconsistent demands of local and state agencies, which sustain the primacy of the medical institution in upholding the gender binary. Beauchamp explains that legal gender classification (especially changing one’s gender on legal documents) frequently requires permanent medical interventions where the ‘success’ of such intervention is defined as the ability to pass as non-transgender and as gender normative. This is the meaning of “going stealth.” And, as Beauchamp notes, the term is further complicated because it “invokes a sense of going undercover, of willful secrecy and concealment, perhaps even of conscious deception. The resonance of militarism in this term suggest the extent to which going stealth entails a certain complicity with state agencies, which demand compliance with specific legal and medical procedures and ostensibly offer in return official documentation that helps make stealth status possible.”

The consequences of going stealth extend far beyond an individual’s legal gender status or their ability to pass as gender normative. Going stealth implies a continual and ongoing process of enforced complicity with a racialized ideal of US citizenship. Echoing and dovetailing Jasbir Puar’s

argument in *Terrorists Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007), Beauchamp writes that going stealth “means not simply erasing the signs of transgender identity, but rather maintaining legibility as a good citizen and patriotic American, providing evidence of legitimate transgender identity that erases any signs of similarity to the deviant, deceptive terrorist figure.” Therefore, going stealth becomes a flashpoint example for how the institutional regulation of gender identity is a means to perpetuate the American state’s ideal citizen-subject. Going stealth is an often fraught process that requires a constant maintenance of normative ideals of whiteness, able-bodiedness, and even heteronormativity. On the other hand, Beauchamp’s conclusion (entitled “On Endurance”) ends with an incisive reflection on a radical trans and queer praxis. He cautions against a simple embrace of illegibility or deception as a political tool and cautions against an embrace of gender nonconformity as an inherent strategy of resistance to contemporary surveillance. He reminds his readers that the flux of surveillance practices across “fluctuating population categories, political moments, and technological developments shows how their endurance depends of a dynamic relationship with us.” To return to Beauchamp’s opening dynamic of coherence and fracture, it is up to us to track the coherences and the fractures created by surveillance so that “we might attune to the possibility in the spaces that open, however briefly, through that interplay.” In this way, Beauchamp’s tackles the complexity of his project’s key term by demonstrating the continually shifting boundaries between fugitivity, freedom, and entrapment that all gender nonconforming people must constantly negotiate.

*Going Stealth*’s intervention is vast and interdisciplinary, contributing to trans studies, queer of color critique, disability studies, surveillance studies, and science and technology studies. In particular, Beauchamp builds on queer of color scholarship, bringing transgender as a category of analysis into the fold, and further extending Roderick Ferguson’s foundational queer of color critique to more intensely hinge on and exceed gender nonconformity. As Beauchamp writes, the “transgender critique” that he seeks is not “limited to a clearly circumscribed category called transgender. Rather, it is most useful when leveraged to unseat those categories of gender and

sexuality that might be normalized and taken for granted through their assumed contrast to transgender.” Thus, building on what the queer theorists David Eng, Jack Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz have called a “subjectless critique,” Beauchamp uses “transgender” as, first and foremost, an “analytic” rather than as an identity category. This emphasis on a transgender analytic is what makes Beauchamp’s critique radical and sweeping, and what makes *Going Stealth* an ultimate critique of the hegemonic practices of the contemporary post-9/11 and post-Trump US nation-state.



**Maria Frederika Malmström**

*The Streets are Talking to Me: Affective Fragments in Sisi's Egypt*

University of California Press, 2019

192 pages

\$29.95

**Reviewed by Alex Norris**

In *The Streets are Talking to Me: Affective Fragments in Sisi's Egypt*, Maria Frederika Malmström uses the material and sensory world to narrate the change in the lives of Cairo activists from 2011 to 2018, paying especial attention to the traumatic events of 2013. In loosely connected chapters,



Malmström shows how her subjects—for the most part educated Cairenes who were active in the 2011 protests—navigate post-revolution Egypt and attempt to make sense of the world. She follows them, while maintaining her own place in the story, as the perspective shifts sharply from revolutionary euphoria, to the rise of Muslim Brotherhood President Mohammed Morsi, to massacre and a new dictator: the general-cum-president Abdelfattah Al-Sisi.

Malmström discusses how she and her subjects interpret the monstrous acts of violence carried out by the Egyptian military in response to popular protest, and how they interact with the material realities that accompany this violence. In the first chapter, a young man named Kamal rebels against his “fake” eye after a government bullet takes his original eye. In the fourth chapter, photographs of discarded objects in Rabaa’ square after the massacre, which have been rendered trash by the regime, evoke the moments before the massacre when everyday rituals took place among the demonstrators.

Malmström’s book attempts to make sense of how the promise of 2011 collapsed into violence, cynicism, and fear of the other in 2013—not just in the political situation, but even within the lives of

individual activists. This sense-making is sorely needed after such a confusing and disheartening series of events, but I think this effort falls short. The fifth and final chapter considers the rise of Abdelfattah Al-Sisi a story of masculinity idealized and attributed to a ruling figure. This gendered exercise of power makes itself felt on both the bodies of Egyptians who crossed this new regime, and on the production of patriotic objects of Sisi devotion. I found this conversation shockingly general, given the intense specificity of the preceding chapters. Some of Malmström's male interlocutors express that they feel unmanned in this new era, but I wished for some amount of reminiscence on this, given the earlier discussion of revolutionary relationships. What is the original association of Tahrir with manhood and womanhood in Egypt? Did Morsi and Sisi present different kinds of threats to this understanding of gender?

This feeling of disruption, without necessarily addressing what was there to be disrupted, is present in the book and in other discussions about what makes the reign of Abdelfattah Al-Sisi a break from previous eras. Clearly the change was sudden and drastic, as experienced by those who did not see themselves as changing. But did those who went from defending the January revolution to defending the January and July revolutions feel the same way? Did they experience this as a transition at all? Given that some of Malmström's circle appear to have supported the Rabaa' massacre, I was hoping for more of a discussion of this.

However, this is not to underemphasize the numerous methodological difficulties that might have blocked this track of research. Egypt now is possibly more dangerous to researchers than it has ever been, and asking specific political questions is doubtless difficult even among friends. Malmström's discussion of the ever-present fear and weight of state surveillance is among the most evocative passages of the book. She calls this the "old-new paranoia" because it harkens back to the early 2000s under President Hosni Mubarak. This construction is interesting because it suggests having to relearn old habits that, in the midst of revolution, may have been cast aside.

The discussion of pain is central to the book, and is most effective when Malmström's interlocutors are given their own words to describe it—which

they very frequently are. In Kamal's discussion of his eye, we feel his own body horror, and, given his own self-awareness and inward attentiveness, are able to listen to his sense-making process. It becomes clear that we cannot talk about his emotional trauma and the bullet in his eye separately. For him, they are one experience. In the testimony of the anonymous photographer "Thawra," we read her reaction not just to the horrors she sees and photographs in the aftermath of Rabaa', but also to the alienation of being among people who refuse to acknowledge its horror.

I found aspects of the methodology for weaving together these testimonies into a narrative about Al-Sisi's Egypt to confuse more than they clarified. In discussing the photographs Thawra took of the objects left behind in Al-Rabaa', Malmström emphasizes that they stand in for the bodies that were removed and hidden from the square. The designation of these objects as trash is part of the disposal of the once living bodies they interacted with. This interpretation of objects is powerful and captures the perspectives of Thawra and Malmström herself. But as she says, there are many more who interacted with the objects and with the square itself, and who become complicit in the massacre's cover-up. Less analysis goes into how these objects might present themselves to these people—regime-aligned journalists, soldiers, and even the trash pickers themselves. My understanding of Malmström's methodology is that she wishes to assert the agency of these objects in presenting a narrative. But like any human storyteller there can be a lot of room for interpretation—even willful misinterpretation. Malmström shows herself willing to entertain, for example, what relatives of the dead might think about these objects. I think it is worthwhile to consider what the thought process is for those that accept (or choose to accept) the state's narrative.

My critiques, as might be clear, are linked. Just as the inner lives of those shattered on the rocks of the state are important, so too are the inner lives of the state's newfound supporters. It can be difficult to access their testimony in the same way that Malmström has managed to collect testimony of those who are quietly against Al-Sisi. But that does not mean they should be treated as an undifferentiated mass, as the "poor young men" who make up the army are. Nor should all those who take part in promoting Sisi's masculinity be

seen to be engaging in the same nationalist, gendered mythmaking. To me this slips back into the comfortable story that the state has unlimited ability to draw people into its discourse, and ignores individual agency and the potential diversity of reasons for following the pack. Because of the fear and alienation that have resulted from the 2013 coup, it is easy to see these people as blinded or hoodwinked. But the fear and alienation are precisely why we need to understand them, their trauma, and the politics of their reactions.

Still, Malström's work deserves praise for bringing testimony out of this new Egypt and building a narrative around how political change inscribed itself on the material and affective worlds, and for capturing a trauma rarely put into words. The pervading experience of fear she describes experiencing while researching in this incredibly dangerous period speaks to her singular devotion and bravery. I am very glad that she is doing the work of bringing these stories to a wider audience.



**C.J. Alvarez**

*Border Land, Border Water: A History of Construction on the U.S./ Mexico Divide*

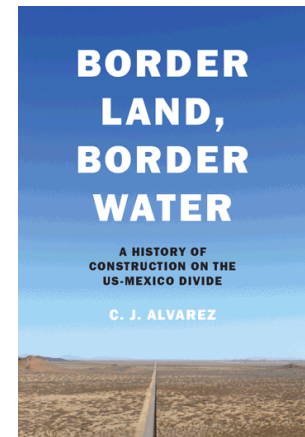
**University of Texas Press, 2019**

**301 pages**

**\$45.00**

**Reviewed by Alhelí Harvey**

If you were to look at a map, you could easily point to the international divide between the US and Mexico. You can hear about it on the radio, see it “captured” on your Instagram feed, but, do you really have a sense of what that stretch of land is? What it means? How it came to be that way?



Alvarez lays out a panoramic history of the projects that have shaped the political and physical points of contact along the almost 2,000 miles spanning from Tijuana/San Diego to Matamoros/Brownsville in his first book. The thesis he submits to us is compelling and it is what allows him to keep a constant eye on tensions between the local and the global, how national public projects shape private lives (and vice versa), and how really, the “border” is more than just a national boundary. *Border Land, Border Water* examines how building projects dotting the line set the stage to both tie the two countries together, put forward the infrastructure for further policing, and ultimately morphed the region into a place where individuals, bureaucracies, and governments sought a common purpose: control.

He introduces us to what he calls “compensatory building”, the accumulation of more and more projects to try to “correct” rivers or “stem the flow” of people and trade. Briefly, put, Alvarez shows how “infrastructure begets more infrastructure”: by the 1960s, the deep systemic flaws in the built environment not only displace people physically when their towns are flooded, but the binational building concretizes other global exercises of power. Political priorities begin to shift,

just like the river that eludes efforts to correct it. Throughout the text, Alvarez puts forward that the political ramifications of racist and exclusionary policy is directly connected to these building projects—they are not separate, but rather always working in tandem.

Organized into five chapters, Alvarez follows how the logics of the earliest boundary survey expeditions in 1850s are connected to the railroads, highways, dams, and fencing that has become highly contested in the 21st-century. These chapters revolve around “border land” and “border water”, both of which are marked by accretion of building projects designed with the idea of gaining mastery and control over the flow of goods, people, and the environment. The first chapter introduces readers to the earliest boundary survey projects, and importantly, introduces the International Boundary Commission, which became the International Boundary and Water Commission in 1944 and which will dominate most of the projects the book takes as case studies. Importantly, Alvarez reminds us of the complex binational nature of many of these developments, thus avoiding a US-centered analysis and providing greater insight into how the border region constantly defies expectation. The second chapter examines the role of the army in building the border to facilitate the flow of goods and how these practices built up contemporary police practices and border infrastructure. In this reviewer’s favorite chapter, the third section of the book furthers Alvarez’s connection between efforts to control the ecologically diverse environment of the region and the ideological thread those efforts share in controlling people. The fourth chapter expands on this by highlighting the systemic flaws of waterworks and policing while the fifth and final chapter illuminates the ubiquitous fencing of the 1990s to today.

The whole point of the book is to poke holes in anything that might seem “natural” about the border while also demonstrating how contemporary developments are in no way new to the border, but part of a long line of projects aimed at alienating people from the environment, extraction, and control. Through an in-depth and binational archival method, combined with maps, photographs, and even brief testimonies, Alvarez’s methods are reflective of a desire to approach the

events that shaped the region in two ways. The official archives and images are representative of bureaucratic and state actors’ understanding of the region. Secondly, the people who were most affected by those understandings comprised communities that were pathologized by virtue of living in “desert wastelands” and were also the first to experience the effects of the built environment and its political aftershocks.

For those in search of an environmental or built environment history, the text is a useful example of the transnational flows that are not often explored in borderlands history, which tend to focus on the border patrol, migration, and colonial histories. Those who are familiar with many borderlands histories will find new information that will help bring into focus the physical dimensions of transnational flows. The greatest intervention the text makes is the case for familiarity. As a means to address how the political discourse of the US/Mexico border in our contemporary moment is informed by how building projects have literally provided the physical space for police and rhetorical violence to take place. This book is one that adds to histories of the INS, Border Patrol, and understanding the degree of reductionism that sneaks its ways into even the most well-intentioned discussions of the international divide.

On a style point, emerging scholars will find this text to be a good example of how to write with clarity and use archival information in nuanced ways. Alvarez does not anchor his analysis in heavy theory, but rather roots it in dissecting the work of maps, topographical details, photographs and design plans and then pairing that information with details from officials and the fates of towns and people. From the early pages of the book, my favorite narration is a salient example I am willing to share (I do not want to provide readers with spoilers). Alvarez writes, in reference to descriptions of the boundary reports of the late 19th century that the commissioners detailed the

“...various “atmospheric freaks’ presented themselves, fallaciously of course, to the travelers...Desert fauna, too, were subject to phantasmagoric reconfiguration...In one instance, “a band of wild horses was mistaken for a herd of antelope, and followed for several miles as such before the mistake was discovered”... But despite



these incessant motifs of desolation, barrenness, and distortion in the desert, people lived there.”

## **RETHINKING POLITICAL AND CULTURAL SPACES: INTERSECTIONAL INDIGENOUS HEMISPHERIC DIALOGUES**

**Edited by Jessica Sánchez Flores &  
Juan Tiney Chirix**

In a globalized and interconnected world, it is crucial to center the knowledge(s), the *saberes*, from Indigenous and Black bodies that have historically been deemed as the subjects of study. Oppression transcends borders and notions of time that is why we focus on an intersectional Indigenous and Black hemispheric dialogue to build alliances among Indigenous and Black communities. Together we can affront the capitalist heteropatriarchal violence(s) of invisibilization, genocide, whitening, exploitation towards our communities (both human and more than human) with sustainable solutions for our autonomy and self-determination. The place from which we write, academia is one of the many spaces in which Black and Indigenous peoples are present, resisting, and making changes. For centuries, academia has represented a colonial institution, that under western eyes as Chandra T Mohanty (1984) has argued, as a Black feminist scholar, has appropriated knowledge. In this way, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) situates the importance of Indigenous scholars to fight, and resist the perpetuation of colonial legacies by (re) membering, (re) connecting, (re)writing, and (re) righting our histories.

The contribution of this section focuses on two main objectives: first, it seeks to recognize Indigenous and Black academics knowledge production from different spaces around the globe. Second, the section reviews engage with an interdisciplinary and intersectional analysis to highlight the racial aspect as central to the structural issues that negatively impact communities of color. Each piece explores the legitimacy of knowledge, and bring out the importance to recognize and respect the original knowledge production from Indigenous and Black communities. Daisy Guzman's review of "Black Autonomy: Race, Gender, and Afro-Nicaraguan Activism by Jenniffer Goett (2017)" brings up the important



role of black women's autonomy through the experience of the Creole and Garifuna people in Central America. Jermani Orjeda Ludena will take the reader to Bolivia, in South America with the review of "Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2012)" which problematize the construction of modernity and decolonization in Abiyala. He highlights that the decolonization of South and North American knowledge (s) and methodologies is in a constant struggle. Adrina Linares Palma's review on "Tangible interventions: the lived landscapes of contemporary archaeology by Marisa Lazzari (2011)" explores the concept of heritage and history of the Ixil people in Guatemala. Kaila Schdeen brings a concrete example of sovereignty in the context of the southwest of the United States in her piece "Network Sovereignty: Building the Internet across Indian Country by Marisa Elena Duarte (2017)" where we see a centralization of Native communities using information and communication technologies (ICT) to practice their culture and politics. On a similar line Monsterrat Madariaga-Caro dialogues with Aymara epistemology in "Un mundo ch'ixi es posible. Ensayos desde un presente en Crisis by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2018)" highlights the micropolitics as a form of decolonization in our daily lives and current global context. Finally, Josefrayn Sanchez-Perry in "Notions of Cultural Continuity and Disjunction in Maya Social Movements and Maya Archaeology edited by Matthew Liebmann and Usma Rizvi (2008)" recognizes the importance of an interdisciplinary methodology in archeology to break with the traditional categories of disciplines.

The contributors to this section of *Rethinking Political and Cultural Spaces: Intersectional Indigenous Hemispheric Dialogues* center Indigenous and Black knowledge(s) along with their experiences throughout Abiyala and Turtle Island. Each review adds a different layer to acknowledge, recognize, and situate Indigenous and Black people as agents of their own knowledge. Overall, each piece in this special section explores the mechanisms of resistance and of *sobrevivencia*, that have been created by Indigenous and Black people to the different processes of erasure. Finally, we recognize that academia is a venue of privilege for many of us to reclaim and transform Western

knowledge productions within colonial institutions. We also want to acknowledge the presence of our ancestral knowledge(s) that have been silenced, erased or dismissed throughout history. Let's never forget that our fight as scholars is embedded in the politics of writing because writing is political.



**Jennifer Goett**

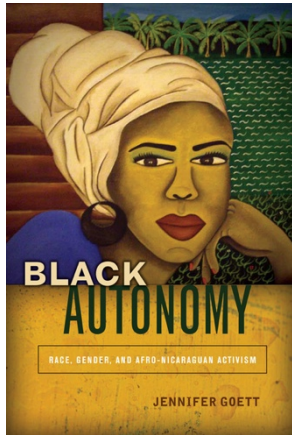
*Black Autonomy: Race, Gender, and Afro-Nicaraguan Activism*

Stanford University Press, 2017

240 pages

\$26.00

Reviewed by Daisy Guzman



Jennifer Goett's *Black Autonomy: Race, Gender, and Afro-Nicaraguan Activism* (2017) centers the experience of Black women activists on the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua. These Black women and their extended families combat state-violence and formulate strategies that present their desire for

national recognition in Nicaragua. Goett uses the personal account of these women that depicts their establishment of Black autonomy as a mode of identification across the African diaspora and their presence in Central America. In Central America Blackness is seen as always displacement from the mestizo nation-state. Creole and Garifuna people continue to strive for autonomy and sovereignty in the Caribbean coast. Goett's feminist method provides a sense of transparency and accountability that displays her positionality as both an academic and an activist. Her work engages the struggle of Afro-descendant women against state-sanctioned violence in Nicaragua. Her work contributes to the literature that shed light on the antiblack nature of multiculturalist agenda across Latin America. Following the establishment of multiculturalism, there is a need to continue to examine cultural distinctions amongst communities in Latin America.

Goett's feminist methodology and activist anthropological pedagogy models the call to action led by Edmund T. Gordon and Charlie Hale. Her work in the NGO (nongovernmental organizations), mapping creation, and report writing is proof of the activist engagement with the community that was part of her scholarship and

fieldwork. Her attention to activism and communal contributions can be considered taking on accountability and truly giving back. Although any ethnography comes with potential harm and consequences, there are methods of engagement that alleviate communal burdens and provide resources for social improvement. Goett's feminist ethnographic methodology would have benefited from a deeper engagement with Black feminist methods and praxis, such as citational practices. I say this to reiterate Goett's use of a feminist methodology, which at times was unclear in exactly how it differed from a non-feminist method and fieldwork approaches.

The community of Monkey Point, Nicaragua exists outside the realm of mestizaje and the homogenous illusion of la raza cósmica in Central America. Monkey Point, Nicaragua is a semirural area due to its location and inaccessibility on the southern Caribbean coast. A combination of Miskitu, the Rama, the West Indian migrants, Monkey Point as a region is a creolization of language, culture, and diasporic belonging. Like their neighbors on the Caribbean coast of Guatemala, Honduras and Belize, this space is perceived by the mestizo majority as racially and culturally distinct to the nation-state. Goett Builds on a foundation set forth by the previous academics that engaged Black Central America as a part of the African diaspora. In Central America and across the Americas, the Black body is seen as always arriving. The dis-belonging yet belonging of Black in Central America is a legacy that Goett contributes to, her theory and methodology create a clear historical and political picture of Monkey Point.

Goett introduces the matriarchs of various families of activists in Monkey Point. Women such as Miss Helen, Miss Bernicia, and Miss Helen Presida Wilson, provide an affective retelling of the political position of Monkey Point during war era and after. Goett navigation of the history and political conflict began with oral history passed down through generations of women and shared amongst their kin. Goett's book centers the narratives of women after the multicultural reforms of the 1990s and shows the anti-black rhetoric that still lies in the underbelly of politics across the Americas. The Anti-Blackness radiates through political discourse in Central America, as shown in the impoverishment, incarceration, and over-

policing of Black people. The search for autonomy, sovereignty, and socio-economic stability is what the Afro-descendants in Central America still strive for in the present. Jennifer Goett masterfully shows the generational trauma of political unrest in Monkey Point and the impact of the patriarchy as a form of power and control.

Goett shifts gears to discuss the sons of some of the women which makes clear the generational difference in active resistance and cultural expression. As men leave Monkey Point, the women form secure units of emotional, financial, and familial support. She explores the impact of drugs in post war Nicaragua, drug abuse amongst Afro-descendants and yet Monkey Point serves as a refuge and an area of recovery. The drug abuse was not isolated to men but an epidemic amongst both the young men and women. Goett then addresses the gender dynamics of mobility amongst Monkey Point community members. In this chapter, the relation between young creole young and mestizo soldiers calls for an intersectional approach for the discussion of sexual abuse as a tactic of control the government employs. Through the display of complex gender dynamics across generations in Monkey Point, Goett addresses patriarchy as a form of power and violence.

Finally, her subjects self-identifying themselves as Black and active members of the African diaspora sets her work apart from her predecessor Dr. Edmund T. Gordon's work in the 1970s and 1980s. Yet Goett's work builds on his work alongside cultural anthropology scholars such as Charlie Hale, Juliet Hooker and Mark Anderson. The development of Black Autonomy in other works by anthropologists shows a critical time in Afro-indigenous studies and Black Central America work done at the University of Texas-Austin. Her methodology displays the balance of researcher, activist, and community advocate through an intimate understanding of Afro-descendant women and their struggle for liberation and autonomy.



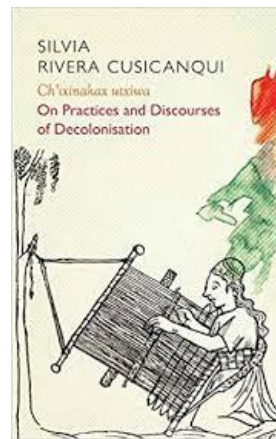
**Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui**

*Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization*

**South Atlantic Quarterly, 2012**

**95-109 pages**

**Reviewed by Jermani Ojeda Ludena**



Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, following the way of other Andean indigenous thinkers, reflects about colonization and decolonizing efforts and experiences in *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization*. The book invites the reader to know about the decolonization processes

happening in the south of Abyayala (South America), a territory as the authors says, in "colonial conditions". But at the same time, a territory with a history of permanent resistance of Aymara and Quechua indigenous people to colonization; as before and after the formation of modern state-nations in the former territory of *Tawantinsuyu*. The author contributes to the academic reflection in decolonizing theories from the South of the continent; in this case specifically relating to the experience of Bolivian indigenous people.

The resistance to colonialism has been manifested with different rebellions as the Tupaq Amaru and Tupaq Katari's. They fought in order to modernize commercial networks in favor of indigenous people rejecting colonial periods' taxation and continue until now with different manifestations as indigenous movements. This permanent struggling of indigenous people demonstrates their commitment to modernity but in their ways that are historically spiral but not linear as the Western, containing at the same time the past, future, and present. This spiral that contains different times is the present or *aka or kunan pacha* (in Aymara and Quechua) and means that the present is creating and emerging the future from the past while this past is bringing us to the renewal or *Pachakuti*. It

reminds us the Incas' emperor *Pachakuteq* who is the responsible of the renewal of the present. In this life conception we will return to the past as it was before Spaniards and its force will defeat conservative and archaic beliefs that represent and support the colonization against indigenous people. Rivera Cusicanqui remarks that modern Andean state-nations need to be decolonized in many ways. As during Spaniards presence, current governments are continuing recycling colonizers' practices of "exclusion and discrimination" against indigenous people. These practices are produced by elite dominant groups interested in maintaining the oppression against aboriginals. While imitating Western culture these dominant groups, in a country with majority of indigenous inhabitants, end up being just a caricature of foreign culture.

Rivera Cusicanqui criticizes academic practices. The studies of postcolonialism is present in contemporary academia, but it needs to change its relationship with "insurgent social forces" and grassroots organization that are struggling against colonization in countries like Bolivia. The practice in the academia is as the traditional colonizer one: stealing indigenous knowledge produced by scholars from South America.

In countries as Bolivia the colonization continues in many ways. For instance, a new wave of colonization is using the name of "multiculturalism" that essentializes and exoticizes indigenous people ignoring their permanent struggle against colonization in the neoliberal era. This multiculturalism implemented by governments just theatricalizes indigenous people softening the neoliberal adjustments that they are suffering. This current "culturalist agenda" is also inviting indigenous people as "minorities" to participate in the government while continuing with the power control by the traditional elites. The culturalist agenda of Bolivian elite is criticized in the book because there are some small reforms continuing with the power control by the same elite. This agenda puts indigenous people as savages belonging to the past and consequently denying their contemporaneity. This practice "obscures decolonization" struggles and enforces colonialism considering indigenous as subalterns and archaic people.

In countries as Bolivia were implemented many liberal reforms after the creation of the modern

state-nation, but they did not have liberal practices in the economic and political sphere, instead the governor elite created an aristocratic group that in the practice was more colonizer than Spaniards before. This new *criollo* elite used and uses precapitalistic practices in favor of huge landowners (*hacendados*) and natural resources extractive companies. While oppressing Aymara and Quechua indigenous people who did not stop struggling against these policies and governments.

The book criticizes the Bolivian academia that is dependent of intellectual power centers located in the north of the continent. The local *intelligentsia* is repeating, and reproducing what intellectuals are doing in northern universities without a positionality as critics. Even when some scholars in the north are appropriating ideas from the south and presenting them as originals. The author denounces US's decolonialism scholar Walter Dignolo who took her ideas about epistemology of oral history depoliticizing them. This is a usual practice of North American academia that traditionally did not interact or dialogue with academic production of the South. The North just provide scholarships to indigenous intellectuals to have support for their theoretical production exoticizing indigenous people according to their multiculturalism theory and practice. On the other hand, some South American universities, as the Ecuadorian Andina Simón Bolívar University, are permanently copying North American ideas using unnecessary neologisms.

Rivera Cusicanqui instead geopolitics of knowledge proposes political economy of knowledge because the former is not paying attention to the importance of analyzing material and economic strategies behind discourses and narratives. For example, many indigenous and mestizo scholars receive a material benefit and legitimize American academia. The author experienced as many indigenous scholars, the editor pressures to cite decolonial theorists of a North American university in order to publish her paper. Her response to that petition was that she uses indigenous people's trajectory of their struggles against colonialism in Bolivia instead of just reading scholars from the US. Finally, the author reminds us that many concepts of colonialism were developed by Katarista movement and indigenous scholars as Fausto Reinaga before scholars in the United States

of America, but as in colonial times those North American scholars are using indigenous knowledges showing them as their original production.



**Marisa Lazzari**

*Tangible interventions: the lived landscapes of contemporary archaeology*

**Journal of Material Culture, 16(2), June 2011  
171–191 pages**

**Reviewed by Adriana Linares Palma**

There is a complex corpus of understandings and debates over heritage. The concept of heritage varies depending on the perspective of indigenous peoples, archaeologists, or agents of the



State. On the one hand, there is a colonial desire over heritage, and on the other hand, "symmetrical interactions," as Lazzari argues, of material evidence and peoples.

In this article, Marisa Lazzari explores the agency of objects subjected to colonial desire. She discusses how the hegemonic discourses created arenas for (archaeological) study, justifying heritage interventions (through research, curatorship, or preservation, for instance), which at the same time establishes the separation of the past from the present. Lazzari brings two case studies from Argentina and Australia since modern democracies of such countries continue enforcing the disappearance of indigenous identity within pluralistic but hegemonic endeavors. The minority representation of indigenous peoples and white predominance in both countries, and the imposition of hegemonic projects to institutionalize custody rights over heritage, allows Lazzari to provide a critical analysis between archaeology and heritage. She depicts the complexity of interaction among cultural heritage by contrasting concepts of heritage with Indigenous' experiences on the landscapes and their relationship with artifacts of the past. Lazzari draws from agency theory and decolonization theory to analyze the separation between the past



and the present in archaeology and heritage studies and practices. These discussions are useful to bring present-day meanings of the archaeological sites in establishing a democratic conversation when researching diverse connections to the past.

Lazzari explores diverse perceptions, contradictions, and experiences of conserving artifacts in Argentina (i.e., a museum exhibition of Inca child mummies from Lullailaco volcano) and Australia (i.e., the oldest human remains from Lake Mungo and Lake Victoria). The purpose is unfolding the lived experiences of the landscape for people and the multiple ways of interacting with it. On the one hand, the landscape is a source for revitalization, where materials and elements combine to allow expressions of the subject who is living in it. According to Lazzari, the landscape also contains multiple meanings and feelings. She draws from Butler to argue how the complexity of intrinsic power relationships over objects is immersed in representations of the past. She explores materiality as an arena in which social significance arises from a long process of entanglement of people within a lived landscape. Several transactions and durations shape the landscape, in which materiality can develop new meanings.

On the other hand, heritage uses landscape to legitimize its predominance. Lazzari explains how inalienable objects defined by heritage are authenticated by history, defining tangible evidence of the past that also maintains current hegemonic projects. Within this context, power structures interfere with the movement of meanings of the past/present systems, modifying the boundaries of control. However, this regulation of the past/materiality opens spaces in which multiple entities-identities contest heritage. Thus, tangible interventions occur in both ways, from hegemonic systems, but also from the subversive ground that forms the "uncomfortable objects of contention." This latter process allows "physical and evocative connections" to generate multiple encounters, feelings, and interpretations of the materiality.

In this contested scenario, according to Lazzari, artefacts become subversive when they "establish sensory orders by means of their interconnected physicality," challenging our assumptions of organizing and classifying the world. These objects

teach us that the past and the present are never fully separated, as opposed to what mainstream discourses indicate. They can be used within hegemonic discourses, but that does not translate to the complete erasure of their agency.

An example from the municipality of San Juan Cotzal contributes to this discussion. During and after the civil war (1960-1996), several archaeological sites were intensely looted in Cotzal. The result of such massive extraction of burials, ceramics, and diverse types of artefacts formed private collections, which later ended up in private museums in Guatemala City and outside the country. During conversations with elders as part of my fieldwork, they demonstrated anger and sadness by the fact that artefacts that belong to their *totz'otz' kuykuman* (the house of their ancestors) or the archaeological sites are in museums' showcases. They do not understand why these materials are outside their context of origin, but they argue that having exhibited their artefacts causes the weakening of their spiritual practice. Similarly, one midwife explained to me how ancient artefacts values for both her spiritual and divinatory practices. Thus, the imposition of heritage over ancient materiality excludes multiple connections that Ixil has with their past/present, and this represents epistemological violence.

Lazzari discusses how "technologies of enchantment" create value over objects under the scope of science, over what seems forgotten (the past), and justifies its intervention. The positivism of archaeology and heritage embraces utilizing the right methods/tools to research and protect the past. Within this process, artefacts become evidence for scientific research, separating multiple interactions/connections. Within this process, local identities are at risk of erasure by imposing hegemonic thinking over such objects.

According to Lazzari, the regulation of visibility that museums manage exposes the power to bring particular past/present systems, with an embedded assumption that the act of seeing can achieve knowledge. This regulated visibility represents the power of science, or heritage, in the name of conservation, to have the authority to exhibit cultural objects and ancient burials in showcases to the public, without taking consideration of sensory orders, or emotional-cultural associations to such

materiality. This assumption is not the case for Ixil peoples of San Juan Cotzal, Guatemala, for instance. They argue that all *kamaviils* (artefacts buried in the ground) should be kept in their original context since those are the source of energy and strength for their spirituality. *B'alb'axtiioxh* (spiritual guides) do not need to have permanently visible materiality to interact with their *totz'otz' kuykuman*.

Within this scenario, Lazzari argues that tangible interventions from hegemonic structures are creating and validating one type of understanding and separating objects from their multiplicity of intersections. In Cotzal, there is a network of archaeological sites that previously have been examined as mere objects that evidence the Classic and Postclassic occupation of humans in this region. These material remains are conceived as belonging to a distant past. However, there are other interactions with such artefacts that are not necessarily from the past but materials that, in the present, enhance multiple cultural interactions that form "the social" in Lazzari terms. Encounters of diverse, and sometimes opposed, understandings of the materiality and time, results in a tension between a network of places -that connects bodies, landscapes, and spiritual practices- with hegemonic systems that study such network. Thus, *tangible interventions* from the State maintain the hegemonic conceptualization to control heritage, erasing multiple Ixil relations to their landscape, which is complexly and intimately related to their territory, spirituality, and bodies. Moreover, multiple layers of individual and collective subjectivities over the landscape can be used to contest power, relying on "uncomfortable objects" to claim repatriation or custodial, as another form of resistance.



**Marisa Elena Duarte**

*Network Sovereignty: Building the Internet across Indian Country*

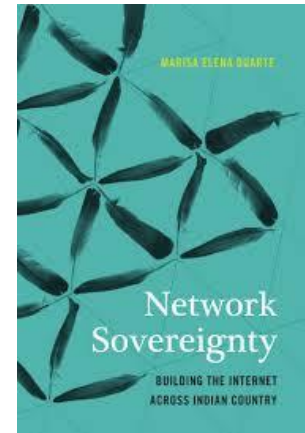
University of Washington Press, 2017

192 pages

\$25.00

**Reviewed by Kaila T. Schedeen**

As a child of the internet era who grew up interacting with my peers through early social media platforms such as Myspace, the internet often seemed like a passé and invisible network of communication that mostly consisted of people sharing painfully dramatic song lyrics and acne-laden



bathroom selfies. I made a Facebook profile by my sophomore year of high school (embarrassingly late for my age group) and had all but abandoned it for its "cooler" Cousin Instagram by the end of college. The transitions between these platforms happened almost imperceptibly in my life and reflected broader cultural understandings of digital technologies as an ephemeral field of ever-shifting access points, each slightly more advanced than the next. Marisa Elena Duarte's book *Network Sovereignty: Building the Internet Across Internet Country* does the difficult and important work of demarcating the outlines of these invisible networks, making their constructed and often exclusionary boundaries transparent in ways that are impossible to un-see. Duarte explores how Indigenous communities use information and communication technologies—otherwise known as ICTs—to practice their long-standing claims for sovereignty within the settler colonial realities of the United States.

*Network Sovereignty* mostly centers on Native communities in the Southwestern United States as case studies of how Indigenous peoples globally are appropriating ICTs for mobilization on various scales. The book is split into eight chapters, each building upon the last in progressively broad-

reaching ways. The most meaningful section of the book comes in Duarte's preface, where she orients readers to place and story through her personal introduction in Yoeme, the language of her Yaqui people. Here she makes the stakes of her research and one of its target audiences clear by asking readers, "What might our experiences as Indigenous peoples teach us about the ways we conceptualize this ineffable, somewhat immeasurable phenomenon we pursue, which we are calling 'technology'?" Duarte thus applies decolonizing methodologies to claim that Indigenous communities have always been at the center of technological developments, and that their histories are necessarily intertwined with today's digital systems of organizing information. A prime example of this is seen in Chapter One, which focuses on the #IdleNoMore movement in order to deconstruct the historically antithetical relationship that Indigenous peoples supposedly have to technology and to promote Indigenous frameworks of information flow. Chapter Two delves further into Indigenous relationships to ICTs, using personal narrative to outline how Duarte arrived at her decolonizing method. In Chapter Three Duarte expands this method through examples like the Tohono O'odham Nation and the Hopi Tribal Reservation to explain the overlap between technology and sovereignty, before turning to the infrastructure of broadband internet and the various tribal bodies that have utilized it for the practice of cultural sovereignty in Chapter Four.

In Chapter Five, Duarte outlines the material complexities of building such networks while still attending to community needs in tribal settings. Though brief, this section is a powerful example of Duarte's skills in weaving together a macro-level argument from a research methodology that values the varied complexity of Indigenous experiences. Chapter Six returns to the interwoven histories of colonization and ICTS outlined in Duarte's introduction to show how tribal governments exercise sovereign rights over broadband internet infrastructure to expand the self-governance of Indigenous peoples. In Chapter Seven, Duarte cites decolonizing methodologies from her interdisciplinary nexus to highlight how particular technological systems affirm colonial power in sovereign Indigenous spaces. Attending to these Indigenous understandings of information allows

her to explore how "Native and Indigenous peoples leverage information and technology to subvert the legacies and processes of colonization as it manifests over time across communities in many forms." As Duarte reminds readers in the Conclusion, by utilizing social media and other digital technologies to connect across space and time, Indigenous peoples (particularly youth) directly subvert colonial legacies and engage in self-determination practices that highlight sovereign rights.

The power of Duarte's text lies in its integration of long-standing critical conversations about sovereignty and self-determination with the newer (and more ambiguous) fields of internet technologies and social media. *Network Sovereignty* is an interdisciplinary text that includes diverse citations from scholars in wide-ranging disciplines such as anthropology, critical indigenous studies, literature, philosophy, and sociology. These include Taiiike Alfred, Manuel Castells, Vine Deloria Jr., Martin Heidegger, Bruno Latour, and Leslie Marmon Silk, among others. Duarte's overarching Indigenous-centered methodology generates new critical meaning across these interdisciplinary frameworks. In particular, Duarte weaves together these disparate academic conversations with her first-hand experiences in the communities she writes about. She gives just as much credence to ephemeral conversations had around tables in Indian country as she does to the written word, thereby highlighting the power of oral language in ways that academia often ignores. The effect is an exceptional form of scholarship that does the work of story-telling that honors long-standing Indigenous traditions, while still commanding an undeniable presence within an academe that still seeks to deny it.

*Network Sovereignty* focuses on social media as a network-building platform for Indigenous sovereignty, which attends to the complex personal and communal relationships created across the internet; however, one element of her study that goes mostly unmentioned is the question of the visual. Her book prompts the question, how are images as a particular form of information shared across Indian Country? Additionally, how do social media interfaces not only reflect human-to-human interactions, but also in turn affect the ways we relate to others in the physical world? While Duarte at times references the affective experiences of

technology in Indigenous lives, more attention could be paid to the visual nature of social media and its impacts on human and nonhuman relationships in the visual realm. Throughout the book, however, Duarte makes a compelling case for digital technologies as essential—and pre-existing—tools for practicing Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination in settler colonial societies around the globe. Her arguments are groundbreaking and necessary beyond the author's own field of Information Sciences.

*Network Sovereignty* will undoubtedly add to ongoing conversations on critical indigenous studies, media studies, sovereignty, network theory, and technology. Duarte's clear and direct form of writing make the book widely accessible for non-academic audiences, though some of the more technical language in the chapters may cause those unfamiliar with ICTs to stumble. *Network Sovereignty* would be well-placed in both undergraduate and graduate classrooms alike and deserves a place in the ongoing conversations of Indigenous sovereign practices worldwide.



### Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui

*Un mundo ch'ixi es posible. Ensayos desde un presente en crisis*

Tinta Limón, 2018

169 páginas

\$49.45

Reviewed by Montserrat Madariaga-Caro



La obra de Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (La Paz, 1949) es un referente ineludible del pensamiento subalterno y descolonizante en América o Abiayala. Siendo fundadora del Taller de Historia Oral Andina (THOA, al que perteneció desde 1983 al 2009), Rivera Cusicanqui ha

puesto en valor las vidas, los idiomas y las epistemes indígenas del continente en relación a procesos de la continuidad colonial. Socióloga e historiadora, aymara y boliviana, feminista y activista, en sus últimos escritos y entregas orales Rivera Cusicanqui se ha dedicado a crear subjetividades y representaciones del “mundo” que responden a prácticas descolonizantes. Es decir, su trabajo busca alternativas a un sistema hegemónico racista, clasista, especista y heteropatriarcal, centrado en la acumulación de poder, que, según ella, impera en Bolivia (incluyendo el periodo de Evo Morales) y en diversos Estados-nación del continente.

El libro *Un mundo ch'ixi es posible. Ensayos desde un presente en crisis* recopila cuatro textos que la autora adaptó del registro hablado y una entrevista con Francisco Pazzarelli. El origen “oral” del libro, según las “Palabras Previas”, es crucial a su metodología descolonizante, pues Rivera Cusicanqui desde sus inicios como autora ha valorado la oralidad andina. Su apuesta ha sido por un pensamiento que se hace cuerpo en la “escucha” y el diálogo, diferenciándose de los discursos autoritarios de la elite colonial que, según la autora, “encubren” y engañan con la palabra escrita. Así, la entrada al libro predispone a lxs lectorxs a conectar

con la energía comunicativa del habla, una energía que en Rivera Cusicanqui es repetitiva y enfática, apasionada y, a la vez, dedicada. Las ideas se exponen en forma de planta enredadera que permite repliegues. Es un libro cara a cara con la pensadora, que abre espacio para asentir y disentir, problematizar como en una conversación, aunque lxs lectorxs sean quienes tendrán que responderse a sí mismxs.

Rivera Cusicanqui habla desde un “presente en crisis”, una crisis política y social hoy inequívoca si miramos la historia reciente de América—el Brasil de Bolsonaro, la Colombia de Duque, el Chile de Piñera y la Bolivia de Jeanine Añez a la espera de elecciones, por ejemplo. Una crisis, además, agudizada por la actual pandemia global de COVID-19. De este estado de catástrofe, plantea la autora, surge la posibilidad de un mundo *ch'ixi*, “una epistemología capaz de nutrirse de las aporías de la historia en lugar de fagocitarlas o negarlas, haciendo eco de la política del olvido.” (25) Rivera Cusicanqui critica al modelo de Estado-nación que, ya sea en alianza con el capitalismo neoliberal o el socialismo, ha afectado la calidad de vida de millones de personas que no pertenecen a las elites excluyentes y beneficiarias de este sistema.

“*Ch'ixi*” es una palabra aymara que entre otras cosas, según Rivera Cusicanqui, refiere a un color gris en apariencia homogéneo, que una mirada cuidadosa descubre como la unión de dos opuestos: el negro y el blanco. La autora utiliza este “concepto-metáfora” (17), llamado así siguiendo a Spivak, para plantear una forma de conocer, es decir, una epistemología; una forma de conocerse o auto-identificación; y una forma de crear mundos desde las “complejas mediaciones y la heterogénea constitución de nuestras sociedades.” (17) La epistemología *ch'ixi* reconoce las superposiciones de diferentes temporalidades en el presente debido a conflictos no resueltos del pasado. Por ejemplo, las demandas actuales de comunidades indígenas por la devolución de tierras o la exigencia de leyes no sexistas por parte de grupos feministas.

Con la noción de lo *ch'ixi*, Rivera Cusicanqui desestabiliza la idea de progreso—tan presente en la etiqueta “país en vías de desarrollo”—y las políticas identitarias de los Estados-nación, especialmente Bolivia. La autora interroga las identidades del “mestizo” y del “indio” desde su

crítica al colonialismo como “una estructura, un *ethos* y una cultura que se reproducen día a día en sus opresiones y silenciamientos.” (25) Por lo tanto, la subjetividad *ch'ixi* se posiciona desde una diversidad irreductible, que devela falsa la homogeneidad social o la hibridación cultural. La autora dialoga, sobre todo, con las propuestas de Franz Tamayo y Fausto Reinaga, afirmando que tanto ella misma como los pensadores mencionados son “resultado de una práctica y un *ethos*, propio del mestizaje *ch'ixi*, que (re)conoce su *indix* interior y está firmemente situado en el aquí-ahora de su tierra y su paisaje.” (36) En otras palabras, reconocer la vida indígena en el territorio que habitamos y en nosotxs mismxs constituye el llamado a la acción de Rivera Cusicanqui.

La autora invita a buscar en el pensamiento y el lenguaje “*indix*” modelos que nos permitan salir de la crisis del colonialismo. Esto no es igual a afirmar que las culturas indígenas le pertenecen o son la base de las naciones modernas, como proponen los Estados coloniales. No, Rivera Cusicanqui apunta a develar la colonización interna, etnografiar e historizar el mestizaje colonial y, en esto, poner en valor lo indígena. En palabras simples, propone a la sociedad “mestiza” tender a la indianización y no al blanqueamiento. La autora está pensando, sobre todo, en la población chola de Bolivia, especialmente, en las mujeres indígenas que se van a trabajar a las ciudades de empleadas domésticas y luego son rechazadas como sujetas “indias” por movimientos como el indianista-katarista, al ser vistas como “mestizas”. Fuera de este contexto, su apuesta corre el peligro de ser mal interpretada y resultar en una nueva cooptación de la identidad y la tierra indígena por parte de personas criollas. Ahora bien, aún dentro de su contexto, Rivera Cusicanqui acusa al ex presidente boliviano Evo Morales y su partido político, el MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo), de llevar a cabo una utilización estratégica de la identidad indígena para acumular poder.

De la mano de su teorización sobre lo *ch'ixi*, Rivera Cusicanqui ejemplifica lo que entiende por micropolítica en diferentes secciones del libro. Este concepto es crucial para su propuesta, pues en última instancia, según expone, son las acciones cotidianas de múltiples y diversas vidas las que fisuran el sistema colonial-neoliberal. Las micropolíticas que resultan de una “socialización



colectiva” (141), que se generan en la calle y no en sedes partidarias, amenazan el *status quo* de las elites (neo)coloniales. “La ‘pesadilla del asedio indio’, la ‘pesadilla del asedio de las mujeres’, pero sobre todo la eclosión de comunidades de vida que se inspiran en epistemes indias, ecologistas y feministas” (39) representan para la autora “constelaciones impensadas” (39), nebulosas de estrellas que iluminan otros mundos posibles.

El énfasis que pone la autora en calificar la capacidad de las personas de “producir y reproducir la vida” (107) como una potencia revolucionaria, es a mi juicio uno de sus argumentos más interesantes. La defensa de la vida, como lo entienden los pueblos indígenas—la defensa del agua, de la tierra—, evidencia que la crisis de la representabilidad de los gobiernos en Abiayala no sólo implica la transformación de los aparatos estatales y sus leyes, sino la urgente movilización de las ciudadanías hacia un cambio radical en sus formas de habitar. Quizás se le pueda llamar un “despertar”, como en Chile nos referimos al cambio de actitud de miles de personas que desde el “estallido social” (18 de octubre de 2019) exigen al gobierno una vida digna. Rivera Cusicanqui advierte en la indignación y en la rabia motores capaces de impulsar una “política de subsistencia” (142), que abren espacio al accionar en red, como un tejido. Este es el mundo *ch’ixi* posible.

Finalmente, la relevancia de *Un mundo ch’ixi* está, en gran medida, en su capacidad de generar preguntas y alentar imaginarios descolonizantes, pues es una escritura abierta al debate. ¿Puede adaptarse su idea de lo *ch’ixi* a otros territorios? ¿Cuáles son los riesgos de su propuesta de indianización? ¿Qué “conceptos-metáforas” nos pueden ayudar descolonizar la idea del “mestizaje” en otros Estados nacionales? Y, quizás, a nivel personal surgan en lxs lectorxs las interrogantes: ¿en qué micro-políticas a contra corriente del colonialismo participo? Y ¿cuáles podría comenzar a practicar?



**Greg Borgstede and Jason Yaeger**

*Notions of Cultural Continuity and Disjunction in Maya Social Movements and Maya Archaeology*

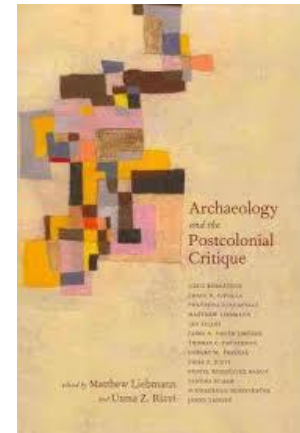
**AltaMira Press, 2008**

**91-107 pages**

**\$42.76**

**Reviewed by Josefrayn Sánchez Perry**

In their essay, “Notions of Cultural Continuity and Disjunction in Maya Social Movements and Maya Archeology,” Greg Borgstede and Jason Yaeger, explore the issues of cultural continuity in Maya area. The essay appears in a volume that seeks to combine archeological methods with postcolonial critiques



(Liebmann and Rizvi, 2008). In particular, these theories challenge grand narratives that fail to accommodate microcosms and idiosyncrasies within larger cultural regions. In Mesoamerica, for example, scholars often identify what connects this broad geographical area. But the cultural differences between communities in Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, and Costa Rica can sometimes outweigh the connections outlined by Mesoamerican scholars.

While the larger scope of *Archeology and Postcolonial Critique* focuses on case studies across the globe, Borgstede and Yaeger engage this premise in the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico, Belize, and Honduras. The essay, “Notions of Cultural Continuity and Disjunction in Maya Social Movements and Maya Archeology” is refreshing, not only for laying out the history of Maya archeology, but also for contextualizing how scholarship of Maya archeology impacts present-day discourse about Maya identity and culture. Borgstede and Yaeger make two important interventions. First, they highlight how postcolonial academic discourse moves towards creating historical discontinuity and difference across cultures. For example, the idea of “Maya civilization” can be easily criticized since both terms project homogeneity across a vast region.



And yet, it is through the discourse of historical continuity and shared identity that Maya intellectuals find empowerment for present-day movements.

While Borgstede and Yaeger contend that present-day Maya movements find commonalities in the identity of being Maya, they also recognize the important differences that exist within their cultures. In their second intervention, they ask: “Unconnected by direct descent or language, what shared qualities lead one to draw on the contemporary Tzotzil Maya community of Zinacantán in the Chiapas highlands for a model of the social organization of an eight-century rural village in the lowlands of Belize” (Borgstede and Yaeger 2008, 103)? The authors show how broad analogies generalize, downplay local histories, and objectify historical and present-day communities. Borgstede and Yaeger propose scholars should prioritize the local descendants of the archeological sites they study. Borgstede and Yaeger argue that this approach moves archeologists and ethnohistorians in the directions for the best historical connections about cultural change and continuity in the Maya world.

I recommend the use of the full journal for anyone interested in the broad study of Mesoamerica. The reader will find that Borgstede’s and Yaeger’s approach to archeology and ethnohistory can be applied to multiple case studies and disciplines that attempt to problematize continuity and change.



## **BLACKNESS, THE BODY, AND ONTOLOGY: PERSPECTIVES ON THE "FACT" OF RACIAL EMBODIMENT**

**Edited by Nicholas Bloom and Gaila Sims**

The fifth chapter of Martinican theorist Frantz Fanon’s canonical 1952 *Black Skin, White Masks* is entitled, in the original French, “L’expérience vécue du noir.” While the most recent English edition of the text, translated by Richard Philcox, translates this title as “The Lived Experience of the Black Man,” earlier English editions used a much more provocative—and more famous—translation: “The Fact of Blackness.” The difference between these two translations has been the source of much critical analysis and debate over the past two decades, likely because it gets at the heart of what Achille Mbembe has called the recent “ontological turn” in the study of race: i.e., the growing conviction among many scholars, intellectuals, and artists that structures of racial domination—particularly anti-blackness and white supremacy—operate as fixed categories of hierarchical difference that exceed the logics of political economy or articulable reason, and are thus not addressable by any clear social or political program.

This “turn” has spawned harsh critics, vehement adherents, and ambivalent interlocutors, all operating around a set of essential questions: to what extent does race operate (at least in the context of the Atlantic world) as a static “fact” of being in relationship to the category of “human” or “civil society?” Who establishes, reproduces, enforces, and consents to such facts—i.e. who is responsible *for* and *to* them? To what extent are “lived experience” and “facts” different, and how does the inherently contingent, changing, malleable nature of the body factor into these questions, given that race is said to be *fixed* to the body? How are race, nation, land, and indigeneity linked to one another, specifically in the context of societies that are historically structured by both indigenous genocide and black slavery? And perhaps most importantly: is it possible to imagine a world unencumbered by the structures of racial domination from within a society that is structured

that way? If so, who is capable and who is responsible for such imagining?

This special section reviews seven works of scholarly and literary writing that in some way address these questions. While each book reviewed here contains a multitude of overlapping themes and questions, we have loosely divided the reviews into four units, based on the works' primary locus of analysis and inquiry. The first unit includes two works that take up the fraught relationship between blackness and normative cultural understandings of "acceptable" weight, body type, and body size in the United States and the west more generally. In the first work reviewed here, Kiese Laymon's 2018 *Heavy: An American Memoir*, the "excess" weight with which Laymon grows up functions as both an actual subject of analysis and a metaphor through which Laymon explores the paradoxes, burdens, and gifts of his experiences as a black boy and man in Mississippi, and above all his deeply complex relationship with his mother. In her review of *Heavy*, Samantha Allen writes that even as the memoir probes fundamental questions about the relationship between grand American myths, race, love, and forgiveness, the body continually takes center stage: "[*Heavy*] asks us to dredge up memories from our bodies...[and] to listen to those for whom this process of somatic remembrance is arduous, and who will continue to carry the load." The second work reviewed in this section, Sabrina Strings' 2019 *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia*, offers a critical, scholarly inquiry into the historical relationship between race, blackness, and dominant conceptions of body-type propriety in Western Europe and North America over the past four-hundred years. Specifically, as Alida Louisa Perrine writes in her review, Strings' book is an examination of the historical linkages between fat-phobia and anti-blackness, and the ways that these two phenomena, which were not always co-constitutive, *became* linked in conjunction with colonial western Europe's increasing social and economic reliance on the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans. Strings' work then tracks the reproduction of this linkage over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially in the United States.

The second unit is comprised of two scholarly works that take intellectual history and ideology as their primary subjects of analysis. The first work

reviewed here is Achille Mbembe's *Critique of Black Reason*, published originally in 2013, and translated into English by Laurent Dubois in 2017. Mbembe's text offers a critical genealogy of the invention and subsequent development of "blackness" as a concept, the work that the term has done in the hands of European and colonial powers, and the various, complicated ways that black folks and intellectuals have thought their way through the concept. Though Mbembe sympathetically traces out the apparently "essentialist" thought of early- and mid-twentieth century black political theorists like Aime Cesaire and Frantz Fanon, he ultimately understands blackness as an invention made for the purpose of confusion, terror, and violence, a concept which privileges resentment and vengeance above all else. Ultimately, as Nicholas Bloom's review highlights, Mbembe suggests that we may be presently undergoing a "becoming black of the world," which holds a dual meaning. While more people are falling under the conditions of pure structural instrumentality that had formerly only defined the position of black people, Mbembe also leaves open the possibility for the growth of the kind of "black universalism" he sees in the work of Cesaire and Fanon in the present moment—a recognition of vulnerability and alterity as a paradoxically universal, shared condition. The second book reviewed here, David Roediger's collection of critical essays *Class, Race, and Marxism* (Verso 2019), considers various dimensions of the relationship between class and race as structures of domination, and as subjects for critical inquiry. Tiana Wilson's review pays particular attention to the ways that Roediger uses the essays in this book to create an intellectual lineage for the field that Roediger himself is most associated with, critical whiteness studies. This field, Roediger suggests, had its genesis in the works of C.L.R. James, W.E.B. DuBois, James Baldwin, and George Rawick, who were in turn deeply engaged with Marxist thought and analysis. And if the main purpose of the book is to advocate for a mode of inquiry that understands race and class as co-constitutive phenomena, the remainder of the historical and theoretical essays in the book offer various examples of this mode of inquiry in practice.

The two works reviewed in the third section explore the relationship between blackness and cultural place-making, from two different

disciplinary vantage points. Sarah Broom's 2019 National Book Award-winning memoir *The Yellow House* (Grove Press), reviewed by Katie Field, offers an account of the predominantly black New Orleans East neighborhood that is part-journalism, part-family drama, with Hurricane Katrina at the center of the story. Field's review emphasizes the book's ambitious scope, as well as its contractions and dilations between archival investigations of New Orleans' history and social structure and piercing, moving reflections on Broom's own relationship to her former neighborhood and city. The second book reviewed in this section is Tiya Miles' 2015 *Tales from the Haunted South: Dark Tourism and Memories of Slavery from the Civil War Era* (UNC Press). Miles' critical investigation of the contemporary explosion of "dark tourism" takes readers through first-hand accounts of various slavery-themed "ghost tours" in the United States, which purport to draw their source material from the real dastardly stories of Civil War-era horrors. Whitney S. May's review summarizes Miles' deft historical and theoretical analysis of these tours, and the ways that they so often traffic in and reproduce the very logics of sensationalized black pain-as-commodity that animated these horrific incidents in the first place. But, May suggests, Miles leaves room for the possibility that we have access to another kind of haunting in these stories—the legacies of African Americans who have commemorated, contextualized, or otherwise made sense of these horrific stories.

The final unit is comprised of just one work, the only text that was not published in the past few years: Audre Lorde's classic work of memoir and critical inquiry, *The Cancer Journals*, originally published in 1980 and republished as a special edition in 1997. Lorde's memoir deals with all of the questions pursued in the books above—blackness and its relationship to the experience of the body, intellectual lineage(s), and place-making—by centering topics that are both the most universally relatable and the most universally avoided: corporeal vulnerability, the experience of sickness, and death. Gaila Sims's review highlights the self-consciously wondering, confused, confessional approach that Lorde takes in this text, highlighting Lorde's repeated reference to her lack of textual models for thinking through the experience of sickness and cancer. The last twenty pages of the 1997 edition, as Sims points out, are

dedicated to tributes from various prominent friends, students, and readers of Lorde, and the profound impact that she and her work had upon their own intellectual and spiritual development.

And it is with this explicitly genealogical passage that this Special Section, appropriately, concludes. For indeed, if the works reviewed here do not necessarily provide clear and digestible answers to the questions that framed this Special Section, they certainly gesture towards the rich, multidisciplinary body of work that has been—and continues to be—produced wrestling with these questions in their full, immeasurable complexity.



**Kiese Laymon**

*Heavy: An American Memoir*

**Scribner, 2018**

**256 pages**

**\$16.00**

**Reviewed by Samantha Allan**

What is weight? In *Heavy: An American Memoir*, Kiese Laymon suggests that it depends on whether you see excess or abundance; flesh or a body; baggage, or the story of a young man navigating a fractured relationship with his mother and his country. Crucially, *Heavy* positions



somatic awareness as a reference-point for generating the language to discuss trauma, failed love, and injustice. To treat this awareness as a source of authority, Laymon must also navigate the prevailing conclusion that his body is trying to destroy him, either due to the body's mere existence in a white supremacist nation bent on obliterating African American men, or through the acts of self-harm, addiction, and negation the body manifests in order to counter its expectation of powerlessness. A young Laymon must weather frustrated attempts to put these experiences into words under the tutelage of a beloved but abusive parent. Years later, *Heavy* masterfully wields language to explore the part words play in constructing—and deconstructing—the weighty illogic of racism that attempts to render him speechless.

Although *Heavy* begins, “I did not want to write to you... I wanted to write an American memoir,” Laymon frames his story as a letter to his mother. The text’s introduction couches the necessity of this address in a variety of “utilizing” stories that Laymon wanted to write, but that ultimately “discovered nothing.” Didactic narrative modes in fiction and memoirs about racism that “center a something, a someone who wants us dead” but promise black America’s salvation through a

combination of white sympathy and “a low carb diet” are insufficient. Instead, Laymon is drawn to an intimate exchange with the person who has most attempted to protect him, and who nevertheless pulls him into the gravity of her own self-harm. Laymon’s mother, a professor with a close fan club of adoring students, teaches Laymon that white police officers are trained to “shoot [him] out of the sky.” She also enforces a regimen of reading, thinking, and writing to counteract this vulnerability with “excellence.” Writing will become one of Laymon’s survival strategies, a lesson in “how to assemble memory and imagination when I most wanted to die,” but a young Kiese first learns to write diligently in order to earn his mother’s love and avoid her punishment. He also follows her to the casino where “an addiction to losing” will trouble his relationship with her for years to come and become one of his own fraught coping mechanisms.

Centering Laymon’s mother allows *Heavy* to make a nuanced argument. It rejects the idea that parental abuse happens independently of wider systemic forces and challenges our tendency to plot racism along a straightforward trajectory between victim and villain, or citizen and state. Reckoning with racial injustice, writes Laymon, is also about reckoning with the impact of internalized racism on familial relationships. To ignore this pernicious redirection is to lie about the way racism operates, which, according to Laymon, is “how we are taught to love in America.” Laymon is not interested in forgiving America, but he is interested in the extent to which he can forgive his mother, who tells him that she “tried her best,” even though, Laymon tells her, she didn’t always. This amendment is equal parts rejection and subversion: Laymon’s way of proposing that in a better world, excellence would never be the only condition for deserving love. In ours, its ability to protect black children from scrutiny or harm is compromised by pain, caveat, and sacrifice.

Readers who loved *Long Division* (2013), Laymon’s first novel, might see traces of its protagonist, City, in Laymon’s portrait of his own adolescence. Witty and curious, a young Kiese jokes his way through high school and into transformative relationships with peers, foes, and girlfriends. He survives a college experience split across two campuses by his response to a racist event (the perpetrators are

never held responsible), and he eventually becomes a young black faculty member at an old, predominantly white university. Although he is slimmer than he has ever been, heaviness persists in the form of an unofficial advisory role, through which Laymon becomes a rock for the university's students of color. What I find most admirable about *Heavy* happens in these later passages: with careful eloquence and an unflinching dedication to honesty, Laymon questions whether he, or anyone, knows how to properly fill this position. The result is a stunning critique of a university system that disproportionately overcommits faculty of color to tasks of mentorship which spill into love, protection, and emotional support. To forgive his mother, Laymon must therefore also learn to parse his own failures in the career she pursued before him.

If *Heavy* teaches readers how to respond to racism in America, it is because it asks complicated questions that demand our participation. It asks us to recognize what we don't know about our country, our history, or our obligations to one another, and it asks us to love fat black boys from Mississippi with the same tenderness that guides our love toward the beneficiaries of white hegemony. It asks us to dredge up memories from our bodies, especially the difficult ones. Urgently, it asks us to listen to those for whom this process of somatic remembrance is arduous, and who will continue to carry the load.



### Sabrina Strings

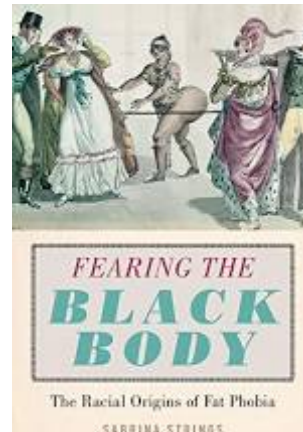
*Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia*

New York University Press, 2019

283 pages

\$27.99

Reviewed by Alida Louisa Perrine



How are anti-blackness and fat-phobia related? Sabrina Strings provides a compelling social history of the widespread aversion to fatness and its links to the rejection of blackness in Western society and culture. Tracing gendered and raced

ideas of body size from the Renaissance period to the present “obesity crisis,” Strings executes a thorough assessment of the evolution of discourses surrounding race, gender, and body size from medical, religious, and aesthetic perspectives. She argues that current social perceptions about fatness in the United States are bound up with social values that arose from the transatlantic slave trade and the profound influence of Protestantism. Strings convincingly demonstrates how racialized concerns about female body size function both to denigrate black women and control white women.

Strings’s book enters the conversation about fat-phobia in the United States with special attention to how race, class, and gender impact ideas about weight. Strings identifies race as the key to understanding the origins of the sustained rejection of large bodies, especially in women, throughout the history of Western civilization. While other scholars have made connections between policing body size and gender, and between fat-phobia and anti-blackness, Strings examines documents ranging from Renaissance-era treatises on beauty to early issues of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* to pinpoint the confluences of anxieties related to both fatness and blackness. Her careful and detailed research is indispensable to anyone interested in the collision of eugenics,

Protestant moralism, and health discourses that underpin current US conceptions of appropriate body size. Strings writes in a largely accessible—if at times florid—style. The book is chronologically organized, and Strings clearly states her salient arguments about each time period analyzed.

Although a sociologist by training, Strings uses methods of historical analysis for her study, highlighting sociocultural and political factors that shaped the perspectives of the artists, authors, and medical professionals that inform her research. The bulk of the text is historical narrative driven by various key figures. Strings identifies prominent or representative thinkers and contextualizes their viewpoints on health, beauty, and the body. For example, she tells the story of Sarah Buell, an editor of magazines that taught women “how best to comport themselves as modern Anglo-Saxon Protestant women.” By always considering the race, class, and gender factors that contributed to these views, Strings reveals clear links between lines of thinking that led to the rejection of fatness as associated with racial Others. In the case of Buell’s teachings, “temperance in food and drink [...] bred the slender physiques that offered evidence of racial superiority.” To construct these narratives, Strings uses a combination of primary and secondary source material. She analyzes a wealth of print material including letters, books on beauty, magazines, and academic journals. She includes many close readings of painting and portraits that indicate prevailing notions of beauty and ideal proportions of their respective eras.

Part One of *Fearing the Black Body* covers the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe when full-figured women were revered in Renaissance paintings and by prominent male thinkers preoccupied with human proportions. In this section, Strings demonstrates that anti-black discourses did not naturally arise when Europeans were first in contact with Africans but were crafted later. In the first chapter, Strings finds that Renaissance painters depicted round and curvaceous female bodies as lovely figures independent of race, although black women were often socially marked as inferior through their dress. Chapter Two proceeds to the seventeenth century when voluptuous women were still appreciated, but an obvious rejection of the possibility for black bodies to be beautiful

coincided with the flourishing slave trade. In England, ideas about fat people were also beginning to shift as wealth generated by slavery and colonization, including ready availability of sugar, was causing people to gain weight. Corporeal largeness, especially in men, was increasingly associated with intellectual torpidity. The end of the seventeenth century also saw the creation of the first system of racial classification.

Part Two illustrates how body size in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries became connected to ideas about race and nation, as well as an indicator of moral character. This is the most extensive and compelling section as it gets to the core of the book’s argument and questions racial elements that contribute to aversions to fatness, especially in women. Chapter Three traces the rise of “rational” thought during the Enlightenment period that emerged alongside scientific racism. Racial theorists came to define race not only based on skin color, but also body size and shape, and by the end of the eighteenth century, gluttony was closely associated with blackness, and therefore barbarism. Concerns about women’s bodies were central to the development of theories of racial difference. Strings presents the widely known case of Sara Baartman, a Khoisan woman from South Africa who was brought to Europe to be displayed as a spectacle. She shows how Baartman’s fame marked a turning point in relating grotesque fatness and black femininity. Conversely, Chapter Four traces how thinness was being associated with white femininity during the same time period. While an aesthetic of thinness was becoming common among both white men and women, Puritan religious beliefs also advocated moderating food intake as a righteous rejection of the sin of gluttony.

The fifth chapter presents a crucial point when Strings ties together Protestant moralization, the valuation of a slender physique, and white supremacy during the nineteenth century. Racial Others, including black and Irish people, were described as dark and stout in contrast with tall and fair Anglo-Saxons. In this way, slimness came to be a marker of racial superiority, while rotundness demonstrated the opposite. At that time, women’s magazines emphasized the importance for women to maintain thin bodies for moral and aesthetic reasons. They suggested that fat women could be a success in the burning climes of Africa, but not so



“civilized” white women in the United States. Chapter Six covers the turn of the twentieth century when scientific racism and eugenic ideologies continued to tinge discussions about female beauty, declaring that American women were the most beautiful in the world because of their tall and thin bodies that were due to their Aryan and Nordic heritages.

In Part Three, the reader learns how attitudes about fatness that were developed over the prior several centuries were absorbed into medical discourse in the twentieth century. This final part seems to rush through a key time period, with much fewer examples and details than the previous sections; nevertheless, Strings makes her points and leaves room for future inquiry. Chapter Seven demonstrates the turn to medical discourse at the beginning of the twentieth century to advocate for controlling body size, especially for white women who were responsible for propagating future generations of Americans. Medical discourse of the time paid little attention to black populations because scientific racism dictated that the inferior black race would eventually disappear of its own accord. Chapter Eight runs through the rest of the twentieth century showing the increasing preoccupation with fatness and obesity, especially in connection with women and their capacities to be mothers for the good of the race and the nation. It documents the arbitrary invention of the Body Mass Index and how black women became the face of the “obesity epidemic.” The end of the book would seem abrupt except for a brief epilogue that summarizes the main points.

Overall, Sabrina Strings makes an immense contribution with *Fearing the Black Body* by highlighting the racialized dimensions of fat-phobia and providing a wealth of historical narrative detailing the dizzying logic of Western appraisal of appropriate body proportions over the span of the past five centuries.



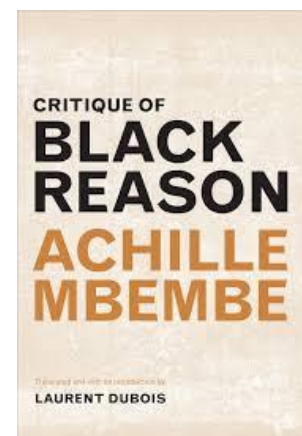
**Achille Mbembe**  
*Critique of Black Reason*  
Duke University Press, 2017  
215 pages  
\$25.95

**Reviewed by Nicholas Bloom**

In Chapter 1 of *Critique of Black Reason*, Cameroonian political philosopher Achille Mbembe offers a deceptively simple definition of “Black reason:”

...Black reason consists of a collection of voices, pronouncements, discourses, forms of knowledge, commentary, and nonsense, whose object is things or people of African origin.

On one level, *Critique of Black Reason* is an examination and elucidation of these “voices, pronouncements, discourses,” etc. But Mbembe’s text might be more accurately described as a plea—an explication of the *stakes* of “Black reason,” in the context of what Mbembe refers to as the contemporary “Becoming Black of the world.” To study the ways that both non-Black and Black peoples have articulated “Black reason” over the course of the last five-hundred years is, for Mbembe, a task of existential clarification and ethical urgency, for anyone interested in preserving the possibility of human community on earth in the contemporary era.



Mbembe’s first three chapters lucidly trace the structural importance of the early-modern European invention of “Blackness” to the shape and machinations of the modern world. While the theoretical ground that he covers in these chapters is not necessarily new, Mbembe effectively elucidates the multilayered, often paradoxical social functions of Blackness and the “Black man” for the colonial Europeans who invented and subsequently

employed these signifiers. For example, while the meanings of Blackness—and race generally—are defined by their “mobility...inconstancy and capriciousness,” they are also *physically fixed*, located indelibly upon the body. And while Blackness, per the dominant colonial and capitalist epistemic regimes that have defined the modern Atlantic world, signified that people marked as Black were “*human-merchandise, human-metal, and human-money*,” according to Mbembe, Blackness is no subordinate derivative of class relations. Rather, race, capitalist relations of production, and the construction of colonial empires are inextricable not only from one another, but also from traumatic and repressed confrontations with fundamental, existential questions about the purpose and meaning of human life. The psychic investment in race for white people, per Mbembe, is both the engine and product of a social, material, epistemic, and libidinal regime that constantly reproduces and cordons off an *alterity*—an outside, or a shadow “Other”—in order to shore up both material and imagined power vis-à-vis the unanswerable and infinite conundrums of human existence. As Mbembe writes:

[Race’s] power comes from its capacity to produce schizophrenic objects constantly, peopling and re-peopling the world with substitutes, beings to point to, to break, in a hopeless attempt to support a failing *I*.

Blackness, for Mbembe, is the paradigmatic creation of race in the modern world, precisely because it emerged in tandem with capitalism’s ascendance, merging the desires and logics associated with commodity fetishism and enclosure with the racist logics of alterity and “Otherness” that pre-dated modern capitalism. As bourgeois Europeans enriched themselves materially via the material flows associated with the Atlantic slave trade and plantation slavery, they also constructed understandings of themselves as individual liberal subjects with the hegemonic conception of the “Black man”—a surplus sea of human commodity, “a being whose life is made of ashes”—as their foil. In other words, as the advent of modern capitalism and its attendant social logics created new existential conundrums for the white people who understood themselves as this new order’s protagonists, Blackness—and Black people—functioned as the essential “substitutes” for these

protagonists, shadow selves through which to work out these ever-evolving conundrums and neuroses. Thus, Blackness and Africa have functioned as “signs of an alterity that is impossible to assimilate” within the dominant Euro-American epistemic paradigm since at least the advent of the Atlantic slave trade, according to Mbembe. Within this dominant epistemic paradigm, the term “Blackness” is “a vandalism of meaning itself,” per Mbembe, as—by definition—it offers itself up to be changed, mutilated, redefined, and *used* by the individual liberal subject, whenever and however that subject sees fit.

Mbembe’s last three chapters turn to the ways in which African and diasporic Black people have understood and taken up the meaning of Blackness. Here, Mbembe most poignantly—and perhaps controversially—interrogates “Black reason.” On the one hand, Mbembe is sympathetic to the ways in which Black thinkers and movements have claimed Blackness as an affirmative assertion of their own dignity and humanity. In the context and wake of the material and epistemic regimes that birthed the term “Black”—colonial regimes that attempted to strip people of African descent of all social and cultural identity besides “Black”—Black meant, in essence, to be surplus, to be pure use-value and socially dead except when animated by the master’s force of will. Thus, the conscious creation of “Black community,” particularly during the eras of legally sanctioned plantation slavery and the explicit European colonial rule of Africa, was a necessarily a radical act of revolutionary self-affirmation. “By its very existence,” Mbembe writes, “the *community of the enslaved* constantly tore at the veil of hypocrisy and lies in which slave-owning societies clothed themselves.” Even in the wake of slavery’s official abolition, to claim Blackness affirmatively, in willed community with other Black people, was to put the lie to the invention of Blackness in the first place. The affirmative claim to Black identity thus existed (and exists), per Mbembe, as “an island of repose in the midst of racial oppression and objective dehumanization.”

Yet for Mbembe, too little critical attention has been paid to the ways in which Black epistemological traditions have relied upon—if perhaps in transmuted form—“the fundamental foundations of [racist] nineteenth-century

anthropology...” Or, in more blunt terms, Mbembe wonders if much Black thought “rebels not against the idea that Blacks constitute a distinct race but against the prejudice of inferiority attached to the race,” a stance with which Mbembe takes issue. He does so not because he finds this stance offensive or unreasonable, but because he believes it covers for a deeply held refusal to confront and confess a core truth—and core shame—about Black peoples’ experience with and memory of the confrontation with colonial capitalist regimes. Namely, not only were Black peoples subjected to European political and material power, they also were “seduced and fooled by ‘the great threat of the machinery of the imaginary’ that was the commodity.” In other words, it has been extremely difficult for Black folks to accept and confess the ways in which, even as they were themselves transformed *into* commodities by the logics and machinations of European colonialism, Black peoples became enchanted and enthralled by the libidinal logics of commodity fetishism and enclosure. “Blacks remember the colonial [regime] as a founding trauma,” Mbembe writes, “yet at the same time refuse to admit their unconscious investment in the colony as a desire-producing machine.”

Indeed, it is only through the confession of such investments and histories that a repaired world is possible, per Mbembe. Mbembe ultimately looks to several mid-twentieth-century Black theorists as exemplars of this reparative approach, particularly canonical Black Martinican thinkers Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon. At their best, these thinkers claimed their Black identity—and the racialization of humanity more generally—as an identity always in emergence. Though they acknowledge that Blackness was invented in order to kill, commodify, and enclose, these thinkers’ active, nuanced, shifting claim to Blackness consciously recognizes race—and social identity generally—as something always in relationship to multitudinous alterities, never actually enclosed or cordoned off from oneself, and thus, paradoxically, a rich form of universalism. It is this universalism from the “underside” that must be the model for thinking through the meanings and uses of Blackness going forward, Mbembe contends. In this way, the “Becoming Black of the world” functions dually for Mbembe—as a dire warning about the possible cordoning off, enclosure, and commodification of

all life, but also as a prophetic vision, the possible manifestation of the best of radical “Black reason” as the world finds itself more and more in need of this tradition.

*Critique of Black Reason*’s epilogue is entitled “There Is Only One World.” It concludes with this declaration:

...the proclamation of difference is only one facet of a larger project—the project of a world that is coming, a world before us, one whose destination is universal, a world freed from the burden of race, from resentment, and from the desire for vengeance that all racism calls into being.

In making this argument, Mbembe places himself squarely in a tradition of Black radical prophetic thought that has, in the last few decades, come under increasing scrutiny and even derision from Black intellectuals both in and outside of the academy. Indeed, though Mbembe maintains his vigorous critique of normative neocolonial post-racial fantasies—a critique that informed much of his earlier work—*Black Reason*’s polemic against the idea of racial ontology as a static, fixed force seems to be a response to the work of contemporary “Afro-pessimist” thinkers. In fact, it is hard to read the epilogue’s title—“There is Only One World”—without thinking about Frank Wilderson’s famous 2014 published interview, “We’re Trying to Destroy the World,” in which Wilderson cites many of Mbembe’s own favorite source texts, especially Fanon, to buttress his argument that the structural antagonism between non-Black and Black peoples is so great that only a catastrophically violent war is capable of rupturing it—certainly not the project that Mbembe seems to be invested in. Given that Mbembe has himself been cited by many of the thinkers associated with this powerful trend in Black political thought, it would have been interesting to see him directly and explicitly engage these contemporary thinkers who have clearly, at the very least, pushed and informed the direction of Mbembe’s current line of inquiry and argumentation.

Though at times mystifyingly dense and virtually hallucinatory (perhaps intentionally, especially in the later chapters), Mbembe’s *Critique of Black Reason* is ultimately a supremely engaging work of

political philosophy, and an effective call for further curiosity and further study into the foundational antagonisms, neuroses, possibilities, and “reservoirs of human life” that comprise the fabric of our modern world. For those interested in the importance of race and racism to the construction of the modern world; genealogies of radical political thought and Black political thought; race and psychoanalysis; and postcolonial and postmodern thought, *Critique of Black Reason* is an essential text.



**David R. Roediger**  
*Class, Race, and Marxism*  
**Verso, 2017**  
**208 pages**  
**\$26.95**

**Reviewed by Tiana Wilson**

Most Americans believed Barack Obama’s two-term presidency was evidence that the US had finally become a colorblind or post-racist society. Bernie Sanders, in his 2016 campaign for socialist democracy, refused to publicly support



race-specific agendas like reparations based on the assumption that class oppression was the most pressing issue for Americans. However, the election of the Republican candidate, Donald Trump, to the Oval Office, proved just the opposite. As many activists, journalists, and scholars have made clear, Trump’s victory can easily be credited as a “white backlash” to the Obama years. Despite his outward misogyny, bigotry, and racism, Trump sweepingly won the white vote. David Roediger’s new volume of essays, *Class, Race, and Marxism* (2017) addresses the falsehood of post-racial America. Roediger, one of the leading scholars of critical whiteness studies, delves into current debates around “class-first,” a term that describes the privileging of class over racial disparities, in order to remind us that race as well as gender are integral to capitalism.

*Class, Race, and Marxism* is divided into two sections, consisting of Roediger’s previously published essays between 2006 and 2016. Part one, “Interventions,” calls for a race and class analysis of our contemporary moment. The significance of the book lies within the historical and theoretical examination of Marxism that Roediger traces back to leading Black intellectuals during the early twentieth century. In doing so, Roediger’s volume offers a foundational method for labor and critical

whiteness scholars to come. The second half of the book, "Histories," pushes the temporal accounts of capitalism and US labor history, which typically begin the narrative in the post-Reconstruction America, to include early American settler colonialism and Black chattel slavery. Roediger demonstrates the centrality of race to the management of land and labor, an analysis central to studies of Native people, but which has yet to make its way to the broader public understandings of US history.

In Chapter One, "The Retreat from Race and Class" (2006) Roediger challenges leftist academics who claimed a "colorless struggle for human progress," was occurring at the start of the twenty-first century. He takes to task scholars Paul Gilroy, Orlando Patterson, Pierre Bourdieu, and Loïc J.D. Wacquant for their works that produced an "against race" argument. These academics called for an end of race-based politics in substitution for class-centered alliances. Roediger views this positioning of either racism or class oppression, as unproductive in thinking about the ways inequalities overlap in both arenas. He points to post-Katrina New Orleans as evidence of continuing racial disparities, where elites, including Black political elites, abandoned the predominantly Black Ninth Ward in the rebuilding process. This essay pushes the field of whiteness studies to critically engage with layered structural oppressions in the contemporary moment.

Roediger's second essay "Accounting for the Wages of Whiteness" (2011) foregrounds influential scholars who shaped Roediger's best known work, *The Wages of Whiteness: The Making of the American Working Class* (1991). Though historians credit Roediger as the cofounder of "critical whiteness studies," Roediger disavows this title and acknowledges the fact that writers and activists of color had long critically engaged with white identities and practices as problems of further interrogation. In this chapter, Roediger documents this longstanding tradition and suggests that the current subfield of whiteness studies is grounded in Marxism, labor activism, and the ideas of W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James, James Baldwin, and George Rawick. By centering black thinkers in the origins of whiteness studies, Roediger reminds us that Black scholars were among the first to link

the degradation of Black labor as fundamental in the uplift of white labor.

Continuing his analysis of George Rawick's intellectual legacy, Chapter Three, "A White Intellectual among Thinking Black Intellectuals," (2010) reads as if Roediger is trying to "prove" just how influential Rawick was to working class histories. Roediger documents Rawick's work that began under the mentorship of C.L.R. James during the 1960s, in the civil rights/Black Power movement, and blossomed with his study on the Black community under slavery. Rawick, as Roediger asserts, was a leftist thinker who listened to Black thinkers because he saw workers' desire for a humane society, and therefore a new society. In this essay, Roediger is most interested in how a white, Jewish American man entered the world of radical Black intellectuals, during a time when Black Power "silenced" white voices. On one hand, readers may question why Roediger feels the need to implicitly defend white scholars writing about marginalized communities. On the other hand, Roediger provides a great model for all scholars to follow, critically engaging with Black writers, and seriously considering our subjects' ideas and actions on their own terms.

In his fourth essay, "Removing Indians, Managing Slaves, and Justifying Slavery" (2011) Roediger explains how the management of enslaved people was embedded in the discourses around management of land that resulted in the dispossession of Native Americans. Because managing slave labor was directly tied to the reproduction of slaves, Roediger also claims that an intersectional analysis, a framework coined by Black feminists, is needed when examining the interconnected histories of slavery, settler colonialism, and women's reproductive labor. He draws on plantation records as the first systematic management publications in the US and documents how central control and violence were to the self-made image of the white, Anglo elite class in the North and South.

Coauthored with Elizabeth Esch, Chapter Five, "One Symptom of Originality," (2009) explores the understudied connection between race and management. Differing from traditional labor and economic history that assumes management of labor occurred after the 1880s, Roediger and Esch

argue that this history cannot be separated from slavery and settler colonialism. Early American management was centered on which race of coerced labor would be most economically efficient and tractable. Roediger and Esch view the plantation South as a model for factory management in the industrial north during the nineteenth century. In this section they also discuss the transnational element of race management in the US's late nineteenth and early twentieth century imperialism. For example, Herbert Hoover gave the name "Golden Age" to the "triumph" of US engineers in the world's mines and their capitalist exploits which brought "efficiency" to Africa, China, and isolated areas of Australia. Roediger and Esch's assessment of the ways race management coexisted with scientific management pushes studies of labor and economic histories to further interrogate the role social scientists played in constructing the standard productivity level of various "races."

The final section, "Making Solidarity Uneasy" makes a critical case for embracing solidarity, while simultaneously being uncomfortable with the assumptions it sometimes evokes. Roediger ponders if solidarity is always a good thing, to what and whom solidarity leaves out, and how solidarity works across differences of oppression. These questions were prompted by the insurgencies that matured to form the Movement for Black Lives as a response to the vigilante murder of Trayvon Martin and to the many murders of other Black women and men at the hands of the police. This movement, like the efforts of the American Studies Association (ASA) to be in solidarity with Palestine, introduced young people to the idea and actuality of coalition-building in these protests. In an age of identity politics, Roediger suggests that by owning the difficulties of solidarity, activists and scholars can come to understand just how contingent and malleable the work has to be in order to confront racist, sexist, and capitalist structures of oppression.

For general readers of the *Ethnic and Third World* (E3W) *Review of Books*, Roediger's arguments might appear familiar and the content well-known to scholars of marginalized groups. However, academics within the field of critical whiteness studies, and even more broadly white liberals and conservatives, the intended audience of this work, would benefit from Roediger's synthesis and

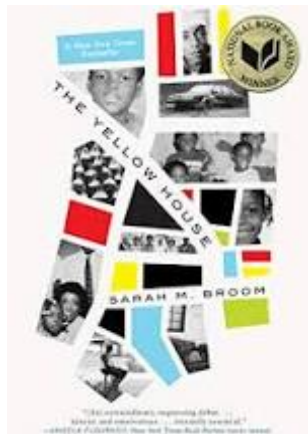
reiterations of the interconnected relationship between race and class. Activists and scholars would also appreciate his essay on solidarity because it historicizes and foregrounds the usefulness of collective organizational efforts in order to confront what Roediger argues is "white advantage." *Class, Race, and Marxism* is a well-written, compelling text that explicitly demonstrates how the critical study of whiteness comes from within the Marxist tradition and thus race should never be separated from any analyses of class.





**Sarah H. Broom**  
*The Yellow House*  
Grove Press, 2019  
376 pages  
\$26.00

Reviewed by Katie Field



Part Hurricane Katrina testimony and part journalistic chronicle of the development and devastation of New Orleans East, Sarah H. Broom's *The Yellow House* is a meticulously researched example of how to tell a story that began before she was born and continued even after she had

moved away. Combining skilled reporting with tales from her family's oral history, Broom charts a literary map of the East, one of the city's largest and most neglected residential areas. She offers an intimate window into her loving, often melancholic relationship with her family's yellow house, her experience of growing up in poverty, and the guilt that plagues her for having survived, and simultaneously having been absent from Hurricane Katrina. Within her narrative of familial loss, Broom also makes a series of powerful statements about what it means to love and be failed by a hometown built upon the violent exploitation of its African American citizens. By digging her heels into the land that the storm and the corrupt city stole from her community, Broom adds a new texture to the under-acknowledged reality that the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina was much more than the aftershocks of a "natural" disaster.

Broom prefaces *The Yellow House* with a detailed cartography of the enormous East and a humble invitation to step inside her childhood home. In many ways, her book is composed for outsiders, and she spells out classic New Orleans quirks at a rate that risks boring locals: "In New Orleans, we tell direction by where we are in relation to the Mississippi River." Or, the fact that city streets have "neutral ground, as we call medians." While these

familiarities might sound like the stammering of an author trying too hard to demonstrate local knowledge, at a closer glance, they breathe nuance into the mundane. What does it mean, for example, to tell direction by water when growing up in the East, where the swampy land has been dredged, sliced, and levied to perpetuate inevitable, life-taking floods? What does it mean to know what to call the neutral ground of Chef Menteur Highway when, as Broom's was, your sister was run over by a car as she walked to elementary school? In this way, *The Yellow House* unfolds: including plenty of context for a non-local readership but offering brave testimony to a version of the city that many locals are also unaware of or choose to ignore.

Four 'Movements' define the memoir, each broken into several chapters. The first two, entitled "The World Before Me" and "The Grieving House," meander through Broom's family history, childhood, and university studies, alluding to what she refers to as "the psychic cost of defining oneself by the place where you are from." This act of time travel constitutes a journey that is sometimes tedious, but often poignant and rewarding. In particular, Broom's account of the marketing and development strategy that crafted New Orleans East in the late 1950's and early 1960's, as well as the ecological devastation that it heralded, gives context for her family's decision to settle in the area and accounts for the non-human cost of life upon which the project gambled. She writes that "when construction began in 1958, the marshes lit up in a dynamite explosion that BOOM, BOOM, BOOMED, debris flying three hundred feet in the air." Following the construction, "ghost cypress tree trunks stood up everywhere in the water like witnesses...The now unrestrained saltwater that flowed in from the Gulf would damage surrounding wetlands and lagoons and erode the natural storm surge barrier protecting low-lying places like New Orleans East." Broom is a master at crafting dramatic non-fiction narrative around natural and familial events that she was not there to witness, and clearly lays out the relationship between the development of the East, the disenfranchisement of its residents, and the pattern of storm-induced floods that continue to plague this area.

Within these Movements, Broom also introduces her mother's speaking voice, transcribed from

interviews, to create an intergenerational, multivocal story that belongs to both women collectively. Her mother speaks to the death of Broom's father, Simon, and how Sarah and her eleven siblings were raised in the yellow house that Simon built. She illuminates the material shame of poverty—trying to keep clean a house with a caved in roof—compounded by the injustice of displacement following Hurricane Katrina. In Movement III, “Water,” Broom expands upon that multivocality, drawing from transcribed interviews with each of her family members in order to dramatize what it was like to be both present and absent for Katrina. Her siblings live and breathe their own stories of evacuation and entrapment into the memoir. From these stories, Sarah is able to chart their paths of dispersal across the state and country, creating a map of her family's separation. She also attends to the means by which political hypocrisy exacerbated the trauma and tragedy of their experience. Broom opens one chapter: “Those images shown on the news of fellow citizens drowned, abandoned, and calling for help were not news to us, but still further evidence of what we long ago knew. I knew, for example, that we lived in an unequal, masquerading world.” The only unsatisfying reading experience here is in her lengthy digression about a nine-month journey to Burundi, another place with a living history of displacement, but one that does not offer very much in terms of Broom's own narrative.

In the fourth and final Movement, “Do You Know What It Means? Investigations,” *The Yellow House* becomes a chronicle of Broom's writing residency in the French Quarter. It is a story of craft and pilgrimage, indulgent at certain moments of writerly self-reflection. Perhaps the most interesting and useful details of this Movement are those that reveal her journalistic process of understanding how her family came to own a house in an area legally zoned for industry. The questions she asks of the city, through interviews and careful archival work, speak volumes. In part, the how and why of urban segregation, lost land rights, and environmental degradation are unanswerable. In others, they are clearly built into the power structure of New Orleans. In the chapter entitled “Photo Op,” Broom's overarching critique of the city's power relations, and what it means to speak out (or write) about them, comes forth with the force of a flood. With frustration, she writes “To

criticize New Orleans is to put one's authenticity at stake. But I resist the notion that if you have left the city...you ought to stay quiet.” Who has the right to tell the story of a place, she asks, when tens of thousands of black New Orleanians still have not returned?

For those who claim to love New Orleans, and for students of literature and environmental history, this book is an important read. Approach it with patience, understanding that Broom has told an impossible, imperfect, and necessary story. It is a bold act, to take on the role of Katrina spokesperson. Broom pulls it off with courage, artistry, and so much heart, drawing attention to the ripple effects of the Gulf Coast catastrophe across the United States and to the systemic racism that allowed the hurricane to function as a force of terror.



**Tiya Miles**

*Tales from the Haunted South: Dark Tourism and  
Memories of Slavery from the Civil War Era*

University of North Carolina Press, 2017

176 pages

\$20.00

**Reviewed by Whitney S. May**

*Tales from the Haunted South* begins, as so many of the best things do, with an unexpected haunting. As Tiya Miles roamed the streets of Savannah, Georgia in 2012 while revising what would become her first fiction novel *The Cherokee Rose: A Novel of Gardens and Ghosts* (2015), she found herself ushered off the street and into the Hostess City's infamous Sorrel-Weed House. Swept up in the morbid, nineteenth century sex/suicide scandal threading through the sordid script of the dark tourist attraction, Miles found herself haunted by its characters, the specters claimed to remain in the house. What, precisely, it means to *be* haunted becomes the focus of Miles's attention in this book?

Structured around three distinct case studies, *Tales from the Haunted South* holds a microscope—or rather, an electronic voice phenomenon (EVP) recorder—to the suddenly thriving industry of American dark tourism, a trade laden with what Miles calls “ghost fancy.” Delivered in Miles's trademark measured blend of academic and public-facing historical criticism, *Tales from the Haunted South* centers ghost stories as a distinct narrative form heaving with contextual intersections. Specifically, Miles revisits the raced specters of the ghost tours throughout the American South—the slave ghosts trapped in eternal bondage, conjured and in some cases conceived to advance commercial interests. She hopes to “ghostwrite,” a term she claims to account for her mission “to write, rewrite, and unwrite the stories of slave ghosts and [her] own interpretations of them, to

circle back to places [she] had been before, to leave traces along the way of ambivalence and contradiction, to let the ‘primeval shadows’ haunt the page.”

Chapter 1 finds Miles returning to the Sorrel-Weed House for another ghost tour and hoping to “ghostwrite” the macabre story of the tour that so affected her. Central to this tale is the allegedly white-passing black slave owner Francis Sorrel, his unstable and ultimately suicidal wife Matilda, and the young slave Molly with whom Francis reportedly pursued a sexual relationship. But for a cursory glance, Miles bypasses the Halloween special of Syfy's *Ghost Hunters* that conveyed the House to brief pop-cultural notoriety, instead focusing on her own experiences of the Sorrel-Weed House ghost tour and on what she can coax from the meager historical record surrounding it. What she discovers in the archives is a distressing series of rhetorical gestures toward romanticizing the lingering wounds of historical (and yet still terribly present) racism, where Francis's alleged “passing” is used to exoticize and eroticize his position within antebellum racial and sexual politics, and where his sexual abuse of Molly is continuously re-scripted as a consensual “affair.” The only thing that could make these discursive reconfigurations of very real racial terror any more alarming is exactly what Miles discovers about their origins: an abundance of titillating detail and a dearth of evidence cultivated and maintained to promote the House for profit—a situation that reflects similar readiness in the scripts of dark tourist attractions in general to commodify Black pain for voyeuristic consumption.

This ominous process is repeated more portably at the beginning of Chapter 2 in the form of a kitschy gris-gris bag, a reified “voodoo” souvenir designed for white consumption. Here, Miles moves to her second case study: the home of New Orleans's grisly murderess Madame Delphine Lalaurie. Accused in 1834 of sadistically torturing and murdering the slaves of her palatial household on Royal Street, Lalaurie escaped justice for her crimes by fleeing New Orleans as her home went up in flames, leaving behind a swiftly renovated mansion and an even more swiftly renovated narrative seemingly ready-made for today's dark tourism industry. Here, Miles's ghostwriting work resituates the Lalaurie story within broader narratives of New

Orleans as a ‘good’ place to have been a slave—a sanitized history Miles observes reiterated throughout the ghost tours of the city. By Miles’s estimation, castigating Lalaurie via ghost tours serves the perverse function of simultaneously distancing individual ghost stories from their own historical connections to slavery, as well as of recasting New Orleans’s past in a similarly rose-tinted light. Lalaurie’s guilt, Miles concludes, “absolves New Orleans slaveholders in the past and the New Orleans tourist industry in the present from responsibility for committing or sensationalizing acts of racialized violence.” To achieve this worrying, two-pronged cultural revision demands a certain level of cognitive dissonance—a theme revisited in Miles’s final case study.

The third chapter is recognizably the most ambitious of the book, and perhaps consequentially, also the most overwhelming. Here, Miles recounts her experiences as a visitor of the Myrtles Plantation just outside Baton Rouge, leaping animatedly—if sometimes jarringly—from discussions of voodoo, plantation tourism, racialized pop-culture tropes, and the material artifacts of dark tourism. At the heart of this chapter and its various intersecting conversations are Chloe and Cleo, the two most popular of the ghosts that allegedly haunt the Myrtles Plantation. Chloe, an enslaved teenaged girl, is said to have been brought into the main house for the sexual exploitation of her white master in the early nineteenth century. Shortly thereafter, he accused her of spying on him and mutilated her ear before banishing her from the house; in an attempt to return to his favor, the story goes that Chloe hatched a plan that inadvertently killed his wife and two daughters before he had her hanged in retaliation. Not long after, Cleo, an enslaved woman and alleged voodoo priestess, was similarly murdered by a white man after she failed to use magic to save his dying child. The most coherent aim of this chapter is a rich analysis that puts Chloe and Cleo into conversation with one another as implicitly and continuously rewritten facets of the same white-authored tropes: as interchangeably Jezebel, Mammy, and “tragic mulatta” characters. Chloe, especially, wears many spectral faces according to many professed dark tourists, all of whom “are extracting something they desire, something reinforcing, from Chloe’s popular story.

Chloe, the malleable black slave woman ghost, can appear as any visitor’s fantasy.”

This is, of course, the crux of *Tales from the Haunted South*. In the face of little historical, factual evidence—indeed, sometimes in the face of none at all—dark tourism of the American South deploys a distinct brand of ghost to spectralize the outlines of its troubled past as a means to distract from its haunted present. The still-bleeding wounds of racial and sexual violence crisscross viscerally throughout its haunted histories and landscapes alike, meeting troublingly at dark tourist attractions that repackage their lingering pain for profit. In this work, simultaneously accessible enough for undergraduates and rich enough for graduate seminars, Miles seeks to give voice to the ghosts written and rewritten at these crossroads throughout the century and a half since the Civil War. She does so by finishing with a thoughtful conclusion that centers African American cultural tradition as a means to respectfully commemorate the dead and the past, “a past chained to colonialism, slavery, and patriarchy, but a past that can nevertheless challenge and commission us to fight for justice in the present.” *This*, she concludes, is the way to “call forth the power of ghosts,” to let their spectral presences linger and inspire positive change.

You might say that *Tales from the Haunted South* ends, as so many of the best things do, with an unexpected haunting.



**Audre Lorde**

*The Cancer Journals: Special Edition*

**Aunt Lute Books, 1997**

**99 pages**

**\$12.95**

**Reviewed by Gaila Sims**

“Where are the models for what I’m supposed to be in this situation? But there were none. This is it, Audre. You’re on your own.” In 1977, Audre Lorde underwent surgery to biopsy a lump she had found in her breast, which turned out to be benign. However, after finding a second lump the following year and enduring a second biopsy, Lorde learned that she had cancerous cells in her right breast. After much consideration, Lorde decided to undergo a mastectomy, which removed her right breast. Upon discovering little discussion of the trauma of breast cancer available in the public sphere, especially for women at the intersections of blackness, queerness, and disability, Lorde chose to publish *The Cancer Journals* in 1980 to provide a model where she had found none. This *Special Edition* of *The Cancer Journals*, released in 1997, contains the original publication of *The Cancer Journals* but also includes tributes to Audre Lorde written by women who mourned her passing in 1992. While she expressed her disappointment at finding no examples to draw from during her experience of cancer in the late 1970s, it is clear in the tributes in this edition that she herself had fulfilled that role for the many women who celebrated her after her death.

*The Cancer Journals* combines journal entries written during her hospital stay and in the months of her recovery, speeches made around the time of her first surgery, and essays focusing on the larger experience of breast cancer and its treatment. Lorde seeks to provide a discussion of the issues surrounding a subject steeped in silence. Though thousands of women are diagnosed with this terrible disease each year (numbers that have only



increased since the book’s original publication), Lorde found that there were few resources available to work through her psychological and physical reactions to her diagnosis and treatment. While she discusses her interactions with nurses, other patients, and an organization called Reach for Recovery, there were few spaces available to unpack her experience as a queer black woman grappling with this illness and her healing. In a speech included in the book entitled “The Transformation of Silence in Language and Action,” Lorde argues that the only way to process her feelings and to help her community is by breaking the silence around illness and mortality. She writes, “I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood.” *The Cancer Journals* fulfills this role, recounting Lorde’s experience of both the physical pain of her mastectomy and the psychological crisis wrought by her close encounter with death.

In an essay entitled “Breast Cancer: A Black Lesbian Feminist Encounter,” Lorde focuses on the decision to undergo surgery and the first few days after her mastectomy. Though she feels relief and relatively little pain in the first two days, the pain really begins to set in on the third day. In journal entries from her time in the hospital along with her memories of this period, Lorde reveals the experience of bodily trauma. She writes, “I must let this pain flow through me and pass on. If I resist or try to stop it, it will detonate inside me, shatter me, splatter my pieces against every wall and person that I touch.” It is rare, I think, to read about the physical experience of pain, especially pain after such a traumatic operation. Lorde records the throbbing in her shoulder, the dull ache of her chest, a sharp stabbing where her breast used to reside. For women, whose pain is not always acknowledged, and for black women, who are stereotyped as tough and unyielding, Lorde’s vulnerability is astonishing. She examines these physical sensations to work through her pain in those first few days but also to give voice to women’s pain on a broader level. For women undergoing similar surgeries, for women who need a way to work through their own experience of illness and healing, Audre Lorde provides a means and model for struggling with pain.

In addition to examining the physical effects of her mastectomy, Lorde also discusses its psychological impact. She expresses her grief in losing her right breast, not only because of the sexual pleasure she associated with it, but also because she had lost a part of herself. Though she mourns its absence, she bristles at interactions with hospital staff and others who encourage her to wear a prosthesis to hide the absence of her breast. In an essay entitled “Breast Cancer: Power Vs. Prosthesis,” Lorde discusses the emphasis placed on women’s physical appearance in relation to cancer, instead of their health and wellness. She writes, “[t]he emphasis upon wearing a prosthesis is a way of avoiding having women come to terms with their own pain and loss, and thereby, with their own strength.” For Lorde, wearing a prosthesis constitutes another form of silence, a way to make others comfortable while neglecting oneself. She argues that seeing other women in the world displaying the results of their mastectomies could help demystify the experience of breast cancer, and that prostheses merely hide what does not need to be hidden. She also explores the fear produced by her brush with death. She does not delve into the actual question of death; rather, she is terrified that she will no longer be able to do her work. And while her surgery is successful and her health stabilizes at the time of the book’s original publication, this special edition shows the end of the work to which she was so committed.

The last twenty pages of *The Cancer Journals: Special Edition* demonstrate the impact of Audre Lorde and her work on women all over the United States. After her death on November 11, 1992, tributes to her life and influence were gathered and published to accompany the earlier publication. These tributes, from women who knew her personally and from those who never met her but appreciated her work, show the success of her determination to end silences. While she had found no model for her experience of cancer (and her other works show that she had found no model in many areas of her life), the tributes included in this edition confirm that she had become a model for many other people. While she was in the hospital after her surgery, Lorde wrote about the community of women who visited her. She described the love and support of her network of friends—women bringing food and blankets to the hospital, taking her kids to school, researching alternative treatments and providing company. While her

passing meant that she could no longer physically contribute to her community of women, her work ensures she will always have a spiritual connection to them – to those she knew and loved during her lifetime and to those of us who read and appreciate her work today. As one of the tributes declares to the incomparable Audre Lorde, “Now it’s up to each of us to figure out how to take what you’ve given and use it, every day of our lives.”





# CATASTROPHE, CONTRADICTIONS, AND DECOLONIALITY: CARIBBEAN PERSPECTIVES FOR A GLOBAL SCALE

**Edited by Wilfredo J. Burgos Matos  
and Sophia Monegro**

The Caribbean has been one of the most sustained epicenters of coloniality in the Americas for various centuries. The aftermaths of such interrelationship with the world has been central to a myriad of works whose intentions are devoted to offering multiple possibilities of being. In this section, our reviewers highlighted six productions of this geography, both on the islands and its diasporas. Ranging from race, performance, music, sociology, and cultural studies in general, each piece presented here imagines a Caribbean, whose thought and cultural productions, confer much towards rethinking global situations of race and class disparities. As such, we present through these texts, a written geography of possibilities for the intellectual nurturing of those most affected by the weight of colonialism, catastrophe, and archival contradictions, erasures, and silences.

We open this section with the everchanging and re-signifying forces of the ocean. Mónica Ocasio Vega reviewed Valerie Loichot's *Water Graves*, which examines the relation between life, death, and water. From events such as the Parsley Massacre and the Middle Passage, to catastrophes like Hurricane Katrina, Ocasio Vega presents a Loichot that reads spaces through the lens of the "unritual" or the obstruction of the sacred. More specifically, she focuses her study on the bodies of water of the Caribbean Sea, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Gulf of Mexico to analyze the aesthetic practices born in the absence of death rituals in such forgotten spaces of otherness.

Ocasio Vega's engaging review is followed by Sophia Monegro's review of the novel *Dominicana* by Angie Cruz. Monegro indicates that *Dominicana* introduces a singular yet culturally commonplace story into the Dominican-American literary canon by putting in conversation Dominican history,

diasporic longing, transnational consciousness, and domestic violence through the story of fifteen-year-old Ana Canción, an immigrant child bride. Monegro will transport you into a Dominican-American story that attests to the evolving landscapes of Caribbean geopolitics after the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and what they meant for gender roles, belonging, and the definition of womanhood in a broad sense with New York City as the epicenter of such narrative. By exposing Angie Cruz's commitment to contribute to the shifting notions of *Latinidad* and its literary tropes, our reviewer and co-section editor opens up a door for new perspectives in Latinx Studies at large.

We then continue with Pedro Javier Rolón's review of *Aftershocks of Disaster*, a selection gathered by Yarimar Bonilla and Marisol LeBrón in the wake of hurricane María in Puerto Rico. The collection of essays which includes traditional academics, activists, and artists, as Rolón points out, "permits pain, reflection, remembrance, and critique to coexist in polyphony, without employing the hierarchical divides that would only reproduce the coloniality of knowledge." Rolón gave us the chance to feel and hear a plethora of voices that engage in the rethinking of Puerto Rico through disaster capitalism and imperialism. All these aspects can very well be transported to other landscapes such as the Middle East and back into the United States and its racialized geographies of otherness in places such as Louisiana after Katrina. The ability to connect such jarring narratives of tangible pain into words of decolonial imaginings, make Rolón's intellectual contribution a viable reality to release the Caribbean, one word at a time, from the utopia of liberation and humanness.

In terms of visual and sonorous narratives of Caribbeanness, Wendylyz Martínez wrote a piece on the comic series *Borinquena*, authored by Edgardo Miranda-Rodríguez. This collection features an Afro-Indigenous Latina, Marisol de la Luz, who is selected by the indigenous spirits of Puerto Rico to defend the island. The series is reminiscent of the superhero comic tradition with familiar panel styles and sequencing of the story and attempts to bridge the various histories that exist in Puerto Rico with a black woman (the protagonist) as the main protector of her people. On a sonic note, John Bimbiras authored a review of *Puerto Rico y su plena: nuevas fuentes para estudio*, a

new book about the origins and practices of the Puerto Rican *plena*, an Afro-rhythm that narrates the legacies of plantations ecologies and sensibilities. Through a series of essays, anecdotes, poetry, photographs, and illustrations, *Puerto Rico y su plena* “weaves together a compelling narrative about the genre and how it came to be such a potent symbol of Puerto Rican national identity.”

Lastly, our section closes with Gabriella Rodríguez’s piece on Hazel Carby’s *Imperial Intimacies: A Tale of Two Islands*. This book exposes the life of Carby, a British woman of Jamaican and Welsh heritage, and her own history of empire. Rodríguez delves deep into the meanings of racial difference between the English Caribbean and its diasporic complexities in the United Kingdom.

Without a doubt, here we deliver promising words for averting colonial legacies. Each line produced by our authors is a testament to the continuous knowledge production that involves different notions of globality with the Caribbean as an axis of universal futurity. We are sure that each review will give you a renewed sense of what the embodied knowledge and thought produced from such geographies—the islands, Circum-Caribbean, and its diasporas—, can contribute to a global struggle where constant erasure of Black, Brown, Indigenous, distinctly-abled, and Queer island folks is in the making. May these words by our reviewers be part of the evidence of resistance to oblivion. May these words count as the will to freedom and the right to joy.



**Valérie Loichot**

*Water Graves: The Art of the Unritual in the Greater Caribbean*

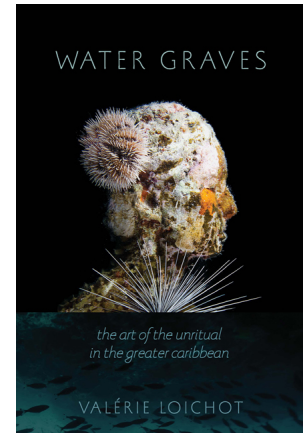
University of Virginia Press, 2020

287 pages

\$32.50

**Reviewed by Mónica B. Ocasio Vega**

Valerie Loichot’s *Water Graves*, examines the relation between life, death, and water. From events such as the Parsley Massacre and the Middle Passage, to catastrophes like Hurricane Katrina, Loichot reads spaces that are signified by what she calls the “unritual” or the obstruction of the sacred. More specifically, she focuses her study on the bodies of water of the Caribbean Sea, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Gulf of Mexico to analyze the aesthetic practices born in the absence of death rituals. The five chapters that make up the book contain a variety of texts: sculptures, ceramics, poetry, fiction, paintings, audiovisual, and mix-media. The wide array of artists featured in this book include painters such as Kara Walker, musicians like Beyoncé, photographers Epaul Julien and Eric Waters, sculptors Radcliffe Bailey, Jason deCaires Taylor, and Édouard Duval-Carrié, and poets and performers like Édouard Glissant, M. NourbeSe Philip, Natasha Trethewey, and Gabrielle Civil.



The book proposes two principal theoretical concepts. The first one, the unritual, is explained as the obstruction of the sacred when black lives are lost. Rituals, Loichot says, “are understood as a defining mark of humanity.” In this sense, the unritual builds on ideas of the *undead* to explore that which lingers between life and death and what is considered human and non-human. The second theoretical concept is the ecological sacred, or a “relational ecological sacred” which builds on Édouard Glissant’s work of relation, poetics, and the abyss. Loichot finds that all of the artists

compiled in this book are dealing with a sort of ecological sacred as they “provide sacred objects and rituals through a connection among humans, aurochs, fish, coral, seaweed, swamp, sea, cotton, tar, railroad shards, salvaged window frames, preserved legal documents, trash, and mud.”

A tour through the chapters of this book will reveal a Caribbean network of mourning born out of the creolized spaces of New Orleans, Haiti, the Gulf of Mexico, and Martinique. Chapter One considers Loichot’s theoretical parting point through which she thinks about artistic practices of the unritual in these spaces parting from Édouard Glissant’s notion of the “open boat” and the “submarine grave of drowned Africans” where everything is dissolved and yet it is also birthed. Chapter Two explores art representations of Radcliffe Bailey, Epaul Julien, and Eric Waters as acts of mourning in the context of Hurricane Katrina. The analysis of the works invites us to consider the artist’s use of the shape of the rectangle as an act of mourning in which they are both “window watchers and casket carriers.” Even more, it asks for readers to question: what does it mean to create in the wake of a disaster?

Chapter Three analyses the “staging of Mami Wata” in Kara Walker’s *After the Deluge* and Beyoncé’s *Lemonade*. The reading of a staging of Mami Wata—also known in other religious practices as Lasiwen, Lasiwen-Labalen, Manman Dlo, Lamente, la Sirena, and Yemaya—allows Loichot to consider the flux between the dead, the living, the human, and the parahuman through water. This is one of her most well-thought essays as it condenses her conceptualizations about the relational sacred, Fred Moten’s the “terribly beautiful”, and the ecological sacred. Her reading of Beyoncé’s “Formation” video pays special attention to the scene in which Beyoncé is on top of the police car and that concludes with the sinking of both the car and Beyoncé. Loichot proposes we read this sinking scene as Mami Wata’s sinking. By doing so, it points toward a simultaneity of separation and relating with death.

However, Loichot fails to push this reading further by taking two things into account that would amplify her discussion of the ecological sacred. The first is that the “Formation” video seems to represent a funeral for the city. Loichot guides us

through a close reading of the elements of the unritual in Beyoncé’s work in the New Orleans space while not stressing the belonging of the lost lives to the city itself. Mami Wata can be seen then “opening the door to the sacred for the victims of the unritual” and the city is one of the victims. The second is the scene that shows the group of dancers led by Beyoncé in formation on what appears to be an empty pool. By paying attention to these bodies in the pool, we see underwater bodies. These bodies underwater blur the distinction of the submerged body and the body about to be born as it emphasizes a becoming body.

This consideration would have been in sync with Loichot’s proposal in chapter four dedicated to the works of artists Jason deCaires Taylor and Édouard Duval Carrie. In chapter four she emphasizes the drowning of sculptures instead of their sinking to point to a transformation from inanimate to animate objects submerged underwater. Finally, chapter five continues the discussion around sculpture, although the materiality she follows are words. She proposes a reading of Natasha Trethewy’s *Native Guard* and M. NourbeSe Phillip’s *Zong!* that considers both authors as “sculptors who shape the raw materiality of words into highly significant forms.” The chapter argues that the raw materiality both writers employ provide “graves, stones, or monuments to the neglected, forgotten, or desecrated dead.”

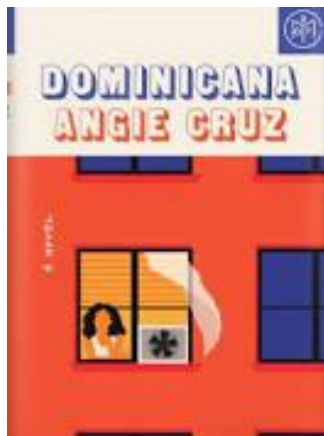
*Water Graves* contributes to the growing field that follows the intersections between wake, mourning, death, and life within critical race theory. The book seeks to establish a dialogue with works like Christina Sharpe’s *In the Wake* and Joseph Roach’s *Cities of the Dead*. By doing so, *Water Graves* invites us to converse, imagine, honor, mourn, celebrate, listen, and give voices to the dead and the undead.



**Angie Cruz**  
*Dominicana, A Novel*  
**Flatiron Books, 2019**  
**319 pages**  
**\$26.99**

**Reviewed by Sophia Monegro**

Angie Cruz's *Dominicana* introduces a singular yet culturally commonplace story into the Dominican-American literary canon. The novel interjects in conversations about Dominican history, diasporic



longing, transnational consciousness, and domestic violence by centering fifteen-year-old Ana Canción's life as an immigrant child bride. Ana's story is not an uncommon one—for women across cultures and Cruz's Dominican mother whose own marital circumstances inspired this book—yet the silence around narratives like Ana's speak to the stakes of this novel. Other Dominican-American novels, like *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994) by Julia Alvarez and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) by Junot Díaz, have engaged violence against women. However, that violence was political in the case of Alvarez's novel or marginal to Díaz's plot; violence acted as a minor character within the larger theater of Dictator Rafael Trujillo politics and lengthy explorations of Dominican masculinity. Divergently, *Dominicana* centers women's experiences with quotidian domestic violence and the moments of freedom and youthful joy that mitigate the abuse. Those moments make this novel a charming story of girlhood filled with naiveté, sexual exploration, and an insatiable curiosity about the world(s).

In "Writing the Latinx Bildungsroman," Lyn Di Iorio suggests that Cruz and other U.S. Latina/o/x novels, like Ernesto Quiñonez's *Taina*, are innovating the classic bildungsroman through coming of age stories that span across two societies

(March 10, 2020). Unlike the common refrain, this novel is both *de aquí y de allá*. Ana belongs to two worlds: her home-*pueblo* in Los Guayacanes, Dominican Republic and to Washington Heights, New York. Perched on the window of her apartment on 168<sup>th</sup> street, Ana bears witness to the months-long memorial of Malcom X, all the while, her nostalgia for home consumes her as she reads about the open warfare tearing Santo Domingo apart in 1965. Ana's dual social and geo-political enculturation develops her as a transnational subject.

Ana's socialization begins during the aftermath of the Trujillato, in 1960s Los Guyacanes where Ana lives with her mama, papá, siblings and cousins. Mamá views Ana as the "winning lottery ticket" that will save the family from rural poverty. Ana's anointment as the chosen daughter is both pragmatic and racialized. Pragmatically, Ana is the only choice once her older sister Teresa's determination to love freely results in pregnancy. Racially, Ana's green eyes highlight her value in post-Trujillo Dominican society that glorifies Hispanicity. Her eyes demarcate Ana as "a curious beauty," especially for Juan Ruiz who feels superior to his gaggle of brothers based on his "lighter skin" and "straight hair." The mother's choice to marry off her daughter to Juan, a man twice her age, is a politic born out of necessity. Escaping Los Guyacanes becomes Ana's involuntary inheritance.

With Ana's sacrifice, Cruz urges us to consider what Dominican immigrant women give up in the name of family uplift.

Ana suffers a great deal to ensure her family escapes the Dominican countryside. On their wedding night in Santo Domingo, Juan rapes Ana. In New York, he beats her and continues his affair with a married Puerto Rican woman while continuously accosting Ana for sex. Yet, Cruz does not make Juan a one-dimensional character. In the opening scene, Juan is introduced as grotesque: drunk, belligerent, and barking like a dog. All the while he also serenades Ana with his majestic voice. This initial paradox foreshadows Juan's dual role as a villain and a benefactor. After Juan first hits Ana, he buys her a TV that allows her to begin practicing her English. One night, Juan arrives drunk and arouses Ana's first orgasm while raping her. Shortly after, Ana becomes pregnant, and their child

facilitates Juan's ability to secure mamá and her brother Lenny's tourist visas. Ana's perception of Juan as her monster and her angel speaks to the intricacy of the Dominican family structure.

Cruz also endows Ana with the same level of nuance. Ana's daily refusal of Juan's abuse takes form both as calculated strategy and joyful realizations of her youthful curiosities. As a means of survival, Ana learns to distance herself from Juan to evade his sexual desires. Ana refuses Juan with all the tools at her disposal: her gaze, "but not even through my eyes will I allow him to enter;" defying his instructions to not feed the pigeons; and by squirreling away money to send to her family. Among Juan's several jobs, he runs a suit hustling business that he entrusts Ana with. She begins to sell more of the inventory than she discloses and stores the money in her ceramic Dominicana doll that becomes an allegory for her own economic independence.

Juan's handsome, younger, and darker-skinned brother César becomes the predominant outlet for Ana's curiosity about the city. During Juan's months-long trip in the Dominican Republic, he leaves César to look out for pregnant Ana. César pays careful attention to Ana and her desires. Listening to her entrepreneurial ambition, César encourages Ana to sell her cooking to his co-workers. César dotes on Ana: sewing her dresses, taking her to Coney Island for her first hot dog, and to the Audubon Ballroom for dancing. When they realize their desire for one another, César asks Ana to run away to Boston with him just as Juan is set to return with news of mamá and Lenny's arrival. At this crossroad, Ana is forced to make a choice: are there limits to the martyrdom she will undergo in the name of family?

Author Angie Cruz's pithy and minimalistic writing style strategically delivers us a story that is everything but simple. *Dominicana* is equally a meditation on Cruz's mother's story, the mother-daughter relationship between Ana and mamá, and the exchange we as Dominicans of the diaspora have with the migrant stories that engendered our existence. Cruz calls upon us to consider the power of culture through the budding eyes of a child that became a woman as the price to live across two worlds.



**Yarimar Bonilla and Marisol LeBrón, editors**  
*Aftershocks of Disaster: Puerto Rico Before and After the Storm*  
**Haymarket Books, 2019**  
**384 pages**  
**\$16.99**

**Reviewed by Pedro J. Rolón Machado**

In her 1988 masterpiece, *A Small Place*, the Antiguan writer Jamaica Kincaid meditates on the role of silence in the histories of colonized peoples, believing that the people in a small place can have no interest in the exact, or in completeness, for that would demand a careful weighing, careful consideration, careful judging, careful questioning. It would demand the invention of a silence, inside of which these things could be done. It would demand a reconsideration, an adjustment, in the way they understand the existence of Time.

In other words, the epistemic ruptures we deem *decolonial* can only arise amidst this most terrifying but ultimately generative quietude. From this silence, a voice is finally able to give something close to account of its countless fractures, revolts, and rebirths, interrupting thus the drudgery of colonial time. In their careful selection of texts for *Aftershocks of Disaster: Puerto Rico Before and After the Storm*, co-editors Yarimar Bonilla and Marisol LeBrón allow the jarring silence in the wake of María to generate precisely this kind of consideration, judgment, and questioning by showcasing voices that insist on disrupting the colonial continuum. This selection permits pain, reflection, remembrance, and critique to coexist in polyphony, without employing the hierarchical divides that would only reproduce the coloniality of knowledge. Gathering scholars, activists, and artists across disciplines and territories, in Puerto Rico and abroad, the book furthermore practices an ethics that María underscored for Puerto Rico: reorienting our concepts of thinking, living, and feeling *in*

*common*. Over the course of more than thirty pieces, *Aftershocks of Disaster* enacts a transversal cut across registers of intellectual and aesthetic reflection, honoring the conviction that to speak and to think María requires multiple senses of the word *disaster*. From photographic mediation to journalistic testimony, from poetic creation to ethnographic work in the field, this edited volume insists that a single discipline does not suffice when witnessing the afterlives of an event that demolishes the available grammar of analysis. In doing so, *Aftershocks* bespeaks an intellectual practice whose integrity stems from its capacity to honor and heal all the fragments, before and after María, through shared listening and voicing.

The introduction charts a roadmap that foregrounds one of the central arguments of the anthology: namely that to fully grasp María's weight as a disaster, we must reckon with María's wreckage itself as a continuation of a catastrophe more than five centuries in the making. To borrow from the language of the editors, María is absolutely not a "singular event." Bonilla and LeBrón frame the natural phenomenon of the cyclone as the culmination of an arc of dispossession, exploitation, and necro-colonial profiteering, where the years 1493, 1898, 1952, and 2017 resonate as instances in a history of traumatic repetition that underscores the role of the human hand in orchestrating cataclysm. María thus becomes a trope, more than merely a disaster to write about; it is an analytical and aesthetic paradigm from which to unearth and reconceptualize the aftershocks of all of Puerto Rico's disasters. From the outset, *Aftershocks of María* distinguishes its theoretical framework through an emphasis on a more variegated and complicated treatment of the hurricane. It urges us to consider María as an assemblage of senses, practices, and critiques that orient the reader towards María as a decolonial episteme capable of helping us question the current juncture, its past, and its future.

The anthology, however, does not merely offer a series of abstractions for the sake of exporting knowledge from what was and is a traumatic event. It goes further by striking a balance between thought and feeling, between the cathartic release of an experience irreducible to language and the theoretical speculation that works to invent new terms and modes of understanding it. Each of the



five sections in the anthology operate as clusters of decolonial theory and praxis, each tackling a different layer of the problem by deploying both the academic discourse and the more fluid forms the field note, the diary entry, and the poem. The first section, titled “Openings,” includes “The Trauma Doctrine,” a conversation between editor Yarimar Bonilla and Naomi Klein, preeminent scholar of disaster capitalism, alongside the play “¡Ay María!,” written and performed around the whole archipelago by a committed ensemble of thespians shortly after the storm hit. The play interrogates the many meanings of jay!: as a communal act of voicing pain, as the sound of ancestral fatigue, as historical rage, and as truth to power. Bonilla and Klein’s conversation harmonizes with this collective jay! by asking a central question: what does it mean to be sovereign now? Their discussion opens up the reader’s field to the ways in which other essays in the collection theorize, dream, and practice a fluid, deep sense of sovereignty grounded in collective aid. They imagine a porous sovereignty that does not reject the transitive pact of living with each other and with an ever shifting and unpredictable natural environment from which we take our means of life and subsistence.

And yet, as mentioned earlier, for all its thorough speculative work on what is to come after María, the works compiled here never stray from the truth of trauma, from its unspeakability in the here and now. Where the anthology could’ve veered into the descriptive or the prescriptive, it boldly chooses instead to make space for the silence of the unnamable. Sections two and three, “Narrating the Trauma” and “Representing the Disaster,” respectively, linger on the ruptures to language and image that María produced. Eduardo Lalo’s meditation on the unnamable begins with a paradox: “To narrate something, you have to see it, and one of the things that happened to us after September 20, 2017, is that for many weeks we could see very little.” This is, in short, the crisis of narrating disaster. More than ever, the disaster asks us to keep our eyes open, our bodies ready, our senses alert. But it is precisely this that cannot be done, because pain and shock place a veil before that which would allow us to speak. The poems and chronicles in this section remind us that to give an account of María is also to meditate on impossibility, to insist that even within that silent,

terrible, boundless void of death, there is an elusive but pulsating will to speak, build, and heal.

Getting up to collect potable water urges the pen to leave the paper and the feet out to the street where survival claims another day. Fragmentary sketches and field notes of entanglement with everyday life amidst chaos such as Beatriz Llenín Figueroa’s “This Was Meant to Be a Hurricane Diary” and Sofía Gallizá Muriente’s “Another Haphazard Gesture,” recuperate the truth of the fragmentary. Could this be the way into a theory of the aftershocks of disaster? A way of telling the tale without needing a beginning or an end? Would this be truer than meeting history’s or the media’s requirements for logic? Before we can begin representing the unrepresentable of María, Frances Negrón Muntaner’s contribution to the anthology reminds us that the Puerto Rican condition posits an *a priori* crisis of representation that acquires a more urgent hue once we consider that, for some, what she calls “rhetorical incorporation” of Puerto Ricans into the category of the “U.S citizen” is a precondition to the administration of aid, to empathy, or to the grievability of death. For many, Puerto Rican being is illegible, and we must be wary of sweeping gestures that attempt to make María easily readable. Erika P. Rodríguez augments this discussion in her essay “Accountability and Representation,” where a critique of this desire for readability is channeled through a deeply personal meditation on the ethics of photography, challenging the pornographic demand for an immiserated, helpless, and docile subject. I believe this cluster of critique offers a decolonial analysis of mass media representation that readers in the field of media studies or photojournalism would benefit tremendously from.

These reflections on representation and narration pave the way for the discussions in the fourth section of the anthology, aptly titled “Capitalizing on the Crisis.” Neocolonial capitalism always finds profit in disaster. Essays in this section foreground and contextualize the historical violence of not just post-María disaster capitalism, but also of the previous and ongoing neocolonial technologies embodied in vulture funds, triple-exempt tax havens, and neoliberal austerity. They are lucid tools for anyone hoping to arrive at a fuller sense for the transhistorical and ever-mutating creature of colonial exploitation, a precondition to any and

all serious analysis of the archipelago's conditions of life after María. Rima Brusi and Isar Godreau's essay on the dismantling of Puerto Rico's education system provides a visceral account of the insidiousness of financial capital in the wake of the hurricane, detailing with heartbreaking precision the profitable corrosion of an already wounded public infrastructure. As they mention in their essay, the turn from education's nature as a "public good" into a "private profit" betrays the winds of a larger, "man-made storm" aimed at the collapse of any possibility of an outside, of dissidence, and of community.

And without the possibility of this community and of collective learning and resistance, we become not unlike the defenseless crop, easily flattened out by any given gust of hegemonic power's wind. In his generous afterword in the final section of the text, "Transforming Puerto Rico," Nelson Maldonado Torres writes that María, as a paradigm-shifting catastrophe, allows a pause "for sharing accounts, taking stock, and standing as witnesses." I return to the opening remarks of this review to emphasize that *Aftershocks of Disaster* stands as a testament to healing and thought in community. It is a work by and for those for whom Puerto Rico is more than mere geography or case study, a work of healing and reckoning first and foremost, and an academic text after. Though this might give the impression of a limited audience, it is anything but. Any scholar, classroom, or artist hoping to witness decolonial thought in action owes it to themselves to sit with the silence of this book. It certainly fulfills its promise of making available a wealth of knowledge pertaining to the modalities of life in Puerto Rico before and after María. But it shines when it takes its cue from the ground-level responses to catastrophe, from the communal creative tactics arising from real need. It imagines an intellectual practice coextensive with this, an exercise in thinking horizontally and generously in common. Therein lies its transformative energy.



**Edgardo Miranda-Rodriguez**

*Borinqueña*

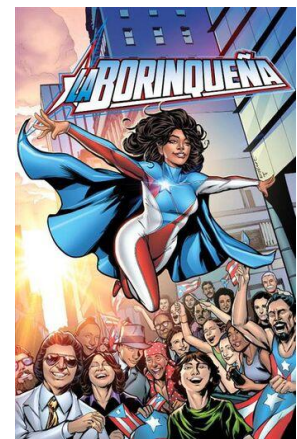
**Somos, 2018**

**64 pages**

**\$19.99**

**Reviewed by Wendy Liz Martínez**

While the complete *Borinqueña* comic series imagines a possibility and future that is both novel yet already a reality, a black woman as a superhero, there are some moments within *Borinqueña* that could be unpacked and revisited. The comic does many things well. Edgardo Miranda-Rodriguez's comic



series *Borinqueña*, features an Afro-Indigenous Latina that is selected by the indigenous spirits of Puerto Rico to defend Borinkén. The series is reminiscent of the superhero comic tradition with familiar panel styles and sequencing of the story. In issue one, we are introduced to Marisol Rio De La Luz, a college student from New York with Puerto Rican heritage. Within the opening pages, Marisol exclaims boldly that she is *pura negra*. Her father's name is Changó and there is often mention of Yemayá throughout the series. These names stand out because these are Orishas, what could be described as a deity from Yoruba culture. Including these names breaks the mold of mainstream storytelling where there are not many stories that center blackness. This decenters standard Christianity that permeates popular culture. The series does include a lot of references to afro-spirituality, gentrification in Puerto Rican communities in NYC, as well as colonialism on the island. Additionally, the series delves into the indigenous history of Puerto Rico and references indigenous spirituality. There are even explicit mentions of calling Puerto Rico, Borinkén - the Taino name for Puerto Rico.

The series attempts to bridge the various histories that exist in Puerto Rico within the character Marisol Rio De La Luz. She, a black woman, is

tasked with watching over and protecting her people - which is what historically black women have done. She was chosen by Taino ancestors to become the protector of Puerto Rico. Marisol's best friend, La La, is an Asian Dominican - which also highlights the Caribbean's overall complex racial history. Miranda-Rodriguez does make careful and interesting choices within this comic series. He makes sure the villains within the story are not unfathomable. The villains that Marisol fights are men that are complicit in transporting toxic chemicals to Puerto Rico or a group of homophobic and racist men that are attacking a Puerto Rican gay couple. In these moments, he is sending out a message that Puerto Rico has a long way to go when it comes to dealing with its "relationship" with the United States. Not only does Marisol fight against people but she also saves Puerto Rican people from natural disasters, which are often implied to be caused by colonialism.

The third issue of the series is an anthology that features *La Borinqueña* in different scenarios all with the theme of Ricanstruction, a play on the word reconstruction. This issue is collaborative in that many different artists and writers come together to create the comics within the issue. It also features other characters from the DC universe such as Wonder Woman, Catwoman, and Static Shock. All of the stories emphasize the need to help Puerto Rico heal after Hurricane Maria and this still applies as this past year has been just as difficult for Puerto Rico, politically as well as with natural disasters. While the collaborative nature of the third issue does not just come through aesthetically (all of the comics are drawn in a variety of styles), it also comes through in the content - the emphasis on everyone doing their part to help Puerto Rico. A moment early on in the comic is very memorable because of Wonder Woman's statement that "Yo soy Puerto Rico" (*I am Puerto Rico*). While this may not actually be the case, it affirms that *everyone* is responsible to help "reconstruct" Puerto Rico.

Yet, while there are many things done well there are parts of the comic that can be improved. Most of what can be improved is the dialogue - which often feel disingenuous. Sometimes the characters mention popular culture references that may feel forced or dated - like with some of the slang that is sprinkled in. While the message of the series is commendable - Puerto Rico libre! - sometimes the

series is very dependent on the dialogue making the panels very word heavy. While the illustrations are well done, they often look simple compared to all of the details the dialogue expressed. For example, in the second issue, Marisol argues with a student protestor in Puerto Rico about the complexities of being Nuyorican versus being "authentically" Puerto Rican. This a great moment in the comic but relies heavily on the words rather than on the image on the page. The juxtapositions between what a Nuyorican and a Puerto Rican looks like would be a great visual to further explore the issue of authenticity. It would be great to see this story unfold slowly through its images rather than have a dialogue that "tells" rather than "show." There are also a few moments within the comic series that could be unpacked further when it comes to race. There are mentions of African Spirituality, such as Marisol's dad name being Chango, or explicit mentions of Marisol being black, but it is often left there. Within the third issue when Static Shock implies that Puerto Ricans are black, Marisol responds that it is a lot to unpack and never mentions it again. Static Shock is embarrassed and apologizes for simplifying the issue and Marisol continues to emphasize the need to help build the island after the Hurricane. This was a great opening to discuss the complex racial history of Puerto Rico that could include the indigenous and black culture, yet it is left unexplored. Yes, rebuilding Puerto Rico is important but speaking about the racial history of the island is not mutually exclusive with Ricanstruction. Additionally, in the second issue there is an explicit comment that "we are Americans" and it is a sentiment that is underscored in the series. The "we" refers to Puerto Ricans. However, this concept should be further explored considering Puerto Rico's status as a colony. What does it mean to be considered *American* if you are not treated as such because your country is a colony? What could *Borinqueña* be if the narrative decenters the United States? Despite these moments, *Borinqueña* is still a view of what could be possible in the comic world if the industry opens up to having more superheroes of color.



**Néstor Murray-Irizarry and J. Emanuel Dufrasne González**

*Puerto Rico y su plena: nuevas fuentes para estudio, Volúmen I*

**Guilarte Editores, 2018**

**309 pages**

**\$15.99**

**Reviewed by John Paul Bimbiras**

*Puerto Rico y su plena: nuevas fuentes para estudio* (Puerto Rico and its *Plena*: New Sources for Study) is a new book about the origins and practice of the Puerto Rican *plena*. Through a series of essays, anecdotes, poetry, photographs, and illustrations, it

weaves together a compelling narrative about this highly syncretized genre and how it came to be such a potent symbol of Puerto Rican national identity. It presents and critiques competing hypotheses about the origins of the genre while suggesting some possible connections between them. Although *plena* is one of the most popular and representative genres of Puerto Rico, few extensive academic investigations have been made into its origins and cultural context.

Néstor Murray-Irizarry is a cultural historian who founded the research center Casa Paoli in 1986. J. Emanuel Dufrasne González is an ethnomusicologist at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras. Dufrasne co-founded the folkloric ensemble Paracumbé with his wife Nelie Lebrón Robles in 1979. While the two authors may approach *plena* differently, they are clearly in dialogue with each other. They both agree that *plena* developed in Ponce during the early twentieth century. This was a volatile period in Puerto Rican history with the island in the initial stages of U.S. colonization. They also agree that it developed from a range of distinct influences including *bomba*,

*guaracha*, and even the music of the English-speaking Caribbean.

The first part, by Murray-Irizarry, examines historical and cultural dimensions of the genre. Interviewing older practitioners of *plena* (known as *pleneros*) and analyzing articles from contemporary newspapers such as *El Águila de Puerto Rico*, Murray-Irizarry traces the origins of *plena* to the La Joya u Hoya del Castillo in Ponce. Newspaper accounts portray an extremely violent atmosphere around *plena* dances in La Joya u Hoya del Castillo and other areas of Ponce during the first decades of the twentieth century. The first mention of *plena* in newspapers is found in 1907, and in its early decades the term is often placed in quotation marks, suggesting that its definition was not yet entirely fixed. Murray-Irizarry considers several potential early influences on *plena*, including the *chansoneta*, *baquiné*, *guaracha*, and *bomba*. He also considers the role of the Cuban *bufo* theater troupes that began visiting Puerto Rico toward the end of the nineteenth century and asks whether Cuban *bufo* theater was responsible for the professionalization of *plena*? Regardless of its origin, Murray-Irizarry insists that *plena* is quintessentially Puerto Rican and that it developed, much like jazz and tango in the United States and Argentina, among economically marginalized Afro-descendent communities. He concludes with a call for further research about the *plena* and other aspects of Puerto Rican folkloric music.

In the second part, Emanuel Dufrasne Gonzalez seeks not only to examine the origins of the *plena* but also to clarify some of the misinformation that has resulted from poor initial investigations. Part II is more musicological in its focus. Dufrasne draws on his intimate knowledge of Puerto Rican music that developed from years of experience with his folkloric ensemble Paracumbé. Dufrasne begins his part with a poem he composed entitled “*Prólogo Plenero*.” He then presents several short anecdotes that help to provide historical context, including one about his grandfather who was a *plenero* and another about a man named Quique who played *plena* rhythms on a guitar with no strings, among other stories. Within these anecdotes, he analyzes the melodies and lyrics to several songs while discussing the musicians that played and composed them and the stories that inspired them. One of the most comprehensive essays in the book is “*La Plena*

*y sus orígenes*” (the *plena* and its origins). Dufrasne states that the *plena* “is a complex percussive rhythm that is generally interpreted with two or three *panderetas* and *güiro*.” However, often guitars, *cuatros*, and accordions (aka *sinfonías de mano*) are often included in the ensemble, and sometimes wind and brass instruments as well. The poetic structure often consists of four irregular verses, with the third or fourth verse longer than the initial verses seemingly creating an acceleration, not in tempo, but in text. The *estribillos* (choruses) usually consist of eight bars in two-four time. It is the instrumentation and formal structure of the *plena* which distinguishes it from other similar and related forms of Puerto Rican music. In the early 1900s, the *plena* was still relatively contained to the area around Ponce but by the 1930s it had become popular across the island. Dufrasne attributes its spread in popularity to traveling workers in the sugarcane industry but also largely to the dissemination of *plena* recordings made by Puerto Ricans in New York such as Manuel “*el Canario*” Jiménez and the lesser known Vicente Velázquez-Santana beginning in 1929.

On the origin of *plena*, Dufrasne discusses three competing theories. The first theory is that of Francisco López Cruz, who claims that there were songs with similar melodies and poetic structures found in modern *plena* that already existed in Puerto Rico during the nineteenth century, but that they were not yet called *plena*. The second theory comes from Félix Echevarría Alvarado, who points to black migrants from the English-speaking Caribbean (*los ingleses*), from islands such as Barbados. These migrants brought their music to Ponce where it melded with localized styles such as *bomba*, *aguinaldo*, and *guaracha*. There is some support behind this argument when one considers that the representative instrument of *plena*, the *pandereta* (a tambourine without metal jingles), is very similar to the *pandero* used by black migrants from the English-speaking islands and the Dominican Republic. A third theory from Vicentico Morales states that the *plena* developed from playing *bomba* rhythms on the *panderetas*. *Bomba* rhythms such as the *güembé*, *cunyá*, and *belén* were particularly well suited for adaptation to the lighter and more portable frame drums. Large *barriles* (the drums used in *bomba*) were heavy and difficult to transport. Also, in some areas *bomba* dances were banned by law and *panderetas* may have

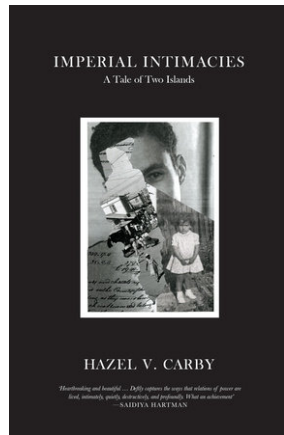
been used initially in place of the *barriles*. Dufrasne presents his own fourth theory: that the *plena* developed from a confluence of all three of these theories. The remnants of these influences can still be seen and heard in *plena* today, but by the turn of the twentieth century they had already concretized into a distinct cultural form.

*Puerto Rico y su plena: nuevas fuentes para estudio* provides new insights into the study of the *plena* while recognizing that there is still much work to be done. This book would be helpful to anyone who is interested in learning about *plena*, Puerto Rican music, and/or Puerto Rico’s history and culture in general.



**Hazel Carby**  
*Imperial Intimacies: A Tale of Two Islands*  
**Verso, 2019**  
**\$29.95**

**Reviewed by Gabriella Rodriguez**



"Where are you from?" This is the question that confronts "the girl" at the beginning of Hazel Carby's new book, *Imperial Intimacies: A Tale of Two Islands*.

For Carby, a white-presenting British woman of black Jamaican and white Welsh heritage, "where are you from?" is a

thinly veiled way of asking, "are you black or white?" *Imperial Intimacies* is Carby's personal history of empire; it exposes the enmeshment of center and periphery by undoing the binaries at the center of colonial logic.

The book begins with an evocation of Carby's childhood alienation and descriptions of the racial animus to which she was exposed during the postwar period in Britain. Carby historicizes these experiences in the context of the white backlash to mass migration after World War II in Britain and personalizes them by narrating her family history. The first two sections, "Inventories" and "Calculations," deal primarily with Carby's parents; namely, their interracial relationship and the ways in which black and white couplings posed a problem for the island nation's conception of Britishness. As a result of their union, Carl and Iris Carby were ensnared in governmental efforts to manage and contain "white and black bodies" and maintain the perception of Britain as a nation of white subjects: "residents of the empire with white skin and of European cultural descent." Carby emphasizes the extent to which couples like her parents were "caught in the entanglements of race, its skeins threading into their actions, attitudes and beliefs." British government officials and bureaucrats, anxious about the newly arriving black migrants from the colonies, focused their energies

on the problems of black settlement and especially on mixed-raced children who were the embodiment of ambiguous national affiliation. Carby's descriptions shed light not only on the individual struggles her parents endured, but also the extent to which she and they were inscribed in a larger racial narrative about purity and ethnicity in the British national imaginary.

The middle section includes "Dead Reckoning Home" and "Family Registers," which deal with Carby's extended family on her mother's side, specifically detailing the connection among histories of labor, gender, and empire. In these sections, our attention is focused on the domestic realm as Carby offers a genealogy of the matriarchs on her mother's side of the family, specifically her maternal great-grandmother, Rose, and her grandmother, Beatrice. These sections are attuned to the materiality of labor: the factory's "extreme heat," its "ill-ventilated rooms," "fumes from gas irons," the film of soot in homes, "specks of coal dust and pieces of grit," "overalls encrusted with dirt; lungs filled with sooty deposits." Filling in these textural details offers insight into the drudgery of poverty, the plight of women in the domestic realm, and the experiences of the working poor. While Carby's family seems far removed from the colonies, Cardiff and Bristol, where these women worked and lived, were connected to the British empire. The time during which Beatrice came of age, in particular, was a moment of rapid industrial and international expansion of the British Empire. As Carby notes, Beatrice would have no doubt been aware of the vast reach of the British empire and would have come into awareness of herself as a British subject by way of "the racial logics of whiteness." The ideological and material imprints of empire during this period produced British subjects that were "convinced of the superiority of imperial power."

In the final sections of the book, "Accounting" and "Legacies," Carby turns to Jamaica and her paternal family. The section investigates the legacy of Lilly Carby, a white, English plantation owner who arrived in the Caribbean during the eighteenth century as a soldier of the British Army. These chapters detail the brutality of plantation life, with particular attention paid to the entrenched racial hierarchies of the Jamaican plantocracy. Free women of color who had children with white men



of means in Jamaica, for example, would seek to protect their status by establishing nomenclature: "free women of colour made a claim to respectability in defiance of those white men who refused to legitimate their lineage or publicly acknowledge an affiliation." Lilly was known to have raped and fathered multiple children with the black women he enslaved. Two of Lilly's children went on to carry his name, while others remained human property. Through a complicated series of marriages, property exchanges, and contracts, the free mixed-race Carbys come to own some of their own family members, a phenomenon not uncommon in the Caribbean. The narratives that Carby features encapsulate the surprisingly contestable nature of power in the West Indies where gendered and racial distinctions were brutally brought into being and aggressively maintained.

Throughout her monograph, Carby demonstrates the interconnectedness of history with personal experiences and everyday encounters. Though it is described as a history of the British Empire, *Imperial Intimacies* is a hybrid text, weaving together aspects of memoir, personal essay, and traditional historiography. Part of Carby's method involves incorporating an array of source material to articulate the surprising affinities between the metropole and periphery. These sources include official and personal correspondence, governmental and administrative documents, newspapers, registers, photographs, maps, and more. The archival material is supplemented by personal recollection, family stories, and imaginative postulation when there is no document to rely on for information. In addition, there are numerous direct quotations from novels, plays, and archival documents nestled in margins or deposited in the middle of pages, providing narrative detours, supplemental information, or a thematic emphasis where needed. Throughout the monograph, Carby interweaves descriptive narrative with historical context, and the sheer spread—the breadth and depth—of knowledge needed to tell the many stories that are covered in the book is impressive.

*Imperial Intimacies* is part of a well-established and growing body of literature that explores the margins and gaps in the historical record. In focusing our attention on the assumptions that undergird this inquiry, *Imperial Intimacies* explodes the myth of a pre-racialized, pre-black Britain. For

those interested in imperialism, postcolonialism, black studies, black British history, and archival studies, this is an essential book to consider.



## FIGURING FUTURITY: THE BODY AS SPECULATIVE FRONTIER

Edited by Rhya Moffitt Brooke and Iana Robitaille

*Speculative*: that which pertains to imagination, to theorization, to conjecture, to the contingent. But the word also brings to mind calculated risk, material consequence, and the valuation of space through time. What power do we have to chart the future when the body is compass?

The reviews in this special section take up decolonial works that explore the positionality of the body at the interstices of past, present, and future. Such texts speculate on (re)imagined states of being, the potential for bodies to dictate the future, the effects of colonization on future bodies, and the body as a site of resistance to(ward) futurity. These works are invested in both theory and praxis, blurring the boundaries between scholarly intervention and speculative art, and pose timely questions: What does resistance look like through and within the body? How can decolonized and depoliticized bodies reclaim their agency? In what ways do speculative contemporary genres--fiction, film, the visual arts--address questions of the body and autonomy? How do we figure the gap between the politicized body and body politic?

Opening the section, Naminata Diabate and Achille Mbembe's latest books expand a Foucauldian theory of biopolitics to consider the place of the body within scenes of contemporary globalization. Iana Robitaille interviews Diabate about *Naked Agency: Genital Cursing and Biopolitics in Africa* (2020), uncovering African women's collective naked protest as a complicated and ever-shifting exchange of resistance and power. Lauren Nelson takes up the latest version of Mbembe's seminal text, *Necropolitics* (2019). She argues that the gap between the original iteration in his 2003 *Public Culture* article and the publication of this book is not a limitation but an opportunity for Mbembe to more deeply apply his theory of necropolitics to other global situations and current discussions within the field.

Next, Bryanna Barrera and Kiara Davis read two scholars who propose new critical and creative methodologies for representing the past and reimagining community. Barrera reviews Marissa K. Lopez's *Racial Immanence: Chicanx Bodies beyond Representation* (2019), contending that Lopez's 'choratic' reading of Chicanx texts reconceives race as a source of agency rather than merely an embodiment of ethnic representation. And in Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, Davis discovers the potential of critical fabulation for recovering a chorus of experimental, intimate, and rebellious Black women and for imagining the future.

The following pieces explore the body as a literal frontier for speculation. These two primary texts, Carmen Maria Machado's 2017 short story collection *Her Body and Other Parties*, and Jordan Peele's 2017 film, *Get Out* are creative works that take up the question of how decolonized and depoliticized bodies grapple with reclaiming their agency. Bianca Quintanilla explores how Machado literalizes the effects that systems of oppression have on women's bodies, foregrounding Machado's interrogation of the multitude of experiences and inequalities different women's bodies undergo as a result. Emma Hetrick situates *Get Out* as a neo-slave narrative that takes up W. E. B. DuBois's theory of double consciousness as a way to push back on the notion of a post-racial cultural moment. She explores the film's treatment of the separation of mind and body to analyze the plight of Black people in the US.

To push this theorization into praxis, Morgan Hamill, Shukri Bana, Rhya Moffitt Brooke, and Hannah Robbins Hopkins read authors who make practical suggestions for the ways in which speculation figures into daily life. Therí Alyce Pickens's *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness* (2019) and Kara Keeling's *Black Times, Queer Futures* (2019) both use Black studies as ways to intervene in multiple fields for interdisciplinary approaches to speculative futures for mentally impaired Black subjects and Black queer subjects. Mark Rifkin's *Fictions of Land and Flesh* (2019) and Ruha Benjamin's *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code* (2019) are both texts that speculate about liberatory practices. Hamill considers how Pickens positions Black speculative fiction as theoretical works that intervene in the lacunae of

critical scholarship between Black studies and disability studies. She highlights the potentiality of such fiction to provide new ways of reading that disrupt white supremacist and ableist notions of linearity, time, and space. Bana analyzes how Keeling throws off the constraints of space and time to read queer Black representation and time through an Afrofuturist framework. Brooke then turns to Rifkin's use of Black and Indigenous speculative texts in order to explore how contemporary movements can strengthen the work of Black and Indigenous solidarity groups. Finally, bringing analysis of race fully into the twenty-first century and considering futurity in its most literal iteration, Hopkins considers Benjamin's approach to creating solidarity in the face of the structural inequalities Big Data perpetuates.

Proposing various methods of speculation and solidarity, all of these works figure the functions of futurity, gesturing at the body's ability to usher in transcendent possibilities for the oppressed. In these works, we see speculation function in new ways of reading texts, new ways of reading the archive, and new ways of reading bodily performance. They demand that we expand our thinking outside of Western intellectual traditions and reorient ourselves to challenge dominant historiographies. While these readings begin at a point of speculation, they open up the possibility for imagined futures to become liberated realities.



## Naminata Diabate

*Naked Agency: Genital Cursing and Biopolitics in Africa*

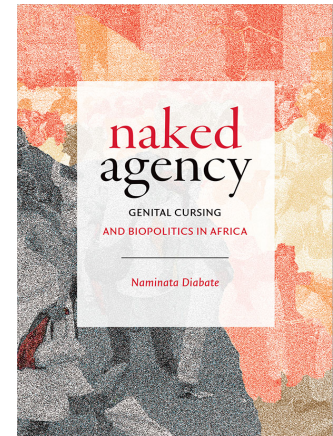
Duke University Press, 2020

272 pages

\$26.95

## Interviewed by Iana Robitaille

Naminata Diabate is Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature at Cornell University. She earned her PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of Texas at Austin in 2011, with portfolios in African and African Diaspora Studies and Women's and Gender Studies.



Dr. Diabate was awarded the 2012-14 Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Diversity Fellowship by Cornell's Department of Comparative Literature. Her work takes up questions of postcoloniality, biopolitics, sexuality and pleasure, and performances of resistance. *Naked Agency: Genital Cursing and Biopolitics in Africa*, published in March 2020, is Dr. Diabate's debut monograph. The book examines the proliferation and reproduction of mature women's naked protest across the African continent and through a variety of cultural genres. She recently spoke with Iana Robitaille about the project's conception and development. *This interview is published in two parts. Part One is below; read Part Two by visiting Texas Studies in Language and Literature on [Facebook](#).*

**IR:** In your introduction, you define 'naked agency' as "both a concept and a reading praxis." How did you come to discover naked agency as an analytic?

**ND:** 'Naked agency' emerged unexpectedly as a theoretical framework. When I set out to investigate mature women's defiant self-exposure, I was mainly interested in understanding the proliferation of this gesture—in news media and other sources—in contemporary African cities. My initial point of departure was the novel, but the

paucity of internationally circulating fiction on the gesture posed a challenge. I therefore shook off the tyranny of the text and began exploring other cultural products: narrative and documentary film, autobiography, visual art, and socio-media material. From these investigations it became clear that the gesture and its effects are far from simple.

When a woman decides or is made to decide to strip naked in protest, she perhaps navigates a host of seemingly contradictory feelings—desperation, joy, disappointment, shame, exhilaration, triumph. (We already find ourselves on complex terrain with the term “decide” and its many valences.) This insight emerged, for example, from my reading of the 1995 short documentary *Uku Hamba Ze (To Walk Naked)*, which depicts the 1990 female naked protest in South Africa. The protest and its manifestations reveal a cycle of contestation, exploitation, and misreading that may differ from the women’s original plan. In this cycle, the agency of the women, their targets, and other stakeholders—including the filmmakers and myself as a scholar—are simultaneously co-constitutive, instrumentalized, precarious, and triumphant. Such a dynamic of openness and fluctuation lies at the core of most instances of defiant disrobing.

It is this movement that I seek to capture with the putatively oxymoronic term ‘naked agency,’ whereby “naked” is formulated as exposure and vulnerability and “agency” as the ability to act or react intentionally. Rather than pin down naked protest as the terrain of any stable meaning and feeling, I suggest we think of it as a shortcut that requires the decipherment of deeper cultural and societal accounts of what counts as nakedness, privacy, violence, shame, power, and desperation.

**IR: Can you elaborate on what stands to be gained from ‘naked agency’ as a “reading praxis”?**

ND: As an interpretive praxis naked agency provides multiple advantages, at the level of the phenomenon of defiant disrobing itself and at the disciplinary levels of Comparative Literature and African Studies. One is the freedom to trace news and representations of mature women’s collective defiant disrobing across various sites. This interdisciplinary approach, which I call “open reading,” provides a deeper account of the dynamic cycles of power and vulnerability mentioned above.

A case in point: the three iterations (1994, 1996, and 2007) of Bruce Onobrakpeya’s visual artwork *Nudes and Protest*. In 1994, Onobrakpeya created a plastography to stage how elderly women of the Niger Delta express their grievances against unrestrained rule and mismanagement of natural resources. The artwork was prescient: 2002 saw dramatic protests in the Niger Delta against multinational oil companies, and women’s threats to strip naked brought the events to international attention. Each of Onobrakpeya’s subsequent versions offers an alternative illustration of the protest, the second (1996) of seemingly more fearful women, the third (2007) a bolder palette and more active female figures. Of course, it is possible to read each of these texts on its own terms (since I discovered them over years as they became available online). But by reading “openly,” I am able to bring the works into dialogue to showcase both the artist’s maturing relationship with nudity and the threat of contestation within Nigerian petroculture.

**IR: On the topic of archive, yours is particularly impressive in both its geographic and its generic scope. In your project, you document dozens of naked protests of Francophone and Anglophone sub-Saharan Africa in the past century. But as you’ve mentioned, you also read representations across documentary and narrative film, news and social media, visual art, and literature. Can you elaborate a little bit on your methodology and the importance of drawing on such a wide body of material?**

The choice of a wide body of material was my way of sidestepping several challenges, some of which I mentioned earlier. These include the lack of a rich archive in any one genre and site, the paucity of fictional texts, and the need to broaden the contours of Comparative Literature. A practice documented since medieval times in the Mali empire, the aggressive disrobing of mature women continues today to provoke intense debates in newspapers, pictorial arts, oral tradition, narrative film, documentaries, novels, and autobiographies, as well as on social media (e.g., YouTube, Facebook, listservs, and personal blogs). Yet, no single genre or site provides sufficient data to do justice to this important gesture.

**IR:** If it opens the door for increased and widened scholarship on naked protest, *Naked Agency* also addresses what you see as several inadequacies in the extant scholarship. What are some of these lacunae within the field?

ND: The first weakness (which spans literary criticism, anthropology, political science, and sociology) is an impulse to uncritically uphold hypersexualized images of disrobing women as sovereign subjects. This postcolonial “romanticization framework,” as I call it, is often anxious to correct disempowering images in local and global media by overemphasizing African women’s agency. Though necessary and novel, this approach and its chosen terms—“genital cursing,” “female genital power”—suggest historical and social fixity and overlook the temporariness of resistant disrobings. In contrast, “naked agency” names a complex and unstable gesture and its effects—open strategies with positions that are constantly subjected and emerging.

Another impulse is the foregrounding of only the women’s reactions, whereas *Naked Agency* attends also to those of the women’s targets and other stakeholders. My reading of female ritual cursing during the September 2001 Gambian presidential elections is one such case. Days after news of the women’s ritual became public, religious leaders from multiple denominations vehemently condemned the women and the rituals as “public indecency,” “anti-Islamic,” “backward,” “irreligious,” “anti-society and anti-cultural,” “vile and repugnant.” The leaders all called for the arrest and trial of the women and urged the government to clamp down on this event to dissuade its recurrence. Although not the designated targets of the women’s ritual, these actors became major stakeholders whose reactions deserve attention. This attention highlights the women’s unmistakable determination to employ a uniquely controversial ritual and, I speculate, that the acerbic attacks may have a dissuasive effect on future rituals of this kind.

**IR:** You repeatedly stress the instability, or “temporariness,” of female agency in such enactments of nakedness. I am therefore curious to think about naked agency as it relates to questions of embodied futurity. To what extent may the female bodies in these

instances be sites for *speculative* resistance? What room does a contingent naked agency leave for speculation, or does it leave room *only* for speculation—“for deliberating on political subjectivity,” as you put it?

ND: I am amazed at the connection you have established between naked agency and futurity and interested in your notion of *speculative resistance*. For me, resistance is always already speculative—an unending march of flow and counter-flow, of force and counter-force. In that account of resistance, I inscribe myself within a Foucauldian framework that understands power not as a stable entity but rather as a set of open strategies. In that sense, power and its supposed opposite are co-constitutive. Neither power nor resistance belongs uniquely to the strong or the weak. Just as the weak resist, so do the strong.

To read Part Two of this interview, visit Texas Studies in Language and Literature on [Facebook](#).



**Achille Mbembe**

*Necropolitics*

Translated by Steven Corcoran

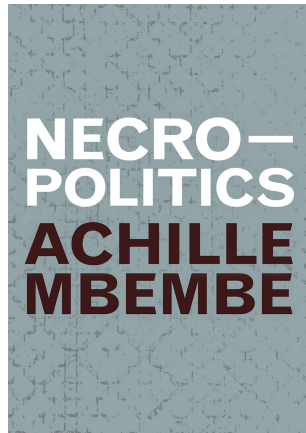
Duke University Press, 2019

213 pages

\$25.95

Reviewed by Lauren Nelson

"If you want to make use of a book, simply picking it up will not suffice. My original aim was to write a book that not a hint of mystery shrouded." These opening lines of Achille Mbembe's extended treatment of his now-famous neologism gestures at the central tension



of his project: *pharmakon*, a medication that is simultaneously remedy and poison. Mbembe, admitting the near-impossibility of writing a book that evades all ambiguity, also hints at the pain of writing as political action. "In any case," he writes, "this text is one on whose surface the reader can glide freely, without control points or visas, sojourning as long as desired, moving about at will, returning and leaving at any moment and through any door." The project of *Necropolitics* is totalizing: it is about war as the "sacrament of our times," about the planetary effects of colonialism and enmity, and about the politics of living beyond humanism. If you want to make use of a book, simply picking it up will not suffice: the force of the necropolitical, Mbembe argues, eludes the enclosure of reading and writing. "The roughness of the topic did not afford a violin note." Newly translated from the original French by Steven Corcoran, *Necropolitics* is composed of eight chapters, inclusive of the introduction and conclusion. While the core of the text does not significantly depart from his seminal 2003 *Public Culture* essay, the full-length monograph expands the reach of Mbembe's ideas, offering new concepts, terms, and case-studies that reconfigure and revitalize his theorization of vulnerability and finitude.

The first chapter, "Exit from Democracy," rewrites the history of imperial control and domination in terms of the "narrowing of the world" and the "repopulation of the Earth." Mbembe implies that conceptualizing the violence of modernity as *repeopling* allows for a more sustained examination of the ways in which colonization intersects with religious emigration, commerce, war, and ecological disaster. As he argues in his introduction, the brutality of borders is a "fundamental given" of the contemporary condition and the history of geographical, racial, nationalistic divisions is inextricably linked to the ability of the state to "exit" democracy—to paradoxically tout a "pure" citizenship as a means to refuse the guarantee of life and freedom. The human, the citizen, the national subject have been made "plastic" and the advent of the "digital subject" problematizes the safeguarding of once tightly-held humanistic values. In an era of technomedicine, what constitutes the "natural" human being, what separates the screen from life, and how do these questions index the intensification of the "power over the living"? However, these questions are not presented as a declensionist narrative of globalization or technological advancement but, instead, as the surface effects of democracy's "nocturnal body"—the violence of colonialism that has always subtended the democratic project. Mbembe's point is that what a long history of borders, war, and enmity demonstrate is that the process of exiting democracy—suspending rights and freedoms—is actually the result of the purported protection of these same rights and freedoms. To exit democracy is to construct walls, camps, and tunnels: to end life in the name of its protection.

The second and third chapters, "The Society of Enmity" and "Necropolitics," respectively, will feel the most familiar to audiences already familiar with Mbembe's *Public Culture* essay. Like the article, both chapters examine the occupation of Palestine, which serves as the backdrop to more fully explicate his conceptualizations of enmity (the desire for "separation and enslaving") and necropolitics ("death that lives a human life.") In the fourth chapter, "Viscerality," Mbembe expands his geographical scope, thinking through the "planetary entanglement" brought on by the global forces of fast capitalism, digital technology, and "soft-power warfare." Mbembe names two main anxieties of Western metaphysics that haunt our



contemporary condition: the “proper” (read: stable) relation between humans and objects, and the nostalgia for a (lost) time when humans could manipulate their environment at will. In these two anxieties, the problem of technology finds its stronghold. What are the effects of the increasing embeddedness of humans within elaborate, global technostuctures? What resonates between the onset of anthropogenic climate change and the malleability of the human genome (i.e. the potential for biological subjugation by capitalist infrastructure)? The fifth chapter, “Fanon’s Pharmacy,” builds on the premise that enmity is constitutive of present liberal democracies by examining the tension between the “principle of destruction” and the “principle of life.” Here, he builds on Fanon’s dual interests in histories of violence (destruction) and the therapeutic process (life), and asks whether Fanon’s theory of decolonization still holds if violence does not *create* anything but chaos and loss. The sixth and final chapter, “This Stifling Noonday,” tackles the problems posed by humanism vis-à-vis the contemporary capacities of technology, connecting these anxieties to the work of Afropessimist and Afrofuturist writers and artists.

Ending with the figure of the passerby (from Fanon’s *passant*), Mbembe asks what it might mean to move beyond democracy’s nocturnal body, what it might look like to smuggle into some “elsewhere,” the passenger of a moment of rupture? What is the future of the human beyond humanism? “What,” he asks, “could the human person resemble beyond the accidents of birth, nationality, and citizenship?” If we cannot escape from the society of enmity, how can we reconstitute what Edouard Glissant has called “World Relation,” or world-sharing? Not without hope, Mbembe asks how we can re-create our world and re-envision community.

Throughout the chapters, Mbembe’s writing is electric, affectively complex, and relentlessly insightful. Corcoran’s remarkable translation significantly expands the linguistic reach of this intricate volume, highly anticipated after the original essay’s publication. The sixteen-year gap between both versions should not be seen as a limitation: this newest instantiation of Mbembe’s theory thinks *with* the acceleration of capital, violence, and technology, foregrounding the extent

to which necropolitics is not a static Foucauldian revision but an anticipatory critique that poses different sets of questions at different moments. Despite the considerable traction of Mbembe’s neologism, the full-length version of *Necropolitics* demands reconsideration. Simply picking it up will not suffice.



**Marissa K. López**

*Racial Immanence: Chicana Bodies beyond Representation*

New York University Press, 2019

191 pages

\$28.00

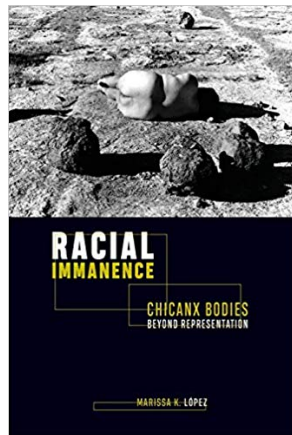
**Reviewed by Bryanna Barrera**

In a political climate of growing anti-immigrant and, specifically, anti-Chicana sentiment, what are the social, political, and individual stakes of a Chicana literary resistance to the oppression and conflation of racialized bodies?

*Racial Immanence: Chicana Bodies beyond*

*Representation*, the second book by literary scholar Marissa K. López, pursues this question through contemporary Chicana artists and writers whose work is often limited to “reading for representation.” Against this kind of reading, López argues for a ‘choratic’ reading of race in Chicana works that have been distorted by the pre-conceived identities imposed by dominant White culture. López also wants *Racial Immanence* to foreground textuality: for the reader, these Chicana works become sensory experiences that produce specific forms of *chicanidad y latinidad* materiality. At the center of these moments lies López’s nuanced conceptualization of race as an internal source of individual agency, rather than a social construct imposed from outside. Embodied as a form of volition, race mirrors literary form, which for López “emphasizes [. . .] both the matter and energy of text.” Where race can be reconceived as agency, literary form can be reconceived as Chicana identity beyond the limits of “reading for representation” and prescribed identities.

López’s intervention in Chicana literature is above all methodological. Drawing on object-oriented ontology, new materialism, and Rebekah Sheldon’s work on the Platonic concept of the “chora,” López theorizes texts as unique objects that interact in the performance of political struggle without



offering a definitive solution or answer to these problems. For López, Chicana texts can resist neoliberal conceptualizations of reading, race, and the body, which stubbornly reinscribe the stereotypes and misrepresentations of community that dominant culture expects of ethnic literature. López’s “choratic” reading opens up Chicana texts as spaces that create a real, living *chicanidad y latinidad*. Plato describes “chora” as being “both the place *in which* and the stuff *from which* a supreme craftsman formed the universe.” Choratic reading thus functions for López as a strategy that “emphasizes form as both the matter and energy of text,” and in doing so, pursues the connection between the agency of matter that functions in the liminal spaces between actants but fails to be materialized through language.

López separates her argument into “Race,” “Face,” “Place,” and “Waste” as problematic sites of representational reading in Chicana literature. In each of these four sections of the book, López replaces representation with some form of unbiased reappropriation of racial stereotypes that allows for fresh presentation of *chicanidad y latinidad*. In the chapter titled “Race,” López focuses on the corporeality of time in three works by Mexican American author Dagoberto Gilb. For López, Gilb’s fiction corporealizes time through his Chicano characters’ use of their bodies as an “imbrication of words and feelings” that produces a physicality both inside and outside the narrative—like Plato’s chora, both here and now. This inside-outside becomes a space of otherness that is material but inaccessible, a physicality that gives Gilb’s Chicana subjects a racial embodiment that resists familiar racialized stereotypes. For López, Gilb’s Chicana characters occupy a now that perpetually refuses to be influenced or made legible by the past or the future.

In her second chapter, “Face,” López reads Cecile Pineda’s novel *Face* (1985) alongside the works of two contemporary photographers, Stefan Ruiz and Ken Gonzalez-Day. Across these works, López finds three modes of looking: looking as performance, looking as viewing images, and looking as reading text. For López, the novel and photographs try to engage an audience in all three forms of looking by taking them to the limits of reading for representation. At this limit, audiences encounter “the anxiety of not knowing.” It is at the

threshold of this anxiety that López wants to show body, text, and other media as “a conduit for racialized communal connections rather than as an index of subjectivity.” At those moments of uncertainty where readers might lean on stereotypes as interpretive tools, López stages a choratic reading of Pineda, Ruiz, and Gonzalez-Day that invites the reader in, rather than excluding the reader as somehow other-identified. For López, there is no other more important ‘meaning’ in these works; their invitation or inclusion is all.

In “Place,” the third chapter of the book, López engages with disability studies to consider the relationship between race and the treatment of AIDS. For López, the work of Gil Cuadros and Sheila Ortiz Taylor challenges scientific understandings of AIDS and race by asking the reader to “reimagine the social through the materiality of the human body.” López argues that the bodies of the Chicanx characters in these works are transcorporeal sites of being and un-being. This collective making and unmaking of *chicanidad y latinidad*, like the here and now in Gilb’s work, becomes another of López’s formulations of the chora. By focusing on Chicanx AIDS fiction, López is able to demonstrate how such narratives illuminate “choratic networks of text, human bodies, and the natural world” that use race and ethnicity not as fact or object, but as “repeating patterns of connection and change.”

The final chapter, “Waste,” brings the reader into the contemporary political realm of wall-building and border-closing. The focus here is on the work of Mexican artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer and his idea of a “participation platform,” which López examines alongside novels by Alejandro Morales, Rosaura Sánchez, and Beatrice Pita. Within this constellation of works, Chicanx bodies exercise power within “geographic, planetary, and political spaces.” López shows how Chicanx bodies are both determined by and determinant of three spatial categories, calling into question the notion of the individual, autonomous subject or actor. Rather than functioning as a symbol of ethnic identity, the body becomes a thing within a multitude of things, present in a community working together to communicate, through various forms of media, the necessity of explicit acts of care. “We all share the same body in the same space,” López says, “and that shared body is implicated in the infinite nexus of flesh and

machine” for which we’re all held accountable. Throughout *Racial Immanence*, López wants contemporary Chicanx art and literature to help readers imagine the possibilities of such nexuses and intersubjectivities. But López also wants to validate Chicanx art and literature and the ways in which Chicanx communities are creating spaces that gesture towards a reading beyond—beyond dominant language and culture, into new spaces of intra-actional reading, writing, and making that become the proving grounds for ethnic literature in a political climate that, far from representing ethnicity, more often tries to obscure or erase it.

*Racial Immanence* takes on the looming question of representation in Latinx studies in an innovative, nuanced, and theoretical manner that begs for further scholarship on the topic through a focus on racial immanence and choratic reading. The way López foregrounds the utter necessity of Chicanx literature and art, while simultaneously attending to the imperfections in how we approach these creative forms, opens up a conversation around Chicanidad/Latinidad intersexuality and inclusivity that has the potential to change the ways in which we all consider race and representation.



**Saidiya Hartman**

*Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals*

**W. W. Norton & Company, 2019**

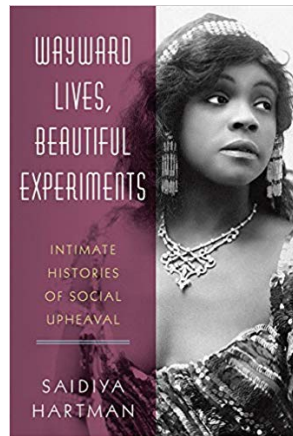
**441 pages**

**\$17.95**

**Reviewed by Kiara Davis**

Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* recovers the histories of "ordinary" young Black women trying to "live as if they were free" in Philadelphia and New York City at the beginning of the twentieth century. To find these women, Hartman turns to the archive: social-work files, parole officers' reports, psychiatrist interviews, slum photography, prison case files, and reformers' notes, all of which become, for Hartman, traces of 'wayward' Black women. To critique the pathologized and criminalized depictions of these 'wayward' young women Hartman takes the reader from the archival opening into the tenement, the ghetto, the streets, the jail cell, the theater, the dancehall, the rented bedroom, the hallway—the places where the Black girls are found. In these places, Hartman finds young Black women experimenting with agency and personhood under impossible circumstances, young Black women determined to "make living an art," young Black women whose experiments as "sexual modernists, free lovers, radicals, and anarchists" inhabited the tensions between freedom and confinement, between autonomy and forced choice, and between deprivation and beauty.

*Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* is divided into three books. Its cast of young Black women includes well-known figures like Ida B. Wells and Eleanora Fagan (later known as Billie Holiday), but celebrities are far outnumbered by unnamed chorus girls, rioters, domestics, factory workers, actresses, inmates, entertainers, and prostitutes. In Book



One, "She Makes an Errant Path Through the City," Hartman puts the reader beside a young Black woman named Mattie who is migrating north to start a new life away from the plantation. Hartman treats the Great Migration as a general strike and positions young Black women like Mattie as political agents participating in a labor movement. Like other young Black women making the journey north, Mattie is "straddling the fault lines of [...] an unthinkable past and a blank future." When we encounter her in the midst of the journey, she is "dreamy with thoughts of what the future would hold." This future, for Mattie, is the tenement. Just as the northern city endangers the black ghetto within it, so too the tenement endangers the young Black woman. The hallway is "narrow [...] two walls threatening to squeeze and crush you into nothingness." It reminds its tenants, "Negro don't even try to live." But this narrow space is also "a clearing," a place for lively firsts, for tongue kisses, for experiments, for desire. The tenement contains the ugly realities of poverty, lack of opportunity, and physical and sexual trauma, yet it is also "a transient resting place, an impossible refuge," and one of the few places where there can be a measure of escape from White surveillance. When we re-encounter Mattie in the tenement, she is experiencing intercourse for the first time. Sex for Mattie arises out of deprivation; it is a lust that stems from "the mere force of existing," fueled by a desire for all of the things the world denies her. Confined by the oppressions of the tenement, Mattie's sexual desire is something resembling agency, a "loophole of retreat." Within these loopholes, Hartman tells us, Black women stage "open rebellion," acts of resistance and self-expression. From the tenement, Hartman follows the path of this rebellion back to the plantation and through Reconstruction to the slave ship and the barracoon. In these open rebellions, Hartman says, "some fought, some jumped, some refused to eat. Others set the plantation and the fields on fire, poisoned the master."

In Book Two, "The Sexual Geography of the Black Belt," Hartman introduces us to Edna, a domestic servant in the north. Amidst the hardening segregation in northern cities, domestic servitude was "field and the brothel [...] the house of bondage." Edna flees these constraints for the expressive freedoms of the stage, where she transforms the stress and upheaval of Black life into

art. As an entertainer, Edna fashions new selfhood, new life, and new sexual expression. For Hartman, the women of the stage, the cabaret, the dancehall, and the cinema transform not just themselves, but the past with which those selves are continuous. In one example, the horrors of the slave ship become the rhythmic beauty of the limbo dance; form and performance remake “the gateway to or threshold of a new world and the dislocation of a chain of miles” at a time when young Black women in the north were still chained to the past by a lack of opportunity, by respectability politics, and by the color line.

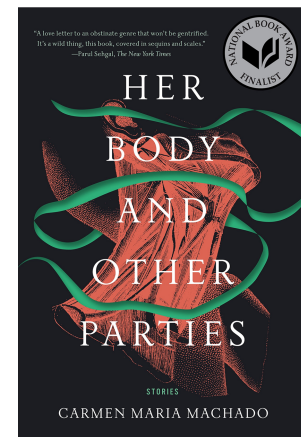
Hartman closes *Wayward Lives* with “Beautiful Experiments.” In this final book, Black women experiment with forms of resistance against unjust working conditions and “the personal degradation of their work.” They strike, they refuse to work, they frequently change employers, and they deliberately make themselves unreliable, resistances that meet with surveillance, police harassment, and incarceration. In their correspondence from jail, these women continue to demand justice, and within the jails themselves, they organize “noise strikes” and “vocal outbreaks”—further resistance taking the form, in Hartman’s words, of a “soundscape of rebellion and refusal.” As a collective entity, this rebellious chorus binds each woman in a unique, experimental, and intimate relationship with the others; the chorus can move, plan, create, and escape. But Hartman’s focus is perhaps less on the group and more on the individual chorine, on her insistent imaginings of life lived freely. Hartman recovers these imaginings; the horizons of these experimental lives return to us in Hartman’s transformative approach to the archive, to its violence, and to the acts of resistance and rebellion that can be rescued from that violence. By breaking open, expanding, and recombining archival objects, Hartman captures the interior and the intimacy of supposedly ‘wayward’ Black lives. She shows young Black women for the political and cultural agents they were, and indeed still are—waiting in the archive for anyone ready to follow Hartman through the oppressions and terrors of America’s present past. In finding the voices of the chorus, Hartman shapes a methodology that makes possible newly imaginable futures.



**Carmen Maria Machado**  
*Her Body and Other Parties*  
 Graywolf Press  
 241 pages  
 \$16.00

Reviewed by Bianca Quintanilla

Carmen Maria Machado’s debut short story collection *Her Body and Other Parties* (2017) explores the myriad sensations of pain and pleasure that women’s bodies undergo. The ambivalence of ‘undergo’ is key here; Machado’s stories are accounts of women’s experiences of the



body freely given or forcefully submitted—to lovers, to fraught medical practices, and to sexualized violence. The first story, “The Husband Stitch,” follows an unnamed woman’s sexual relationship with the man that will become her husband. Although the couple enjoys passionate lovemaking, the man begins to exert a dangerous power over the woman’s body after she gives birth. She undergoes a surgery that enhances her husband’s sexual pleasure at the expense of her own. The conflict in their sex life increases until the husband, as if to relieve these tensions, insists on untying the ribbon at his wife’s neck, a ribbon that she was born with and has worn all her life. The woman yields to her husband’s demands, allowing him to untie the ribbon: her head instantly falls from her neck and rolls off the bed, and yet she cannot “blame him even then.”

Elsewhere, Machado pushes generic boundaries to center sexual violence. In “Especially Heinous: 272 Views of *SVU: Law & Order*,” Machado uses the serial crime drama to comment on the popular representation of harm done to women’s bodies. After a slew of brutal murders and rapes, the narrator notes that “[f]or three days in a row, there is not a single victim in the entire precinct.” During this lull, the typically action-packed *SVU* episode turns to the domestic lives of detectives Benson

and Stabler. Their uneventful off-duty time lacks entertainment, which Machado delivers: she swiftly resumes the brutal crimes she'd held in suspension, demonstrating that a show like *SVU* is about critiquing, not halting, gendered violence.

In "Real Women Have Bodies," Machado plays on the 2008 film *Real Women Have Curves* to recast beauty standards in terms of women's rights. The women in the story remark on the fact that they are "fading," losing their embodied form without physically dying. This "fading" is a source of profound anguish for women and their loved ones. The cause of the fading is hinted at obliquely: the women protest their fading by "fucking up servers and ATMs and voting machines," laying siege to the technological limbs of heteropatriarchy. While "Real Women Have Bodies" represents a widespread loss of embodiment, "Eight Bites," another story in the collection, explores the individual psychology of societal beauty standards. Here, the protagonist undergoes surgery that reduces one's appetite to induce weight loss. The voluntary surgery appears at first like the protagonist taking possession of her body, but as the surgeon gets to work, possession seems to change hands: "[h]er hands are in my torso, her fingers searching for something. She is loosening flesh from its casing, slipping around where she's welcome, talking to a nurse about her vacation to Chile." Boundaries are blurred between surgeon and patient, between woman and woman, between mind and body, between body and body. The surgeon's breach of the body, and the intervening conversation, conjures the woman-identified body as something eerily unwhole, un-self-contained, and un-self-possessed.

Although in this collection Machado does not directly address categories such as race or class, neither does she foreclose them. She rarely describes women's physical features—she describes what is done to women's bodies, not the bodies themselves. Instead of directly identifying the socioeconomic statuses of her characters, Machado represents these women through their diverse circumstances. For example, the characters in "Real Women Have Bodies" work in factories, jobs that are underpaid and dangerous. In contrast, the protagonist of "Eight Bites" comes from a family in which elective cosmetic surgery is the norm. The varied socio-economic positions of

Machado's women raise questions about institutional inequality and the ways in which this inequality itself has been instituted in bodies, gender, and sexuality.





**Jordan Peele**

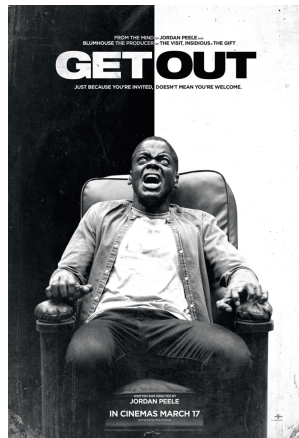
*Get Out*

**Blumhouse Productions, 2017**

**104 minutes**

**\$14.99**

**Reviewed by Emma Hetrick**



Jordan Peele's genre-defying 2017 film *Get Out* masterfully addresses the way Black Americans experience racism, both personally and systemically. A neo-slave narrative that draws elements from horror and sci-fi genres, the film satirically but effectively argues that

the United States is far from being a post-racial nation. The film's opening scene shows a young Black man (Lakeith Stanfield)—whose name the viewer later learns is Andre—walking down a street, expressing discomfort about being in a white, suburban neighborhood. The viewer begins to share Andre's paranoia when a car slows down, and the paranoia escalates to fear when the driver steps out of the car, knocks Andre out, and puts him in the trunk. From the start, Peele makes clear that at no time in this film—nor more generally, in the U.S.—are Black Americans safe. As the film unfolds, the accumulation of minor interactions between the protagonist Chris (Daniel Kaluuya) and his girlfriend Rose's (Allison Williams) family members, family friends, and family employees, causes Chris to realize that he is in the middle of an inescapable nightmare that threatens his very selfhood.

The film revolves around a trip Chris and Rose take to visit her parents, Dean and Missy Armitage (Bradley Whitford and Catherine Keener). During Chris's first night at the Armitages' home, Missy temporarily hypnotizes him, ostensibly because she caught him smoking—a habit of which she disapproves. The viewer soon realizes Missy's intentions are more sinister when her hypnosis causes Chris to become immobile and to enter the

“sunken place,” an intermediary state of being expressed onscreen as Chris's consciousness falling through space—while his physical functions, such as his ability to see and hear, remain intact. The “sunken place” can be read as an iteration of W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of “double consciousness,” which refers to how Black Americans see themselves outside of their own bodies and experience the incongruities of being both “Black” and “American.” Peele extends the concept of double consciousness by refocusing his attention back onto the body, examining how systemic racism is expressed through and inscribed upon the very medium of Black bodies. Later in the film, Chris realizes that the other Black people Chris encounters while at the Armitages', including the family's house employees—Georgiana and Walter (Betty Gabriel and Marcus Henderson)—and a much-altered Andre, are all in the sunken place, their bodies having been overtaken by white brains transplanted through surgery. When the Armitages host a party, all of the guests are keen on speaking with Chris. Chris becomes more unnerved as the partygoers remark on his appearance and photography skills. As it becomes clear that the purpose of the party is to bid on Chris's body, there is a sense that the specter of transatlantic slavery continues to haunt the U.S. present in the form of the contemporary desire for the Black body and disregard of the Black mind.

There are, however, moments of rupture in which Georgiana, Walter, and Andre are able to assume control over their bodies. In one of the most poignant scenes of the film, Chris steps away from the party and asks Georgiana if she is bothered by being around so many white people. She emphatically and repeatedly replies “no” while smiling, but her smile is forced, and a tear drops from her eye. Unlike Andre and Walter, who require intervention from Chris in order to break through from the sunken place, Georgiana is able to penetrate the sunken place on her own. This opens up questions that go unexplored in the film, including the extent to which gender plays a role in the characters' abuse at the hands of the Armitage family.

Bodies and minds are violently separated in Peele's film. Chris ultimately manages to free himself from the Armitages, escaping the power of Missy's hypnosis by stuffing his ears with the cotton of the

chair into which he's been strapped. Pointedly, it is Chris's quick thinking about how to protect his body from Missy's hypnosis that saves Chris from being possessed. This scene seems to reify the over-valuation of the mind over the body and suggests that Chris's mind is somehow safeguarded from the effects of racism.

Peele actualizes microaggressions, racism, and white supremacy in *Get Out*, and in the process forces the white viewer to confront the horrific reality of millions of Americans. Yet, Chris's escape at the end of the film, and the moments of surfacing by the real "selves" of Georgiana, Andre, and Walter, suggest that the sunken place is not a permanent state of being. Agency exists within and can be transmitted through community-oriented interaction.



**Therí Alyce Pickens**  
*Black Madness :: Mad Blackness*  
**Duke University Press, 2019**  
**176 pages**  
**\$23.95**

**Reviewed by Morgan Hamill**

As a field, disability studies often approaches questions of disability from a position of assumed whiteness, rarely (if ever) considering race as integral to disability discourse. Meanwhile, Black studies has focused on issues of embodiment and physical disability, but in large part fails to



engage questions of cognitive disability. In *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness*, Therí Alyce Pickens grapples with these critical gaps. She takes her cue from scholar and activist Christopher Bell, who in much of his work pushed for intersectional approaches to Black studies and disability studies. Pickens builds on her previous book, *New Body Politics: Narrating Arab and Black Identity in the Contemporary United States* (2014), which approaches Black experience from a disability-studies perspective. She also extends Rosemarie Garland Thomson's foundational work by incorporating Blackness into Thomson's approach to physical disability. Pickens tells us that "relationships between Blackness and madness (and race and disability more generally) are constituted within the fissures, breaks, and gaps in critical and literary texts," and that this is especially evident in speculative fiction. Pickens wants readers to be "wary of projects that locate resistance on Black mad bodies solely in service of white bodies," especially where this happens in fiction, long a site of erasure for Blackness and Black bodies.

*Black Madness :: Mad Blackness* advocates intersectionality by mobilizing works of fiction as theoretical sources alongside traditional academic criticism and other historical works. Throughout her work, Pickens adroitly maneuvers through

these critical and creative spaces, often entangling the two. *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness* productively places such works in overlapping conversations that “refer back to each other, revise, augment, and, sometimes [. . .] contradict” each other. One such conversation examines the concept of mutual constitution in intersectional criticism. Pickens acknowledges that proponents of mutual constitution tend to define Blackness and disability as enmeshed and, in many ways, concurrent. In Pickens’s view, mutual constitution thus limits critics to two reading strategies: “[h]istoricizing projects assume linear progressive narratives in which Blacks and whites occupy the same temporal place; recuperative projects require Black disabled bodies to bear up under the weight of white redemption.” Because these divergent readings leave little room for critical alternatives, Pickens brings in a work of fiction, Octavia E. Butler’s *Fledgling* (2005), to stage a creative alternative. Pickens shows that in *Fledgling* the “presence of Black madness allows for the partial unmaking of the logics that govern the linear progressive idea of time and space. Blackness and madness discomfort and confuse, particularly in intimate spaces where their cleaving is not possible,” thereby challenging the existing methods of using mutual constitution as a reading strategy. To Pickens, novelists, particularly writers of Black speculative fiction, are as visionary as any literary critic; speculative fiction presents a creative and imaginative genre that not only quite literally disrupts time and space, but also questions a number of white, ableist, and Western assumptions.

Nalo Hopkinson’s *Midnight Robber* (2000) drives Pickens’s second conversation. Here, Pickens turns away from examples of Black madness and toward examples of mad Blackness. For Pickens, the word ‘mad’ modifies the word ‘Black’ in several ways: it intensifies Blackness, implies insanity and anger, evokes excess, and undoes linearity. Throughout Hopkinson’s text, Pickens links silence, speech, and sanity with madness. She places particular emphasis on Hopkinson’s rejection of simple binaries. Pickens shows both how Hopkinson complicates typical binaries to portray complex constellations of relationships and how, further, Hopkinson directly engages mad Blackness in two key ways. First, Hopkinson opens the possibility of reading in narrative folds and writing between narrative silences. For example, Hopkinson uses one

protagonist’s productive silence to challenge the idea that cognitive disability is neither intelligent nor intelligible. In this example, the protagonist’s worth isn’t predicated on her ability to generate speech, and her silence “forces an expansion of how we interact with language” and questions ableist assumptions. Second, Hopkinson complicates the relationships between animacy, whiteness, Blackness, and humanity. Using Hopkinson’s work, Pickens shows that ableism “requires a strict line between animals and humans” and that “real humanity requires shunning a connection to animals.” According to Pickens, artificial intelligence and animal-like figures in *Midnight Robber* challenge notions of humanity by unmaking the “belief in the complete uniqueness of human creative autonomy.”

In her third conversation, Pickens engages with Tananarive Due’s *African Immortals* series (1997–2011). Here, Pickens notes that ‘human’ is an exclusive, rather than inclusive, category, in which the default human is the ableist white cis-het male. Other categories, such as Blackness, are—by default—thus excluded from qualifying as human and are therefore erased from time and space. As such, Pickens argues that “the ideology of ability shuttles us away from the capaciousness of the category human.” As in Hopkinson’s *Midnight Robber*, one might read or write in the gaps, the silences, and the folds—and this is exactly what Due does. Pickens shows that Due uses such narrative gaps to expand, break down, and modify the category of human, ultimately abandoning the concept of the human altogether. Due accomplishes this in part by including “disability, particularly madness, as part of the structure of the text,” as when Due writes about desiring Blackness and seeking disabled Black communities. Perhaps most significantly for Pickens, Due’s novel questions healthcare, care work, and disability in the Black community by examining “what gets sacrificed in the desire for wellness and longevity,” especially when ability is prized at any cost.

By engaging creative works as theoretical sources, Pickens finds a new language for critics and critical discourse in both disability studies and Black studies. For Pickens, madness resists logics of racism and ableism through what Pickens calls madness’s “lexical range.” The simultaneously conflicting and overlapping definitions and

connotations of madness present a unique possibility, a choice “to rest in the vagueness and insult madness brings” while simultaneously critiquing and “resisting an uncritical celebration of madness as experience or as metaphor.” Madness unsettles a social model of disability that privileges mental ability and “dismisses madness as a viable subject position,” erasing Black agency in the process. Mad Blackness recovers the deliberate vagueries of this lost agency; it “refuses linear temporality, invaginates space, deposes ocularity for sonic knowledge, embraces silence, pursues control, and relinquishes power, all at the same time.” For Pickens, mad Blackness is a threshold of intersectionality and a new beginning. In the end, Pickens herself eschews the linearity and silence of conclusion with a final image: a second cover page, waiting to be opened.



**Kara Keeling**

*Queer Times, Black Futures*

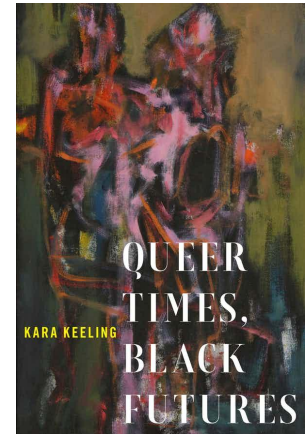
New York University Press, 2019

257 pages

\$30.00

**Reviewed by Shukri Bana**

In the midst of a poem about a dream that troubles time and space, Bartleby the Scrivener interjects: “I would prefer not to.” So characterizes Kara Keeling’s *Queer Times, Black Futures*, a text which takes seriously the proposition that another world is possible through an imaginative



exploration of works and worlds that imagine and embody Black queer freedom. Her interest in Bartleby, the fictional scrivener in Herman Melville’s short story “Bartleby the Scribe,” is best summarized in the first Interregnum, the first of three interruptions of her text, where she writes “Bartleby’s queer formula refuses to reproduce what is.” In this vein, Keeling establishes *Queer Times, Black Futures* as a text that both refuses the constraints of space and time in what constitutes a Black queer existence.

Keeling begins with a key figure in Afrofuturism, Sun Ra, and his film *Space Is the Place* (1974). Chapter One opens with an epigraph from Karl Marx’s *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (via Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*) on the impossible possibility that the social revolution must draw its poetry from the future and not the past. To get to the future, she uses the exploration of Afrofuturism as articulated by Sun Ra to investigate how conceptualizations of race and non-normative expressions of gender and sexuality make obvious the organization of space and time. This chapter offers one of the first articulations of how Keeling invokes Black futures: “Here and now. In these Black futures.” She continues this investigation of what poetry of the future might offer our times in Chapter Two, “Yet Still: Queer Temporality, Black

Political Possibilities, and Poetry from the Future (of Speculative Pasts),” where she analyzes Black queer speculative films. Here, she explores *The Watermelon Woman* (1996), *Looking for Langston* (1989), *Brother to Brother* (2004), and *The Aggressives* (2005). Keeling focuses her analysis on *The Aggressives*, an expose style film following the lives of people who identify as female, and rather than “lesbian,” “butch” or “gay woman,” identify with the term “aggressives.” Keeling here is interested in the trajectory of one particular character, “M—,” and critically engages with her own interest as implicated in an “uneven calculus of visibility distribution,” or, the inequalities present in production of academic and creative works and the potential benefits and harms of visibility for the subject. From these films, Keeling implores a relationship to the past (looking for) must also be concerned with liberation (looking after).

After an interlude from Bartleby, Chapter Three begins with an epigraph from John Akomfrah’s “Digitopia and the Spectres of Diaspora,” where Akomfrah argues that those born in his era (around the 1960s) understand “the politics of identity and race as a digital signal.” In this chapter, Keeling most clearly articulates the relationship between Cinema and Media Studies, Black Studies, and Queer Studies. She does this through an investigation of what Akomfrah terms the “digitopia,” a film history which anticipates today’s digital media technologies without being fulfilled by them. She raises issues about the centrality of technology to Black existence, arguing it is fruitful to engage with these technologies as part of the transformation of the cinematic rather than a break. This chapter heavily invokes Heidegger’s *technē* as a means of “bringing forth.” *Technē*, defined here, builds from Heidegger’s definition of *poēsis*, or the arts, as a means of *technē*, or moving forward. *Technē* serves as the framework for understanding Akomfrah’s *The Last Angel of History*, which described Blues music as a “Black secret technology.” She argues that within this exploration of Black existence in the digital regime, there is a new Afrofuturist formulation of “being” articulated.

Chapter Four explores Grace Jones’s “Corporate Cannibal” through the framework of repetition in economic discourse from James A. Snead’s “Repetition as a Figure in Black Culture.” Keeling expands the work of Fatima El-Tayeb and Nassim

Nicholas Taleb to operationalize how she uses Blackness to argue that Blackness as technology is African and science fiction. In a text concerned with Black futures, Keeling’s theoretical loyalties are not necessarily Afrofuturism, but rather, a hybrid of scholars, both contemporary and traditional philosophers and theorists, including Saidiya Hartman for her investigation of what figures are considered knowable; Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari for heuristics of formulations of “queer” and “Black;” and Martin Heidegger on *technē* and *poēsis*.

Keeling analyzes Black artists and their work to explore the relationship between ethics, futures, temporalities, and Blackness. As a book explicitly about American Black works, Keeling addresses the implications of this work in a diasporic context: the only African authors are in the concluding Chapter Five, where she analyzes the work of Wanuri Kahuri’s *Pumzi* (2009) and Nnedi Okorafor’s *Who Fears Death* (2010). This leaves space for a larger investigation on the resonances of her work in a non-Western, Afrofuturist cosmology, and perhaps of the potential for diasporic connection with regards to functions of time and space as processes of violence, alienation, and potential sites of radical imaginings of time. With theoretical frameworks ranging across discipline and analysis of material through the framework of film studies, Keeling writes a book for scholars exploring similar questions of representations and time. There are various parts of this text readers might find useful: Keeling’s method of conducting film analysis, her exploration of Bartleby in the context of Black queer futures, and how she expands the theoretical contributions of other scholars. Readers unfamiliar with the guiding philosophical frameworks might find themselves lost in this rich text, though Keeling will lead readers expertly through her explorations.





**Mark Rifkin**

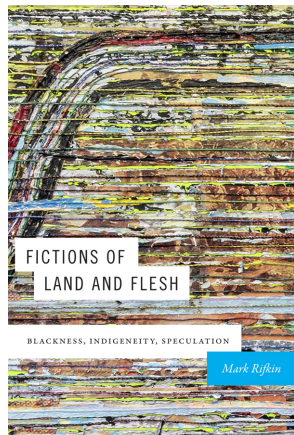
*Fictions of Land and Flesh: Blackness, Indigeneity, Speculation*

**Duke University Press, 2019**

**336 pages**

**\$27.95**

**Reviewed by Rhya Moffitt Brooke**



True solidarity between contemporary political groups can be a challenging feat to achieve. In *Fictions of Land and Flesh: Blackness, Indigeneity, Speculation*, Mark Rifkin puts forth an investigation of how to deepen solidarity between Black and Indigenous groups. He uncovers areas where solidarity between the two can be especially difficult, and he argues that embracing and remembering the differences between the struggles of Black Americans and Indigenous communities can be a means of deepening connections between them. Intervening in Black studies and Indigenous studies while keeping his argument grounded in political activism, Rifkin turns to speculative fiction by Black and Indigenous writers to further explore the potential tensions of Black and Indigenous activists. Ultimately, Rifkin argues that Black and Indigenous projects should be politically linked but distinct. He seeks to avoid the risk of conflating the unique struggles of both groups by distilling the “political imaginaries as that of flesh and of land, a contrast between a focus on the violence of dehumanization through fungibility [Black communities] and occupation through domestication [Indigenous communities].”

In his first chapter, “On the Impasse,” Rifkin outlines the ways he thinks through Blackness and Indigeneity. He draws on Sylvia Wynter in thinking about Blackness, and he considers Glen Coulthard to conceptualize the needs of Indigenous communities. He argues that a common strategy for thinking about the relations between Indigeneity and Blackness is to position settler

colonialism and enslavement within a single system, since both resulted in “uneven distributions of power, resources, and life chances.” Rifkin posits this as a pitfall, because it flattens the differences between the two systems and elides the unique impacts they have on Black and Indigenous communities. He is careful, therefore, to think of Blackness and Indigeneity as separate and with distinct needs. Édouard Glissant’s foundational concepts of relation and opacity become particularly influential in this regard, enabling a theorization of solidarity that also embraces difference. Rifkin highlights the violence of the settler and the need for Indigenous sovereignty as necessary elements of Indigenous solidarity that tend to be effaced in interethnic solidarity movements. He finally turns to speculation, arguing for the value of speculative fiction as a genre. Here, he argues, “Futurist narratives allow us to see divergent ways of conceiving and perceiving, variable frames of reference through which to understand how things work in the world. Seeing them as framings—as *possible* ways of describing what was, is, and could be—allows for the potential for there to be multiple modes of understanding that all may be true while also being nonidentical.”

In Rifkin’s second chapter, “Fungible Becoming,” he considers racial embodiments as “a reduction to flesh.” Rifkin analyzes how Black people are dehumanized in terms that leave them reduced to their potential—“not simply objects for ownership and sale as chattel but as the vehicle for manifesting economies, geographies, and modes of personhood for whom others will serve as the subject.” In response, Rifkin wonders about the potential for both Black and Indigenous communities to reject the categorization of the human altogether. Ultimately, through analysis of Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis* trilogy (1987, 1988, 1989) and short stories by Native futurist writers Drew Hayden Taylor and Mari Kurisato, Rifkin concludes that while eschewing a claim to personhood has been theorized for Black communities, that same process for Indigenous communities would also entail a simultaneous rejection of “place-based peoplehood,” thus alienating possibilities for “engagement with Indigenous sovereignties.”

In his third and fourth chapters, Rifkin considers two types of flight as sites of resistance. In “Carceral Space and Fugitive Motion,” Rifkin



examines mass incarceration of Black communities, and with it, the increased surveillance of Black neighborhoods. He argues that captivity in relation to flight is a useful tool for Black communities, but he also addresses the tensions around flight and collective emplacement when considering the importance of land for Indigenous communities. Rifkin reads Walter Mosley's *Futureland: Nine Stories for an Imminent World* (2001) and *The Wave* (2006) and Daniel Wilson's *Robocalypse* (2011) to trouble tensions between collective placemaking, territoriality, and fugitivity. He furthermore turns to a consideration of flight and collective emplacement together through "The Maroon Matrix." Maroonage has served as a hallmark of resistance to slavery, whereby groups of enslaved populations literally fled plantations and established their own communities; it has also been thought of as a "process of *indigenization*." Rifkin features Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* (2000), Andrea Hairston's *Mindscape* (2006), Melissa Tantaquidgeon Zobel's *Oracles* (2004), and Stephen Graham Jones's *The Bird is Gone: A Manifesto* (2003) to "highlight the difficulty of conceptualizing how Black projects of placemaking and of Native self-determination might articulate with each other in ways neither superintended by the state nor predicated on an indigenizing politics of analogy."

While Rifkin draws on theory and fiction to support his claims, his project is ultimately one of praxis. Rifkin bookends his provocation with contemporary social justice movements such as Black Lives Matter and #NoDAPL, in protest of the Dakota Access Pipeline, as two locations for Black and Indigenous solidarity. He considers solidarity between these groups particularly urgent because of the various oppressions that impact them both—thinking, for example, of environmental racism and access to clean water in Flint and #NoDAPL. In his coda, Rifkin also acknowledges the work already done in solidarity to unite the movements. He specifically praises Black Lives Matter for their use of land acknowledgements that thank Indigenous populations for "hosting" them. Considerations like these are what is at stake in his argument, rooting it in political activism of today.

Rifkin's book is a salient reminder of the challenges of interethnic solidarity and the pitfalls to which well-intentioned activists and scholars might

succumb in attempts to make connections between groups. Thus, Rifkin's deep dive into the specific dangers of conflating Black and Indigenous struggles is both timely and essential. Additionally, Rifkin's suggestions for considering Black and Indigenous struggles as distinct whilst encountering and engaging one another provides a framework for contemporary political activists in both groups. Rifkin's turn to speculative fiction is an interesting choice in that it elevates the novel as a tool for theorization and legitimizes the political power fiction can have. It is essential, however, to consider its limits and the concessions that must be made when considering the novel as a genre for political action. What are the practical methods by which political activists might engage with it? While Rifkin suggests that certain novels can provide new ways to think through contemporary issues, further theorization might consider a process of turning such thought into political action that is accessible to activists situated in more public work. Rifkin has started an important conversation around the ways Indigenous and Black solidarity might be thought of together. His work is essential for those interested in engaging interethnic solidarity without erasing the differences between the communities for whom they advocate.



**Ruha Benjamin**

*Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*

**Polity, 2019**

**172 pages**

**\$17.99**

**Reviewed by Hannah Robbins Hopkins**

Borne out in headlines and in laboratories, much of our contemporary data practice is concerned with what we, or rather computers, can see. We train machines to erase distance and scale: combing through massive datasets for trends, searching through thousands of pages for the mention of a single word, making meaning from the glimpse of a stranger's face in a faraway place. Our lives are increasingly shaped by Big Data, high volumes of varied information moving at breakneck velocity. Corporations and governments deploy Big Data to tune and refine purchasing decisions, state violence, social associations, job prospects, and our most infinitesimal tastes. In pursuit of creating machines that can see straight ahead to—and perhaps through—our encoded present and future selves, we use Big Data to seek out what Donna Haraway calls the god trick, the illusion of omniscience without the burden of a subject position. Our desire for a determinist objectivity erases the very real ramifications of that invisibility, particularly when discriminatory systems of domination put lives on the line. In *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*, Ruha Benjamin argues that “invisibility, with regard to Whiteness, offers immunity.” Benjamin's masterful work in *Race Against Technology* resists a weaponized white invisibility, calling instead for intentional, equitable “socially just imaginaries” in the face of technological production that would instead fight for quick, cheap hegemony.

As Benjamin shows, the very algorithms that have everything to do with our daily lives are often those



that are black-boxed, their inner workings invisible from view in order to mask their operations. This invisibility is redoubled in Benjamin's “anti-Black box [which] links the race-neutral technologies that encode inequity to the race-neutral laws and policies that serve as powerful tools for White supremacy.” Like Haraway, Benjamin foregrounds that technological seamlessness and algorithmically rendered objectivity work together to uphold the same racism that some algorithms pretend to dismantle as tools for white supremacy. For Benjamin, race is a “set of technologies that generate patterns of social relations, and these become Black-boxed as natural, inevitable, automatic.” Here, Benjamin brings forward the ‘New Jim Code’ as a rubric for the “new technologies that reflect and reproduce existing inequities but that are promoted and perceived as more objective or progressive than the discriminatory systems of a previous era.” Under the New Jim Code, “the desire for objectivity, efficiency, profitability, and progress fuels the pursuit for technical fixes across many different social arenas.” New Jim Code fixes interlock with existing infrastructure and yield a host of “discriminatory designs—some that explicitly work to amplify hierarchies, many that ignore and thus replicate social divisions, and a number that aim to fix racial bias but end up doing the opposite.” Out of Benjamin's race critical code studies, *Race After Technology* sets forward four dimensions of the New Jim Code: engineered inequity, default discrimination, coded exposure, and technological benevolence. In delineating these facets of the New Jim Code, Benjamin is quick to point out that design does not necessarily contain within itself the best or only way forward. In the same tradition that encourages us to interrogate what the black box conceals, Benjamin asks, “In the breathless race for newer, faster, better technology, what ways of thinking, being, and organizing social life are potentially snuffed out?”

The four dimensions of the New Jim Code structure each of the book's four sections. In each, Benjamin illustrates several instantiations of the New Jim Code's effects, examining each through the framework of race critical code studies. In the first section, “Engineered Inequity: Are Robots Racist?” Benjamin argues that “robots exemplify how race is a form of technology itself.” Whether marketed for sex, policing, military activity, or

household chores, robots are emblematic of “social bias embedded in technical artifacts, the allure of objectivity without public accountability.” As Benjamin points out, this allure is captured and concealed in part through the machine learning processes that undergird robots’ capacity to perform tasks: if the models on which machines are trained are racist, those proclivities are only amplified in the robots’ learning. Through the interweaving of mid twentieth-century advertisements for then-futuristic domestic robotics and the relationship of the carceral state to both robotics and Black bodies, Benjamin raises the notion that those “who believe in a more egalitarian notion of power, of collective empowerment without domination” might consider how their “relation to robots offers a mirror for thinking through and against race as technology.” In this section, Benjamin deploys cases from government and science fiction to approach digitally-managed social credit systems as regimes of robotic or automated control. She insists that “when bias and inequity come to light, “lack of intention” to harm is not a viable alibi.”

In the second section, “Default Discrimination: Is the Glitch Systemic?” Benjamin “probes the relationship between glitch and design, which we might be tempted to associate with competing conceptions of racism” by way of several instances in which technologies erase or elide groups of people. Rather than take glitches as isolated mistakes, Benjamin asks what valuable insight we can gain from the system’s pain points and misfires. Returning to practices of prediction, Benjamin takes up predictive policing and recidivism calculations as one site of the New Jim Code whereby Black bodies are disproportionately algorithmically forgotten. In a world so dominated by algorithmic decision-making, Benjamin cautions that “the danger with New Jim Code predictions is the way in which self-fulfilling prophecies enact what they predict, giving the allure of accuracy.” This accuracy is over relied-upon, particularly when glitches can be easily explained away. Benjamin goes on in this section to argue that “whereas racist glitches are often understood as transient, as signals they can draw our attention to discriminatory design as a durable feature of the social landscape since this nation’s founding.” Sight returns to the fore in the fourth section, “Coded Exposure: Is Visibility a Trap?” in which Benjamin interrogates

“who is seen and under what terms” in the era of the New Jim Code, particularly when white bodies’ status as a default means that their non-white counterparts are treated as either deviant or invisible altogether. In this section, Benjamin also elucidates the relationship between eugenics and contemporary robotics and machine learning paradigms, arguing that “racial representations engineered through algorithmic codes should be understood as part of a much longer visual archive.”

Part of Benjamin’s innovation in *Race After Technology* has to do with its implementation: it is a toolkit, a field guide, and perhaps an unanticipated anti-design manual in the fourth section, “Technological Benevolence: Do Fixes Fix Us?” Benjamin cites that the “conceptual toolkit we build around a race critical code studies will be useful [. . .] for analyzing a wide range of phenomena [. . .] through which Whiteness becomes the default setting for tech development.” Benjamin’s toolkit is an expressly abolitionist project, unfettered by zeitgeisty phraseology around engineering liberation. She writes that a liberatory method ground in and identified by its linkage to the “ethos of design” precludes one from “[breathing] in ways that might be useful.” Indeed, Benjamin’s critique of “discriminatory design” approaches the issue from both ends: just as she exposes the discrimination inherent in contemporary digital objects, she also questions our relations to and with design. She poses the question that perhaps, rather than “liberatory designs,” we might instead “demand [. . .] just plain old liberation.” At the start of her toolkit, Benjamin asks: “Are you ready?” If the only way to practice abolitionist imaginations in the face of racist designs is to act in solidarity with one another, creating new kinships and communities, then Benjamin’s early question is in fact our call.



# INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE AFTERMATH OF COLONIALISM

**Edited by Jeremy Goheen and  
Claudio Eduardo Oliveira**

In 1844, a British engineer responded to a report on the condition of slave ships with a troubling recommendation. A portable ventilator, he suggested, “might prove useful in removing the atmosphere before the sailors enter below deck, when it is in extreme condition, and also when they may have to be conveyed for considerable distance.” Ventilation here is imagined as an infrastructural technology that could help ensure the smooth passage of slaves across the Atlantic. This recommendation exposes the degree to which the history of infrastructure was informed by imperialism, as well as how infrastructural technologies themselves shaped the colonial project. Infrastructure has no doubt continued to haunt disenfranchised communities, but if Bruce Robbins is right in saying that the project of making infrastructure visible is a “materialist version of the politics of human rights,” then how might we mobilize it in the service of decolonization? Questions like this have been taken up in “critical infrastructure studies,” an emerging interdisciplinary field that, according to Alan Liu, aims to think “about the built, repaired, and lived things of the world—how we make them, and how they make us.” The following reviews in this special section reflect on recent scholarly texts that engage questions of infrastructure in the aftermaths of colonialism.

This special collection opens with Hayley Braithwaite’s review of Dominic Davie’s *Imperial Infrastructure and Spatial Resistance in Colonial Literature, 1880-1930*, which invites us to consider the value of what Davies calls “infrastructural reading” can have in thinking through histories of imperialism and colonialism. In this review, we learn that as both an object of study and methodological approach, infrastructure, for Davies, enables us to locate instances in even the most overtly colonial texts of “spatial resistance,” challenging assumptions that colonial subjects are always already subjected to colonial rule. Davies’s

method of infrastructural reading is further explored in Tristan Hanson’s review of *Urban Comics: Infrastructure and the Global City in Contemporary Graphic Narratives*. Here, Hanson reflects on Davies’s suggestion that one particular genre—contemporary graphic narratives—has opened up avenues for learning how to “participate in infrastructural development and intervene in unequal material realities.” In her review of Maite Zubiaurre’s *Talking Trash: Cultural Uses of Waste*, Zoe Bursztajn-illingworth speaks to the way in which thinking infrastructurally can change the way we analyze trash.

The subsequent reviews attend to anthropological and historical works that have placed infrastructure at the center of their studies. Molly Porter walks us through how Nikhil Anand’s anthropological work *Hydraulic City: Water and the Infrastructures of Citizenship in Mumbai* uses infrastructure as a conceptual framework that exposes the “tenuous structures of citizenship and belonging in the physical and political infrastructures of postcolonial Mumbai.” Monica Moshensi’s review explores how Katayoun Shafiee’s infrastructural approach in *Machineries of Oil: An Infrastructural History of BP in Iran* allows for a shift from cultural histories of oil extraction that typically focus on human actors toward a history that underlines the way in which oil companies like BP gained control over the middle east by politicizing the sociotechnical language of industry. If Moshensi’s review investigates an infrastructural approach that moves away from cultural histories, Diana Heredia-López’s review of Christina Bueno’s work *The Pursuit of Ruins: Archaeology, History, and the Making of Modern Mexico* reflects on how an analysis of not just material but cultural infrastructures can enrich our understanding of how Mexican elites in the early 20th century marshalled ancient ruins in the service of creating a modern national identity.

Ultimately, the six reviews in this special section go to show that critical infrastructure studies afford scholars from a range of disciplines a framework for making sense of material realities in the aftermath of colonialism. The scholarly works reviewed here speak to how studies of infrastructure can help us locate where and how colonialism persists in material structures and, at the same time, offer strategies for resistance.

**Dominic Davies**

*Imperial Infrastructure and Spatial Resistance in Colonial Literature, 1880-1930*

**Peter Lang Ltd, 2017**

**298 pages**

**\$93.95**

**Reviewed by Hayley Braithwaite**

Offering a materialist critique of colonial fiction written in the latter years of British imperial rule, Dominic Davies's ambitious text tracks the depiction of infrastructural developments in literary works set in Southern Africa and the Indian Subcontinent.

Centering on the years 1880-1930, *Imperial Infrastructure* tackles a period of immense transformation. Across this half-century, the Empire's infrastructural networks (railway, shipping lines, telegraph wires, roads, bridges) expanded rapidly as Britain attempted to create a series of global trade connections. By engaging with fiction set against this backdrop of vast development, Davies aims to improve scholarly understanding of the colonial landscape.

Highly engaged with theory, *Imperial Infrastructure* draws on a number of thinkers from a number of disciplines (including, but not limited to, Edward Said, J. A. Hobson, Edward Soja, Karl Marx, Rosa Luxemburg). No one theorist is more heavily represented within this text, however, than Immanuel Wallerstein. Wallerstein's "world-system" theory forms the foundation for much, if not all, of Davies's analysis. A large portion of the text's introduction is, as such, given over to unpacking the many complexities and nuances of Wallerstein's theoretical apparatus.

Whilst his own thesis is, at times, lost amidst the crowd of theoretical voices, Davies does make space within the introduction to outline and coin the text's primary critical methodology: "infrastructural reading." Building on the work of

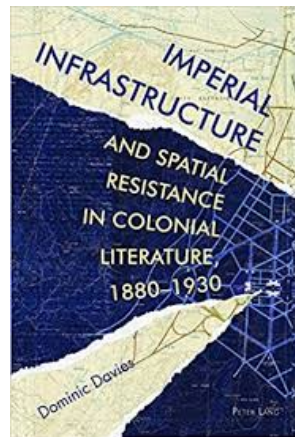
world-system theorists, Davies identifies the complex spatiality of the colonial nation. He asserts that infrastructure demarcates the uneven development of the world-system; underdeveloped towns, villages, and neighborhoods find themselves divided, and visible, as the railway charts a path across the globe. Analyzing the depiction of infrastructural systems within colonial writings, of necessity, reveals the inherently exploitative nature of imperial expansion regardless of the literary work's own (often pro-imperial) agenda. To use Davies's own terms, infrastructural reading has the power to locate pockets of anti-imperial "spatial resistance."

Despite Davies's theoretical approach, this work does not suffer from lack of close textual engagement. "Infrastructural reading," this book reveals, necessitates a kind of micro-analysis. Davies's aim is not to perpetuate or reassert the blatant pro-Imperial ideologies of these novels and short stories, but rather to uncover hidden, silenced, or misinterpreted moments of anti-imperial resistance—work that must be done at the level of close textual analysis. Colonial literature, he writes, "gives voice to more than it realises."

*Imperial Infrastructure* is organized into four chapters, each of which aims to map what Davies determines to be the period's four most "dominant" ideological paradigms: 'humanitarianism,' 'segregation,' 'frontiers,' and 'nationalism.' Drawing on geo-critical methodologies (principally the work of Franco Moretti), Davies's choice of primary material is, for the most part, non-canonical. Across his four chapters, Davies focuses on works by Flora Annie Steel, Olive Schreiner, H. Rider Haggard, John Buchan, E.M. Forster, Edmund Candler, and Edward Thompson.

Davies situates himself in opposition to a post-Said tendency to avoid critical engagement with colonial literature because of the racial, cultural, and political hierarchies such work is structured by. Davies's choice of texts is born of a belief that to leave such works unread is itself dangerous; by not engaging with colonial literature we risk losing sight of the ideological complexities of the imperial world-system.

Whilst the inclusion of female authors does expand the scope of voices represented within this study,



one cannot help but ask how the work of native authors might interact with Davies's critical apparatus. This is not so much a criticism of the work (which successfully tackles multiple complex theoretical notions and an ambitious number of primary works) but is rather an example of one of the many potential avenues of study infrastructural reading illuminates.

*Imperial Infrastructure* begins its analysis in the Indian sub-continent through a selection of Steel's short stories. Taking his reader on a four-step journey, Davies establishes firstly that Steel's (and the Raj's) humanitarian ideology is used to justify infrastructural development, secondly that infrastructural development is uneven, and thirdly that uneven development leads to socio-economic violence. These strands of argument are pulled together in the chapter's conclusion as, completing the fourth step, Davies asserts that socio-economic violence is produced by humanitarianism and is, thus, implicit within depictions of imperial benevolence. Textual engagement in this chapter is particularly noteworthy. Whilst the more impressive moments of analysis are reserved for later chapters, Davies's engagement with a series of evocative textual vignettes, such as the story of the starving Gopāl Das from Steel's 1903 *Surābhi, A Famine Tale*, draw his arguments into sharp relief.

Turning to the work of H. Rider Haggard, Olive Schreiner, and William Plomer in his second chapter, Davies draws parallels between the material infrastructure *in* colonial literature and the textual infrastructure *of* colonial literature. This is perhaps best exemplified through Davies's discussion of Plomer's *Ula Masondo* (1927). Set, as all of the texts discussed in this chapter are, in Southern Africa, Plomer's work subverts the conventions of the imperial romance genre. Rather than detail the journey of a white imperialist from South to North, Plomer's adventuring protagonist is a black African who moves from the undeveloped North to a Southern industrial center. Explicitly replacing the imperial romance's linear journey on an empty road with a voyage across a complex network of trains, trams, cars, and bicycles, and its natural dangers with the barracks, compounds, and mines of Johannesburg, Plomer draws attention to the infrastructural developments and socio-economic realities of colonial capitalism.

Moving his focus from core to periphery, Chapter Three is interested in the frontier. Building on the well-established theoretical associations between the frontier, imperialism, and liminality, Davies coins the term "frontier consciousness." In the work of Buchan, the frontier is figured both as an antidote to the urban center's socio-economic issues and as unsafe because it lacks infrastructure. The frontier narrative is read as a "cultural fix" that attempts, unsuccessfully, to resolve the crisis of uneven infrastructural development. This chapter's analysis of Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915), specifically Davies's reading of London's own infrastructure and his identification of a frontier consciousness in Scotland, is noteworthy. In moving his analysis out of the colony, Davies provides a glimpse of the potential applications of infrastructural reading outside of colonial and post-colonial scholarship.

In the book's final chapter, Davies explores the impact of India's imminent independence on pre-partition writings. Diverging from what Davies's analysis has thus far revealed, in the wake of Indian Independence, spatial resistance in the works of Forster, Candler, and Thompson is found not in the subtext but on the surface. Each of these texts, Davies asserts, attempts to undermine the legitimacy of Indian nationalism whilst simultaneously imagining that the infrastructural networks established by the Empire will continue after British rule has ended.

Despite its 1880-1930 focus, Davies's book demonstrates an impressive awareness of the impact imperial infrastructural development (and underdevelopment) continues to have in post-colonial nations. The decision to center his conclusion on reading the present infrastructurally effectively asserts the book's relevance both within and without the academy. Given its focus, Davies's text will be of particular value to those interested in literary depictions of space and infrastructure, and those working on British imperial literature. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that scholars working outside of *Imperial Infrastructure's* remit will find no value in this work. Davies's book is not only theoretically illuminating and contextually sensitive but provides critics with the tools to locate resistance within cultural productions from a range of colonial, post-colonial, oppressive, and exploitative geo-historical



contexts. The kind of work that is, as Davies succinctly affirms, “of ever-increasing urgency in the contemporary world.”

**Dominic Davies**

*Urban Comics: Infrastructure and the Global City in Contemporary Graphic Narratives*

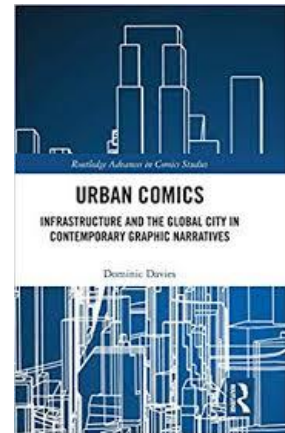
**Routledge, 2019**

**273 pages**

**\$155 (hardcover)**

**Reviewed by Tristan Hanson**

Dominic Davies’s *Urban Comics: Infrastructure and the Global City in Contemporary Graphic Narratives* seeks, quite ambitiously, to answer some crucial questions for comics studies scholars, particularly those interested in urban infrastructure and resistant social movements. What



might comics have to say about urban infrastructures specifically in the global south? How do comics represent urban infrastructures? How might comics be particularly well-equipped to analyze and critique urban infrastructure? Can we think of comics themselves as infrastructure—as opposed to “mere” representations—and where might that take us in a fight against neoliberal urban development? To what extent are comics viable activist tools allowing marginalized communities to exercise their Lefebvrian “right to the city”? To varying degrees all of these questions are answered in this heavily researched and energetically political piece of urban theory/comics analysis.

*Urban Comics* takes readers all over the global south in an effort to demonstrate how comics cultures are (re)inventing vital practices for more just urban development. Each chapter revolves around a specific city—Cairo, Cape Town, New Orleans, Delhi, and Beirut—where alternative comics—sometimes called “comix”—have explicitly challenged neoliberal narratives of progress with re-imagined infrastructural renderings of these cities. In my view, Davies’s critique has four main threads that can be traced through all of the chapters: 1) that comics are particularly suited to navigating publics, 2) that comics lend themselves to collaborative effort, 3) that comics have the capacity to critique urban infrastructure by playing



with their own internal forms or infrastructures, and 4) that comics can be a vital activist enterprise. These threads circulate, reiterate, and commingle in each of the chapters to form a sense of comics as a particularly potent medium for social change.

Chapter One shows how comics artists in Cairo have revised comics infrastructures in their graphic narratives to reorient looking, giving readers a view from the street in opposition to top-down neoliberal visions of infrastructural development. It focuses most of its analysis on the comics *Metro* by Magdy El Shafee and *Qahera, the Webcomic, Not the City* by Deena Mohamed. What the reader comes to see through this analysis is how Egyptian comics have sought to resist “telescopic urbanisms,” those visions of cities that see from above and tend to obscure street realities of poverty, discrimination, and sexual violence in favor of “segregationist” infrastructures of urban renewal. These artists position readers at the bottom allowing them to see *from* the street and *see* the street, and their comics “rebuild through its infrastructural form a renewed, radically re-visioned public city.” Such revisionings are material and circulate through revolutionary channels—the 2012 Tahrir protests being a locus of activity for many of the creators Davies discusses—potentially reshaping material realities. What Davies explores here is how attention to infrastructure opens up the between of visibility, positionality, and verticality, and how this opening can make way for a revolutionary consciousness.

If Cairo’s explosive protests form the backdrop for a meditation on visibility, Cape Town’s push for the status of “global city,” as described in Chapter Two, brings the issue of image-making front and center. For Davies, comics artists of Cape Town have sought to lay bare “segregationist infrastructures” and the surveillance and oppression that comes with neoliberal development, through narratives of speculative utopia and eco-crisis. These narratives tend to look away from the heavily developed central part of Cape Town to the periphery—literally hiding behind a mountain in some cases—to find historically rooted communities that “deconstruct the progressive image-making of city planners.” In a sense, the comics emerging from alternative artists in Cape Town “reframe” the infrastructural image of the city by emphasizing potential pressure points such as eminent and actual water shortage, and by

historicizing from the past or into the future to dirty the sterilized infrastructures that leave behind large portions of the Cape Town population in an echo of South Africa’s apartheid past.

Where Cape Town’s government has constructed a sort of designed sterilization of its urban environments, New Orleans’s sterilization arrived much more forcefully. Chapter Three addresses how graphic artists—many from outside of the city—have responded to “disaster capitalism” and “voluntourism” following the devastation of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina. Examining a number of comics, but focusing on Josh Neufeld’s graphic narrative *A.D.: New Orleans After Deluge*, Davies argues that comics artists have deployed “volumetric views” and “scalar shifts” in perspective to fill the space of a post-Katrina New Orleans that has largely forgotten about its urban “precariat”—those mostly black citizens displaced from their homes—in its dash for renewal. Crucially, some of the comics produced about/in New Orleans have come to intervene in the material conditions of the city’s infrastructure as they circulate in the city itself. This is exemplified by the work of the New Orleans Comic and Zine (NOCAZ) festival which has supported work with a commitment to social activism and has been able to solidify a community in resistance to the “neoliberal deluge” pummeling the heart of the city.

While also focusing on the way comics are able to represent movement in/through urban space, Chapter Four examines Delhi by returning to the street that was crucial to how comics artists in Cairo were able to create space for resistance. This time, however, Davies notes how comics emerging from collective action—like those of the Pao Collective and others—have taken to “rewiring” Delhi by “going underground” and outside of the city’s typically neoliberal gated security and urban renewal infrastructure. These comics seek to decode that infrastructure through an ethic of “pedestrianism”—a concept borrowed from Michel de Certeau—that finds characters within these graphic narratives literally walking through the margins of the city to observe the everyday minutiae of Delhi. Pushing at the boundaries of “overworlds and underworlds,” these narratives make visible certain regulatory infrastructures, including those that make it dangerous for women

to even take up pedestrianism to begin with. Here artists like Sarnath Banerjee, Vishwajyoti Ghosh, and contributors to the *Drawing the Line: Indian Women Fight Back* anthology “turn the city inside out” to reveal hegemonic infrastructures that intensify discriminations and marginalizations.

As pedestrianism in Indian comics emphasizes the everyday experiences of those Delhians living at street level or below, so have graphic narratives of Beirut sought to recover everyday public interactions/spaces from a “selective post-war amnesia” emerging from the “urbicide” of the Lebanese Civil War. Many of these narratives—including those by Zeina Abirached, Lamia Zidae, and the collective, Samandal—have worked to move behind the violence of war and post-war neoliberal development to memorialize public/private spaces seemingly forgotten. Through formal experimentation, infrastructural and social resilience emerges from the everyday lives of Lebanese caught up in conflicts that segregate and marginalize them, exploding boundaries—both of representation and everyday materiality—to reconstruct a “more socially and spatially just” potential future. Comics here are, self-consciously, “comix,” alternative graphic narratives that emphasize “coexisting difference” in the form of coexisting images and texts.

Davies’s book appeals to me, as a scholar of rhetoric and an instructor of a self-designed Rhetoric of Comics course, because it has a recognizably rhetorical bent: it addresses issues of democracy, public circulation, and public participation. Each of these chapters, if read in isolation, contributes nuanced readings of graphic narratives that account for contexts and exigencies, providing “volumetric” views of the interventional practices of alternative comics cultures. Taken as a whole, the book gestures toward how comics infrastructure—its formal elasticity—can teach us how to read cities. And, at the same time, it helps us to imagine the extent to which comics might be a viable way to participate in infrastructural development and intervene in unequal material realities.



**Maite Zubiaurre**

*Talking Trash: Cultural Uses of Waste*

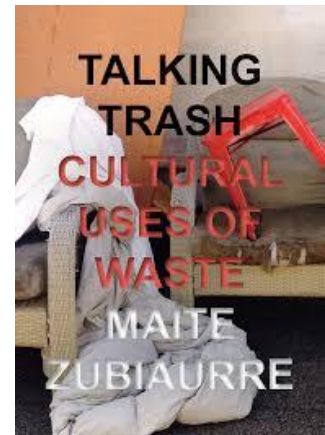
**Vanderbilt University Press, 2019**

**246 pages**

**\$35.00**

**Reviewed by Zoe Bursztajn-illingworth**

Maite Zubiaurre’s monograph *Talking Trash: The Cultural Uses of Waste* investigates the racialized and gendered aspects of litter’s representation in visual and literary sources. Zubiaurre’s objects of inquiry are eclectic, among them: the Brazilian artist Vik Muniz’s *Pictures of*



*Junk*, litter-based replicas of paintings in the Western art historical canon, the recently deceased French New Wave director Agnès Varda’s documentary on the practice of gleaning *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse* and American popular cultural sources, like the 1980s Garbage Pail Kids trading cards and the recent reality television show *Hoarders*. Examining this diverse array of sources, Zubiaurre deftly demonstrates her thesis that “Trash is alive (and rots, like we do). Trash particularly small rubbish that lingers and is reluctant to leave the city, is our mirror. At the end, it is all about scale. The monumentality of landfills captures our imagination...But, eventually, it is the small and near where we recognize ourselves.” As she contends that our sense of trash writ large ultimately atomizes into the chaos of rubbish, Zubiaurre’s approach similarly identifies nuance among her these artifacts through a comparative approach within her individual chapters.

*Talking Trash: The Cultural Uses of Waste* is divided into four chapters: (1) “Sentient Filth: The Motions and Emotions of Garbage,” (2) “Litterscapes: Topographies and Archives of Waste,” (3) “Dumpsterology: A Cultural History of the Trash Container,” and (4) “Dirty Innocence: Childhood, Gender, and Muck.” The first chapter, “Sentient Waste,” argues that trash not only moves across

space and time—“in discarded artifacts—much more than in objects we still keep present and desire, and therefore are ever-present to us—the past and also the future is more tangible and ever more forceful than now”—but also powerfully moves our emotions by “speak[ing] of age and, ultimately, of decay and bygone beauty and “usefulness” as well as of abandonment and social marginalization.” Zubiaurre situates this argument in response to her fieldwork at the Santa Monica Recycling Center, children’s literature, such as Dan Yaccarino’s picture book *Trashy Town*, but also photography of objects discarded on urban streets like Bill Keagy’s *Sad Chairs* series. Zubiaurre also considers more daring trash-based interventions into the urban landscape and how they animate trash such as Francisco de Pájaros’s street sculptures that construct anthropomorphic forms out of discarded objects on the streets of Barcelona, Sevilla, and New York. But, while Zubiaurre may praise the artist’s “strong political consciousness,” she’s also not afraid to advance a critique about the stakes of his work in a Western context:

de Pájaros’s well-intended...art engagé takes place on the streets of ‘sanitary’ cities in the Western hemisphere, where trash cans patiently wait on sidewalks, empty boxes pile neatly against trees, and Dumpsters never really overflow. This artist’s garbage is still somewhat measurable, somewhat “domestic” and “individualized.” It is thus relatively easy to humanize it, to create a soul for it and a face capable of expressing feelings, and of triggering emotional responses in others.

Similarly, in this chapter, Zubiaurre points out a gendered critique of the Californian photographer Gregg Segal’s *7 Days of Trash Series* in which he photographed people, many of them women, with seven days of their trash, by describing how “[t]he images...perfectly align with the cliché of the dirty female body so deeply ingrained in Judeo-Christian culture.”

It is in the second chapter, “Litterscapes: Topographies and Archives of Waste,” which focuses on how “litterscapes leave their imprint in urban and natural surroundings and...elicit a series

of reactions (and actions) among artists and regulators,” that Zubiaurre’s monograph is at its most politically urgent in her discussion of artwork created from the discarded belongings of migrants in the US-Mexico desert in a subsection of the chapter, “Border Trash: Archiving Immigration.” Here, Zubiaurre carefully suggests the intertwined preoccupations of “[e]nvironmentalists, xenophobes that pose as ecologists, and artists whose work is infused by ecological ethics.” By closely analyzing and comparing different art works and anthropological texts that engage with discarded belongings on the US-Mexico desert—anthropologist Jason De León’s *Undocumented Migration Project*, and an art project, *El Sueño americano* by Thomas Kiefer, an ex-Border Patrol Facility janitor, and Guillermo Galindo’s sculptures like *Piñata de cartuchos*, a metal piñata in the shape of a West African percussion instrument covered with shell casings from a Border Patrol shooting range—Zubiaurre creates a nuanced account of the ethical pitfalls and assets that these works bring to the forefront in discussions of the environmental impact of migration.

Zubiaurre’s comparative approach in *Talking Trash*’s third chapter, “Dumpsterology: A Cultural History of Waste,” couples with a sense that dumpsters are “a powerful reminder of how life unavoidably circles back into nonexistence.” In this chapter, the author picks up her previous critical thread—the gendered aspects of artistic and cultural engagements with trash—to discuss masculinized representations of the dumpster and dumpster-diving, particularly in films. Zubiaurre contrasts the emphasis on control and hygiene as a moral imperative in a 1940s promotional film produced by the Dempster company to advertise their newest waste management invention—the Dempster/Dumpster aka the dumpster—with the avant-garde documentarian and Nouvelle Vague icon Agnès Varda’s 2006 documentary *The Gleaners and I*, which grants autonomy and compassion to discarded objects, rural gleaners, and urban dumpster divers. Jeremy Seifert’s 2009 documentary *Dive! Living Off America’s Waste*, which the Zubiaurre suggests exhibits a sense of masculine entitlement and “willful ignorance of how the color of the skin radically changes the meaning and consequences of urban scavenging,” provides further contrast.

The final chapter, “Dirty Innocence: Childhood, Gender, and Muck,” brings together Zubiaurre’s emphasis on trash as it embodies the uncontrollable, chaotic qualities attributed to women in a patriarchal society with the fact that these qualities are also ascribed to children: “Western culture has made a point of consistently linking filth to infancy, and by extension to women, to the lower social classes, and to whole cultures deemed ‘childlike’ or ‘primitive.’” Zubiaurre’s archive in this chapter ranges from toys made for children, the 1980s Garbage Pail Kids Trading Cards, to memoirs written by the daughters of hoarders like Jessica Sholl’s *Dirty Secret: A Daughter Comes Clean about her Mother’s Compulsive Hoarding*, and a German coming of age novel, *Tschick* by Wolfgang Herrndorf, in which the novel’s male protagonists ultimately use an adolescent girl who they meet in a landfill as a means to explore their sexuality.

Aside from the impressive global and disciplinary breadth of Zubiaurre’s archive and her gift for drawing nuanced distinctions between her objects of inquiry, the author also demonstrates a self-reflective streak rare in academic writing. “Museums aren’t landfills (though sometimes they are morgues), and books (or mirrors, for that matter) aren’t either. Garbage does not thrive, nor does its true nature come to the fore when encased in the rigid and sanitized quadrature of museums structures and books” concludes Zubiaurre in *Talking Trash*, a text that represents litter-based artifacts in all their multifariousness and apt messiness. Since *Talking Trash* paints a picture of trash-based artifacts in broad and fine strokes, the book may be of interest to scholars working on global visual culture, rubbish theory, and ecocriticism.



**Nikhil Anand**

*Hydraulic City: Water and the Infrastructures of Citizenship in Mumbai*

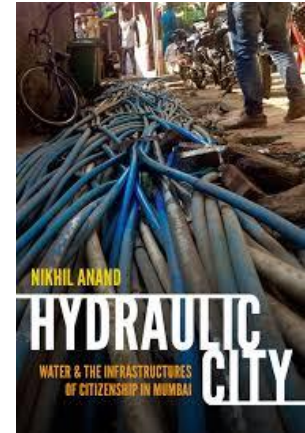
**Duke University Press, 2017**

**312 pages**

**\$27.95**

**Reviewed by Molly Porter**

In *Hydraulic City*, Nikhil Anand considers the tenuous structures of citizenship and belonging in the physical and political infrastructures of postcolonial Mumbai. Based on several years of field research, this outstanding anthropological work seeks to better understand the social and legal position of Mumbai’s settlements, Anand’s preferred term for slums. Anand examines the fluctuating relationships that settlers have with the local and state governments in Mumbai and how they’re able to assert their presence and legal right through their access to running water. This new category of citizenship, which the author refers to as hydraulic citizenship, is not easily granted, nor is it guaranteed once recognized by the state. Instead, settlers must constantly negotiate with state and local authorities, with water treatment workers and pump operators, and, ultimately, with each other in order to maintain the water necessary to live and state recognition of their legal presence.



The first two chapters of the book consider the narratives of citizenship in Mumbai and how both the government and the settlers seek to influence and change these narratives. In Chapter One, Anand focuses on the rhetoric and politics surrounding water scarcity in Mumbai. Through close examination, Anand is able to demonstrate that the narratives of water scarcity at once help to dismiss concerns of the inequality of water access and justify diverting water away from other, more rural areas of the country—an act which, in turn, drives people from those areas into the settlements

of Mumbai, thus furthering the cycle of scarcity dialogues.

Chapter Two delves more deeply into the complex methods of relation through which settlers interact and establish citizenship, as well as the dependency of the established, more affluent part of the city upon the settlements and their inhabitants. Building on the work of anthropologist Marilyn Strathern, Anand argues that the residents of Mumbai, and especially settlers, are *dividuals*, “differentially and simultaneously constituted through the discrete exchange of gifts, commodities, and rights, enabled through infrastructure services in the city.” Using the concept of the *dividual*, Anand effectively traces the development of settler citizenship claims.

In Chapter Three, Anand considers the role of the local government and employees and the ways in which the government uses water schedules not only as a way of distributing water effectively but also as a means of control. Through setting the water schedules for each area of the city, the government is able to mandate the existence of its citizens—and, disproportionately, its settlers—within a temporal framework over which those citizens have no control. While the more established and governmentally recognized areas of the city have stronger water pressure and a water schedule that provides that pressure for a longer period of the day, many settler communities have to share a pipe connection and draw water during a set, three-hour period each day. This necessitates presence and cooperation among the settlers if they want to have enough water for daily life. By curtailing settlers’ access to water, too, the government of Mumbai makes it more difficult for settlers to establish themselves through hydraulic citizenship, either by demanding better access or by moving to a more established area. Anand is also careful to note the gendered expectations of such duties; frequently the women in the family must stay home in order to collect the water during the scheduled times. By judiciously highlighting such disparities within the settler communities, Anand offers a more nuanced view of hydraulic citizenship and its inequalities.

In Chapter Four, Anand considers the lines of communication between the government and the settlers who seek recognition as hydraulic citizens.

He describes his time with people he refers to as “social workers” from the group Asha and their efforts to create structural change for the residents of the settlements. On behalf of the settlers they represent, Asha’s workers negotiate the fraught political landscape of life in the settlements, including things like water connections. These workers are also frequently the intermediary between the settlers and the politicians who actually have the power to address issues with the water system and establish new water connections. In helping people to attain hydraulic citizenship, these politicians engage in a system of reciprocity. The workers, many of whom hail from the settlements themselves, work constantly to bridge the gap between the settlements and the various government entities for whom denying hydraulic citizenship might otherwise be advantageous. Anand also deftly illustrates his own position within the settlements; his field work often places him in a position of intervention, and this acute awareness of his own liminality strengthens his argument about the tenuous nature of hydraulic citizenship.

In the last two chapters, Anand turns his attention to the many ways in which the hydraulic infrastructures of the city break down. In Chapter Five, Anand discusses the factors involved in instituting a ‘continuous,’ 24/7 water system in Mumbai and the practical and political difficulties in switching over from the current intermittent system, not the least of which are leaks. Anand notes the many leaks in Mumbai’s water system and considers the causes for the leaks as well as the difficulties in fixing them. He cites a study that “[suggests] that over a third of the city’s water [is] ‘leaking’ both into the ground and to residents drawing water through unauthorized connections.” The water department of Mumbai chose to dismiss the study upon initial publication because of the potential damage to their public image, but behind the scenes, the water department and the local, state, and federal governments all work to address the leaks in the city’s intermittent water supply, even as new leaks appear daily.

In his final chapter, Anand demonstrates the tenuous nature of hydraulic citizenship within the settlements of Mumbai by examining the water connections, or lack thereof, for a subset of the settler community: Muslims, who have been increasingly discriminated against in recent years in



Mumbai and in India on a larger scale. Anand focuses on the settlement of Premnagar, a predominantly Muslim settlement in northern Mumbai that previously had adequate water, but now suffers due to an intentional lack of maintenance. The residents are denied hydraulic citizenship and must resort to creating unauthorized connections in the pipe systems and leading to the leaks outlined earlier or digging bore wells to access groundwater, an option that is usually less sanitary for residents. Anand outlines the ways that the disenfranchised Muslim residents of Premnagar access water outside of the government's purview, and he underscores the need to examine the "brazen attempts" to control water, an element prone to leaking and slipping away.

In what is ultimately the central focus of the book, Anand highlights the dichotomies of authorized versus unauthorized connections and settlers versus established citizens in order to emphasize the codependence inherent in these relationships. Further, he underscores the futility in attempting to control water, itself of a materiality so resistant to control, as well as the use of water to control others—attempts that inevitably lead to leaks. Finally, Anand throws into sharp relief not only the class disparities but also the religious and gender disparities in the interactions and behaviors necessary for sustained hydraulic citizenship. For those in the fields of anthropology, geography, infrastructure studies, science and technology studies, and postcolonial theory, *Hydraulic City* offers a cogent and comprehensive study of the tenuous boundaries of citizenship and belonging in contemporary Mumbai.



### Katayoun Shafiee

*Machineries of Oil: An Infrastructural History of BP in Iran*

Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018

347 pages

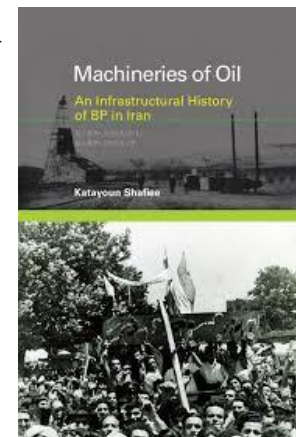
\$39.00

### Reviewed by Monica Mohseni

In *Machineries of Oil: An Infrastructural History of BP in Iran*, Katayoun Shafiee uses an amalgamate of Science and Technology Studies, Sociotechnical Systems (both of which are shortened to STS) and Business History to describe how the technicalities of oil extraction shaped Iran's socio-political

development in the first half of the twentieth century. Turning away from the corporate figures and human actors that traditionally monopolize histories of oil, *Machineries of Oil* focuses on the sociotechnical jargon levied by the British controlled Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) on the still developing Iranian state. The AIOC, later renamed British Petroleum, employed formulas and other devices typically used in organizational development as methods of political management to enact their will in the Middle East and assist in the creation of a British International oil consortium.

Distancing herself from earlier corporate-centered oil histories such as Daniel Yergin's *The Prize*, Shafiee meaningfully contributes to the conversation held by a suite of scholars, such as Timothy Mitchell, who've in the last decade expanded the field of environmental humanities. Scholars like Mitchell, author of *Carbon Democracy*, have moved beyond traditional historiography—ascribing monumental social, cultural, and political transformative powers to fuel sources. While Shafiee's argument remains centered around oil, rather than engage with the resource's overall cultural significance within Iranian and British politics, Shafiee turns to the sociotechnical



expertise surrounding the oil industry. Looking at the AIOC's politicization of the technicalities of the industry, such as mathematical and legal formulas, as well as scientific experiments, the author revisits the historical narrative surrounding Iran's oil governance, and reveals the ways in which the industry's over-representation of expertise contributed to the racially-based relationship underpinning British-Iranian politics.

While the book takes much from Mitchell's work, in particular his drive to circumscribe oil companies with hefty agency, Shafiee's *Machineries of Oil* suffers from the same issue that often problematizes environmental humanities. As Allan Stoekl and even Stephanie LeMenager have argued, despite being addressed almost explicitly as a resource and a commodity in academic scholarship, oil remains largely invisible as an economic driver and political actor. Despite its unalienable connection to technology, scholarship surrounding oil has fallen short of recognizing the resource's "cultural centrality" as Stoekl puts it in his preface to *Oil Culture*.

Evidently in writing *Machineries of Oil* Shafiee looks to present an infrastructural rather than a cultural history of oil. However further discussion on the cultural ramifications and limitations of oil would not be amiss when depicting the machinations of an inherently transnational industry, particularly one with such a rich history of imperialism and neo-colonialism. To its credit, chapter four of the book touches upon the socio-cultural outcomes the industry and its main commodity had on its workers. The chapter addresses oil's role in determining the potential of worker unionization, as well as the AIOC's racially premised housing organizations and employee formulations, which not only evidence the company's paternalism but also its racially-based hiring practices and prejudices. Despite the lack of overall attention towards the cultural histories of oil, the text's overview of the inventive paternalistic measures and practices employed by the AIOC raises further interrogatives that invite future scholarship.

Shafiee's chosen historiographical approach eschews deeper engagement with the cultural and social effects of oil as a commodity in favor of a novel interdisciplinary framework that combines Sociotechnical Theory, Business History, Material and Technical Politics, and Middle Eastern Studies.

*Machineries of Oil* looks to the study of oil infrastructure not so much to calculate the resource's political and economic impact in the region, but rather to glean the "sociotechnical process of simplification" by which the British industry wove durable associations between politics and markets. Shafiee looks at the formulas used by BP to strengthen their position in the middle east and their position as an international conglomerate. While the book sufficiently analyzes the industry's infrastructural effects on Iranian oil governance, further discussion on the politics underpinning the intercultural relationships formed and affected by the sociotechnical system would have strengthened the book's argument and provided a more solid understanding of the circumstances surrounding the Iranian oil industry.

This being said, scholars hoping to gain further insight into the political and organizational tools employed by the British oil industry in Iran will gain a wealth of information on the AIOC's history and infrastructural transformation of Khuzistan. Each chapter in the book addresses key moments in the history of Anglo-Iranian oil through various approaches, such as property rights, the monopolization of scientific knowledge and technical expertise, racially-based hiring practices, and sociotechnical arrangements intended to curb nationalism and retain British power. *Machineries of Oil* contributes to the expanding interdisciplinarity of the humanities, and further broadens the boundaries of what can be expected from future oil histories.



**Christina Bueno**

*The Pursuit of Ruins: Archaeology, History, and the Making of Modern Mexico*

University of New Mexico Press, 2016

280 pages

\$29.95

**Reviewed by Diana Heredia-López**

In the late nineteenth century, statesmen of emerging nation-states in Latin America sought to modernize their countries through ambitious infrastructure projects. However, such projects did not always involve building new roads or sewage systems. As Christina Bueno shows in *The Pursuit of Ruins*, vestiges from antiquity could be turned into meaningful cultural infrastructure for the nation-state. Focusing on Mexican archaeology during Porfirio Díaz's regime (1876-1910), Bueno analyzes how elites set out to create a national identity rooted in a shared ancient past. She convincingly demonstrates that the National Museum and a network of archaeological sites were crucial in this endeavor as their display under scientific ideals of the era would bring international prestige and validate Mexico as a modern nation.

Bueno takes a close look at the fieldwork that made possible the centralization and modernization of Mexican archaeology. While this approach reaffirms the explicit role of archaeology in constructing an official narrative of the nation, it also shows the complicated paths to the pursuit of ruins. Bueno follows the activities of the Inspectorate of Monuments, which is the predecessor of the current National Institute of Archaeology and History. By doing so, she traces the labor of indigenous guards, local forgers and other overlooked actors that participated or resisted in the Porfirian archaeological project. This way, she exposes this project's contradictory nature: it celebrated the glorious past of Mesoamerican sedentary cultures but at the same

time saw contemporary indigenous populations as inferior and unworthy of the nation's archaeological heritage. Bueno further suggests that twentieth-century indigenismo, which emerged during the Mexican Revolution, actually has its roots in this archaeological tradition.

Divided in three parts, *The Pursuit of Ruins* first presents the intellectual and political motivations that drove the Mexican state to formally create an archaeological heritage. Bueno opens with a detailed description of foreign archaeologists' work in Mexican ruins. Aside from noting their Euro/Anglocentric attitudes towards ancient objects and the local people, Bueno discusses what these monuments meant to locals in a growing market for antiquities. The following two chapters describe the response of Porfirian elites to the massive outflow of Mexican objects to Europe and the US. Bueno sees the elites as increasingly anxious about their inability to properly showcase and study Mexican monuments. Statesmen had heated debates on how international scientific cooperation should proceed all while the personnel of the National Museum struggled to operate this institution with limited funds and little training in archaeology.

It was not until the mid-1880s that Díaz's regime began a more concerted effort to build an archaeological heritage. In Chapter Four, Bueno introduces a key figure in this process: Leopoldo Bartres. Bartres was the head of the General Inspectorate of Archaeological Monuments and supervised the preservation of archaeological sites and the movement of monumental pieces to the National Museum in Mexico City. Bueno takes on the complicated task of assessing the legacy of this forgotten figure in Mexican archaeology. Drawing on Bartres's unexplored personal archive, Bueno shows his quarrelsome and territorial personality as well as his extensive field work and staunch nationalist effort to transform Mexican ruins into archaeological sites. She also narrates how Bartres built his career in the Inspectorate. He practically appointed himself as director as soon Díaz founded this institution. Under his quasi-dictatorial leadership, the Inspectorate's influence grew across the country and had an unprecedented budget for archaeological study and preservation. Bartres went to great lengths to enforce the Law of Archaeological Exploration (1896) and the Law of

Monuments (1897) which according to Bueno, for better or for worse, represented the largest and most intensive effort to preserve archaeological heritage in Mexico. However, he also mistreated locals and blocked the work of national and foreign archaeologists such as Manuel Gamio and Zelia Nutall. Bueno captures many of these bitter disputes in great detail and does not hesitate to point out his dismissive behavior.

Bartres's presence in the second half of the book contributes to a rich and grounded view of what archaeological work in nineteenth-century Mexico entailed. As Bueno reminds us, the archaeologists at the National Museum rarely did fieldwork. Thus, figures like Bartres provide insight on the appointment of guards (*conserjes*) for archaeological sites (Chapter Five), the supervision of their activities (Chapter Six), and the centralization of artifacts in the country's capital (Chapter Seven). The culmination of Bartres's work is reflected in the reconstruction of the pyramid of the sun in Teotihuacán during the first decade of the twentieth century. However, Bartres stepped down from his post when the Mexican Revolution broke out and within a few years, saw much of his work forgotten and get labelled as useless.

On the whole, Bueno's monograph adds to a growing body of scholarship of archaeology in the Americas. The strength of this book lies in its rich cultural and political discussion of Porfirian elites, and to a lesser extent, its attention to the social history of anthropology. The latter aspect could have been further developed by using a more extensive hemerographical archive. Bueno only relies on a well-known selection of newspapers compiled by Sonia Lombardo de Ruíz, so a wider array of periodicals could have provided more diverse glimpses into what Mexicans thought of archaeological heritage. Objects are another important source that inform Bueno's investigation. Even though she asserts that her analysis revolves around them, the treatment of monuments and antiquities is rather superficial and

mostly visible in the first two chapters and in Chapter 7. Bueno does acknowledge that artifacts change their meaning as they enter new contexts, yet throughout the text, there are no analyses that detail how this process occurred with specific objects or other forms of material culture.

Admittedly, Bueno did not set out to create an intellectual history of Mexican archaeology or contribute to the history of science. Nevertheless, her study could have benefited from recent discussions in these areas such as those prompted by the work of Irina Podgorny and Miruna Achim. For instance, the concern for what was scientifically accurate or who was actually right comes across as presentist. When Bueno recounts Bartres's quarrels over Oaxacan ruins against American anthropologist Marshal Saville, it becomes clear that Bartres's work did not adhere to the emerging archaeological standards (e.g. methodic measurement, thorough inventories of archaeological sites, and detailed descriptions of artifacts). In this characterization, Bartres's intellectual motives are nothing but a reflection of Mexican nationalism and his own troublesome personality. There is nothing wrong in pointing out the shortcomings and inaccuracies of past knowledge, especially if they justified discriminatory practices. However, a serious engagement with mistaken views can lead to deeper intellectual and political insights of the time. This is equally true for the Porfirian elites who "interpreted antiquity in contradictory ways, but always in the shadow of the constructs of the West" (44). Bueno is right to see that Mexican archaeologists and statesmen did not simply replicate these ideas, yet it is striking and truly paradoxical that they did so in overtly anti-imperial tones. A thorough analysis of this peculiar scientific discourse in Mexico and other parts of Latin America would free scholars of the persistent temptation to interpret every intellectual contribution from the region as a desire to be Western.

## CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

Aycan Akçamete is a PhD student at the University of Texas at Austin, Comparative Literature program. She has an MA degree in English and British cultural studies, with an emphasis on post-war British women playwrights and feminist critical theory. Her doctoral project focuses on the role of theater critics in the reception of intercultural performances in Turkey, England, and the USA. Her latest and forthcoming publication is the Turkish translation of Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theater*.

Samantha Allan is a doctoral student in the Department of English at the University of Texas at Austin. Her research focuses on twentieth and twenty-first century American literature with an emphasis on citizenship, affective relationships to geography, and memory. She is particularly interested in documentary and archival projects taken up by poets and creative-nonfiction writers.

Shukri Bana is a first-year graduate student in the Center for Women and Gender Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. Her research interests are apology, writing by youth, contemporary South Africa.

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Bryanna Barrera is a first year in the English PhD program and a graduate portfolio student in the Mexican American & Latino/a Studies department. Her research focuses on contemporary Chican@/x fiction, specifically migrant narratives, and its relationship with the environment and affect-- specifically geographical boundaries as political borders, Chican@/x environmentalism and pain.

John Paul Bimbiras is a second-year Ph.D. student in Ethnomusicology at the University of Texas at Austin. He holds a B.M. in jazz and classical guitar performance from Towson University (2011), as well as an M.A. in composition from The City College of New York (2016), where he studied with David Del Tredici. After graduating from CCNY, John became a Research Associate at the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute and helped the Institute secure a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to create an interactive website entitled *A History of Dominican Music in the U.S.* His research focuses on politics, transnationalism, and the music of the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico.

Nicholas Bloom is a doctoral student in the Department of American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. His research interests include the critical study of race and racism; Atlantic slavery and its afterlives; migration and diaspora in the Atlantic world; African American history and the black radical tradition; morality and violence; radical political imaginaries; Marxism; and the US South.

Hayley Braithwaite has just completed her Master's Degree in Victorian Literature and Culture at the University of York. Primarily interested in the gothic literature of the Romantic and Early-Victorian period, Hayley has worked on nineteenth-century vampires, the explained supernatural, and the impact of commercial society on gothic fiction. She has a particular interest in the Victorian serial writer George Reynolds (who was the subject of her MA dissertation), and is hoping to gain funding for a PhD centred on his work.

Erica Brozovsky is a PhD candidate in the Department of English at the University of Texas at Austin. Her work in sociolinguistics focuses on language variation and change, particularly on linguistic performance as used in the construction of Asian American identity.

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work has been presented and published in the United States, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Spain, Cuba, and Haiti.

Zoe Bursztajn-Illingworth is a PhD student in the Department of English at the University of Texas at Austin. Her research focuses on the intersection of modern and contemporary American poetry, poetic theory, and film studies. Her chapter, "'Both in and out of the game, and watching, and wondering at it:' Whitmanic Currents and Complications in *He Got Game* and 'I, Too'" is forthcoming in the anthology *Next Generation Adaptation* published by the University Press of Mississippi.

Aris Clemons is a PhD candidate in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, as well as a graduate portfolio student in the Mexican American and Latina/o Studies Department. Her research explores the relationship between language, racial categorizations, and identity for Afro-Latinx immigrants and their children in a variety of contexts.

Kiara Davis is a first year MA student in the Department of English at the University of Texas at Austin. Her research explores the ways Black women create and engage with locations and spaces. Her general interests include 20th and 21st century Black feminist writers, Black geographies, and Caribbean Literature.

Claudio Eduardo Oliveira is a PhD student in the Program in Comparative Literature at the University of Texas at Austin. His research focuses on the rhetoric of silence in the Inquisition archives in Spain and Mexico.

Katie Field is a doctoral student in the Program for Comparative Literature. Her research explores the intersections between coloniality, disaster, race, and geography in the Caribbean and Gulf South, with current attention given to Puerto Rico, Louisiana, and New Orleans. She also writes fiction.

Holly Genovese is a PhD student in American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. She is also completing Graduate Portfolios in Black Studies and Women's & Gender Studies. Her dissertation will consider black poetics, life writing, hip hop, and street art by incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people in the American South as resistance to the carceral state. Her writing has appeared in numerous publications, including Teen Vogue, The Washington Post, The LA Review of Books, Literary Hub, Electric Literature, and The Chronicle of Higher Education. She has served as co-curator for exhibitions at Eastern State Penitentiary, McKissick Museum, and the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks.

Jeremy Goheen is a graduate student in the Department of English at the University of Texas at Austin. His dissertation examines how nineteenth-century writers gothicized infrastructures in order to make visible the ways in which mundane and seemingly invisible systems/structures simultaneously sustain and threaten to dissolve the promises of modernity.

Daisy E. Guzmán Nuñez is a first year PhD student in the department of African and African Diaspora Studies. Her research focuses on the Transnational experience of Garifuna women from Guatemala to New York City. Daisy's work uses Black feminist anthropological methods to discuss Afro-indigeneity.

Morgan Hamill is a writer and researcher from Boston. In the fall of 2020, she will begin her graduate studies in English at Penn State. Her research interests include Disability Studies, aging, and cognition.

Tristan Hanson spends a lot of time with comics. When he's not reading or thinking about them, though, he's working toward his PhD in the Rhetoric and Writing Department at the University of Texas at Austin and teaching a class called the Rhetoric of Comics. So, even when he's not reading or thinking about them, he's reading and thinking about them.



Emily Harring is a PhD candidate in the English Department at the University of Texas at Austin. She studies Afro-Caribbean folklore, indigeneity, and the postcolonial gothic. In particular, her work examines how Jamaican literature represents colonial trauma through the reimagining of gothic landscapes. She is an enrolled member of the Sault Ste. Marie Chippewa Tribe.

Alhelí Harvey is a first-year Ph.D student in the Department of Mexican-American and Latino Studies at UT Austin. Her research is primarily concerned with how people create and interact with artifacts that speak to their experiences of belonging in a given place. She looks at built environment history, and land art installations and DIY projects.

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Diana Heredia-López is a Ph.D. student in the Department of History at The University of Texas in Austin. She explores the intersections between science and empire in Latin America and the Atlantic World during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Her current research focuses on the circulation of dyes, material culture, consumption, and indigenous knowledge in the Spanish Empire.

Emma Hetrick is a first year graduate student at UT-Austin in the dual-degree masters program in English and Information Studies. She works on the reprinting of English literature in America in the 18th and 19th centuries, with a focus on modified American editions of English novels. More generally, she's interested in conceptions of national identity, transatlantic print culture, and the digital humanities.

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