

POVERTY AND THE QUEST FOR LIFE: Spiritual and Material Striving in Rural India

By Bhrigupati Singh. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015. xii + 335 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0-226-19454-7.

The human landscape painted by Bhrigupati Singh in *Poverty and Quest for Life: Spiritual and Material Striving in Rural India* is one of rich colors and great detail. We are presented with a story that takes us along to Shahabad, a rural region in southeastern Rajasthan, where Singh did one and a half years of fieldwork among the Sahariyas, a community of former bonded laborers. While this is a region marked by poverty, Singh shows us how poverty or plenitude of life cannot be defined solely by economic status, thus making us envision “life” in a different way. Along the way, the book destabilizes a range of well-established dichotomies like the rational and the supernatural, the erotic and the divine, the human and the nonhuman, and the aspects of the state pertaining to contract (*mitra*) and force (*varuna*).

The book is divided in two large parts: power and ethics. Both concepts are given a different reading through what Singh has termed *mitra-varuna* and “agonistic intimacy.” Both aspects are well integrated to make us understand how concepts like state, sovereignty, aspiration, and inequality are not unrelated to more religious questions concerning deities, warrior gods, shrines, erotic songs, asceticism, and more.

The concepts of *mitra* (contract, between citizens and state; the caring side of the state) and *varuna* (force, from the state on its population; the violent side of the state) are explored in chapters 2 and 3. We are given a preview through the description of Thakur Baba, the headless horseman. This deity, a dead Rajput warrior, embodies both force (threat) and contract (care). This splendid ethnographic account of Thakur Baba marks the first appearance of a range of “lower-level” deities in the book. The fluctuating sovereignty and its *mitra* and *varuna* elements within are taken to the state in chapter 3 and more specifically to the infamous Forest Department. Throughout the years, the department has been involved in both violent practices in search for profit, and projects aimed at increasing the community’s welfare. Both dimensions have existed throughout history, with different fluctuating intensities.

Chapters 4 and 5 explore the concept of “quality of life” in a nonnumerical way, herein noting how “quality” acquires different meanings as values and tastes change in terms of food (chapter 4) and labor contracts and remuneration (chapter 5). The chapters focus on the change in people’s perceptions on what types of grain or terms of contract are held in high esteem and which are looked down on. These changing values, as well as the material context, continuously redefine “quality of life.”

The second part of the book, comprising chapters 6 to 9, digs into the question of ethics. Singh introduces the concept of “agonis-

tic intimacy” and, with it, offers a blueprint of an ethical model that embeds the *agon* (contest, rivalry) and takes altruism off its pedestal. This *agon* is an inherent characteristic not only of human relations but also of relations between humans and nonhumans, like animals and Gods (chapter 7). This is amply illustrated in the story of Tejaji, a cultivator-warrior deity that became popular a few decades ago in Shahabad and is mostly associated with the healing of snakebites. By looking at the appeal of asceticism in a global pastoral context, Singh argues that the Sahariyas worshipping the ascetic Tejaji should not be seen as a Sanskritization technique. Rather, different castes are coming together in the practice of worshipping, without the *agon* herein being erased. Singh also notes how divine constellations are not impervious to oscillating intensities by telling the life and death story of Indra, a warrior god whose image did not comply with ascetic ideals. He was replaced by the cultivating-warrior god Tejaji, who is now also losing his popularity and intensity.

A further, intimate exploration of what “agonistic intimacy” could look like, and how it can be “ennobled,” we find in chapters 8 and 9, which focus on Kalli, an empowered female actor, and Bansi Mahatmaya, an erotic ascetic. Kalli is an NGO-employed woman and a popular leader, who draws strength from “being completely mad” to confront her higher-caste neighbors, refuting revenge but not *agon*. Bansi is an erotic ascetic, who uses subtle agonistic to live both parts of his identity, that of a Sahariya and that of a locally renowned god man. Finally, Singh critically questions himself using the daemon Yaksha in the last, entertaining chapter, which does an excellent job in restructuring and viewing the full material for the reader who might have lost their ways in the sometimes broadly wandering chapters.

Overall, the book makes us reimagine what “life” itself looks like, inspiring us to start writing about life in a more experiential way. By positing that both rational and super-

natural perspectives are transcendent, Singh phrases a new type of political theology as an alternative to the religion-secularism dichotomy. In this theology, sovereignty is reimagined as dynamically consisting of *mitra* and *varuna*, and ethics are reformulated through an incorporation of the *agon*. The agonistic multitude of nonhuman and human life that populates daily life can, with its waxing and waning intensities, make for a “plenitude” that is unrelated to numerical factors calculating the quality of life. This perspective also disagrees with Giorgio Agamben’s concept of “bare life,” which defines life as an ultimately helpless subject to the dark, violent force of sovereignty (the *varuna* without is accompanying *mitra*).

The research is based on an exceedingly strong ethnography, written in a very intimate and sometimes literary way that radiates great empathy of the author for his surroundings. This intimacy is transcended in the theoretical parts, where the author successfully embeds a comparative dimension to understand his themes in a more universal way, both spatially and temporally. As any good research does, this book opens up many more questions than it answers, thus becoming a fertile ground for new, innovative research and inspiration. One question that Singh has left open for now is how we can understand the fluctuating intensities of life. Can we understand the “why,” “when,” and “how” of fluctuations only on a micro level, or can we come up with concepts that organize our impressions so as to provide for a broader understanding? Fortunately, in navigating this new set of questions and the post-structuralist reality, Singh has given us a new terminology, which again shows the ample ambition of the book and makes it an innovative force in the field of social and cultural anthropology.

With its interdisciplinary take on “life” and poverty/plenitude, Singh is bound to fascinate sociologists, political scientists, philosophers, economists, and nonacademic actors as well. One question that will be discussed is the de-

politicization of poverty. Does Singh not, by painting us the “full lives” of his respondents and by shying away from “vilifying” actors or institutions, divert our attention away from the socioeconomic reality in one of the poorest regions of India? Or is Singh “rehumanizing” the image of the poor by showing their identity cannot solely be defined by their financial status? Potentially, he felt he could become a different voice in a debate that is dominated by voices calling out the misery, the “lack,” rather than the “presence.”

Overall, *Poverty and Quest for Life* is generous, both ethnographically as well as theoretically, and is bound to shape further debates on a range of issues in our discipline. It leaves us, laughingly and confusedly, with a little of that “plenitude” Singh has been writing about.

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LOS ZETAS INC.: Criminal Corporations, Energy, and Civil War in Mexico.

By Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017. 400 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1-4773-1275-9.

Violence in Mexico is predominantly depicted in both academic research and investigative journalism as the consequence of power struggles between cartels for trafficking corridors and subsequent attempts of containment by the state. Many books have been written on the topic, and prevailing approaches are largely nonacademic, descriptive, lacking in theoretical capacity, and prone to “sensationalize violence and mystify some key events and actors involved” (4). In *Los Zetas Inc.: Criminal Corporations, Energy, and Civil War in Mexico*, Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera advances a theoretical framework to establish the way in which Los Zetas, Mexico’s most notorious cartel, represent a new model of organized crime.

Based on fieldwork spanning six years, Correa-Cabrera theorizes that Los Zetas, and other groups emulating them, are structurally akin to transnational corporations. Mexican cartels have diversified their activities from traditionally criminal enterprises—drug and human trafficking, kidnapping, and extortion—into industries associated with the licit economy, namely the production and distribution of energy commodities such as coal and natural gas. Instead of alluding to “cartels,” Correa-Cabrera uses the moniker “transnational criminal organization” (TCO). The book is organized into three parts: the first investigates origins of Los Zetas in the northeastern state of Tamaulipas, the second introduces theoretical discussions surrounding the new model of transnational organized crime, and the final part examines the linkages between policy reforms in Mexico’s energy sector and controversial security policies that have been used against TCOs.

Los Zetas Inc. is based on qualitative research combining “on the ground research” with business administration and security studies theoretical frameworks. Conducting more than one hundred interviews, Correa-Cabrera also makes use of preexisting investigative journalism, mainstream media coverage, narco blogs, and, notably, various social media platforms. A compelling dimension of the book examines “Mexico’s cyberwar” and the ways in which the internet has been employed by TCOs as a tool of intimidation and by anonymous citizens to monitor and broadcast firsthand accounts of “situations of risk” (144). Correa-Cabrera catalogs the minutiae of the Zetas business model using parameters of business administration such as marketing, research and development, human resources, recruitment, financial planning, and subsidiary operations. Further, corruption networks have developed between cartels, law enforcement, politicians at all levels, and international financial institutions in a way that has irreversibly altered state-society relations. While Correa-Cabrera acknowledges that the model isn’t meant to be a per-

fect blueprint, it is a compelling approach to understanding the complexities of the relatively nascent structures of organized crime in the twenty-first century.

Correa-Cabrera's contention that Mexico's conflict closely resembles a civil war is a bold analytical evolution from other scholars of Mexican security studies. She interrogates the benefits and limitations of applying civil war academic literature and classical theories of war to Mexico, including applications of Carl Von Clausewitz (136), as well as Max Weber's idea of state "monopoly of violence" (145). She wades into prolific debates in wider security studies, including the "greed or grievance" thesis, famously introduced by Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler (2002), which explores economic motivations for civil war. Correa-Cabrera concludes that "Mexico's so-called drug war is indeed a new civil war, essentially moved by economic agendas" (137). However, she concedes that true motivations are difficult to establish when examining groups that are extremely private, dangerous, and hard to access to for research purposes. In cases where extraction activities of transnational energy firms are being negatively affected by TCOs, Correa-Cabrera has argued that "symmetric nonconventional war"—state support of paramilitarism to combat the loss of territorial control to TCOs (179)—has been employed as "government protection of corporate capital and foreign investments" (180). This implies that in areas of weak state control over populations, irregular armed groups are stepping in against TCOs to the benefit of the Mexican government.

The final chapters examine who the winners and losers are in Mexico's civil war. Correa-Cabrera brilliantly maps the ways in which violence in Tamaulipas directly benefits transnational energy firms: extortion rackets and energy theft by TCOs, combined with aggressive responses by the armed forces drives out small entrepreneurs and landowners (169) to an extent far greater than any coercion transnational corporations experi-

ence. Depressed economic conditions, combined with terra nullius (empty space) created by TCOs and the deterioration of Mexico's state oil company, Petróleos Mexicanos, create ideal conditions for asset accumulation by energy firms. The conclusion is that transnational energy firms, security firms contracted to protect them, and factions of national security are the biggest winners (227).

Correa-Cabrera goes to great lengths in cohesively analyzing the profound restructuring taking place in Mexico's energy sector. Given the task of explaining the multitude of state and nonstate actors involved, it takes several chapters before the various political, economic, and security connections are established to elucidate her overarching analysis. Extensive knowledge of Mexican geography and the distribution of energy resources such as shale gas, coal, lithium, wind, and solar is displayed using excellent maps, charts, and appendices that aid the general line of argumentation situating the war, long associated with drug violence, within the context of modern energy reforms. The ways in which Correa-Cabrera uses theories of business administration and new civil wars literature are innovative, novel, and groundbreaking in that they are seldom applied to narco groups or to empirical security studies in the Western Hemisphere in general. Correa-Cabrera develops an empirical study that strongly articulates the complexities of new wars in which nonstate actors are increasingly at the center, along with nonconventional manifestations of violence that take shape via cyberspace and control of strategic resources.

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RESILIENCE AND THE LOCALISATION OF TRAUMA IN ACEH, INDONESIA

By Catherine Smith. Singapore: NUS National University of Singapore Press, 2018. 232 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-9-8147-2260-5.

The literature on humanitarianism is divided on the issue of trauma. Proponents of post-traumatic stress disorder analyses believe in measuring the impact of violence and interventions based on medical treatment. Critics (including many anthropologists) point out that generalizing experiences of violence through a psychiatric lens objectifies suffering and can have adverse political and disempowering effects (e.g., by making DSM-based psychiatric disorders a criterion for political recognition and receiving aid). Catherine Smith, in this rich ethnography of trauma in post-conflict, post-disaster Aceh, Indonesia, takes a nuanced position in this debate. Yes, people in Aceh are in need of much more and much better access to professionalized psychiatric health care. But it is also imperative to have a good understanding of how trauma, as a globalized medical idiom, has been appropriated by the Acehnese and embedded in, and linked to, a range of local cultural and religious discourses and practices. *Resilience and the Localisation of Trauma in Aceh, Indonesia* demonstrates how and why this is the case.

When Smith was carrying out fieldwork in the Indonesian province of Aceh, from 2008 to 2009, the region was in the midst of recovering from a 30-year-long civil war and a horrific natural disaster. From 1976 to 2005, the Indonesian Army, in its attempts to crush a separatist rebellion, subjected the region to military crackdown, intimidation, torture, and killings. Ironically, peace became possible only after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami had taken the lives of more than 160,000 people across the province. In her research among conflict survivors, Smith found that the concept of trauma, although a relatively

recent addition to the Indonesian (and Acehnese) language, was a central means for the Acehnese to understand the impact of both tragedies. Apparently, trauma allowed people to describe, analyze, and reflect on mental disturbances in ways that indigenous concepts, many of which are grounded in Islam, could not. This is not to say that these indigenous concepts—referring to (disturbances of) soul and spirit, stress and distress, confusion, mental illness, and healing—had been pushed aside. Rather, as Smith convincingly shows, they interacted with the concept of trauma in complex ways as the Acehnese tried to recover from the war and the tsunami.

During 17 months of ethnographic research, Smith collected the life histories of (mostly female) conflict survivors, observed religious practices and healing sessions, interviewed medical professionals—including Aceh's four (!) psychiatrists—and generally sought to understand the ways in which people perceived mental illness and trauma. Her central argument is that "Acehnese conflict survivors actively engaged globalized medical-moral discourses, not to gain access to aid or citizenship, but in an attempt to transform and heal suffering and with the intention of bringing out a new politics of care in the post-conflict world." The focus of her enquiry is "the intellectual, moral and social work that is performed by ordinary Acehnese conflict survivors attempting to reshape their world following the end of a long period of political violence" (16). By navigating Aceh's "pluralistic medical landscape," including Indonesia's flawed system of (bio)medical care and a wide range of alternative therapies and religious healing, and by integrating the idiom of trauma in their everyday speech and individual ponderings, people in Aceh give shape to their moral lifeworlds and try to imagine a new future.

The separatist conflict is part of a long history of violence that started with the colonial war against the Dutch. What makes Aceh different from other cases is that, in the wake of

these successive struggles, the Acehnese have come to cultivate a narrative about themselves and their history in which great emphasis is placed on bravery and resilience as registers of virtue. The notion that the Acehnese are “strong,” “brave,” and “tough” reverberates like a mantra in the book’s many direct quotations. Through the combination of endurance and pious practice, Smith’s interlocutors showed her, the victims of violence and loss are able to find back their balance, recover from their traumatic experiences, and move on with their lives. Trauma, as localized concept, points at a politics of care because it serves to reposition people, socially, through categories of speech and action that are both protective and coercive in nature.

The book consists of five chapters and a conclusion. The first is an introduction. Chapter 2 is based on the life stories of four female conflict survivors and looks at the central role of narratives of local history in descriptions of and reflections on trauma. Here, the term trauma “captures the paradox that Aceh’s history of violence has caused great suffering, while also enabling Acehnese to become strong and brave” (56). Chapter 3 focuses on the connections made by Acehnese between trauma, the body, and spirit possession and on the frequent yet contested practice of exorcism as a way of healing trauma. There is an evocative section on exorcism, which—moving back and forth between the words of a fulminating healer and the trivial yet insightful chitchat of bystanders wearily waiting their turn—I found absolutely fascinating. Chapter 4 engages with victims of both the conflict and the tsunami and discusses the ways in which they, and Acehnese more generally, understand the Islamic concept of fate. Islamic ritual and devotional practices play a crucial role in people’s attempts to “become strong” and restore inner tranquility. The notion of surrender is particularly salient. Smith’s interlocutors often explained trauma as “the ‘inability to accept destiny’” (91). For many, then, the process of recovery was also

a process of reinvigorating faith, of religious becoming.

Trauma, as a localized idiom, is both an appealing and a deeply ambiguous category. This is the main argument of the final chapter. The agreement that a person “has trauma” protects them against the grave stigma attached to mental illness and the social marginalization that often results from this stigma. This is because trauma is seen as a reversible condition, while insanity is not. Trauma thus becomes a deliberately euphemistic term that people use to shield others—family, friends, neighbors—from social exclusion by tolerating the nonnormative behavior that may result from suffering (including “excessive” expressions of grief). The “flipside,” Smith argues, is that trauma is also a powerful instrument for coercing people to submit to dominant social norms and narratives. Healing requires from people to “respond to their suffering” and “enact the important sensibilities of bravery, piety and solidarity” (144–145). If they are not pious and brave, the implication seems to be, little protection remains.

Here, the analysis might have been pushed further. Because of Smith’s focus on the dominant narrative of piety and endurance, little is learned about people who do not recover, who do not want to or cannot, for whatever reason, be “brave,” “strong,” or “resilient.” What about the subjectivities of people who fail or refuse to “accept their fate,” who unravel, who live in an asylum or under conditions of social abandonment? These questions should not distract, however, from what is a significant achievement. Difficult and undoubtedly emotionally demanding research has resulted in a strong ethnography of trauma and suffering. Whereas several analyses have looked at the politics of peace in Aceh, focusing on the roles of ex-combatants and former leaders of the separatist movement, this book provides insight into the experiences and resilience of ordinary conflict survivors. Researchers of violence and conflict around the world will find in it a valuable source for comparison

and theoretical debate. Readers interested in religion will find rich material on religious practice and an incisive analysis of its potent role in recovering from great pain. The book should be widely read.

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AFTER RAPE: Violence, Justice, and Social Harmony in Uganda

By Holly Porter. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. 255 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1-3168-4129-7.

In the mid-1950s, in what is now Acholi sub-region of northern Uganda, a woman's dead body was discovered a half-mile from a homestead. The man who found her corpse cried out. He ran and told his neighbors—one of whom summoned the police—that he was coming home from court and saw two legs sticking out of the grass. Peering closer, he saw they were the legs of a woman. He saw blood and thought her neck was cut. Her clothing had been torn off and thrown on top of her.

"He didn't know who she was, because he didn't go to see her very close," wrote one of these neighbors, the anthropologist Paula Hirsch Foster (1954–1958), in a field note. He said she might be a Munyankole from the dress. "Everyone was relieved at that and they remarked how bad the Ankole were when they got drunk, they fought and killed each other." One female neighbor countered that it may have been rape and maybe the woman "didn't agree" so "the man" cut her throat. A male neighbor replied, "Why should a man kill a woman for that? He could just beat her, not cut her throat." The female neighbor said that when a man is drunk, he could cut the throat of a woman who refused him. A local chief suggested that the victim was not dead at all but got drunk and hit herself when she fell.

Then, after *askari* (security guards or police) arrived to get the news and go investigate the body themselves, the neighbors' discussion turned to the exciting festival that occurred the previous day. Women had performed a traditional dance to the delight of onlookers, and each clan good-naturedly competed with gifts of produce and livestock for the bishop, who called on Acholi Christians to slay the enemy, Satan.

Reading *After Rape*, an insightful and powerful ethnography by Holly Porter, I returned to this troubling description in Foster's field notes at Boston University. The rape and murder of an unknown woman more than 60 years ago echoes through the contemporary experiences of sexual violence and its after-effects in this same region, which Porter details and analyzes with rigor and compassion. These experiences include rapists' general impunity, the vulnerability of some girls and women with their risks of "refusing," the role of ethnicity and belonging in adjudication, the ineffectiveness or irrelevance of institutions such as courts, clans, and churches that might protect and defend victims, and the quiet ways of forgetting.

Nine chapters discuss a remarkable spectrum of nuances in terms of lived experiences and social interpretations of coercion, sexual violence, wrongdoing, and possibilities of remedy. There is rape within the logic of the recent civil war (1986–2006), for example, but, as Porter documents, rape also figures as a specter in women's quotidian lives. (Male rape is outside the scope of this study.) A particular strength thanks to Porter's Acholi-language fluency and years-long commitment in the region is her comprehensive explanation of cultural understandings, for instance, as echoed in songs and storytelling in public settings, about food as a metaphor for sex (75, 79–80, 96, 217). As one male colleague opined, "When a man has an appetite, and a woman is there then he feels he should have access" (16). Wartime experiences and uneven recovery have rendered many girls and women vulnerable to predation; so, too,

have patriarchal privilege and attendant subordination of women, among other factors (57). What happens after rape reflects no singular understanding of wrongdoing or appropriate approach to justice (227). Sometimes nothing happens. Until this study, many women at Porter's field sites had not told anyone they were raped or abused (15), even though "most people love to talk about sex" (76–77) and sex is a frequent topic of ribald commentary.

In this regard, the study makes note of the humor, escorting Porter's investigation in unexpected ways. Elderly women laughed and pronounced her questions as "very useless." In their day, no woman could refuse a man (174). Porter joins a panoply of thinkers like Mary Douglas, Ivan Karp, Walter Benjamin, and Sigmund Freud who recognized the multilayered language of laughter. As the anthropologist Donna Goldstein notes in a different ethnography of rape, *Laughter Out of Place*, set in a Rio shantytown: "Humor is a vehicle for expressing sentiments that are difficult to communicate publicly or that point to areas of discontent in social life. The meanings behind laughter reveal both the cracks in the system and the masked or more subtle ways that power is challenged" (2013: 5).

Laughter makes sense within social harmony, the key concept Porter identifies. Good relations are essential, but more than that, she explains, social harmony in Acholi subregion is a socially constructed *vision* of how life together should ideally function, "shaping—if not wholly determining—people's conscious and unconscious choices" (3–4). This vision of an ideal Acholiness seems to override painful realities among those who adhere to it. For example, upon learning of her research, one religious leader told Porter: "There is no rape in Acholi [subregion]. It is not there. It should not be there" (16). Social harmony as an idealism project seems to mask sexual violence as well as, one surmises, striking inequalities like elsewhere in Africa resulting from land expropriation by local and nonlocal elites (Peters 2004: 270), differential vulnerability

to HIV/AIDS (Smith 2014), and the bride-wealth burden on young urban men (James 2015).

The book's great strength is in contextualizing rape, wrongdoing, and social healing within Acholi identity, society, and cosmology. I would have also appreciated a broader political and economic setting (e.g., Silberschmidt 2005) within which to understand social harmony and sexual violence. What is at stake for different categories of actors by maintaining the vision of social harmony around (and despite) sexual violence? The anthropologist Laura Nader, in her landmark work *Harmony Ideology*, says the uses of harmony are political (1990: 1–2). Nader interprets harmony ideology as a product of colonial and mission encounters, as well as a strategy of resistance against state hegemony (2). Harmony as a product and a strategy seems possible in the Acholi case, too. Perhaps this angle might illuminate sexual violence within the politics of reproduction in this society recovering from a 20-year war in which civilians suffered high mortality rates (9). Today's young Acholi men and women face great social pressure to produce children (e.g., Owich 2017) despite tenuous claims to land, unaffordable bride-price, hardening class divisions, and an uncertain future politically as members of a Nilotic minority within a state that (with exceptions) tends to privilege members of the president's Ankole ethnicity. The Acholi subregion has long been a crossroads of peoples, products, and logics, so when a man shares his view that "there is a revolution going on. Things are changing so fast" (78), I wonder about the impact of this sense of urgency on meanings and practices of intimacy, violence, and justice.

Overall, *After Rape* is a movingly written, in-depth contribution to the literature of Africa and northern Uganda in particular. It is a detailed and authoritative account of the aftereffects of sexual violence and, as such, provides subtleties for policy makers to weigh carefully. It would certainly enhance undergraduate or graduate courses in gender

studies, ethnographic methods, legal anthropology, and contemporary post-conflict processes. *After Rape* could also help in analyzing ordeals in neighboring South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, and elsewhere in the world. As one woman said of sexual violence, “Yes, that happens. Yes, even to me” (116).

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THE SPECTRAL WOUND: Sexual Violence, Public Memories, and the Bangladesh War of 1971

By Nayanika Mookherjee. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015. 352 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-8223-5949-4.

The Spectral Wound: Sexual Violence, Public Memories and the Bangladesh War of 1971, is a thorough, recommendable, and disturbing analysis of the Bangladesh War of Independence and how contestations over testimony and memory have influenced Bangladesh society and politics of state formation up until today. Nayanika Mookherjee sheds light on the experiences of wartime rape committed by the West Pakistani Army and local Bengali men during the short but violent Bangladesh war of 1971. She seeks to understand how the raped women are invoked in the public memory of 1971 and investigates the relationships between this memory and the personal experiences of the women exposed to sexual violence (6).

The book is impressive in its empirical depth and breaks new ground by suggesting original approaches to analyze the history of memory, allowing us to question the “limited and orientalized” notions and understandings of rape and gendered victimhood. It is an evocative account, calling for a patiently slow read, as Mookherjee, inspired by Veena Das, meticulously and empathically unfolds the experiences of sexual violence “in order to communicate how people fold the violence of wartime rape into everyday sociality” while being attentive to the temporally fragmented narratives of suffering, stigma, and livelihood, of the past and in the present (260–261).

Mookherjee convincingly shows how stories and experiences of raped women become part of a broader set of national discourses, which together create a shared public culture of knowing and remembering. Publicly circulated in literal and visual representations, this public memory not only influences and shapes national processes of testifying and

human rights but also informs notions of proper victimhood and suffering (6). This constitutes the spectral wound, whereby the raped women can only be perceived as a horrific alterity—suffering and oppressed women, denied voice and social life—that allows Bangladesh citizens to see and recognize experiences of sexual violence as sacrifices for the new nation. This public narrative of victimhood becomes a cornerstone of participation in public life (26).

The book addresses the events leading to independence and national self-assertion, questioning the grand narratives of publicly shared and politically recognized notions of proper victimhood and authentic suffering, and, relatedly, of personhood and citizenship (263). Unpacking the varied experiences of rape and sexual violence by inquiring into the heterogeneous iconic figure of the *birangona* (brave or courageous women), *The Spectral Wound* touches on issues at the center of political conflict in the country.

Faced with atrocities at a massive scale the Bangladesh state, in an attempt to rehabilitate the women and recognize their experiences as wartime sacrifices, came up with the term *birangona*, or “war heroines,” to restore honor and dignity and recover them as female citizens of independent Bangladesh. (138). It is this grand state narrative, figure, and subjectivity that *Spectral Wound* questions, explores, and unravels through an analysis of narratives and literary and visual representations.

The point of departure for the analysis is one of the most famous and widespread representations of the *birangona*: Naibuddin Ahmed’s photograph of a young rape victim covering her face with her hair and her hands (xvii). This picture illuminates dichotomies of silence-voice, visibility-invisibility, and absence-presence, which *Spectral Wound* brings to the forefront by asking, “What makes the raped women visible and audible?” (24). Mookherjee uses the metaphor of combing (borrowed from Cohen 1994) that “expresses the processes of both remembering

and occlusion.” “The comb represents simultaneously the power to reveal and to search for knowledge and attempts to cover and veil knowledge” (23) in order to capture the contestations between the women’s experiences and the public narrative of the state, and how certain testimonies and representations are promoted and utilized while others are denied and ignored. The comb as a metaphor neatly combines the visual and literary representations with the women’s narratives and works as a heuristic device to illuminate dichotomies of presence and absence. The combing practices, which inherently contain some form of intentionality of action, could have been further explored in analysis, especially in the chapters on state narrative, as it changes over time.

The book’s nine chapters, of which the first five are about the village of Enayetpur and the latter four about visual and literary representations of the *birangona*, all bring the two indexes of reveal-search and cover-veil into the analysis in a variety of thematics: in (1) state historiography, (2) activist documentation as dynamics of combing for absence-presence, (3) villagers’ history making through *khota* (scornful remarks; 76) and public secrecy, (4) complicity and patronage of local politics, (5) embodied fragmented experiences and intricacies of demasculinization, (6) rehabilitation practices, (7) public memory and absences of violation of men, (8) human rights and the representation of the raped women, and (9) the *birangona*’s subjectivity as victim, agent, and traitor. Underlining all chapters is the juxtaposition of the raped women’s own fragmented narratives of their experiences and memorialization, through political discourse and in visual and public culture.

Mookherjee’s ethnography of village life in Enayetpur, narrated through the voices of four women, illustrates how combing takes place in intimate interactions, conversations, and conflicts among fellow villagers and neighbors. Though accepted in everyday life, the

social stigma of rape and the public claims for state compensation undermine the social status of the women and their families in the community. These come to the fore in squabbles and conflicts in which their stories are invoked to question their honor and respectability (70).

On the other side of this intentional evocation is the embodied remembering of violence that triggers memory: “The meaning of rape draws from everyday experiences and from outside of the body” (115). The book shows how sensations and places become triggers of unwanted recollection of rape experiences, immanently dormant and ready to be actualized by touch or presence (e.g., the smell of particular food, the site of the violent event, etc.). The experiences are always already present in the places and in the relations in which they live and which they can’t escape: “Having been raped within their homes, they have no respite from such terrible signposts” (116). It moves the violence out of the victims, through their bodies, into presence, in their houses, in the streets, in nature, and in the markets—in private and public spaces—folded into everyday life.

Spectral Wounds furthermore shows how visibility includes matters of political agendas and objectives. Left-leaning activists comb the women’s fragmented narratives, searching for material applicable for political projects of state formation and rehabilitation; for war crime trials; for popular literary and visual consumption in novels, theater, and films to educate and entertain; for history writing and commemoration of liberation. Yet, they comb over rather than through the fragments to search and collect the politically needed, and cover and veil excluded knowledge from inspection. Mookherjee shows how the transgressed female body becomes a battlefield of suffering, honor, stigma, and citizenship, illustrative of how the stories of the *birangona* are presented in various contexts for various purposes.

Since its publication, the book has been widely debated in Bangladesh by academics

and activists—a debate that has focused more on the person than on the academic work, facilitated by a newspaper article that propelled a “distorted version” of the interview conversation and the entirety of the project, its rationality, and its ethics into national political antagonisms and fault lines (256). Mookherjee’s book questions how the researcher positions herself and is positioned within a politicized field, in which issues of contestation and appropriation are, perhaps, unavoidable. It shows how grand state narratives are upheld by a variety of actors when challenged, including left-leaning activists and academics, through personalized smear, threats, and intimidation. Testifying to the contentious endeavor of unraveling and writing historical accounts of the 1971 war of independence and showing that, regardless of our intentions and tactics, the stories we hear and write will have their own life beyond our control.

The book leaves us with the question of compensation and redress for the *birangona*, their families, and other victims of the war of 1971—the initial reasons why the women were ready to tell their stories in public “remains unanswered” (256). Though Mookherjee insists on “what the women themselves want to say” and challenges any attempt at homogenizing their testimonies and experiences, two developments have somewhat hyper-dramatized the war of independence and fortified political narratives: first, the state-sanctioned war crimes tribunals, in which leading political figures of the opposition have been tried, sentenced, and hanged as war criminals; and second, the Shahbagh movement, demanding the death penalty of known political collaborators and the continuous prosecutions of war criminals.

At the tribunals, testimonies and legal proceedings became vehicles to reach a political end by establishing perpetration and culpability, and concluding the Bangladesh states public memory of 1971. When the movements demand for death penalty was achieved, overturning a previous court judgment, it gradu-

ally withered away. Many of its progressive student activists had to leave the country, under death threats from radical religious groups, since the state was unable to prevent a series of lethal attacks against free thinking writers and bloggers. These developments have reinvigorated political fault lines around the events of 1971 and made divisions in society ever deeper, to a point where debate and dialogue was rendered impossible and void. In such an environment, Mookherjee's insistence on giving voice to the women are somewhat numbed, when contestations of grand narratives are sidelined for categories of "authentic" suffering and culpability. The analysis affirms that recognition is a situated process set in a wider political setting, in which individual experiences are combed over for national political ends.

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THE REVOLUTION HAS COME: Black Power, Gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland

By Robyn C. Spencer. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016. ix + 260 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0-8223-6286-9.

In the opening chapter of *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates declares that expressions such as "race relations," "racial justice," and "white privilege" serve only to obscure the reality that racism is above all a visceral encounter that "dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, [and] breaks teeth" (2015: 10). Seeing the imperious killings of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, or 12-year-old Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Ohio, it would seem almost self-evident that American whiteness is meant to destroy the black body. Black nationalism responds by underlining that the black body deserves more than swift destruction. Yet, it is the Black Panther Party (BPP)

that, by being just as visceral in its persona, ethos, and politics, strived to demonstrate the extent to which racism in America dislodges, blocks, rips, extracts, cracks, and breaks the black body.

In this sense, the historian Robyn C. Spencer's account of the rise and fall of the BPP is noteworthy because it provides an authoritative genealogy of revolutionary black nationalism in America. Moreover, *The Revolution Has Come* is of contemporary relevance to the uninitiated, looking to know more about the socioeconomic and political circumstances that surround the still prevalent struggle for an America where black lives matter. To be sure, other volumes on the BPP have covered the "broad strokes" of the empirical material in this book. What is unique, however, is the extent to which Spencer, in her narrative style, is able to capture the perspectives of those within the organization, shaped by the trials of their immediate surroundings. That is to say, by narrating the story of the BPP through the vivid voices of the party's members themselves, she successfully captures a bottom-up perspective on how "black" America views and negotiates its place in the shadows of the big structures of institutionalized racism.

The bottom-up perspective appears in particularly compelling ways through the course of this book. For instance, in chapter 1, Spencer discusses the inaugural issue of the *Flatlands* newspaper, named after the flatlands neighborhood in Oakland, California. In the postwar period a segregated flatlands became "synonymous with the poorest and most dispossessed areas of the city." Incidentally, this spatial experience of dispossession eventually gave rise to the revolutionary ethos adopted by the BPP. The organization was established a few months later. However, it is the first issue of *Flatlands* that editorialized that the intersection of race, class, and space determined whether Oakland was experienced as an "all-American city" or as a "city of pain." As the newspaper declared, "We're not taking it anymore," so too did the BPP personify this message in their revolutionary activism (9).

In the same vein, voices of members within the organization was a captivating addition in chapter 5 that characterized a self-reflective BPP struggling to “rethink” its place in American politics. Drawing on archival sources, Spencer cites cofounder Huey P. Newton’s admission that there was a disconnect between the party and the black community, evident not least by the “majority white attendance at the Panthers’ United Front Against Fascism conference in July 1969” (116). While still striving for structural changes at the national level, Newton saw the need to “return” to the people and “bow” before the local churches, businesses, and ghettos that had accorded it political prominence (and relevance) in the first place (115). This “return” translated into the centralization of the BPP in Oakland and the dismantling of chapters across the country. Many of those who chose to relocate to Oakland were leaving behind thriving local chapters and valuable community ties. Yet, former BPP Minister of Culture Emory Douglas noted that many chose to remain in the organization despite the centralization because they were invested in the BPP and arrived in Oakland “with the spirit of growth and development.” One such member, Bobby McCall, said to the author, “Regardless of what was happening internally, I knew . . . this was what I wanted my life to be about: uplifting the black community by any means necessary no matter what it took” (116).

Despite making these compelling additions to an otherwise well-documented story of the Black Panther Party, Spencer’s account does not entirely fulfill its promise of providing a gender perspective on black revolutionary nationalism. To be sure, the author succeeds in prominently featuring the rarely cited voices of the women in the organization. This impetus is clear in the use of images of the likes Kathleen Cleaver and Tarika Lewis in the cover art and some of the pictures in the book. Yet, a gender perspective also requires a sustained discussion of patriarchy—not least, institutional(ized) patriarchy and patriarchal

power relations—masculinity, and sexuality. Unfortunately, these *other* facets of the gender perspective are rarely addressed in this book, and, while the voices of the women in the organization are an invaluable contribution to the literature on the BPP, references to gender often do not transcend beyond expressions such as “young men *and* women” of the organization (2, emphasis added).

For instance, the first significant reference to the women in the organization appears only in chapter 2 under the subsection titled “Comrade Sister.” It begins with interesting caveats on the synonymy the BPP saw between “fighting white supremacy” and combating “male supremacy.” The organization, Spencer reveals, also did not view the “strong manhood” required by revolutionary black nationalism as being built on “submissive womanhood.” This then allowed black women to use such “theoretical loopholes” to cement their place in the organization as, much like black men, they too sympathized with the party’s message that black America’s “poverty and political powerlessness” needed to be rectified (45–46). The section then goes on to describe how individual women (like Tarika Lewis and Elendar Barnes) came to join the organization.

However, Spencer does little by way of elaborating how/if the presence of these women (re)shaped the ideological and tactical character of the BPP. This is a significant missed opportunity with regard to the *other* facets of the gender perspective considering, earlier in the same chapter, the author mentions that the party “uncritically embraced the gendered assumptions of masculinist self-defense rhetoric” (37). In the same vein, chapter 3 prominently features the voices of women like Kathleen Cleaver, Janice Garrett-Forte, and Brenda Presley and demonstrates the significant role of women in the functioning of the BPP. Yet, in the final pages of the chapter, where the author mentions in passing that Eldridge Cleaver feminized the Breakfast for Children Program by calling it

“sissy” (85), a discussion of masculinity and sexuality in relation to revolutionary politics would have added some theoretical depth to an otherwise anecdotal reference.

In chapter 4, the section “Targeting Panther Women” presents another compelling look into the role of women that could have been deliberated from a gender perspective. Spencer presents a thought-provoking paradox. On the one hand, as law enforcement mostly targeted BPP men, the women kept the organization afloat behind the scenes. Yet, as financial pressures forced women and men to cohabit living and working spaces, some male members struggled to look beyond the traditional role of women in the household and acknowledge the role of women as revolutionary leaders (94–96). Here, Spencer does little more than present this paradox, and the reader is left wanting a further discussion on the role of women in revolutionary politics. A similar line of criticism can be levied on the rest of the chapters.

In chapter 6, Spencer references BPP women’s participation in electoral politics and highlights their role in electoral campaigning. Yet, these references are treated as no different or significant than that of the organization’s men. The final pages of the chapter specifically discuss the leadership of Elaine Brown and call for a discussion of institutional patriarchy and power relations in the BPP. But this section only provides teleological overview of developments that happened with Brown at the helm, with passing references to some male members complaining that “women had taken over” (173). While documenting the decline of the organization in chapter 7, the author documents the growing feeling among (male) members that the BPP had become “weak” and “female.” As Newton took over the leadership from Brown, he attempted to rectify this image by “installing macho security squads [and] establishing circles of brotherhood”—despite John Huggins ruing in retrospect that this rectification further instigated the decline of the party (179–180). This chap-

ter demonstrates the importance of exploring masculinity and femininity in revolutionary imagery and identity politics. Yet, the author does not explore these themes and in the end provides no more than a teleological account of the downfall of the BPP, albeit through perspectives the members of the organization.

In all, *The Revolution Has Come* is a valuable addition to the existent literature for its narrative historical account that attempts to view the BPP through the voices from within the organization. The perspectives of members of the BPP gives an insight into the fractured, idiosyncratic, and often hotly contested behind the scenes workings of a revolutionary figuration that strives to present a resolute and decided image of itself in the public area. This book’s most significant contribution, however, is how it prominently displays the perspectives and activities of the women in the organization. That said, by including the term “gender” in its title, the author leads readers to expect a broader understand of gender in the context of revolutionary black nationalism; one that is not limited to the forefronting of the voices of the women in the organization. In a way, “Black Power, Women, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland” is a far more appropriate subtitle for this book.

Despite this, the lack of a consistent gender perspective renders the book no more than a narrative historical account of the organization, albeit told through the perspective of the revolutionaries. This lack is what ensures that the story of the BPP elucidated in the book is not entirely unique compared with the plethora of other works on the organization.

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SOVEREIGNTY IN EXILE: A Saharan Liberation Movement Governs

By Alice Wilson. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. 312 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-8122-4849-4.

Alice Wilson's *Sovereignty in Exile* opens with an anecdote: having spent most of her research time with refugees in a series of camps near Tindouf, Algeria, Wilson ventures with a host family into the nearby pasturelands, watching the refugees become nomadic pastoralists. These two identities—refugee and nomad—are frequently on display in Tindouf. Historically, each of the many nomadic groups who moved through this space would have had a unique brand for their camels in order to identify them when the camels inevitably wander off, but Wilson encounters a camel bearing the brand of the Polisario Front. Polisario is a revolutionary movement demanding independence for Western Sahara and more recently functions as a sort of movement/party (the only one) within the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), a government-in-exile that administers both the Tindouf camps and the eastern part of the original territory of Western Sahara.

Wilson identifies the case of the camel brands as an example of Polisario's efforts to supplant the various Western Saharan *qabā'il* (sing. *qabīlah*), which she calls "tribes"—a contested term in anthropology, though Wilson is not using it uncritically. The relationship—basically one of superimposition—between Polisario and the *qabā'il* forms what Wilson calls a "palimpsest." In typical usage, a palimpsest refers to a painting or manuscript that has been repurposed (the original image or text replaced with a new one) but still bears traces of the original. Wilson's use of this process as a metaphor for the evolution of political identity in Western Sahara is inspired, and it provides an organizing model for her investigation.

Having established the context, she examines how the state-movement (her formula-

tion for the joint SADR-Polisario entity, another inspired vocabulary choice) has remade the "social relations of sovereignty" that at one point existed between groups of Hassaniyya-speaking nomads in precolonial Western Sahara. Tribes, Wilson argues, are also projects of sovereignty. Across each of her chosen areas (law, taxation, inequality, markets, elections), she traces how the state-movement sought to impose its own sovereignty-making project, how tribal relations were overwritten or co-opted, and how, over time, those tribal relations reemerged in new ways, becoming visible once again through the palimpsest.

Wilson's empirical contribution is outstanding. Her degree of access and the duration of her research are remarkable. Rigorous scholarly work on Western Sahara is sparse, and this is one of the more substantive contributions to the literature in recent years. A political bibliography of Western Sahara surely requires Wilson's book, and anyone seeking an understanding of internal dynamics in the camps should read it closely. Because Western Sahara is remote and challenging to access, politically driven claims about conditions in the camps or the Moroccan-occupied areas can proliferate. Empirical, on-the-ground research is the best countermeasure to this overt politicization, and Wilson has made an impressive contribution. Her chapter on managing inequalities, which focuses almost exclusively on marriage, is worth the price of admission alone, and her account of elections in the camps is well-researched ethnography but also doubles as compelling political campaign journalism.

The book's theoretical contributions are occasionally on less solid ground. It sometimes has the feel of a checklist, as Wilson attempts to pattern-match various aspects of political life in the camps to existing models of sovereignty and to the palimpsest. As Jacob Mundy noted in another review, her focus on bottom-up ethnography, while laudable, sometimes comes at the expense of a deep analysis of the state-movement's goals,

agency, and internal processes. Her case studies would be enriched by a more thorough consideration of how the state-movement actually makes its choices.

One of Wilson's theoretical targets is the relationship between sovereignty and territory, since the state-movement is physically separated from most of the original territory of Western Sahara. From this starting point, she proceeds to analyze "the social relations of sovereignty" through the lens of control over population or resources, rather than territory itself. This is an interesting point, but it comes at the expense of a thorough consideration of the relationship between sovereignty relations and territory in the space which the state-movement actually controls; we hear very little about the parts of Western Sahara administered by the state-movement, or the state-movement's conception of its own borders. A complete picture of the state-movement's relationship to territory would presumably have to include a discussion of its relationship to Algeria, but, strikingly, there is virtually no mention of Algeria in a case study that takes place mostly (nominally, cartographically) within that country.

Similarly, her analysis of economic relations in the camps argues that the state-movement foregoes taxation in favor of other avenues of control: labor, aid redistribution, and so on. Her point about redistribution of aid as a parallel means of schematization is valid. But, because Algeria is absent from her analysis (as are, largely, other relevant state-centric projects like the UN Refugee Agency, the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, and the World Food Program), there is limited consideration of the fact that much of the state-movement's funding comes from exogenous sources in the form of financial aid, or the food and fuel supplies that reduce the hypothetical financial burden placed on the state-movement by its population. There are at least some analogies here to a rentier state, one that draws on, for instance, resource wealth and has no need to tax its population.

More interesting is the state-movement's history of labor conscription, which Wilson considers a potential form of taxation: it is, for instance, justified in part by its relation to public services, and labor can perhaps be considered a "resource" to be appropriated from the population. But Wilson notes that some refugees enthusiastically contribute far more labor than required, apparently in support of revolutionary ideals, and there is no obvious mechanism for coercive appropriation of labor beyond social expectation. As Wilson notes, "The coincidence of volition with the lines of legitimate coercion was such that it is not clear that there were punishments for failing to comply with labour conscription" (135). Is this taxation in any meaningful sense? It may be a useful idea to think with, but a state that does not need to tax its population, and to whom labor is provided voluntarily by that population, is more unusual than Wilson's analysis allows.

Wilson's conclusion, "Revolution as Moral Contract," is fascinating. In it, she argues for a sort of bargaining process between the state-movement and its population, in which each expects the other to place the moral demands of revolution ahead of the particular demands of, for instance, membership in a specific *qabilah*. This is an interesting idea, and it is worth considering in more depth than a book review permits. It may be that all state-making projects are essentially palimpsests, the replacement of one kind of political authority with another that shapes and is shaped by its predecessors.

The book ends with another anecdote from the pasturelands. One day, a car comes up to the tent in which the Wilson has been staying, and a man emerges. "Whose tents are these?" he asks. "These are the tents of the Sahara," responds Wilson's host. "Yes," says the visitor, "we are all tents of the Sahara, but which tribe are you?" Meaning: Yes, the state-movement is preeminent. And no, its claim to power is not exclusive. The erasure is important but incomplete. At last, Wilson's host, having

established her revolutionary credentials, tells the man which tribe she is from. The visitor, who is looking for a different tribe, drives away. For a moment, the palimpsest is visible.

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OCCUPIED LIVES: Maintaining Integrity in a Palestinian Refugee Camp in the West Bank

By Nina Gren. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2015. 250 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-9-7741-6695-2.

Every now and then, you read a book and realize that completing it from the beginning to end is necessary and that skipping over sections would lead to an incomplete mosaic. This is what I felt while engaging with Nina Gren's *Occupied Lives: Maintaining Integrity in a Palestinian Refugee Camp in the West Bank*. Gren is a Swedish anthropologist who conducted ethnographic research in the Dheisheh Refugee Camp in the West Bank district of Bethlehem from 2003 to 2004. Her book explores how residents of the camp experienced violence and attempted to build normal lives while maintaining morality. Her descriptions ring true for those of us familiar with this context, her analysis is apt, and her text is dense with details about this place and its people. The book provides a comprehensive understanding of the political and social issues faced by this community, and each subsection could easily be its own chapter.

Gren's fieldwork, completed with the help of two Palestinian research assistants, was focused on the Second Intifada, in which there were high rates of violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. Her explication of how emergencies are normalized in this context was insightful, and revelatory in her delineation of when this is threatened, so crises become apparent. Gren persuasively argues that "normalizing repeated emergen-

cies may be seen as an effort to reestablish ontological security and thus continuity." (15) She adds, "It is possible to understand the normalization of death as a way of repressing grief, which may be necessary during ongoing conflict." (87) And with regard to prisons in particular, she elaborates that their glorification on the part of Palestinians, considering Israel's alarmingly widespread incarceration of Palestinians, makes "suffering at least partially meaningful in the camp, and might even transform them into a form of empowerment." (89) As a result, we gain a textured analysis of the processes underlying how different layers of violence become so intimate, ordinary, and quotidian in Palestinian society.

There are many additional strengths to *Occupied Lives*. The literature review throughout the book is impressive, demonstrating a robust knowledge of contemporary Palestinian studies, and Gren's theoretical foundation is excellent. She provides a nuanced understanding of the diversity of Palestinians, whether as a result of class, refugee, geographic, or religious status, differentiating, for example, for the differences in Christian versus Muslim experiences in the West Bank, or the alienation experienced between those in Dheisheh and the political elite and Palestinian authority.

The survey of social domains with which Palestinians must grapple is also to be lauded in this text, from Israel's "matrix of control" over Palestine to outlining the conceptual richness of Palestinian notions such as *sumud*, drawing readers' attention to resilience mechanisms such as humor, writing about the devastating impacts of Palestinian collaboration with Israel security services, corruption, Israeli blackmailing of Palestinians, and the erosion of trust within Palestine. We develop a sense of practice such as parallel cousin marriages, how gender works in Palestinian society, and manifestations of anti-Semitism (72, 104).

Gren's insights are profound at critical junctures in the book, such as her linking Palestinian understanding of themselves as

morally superior, Israel as morally inferior, and the need to avoid “contamination” from the latter (164). Furthermore, how Palestinians become fatalistic in the turn to God for meaning in this context of oppression and domination was important in its inclusion by Gren. Her attention to the smallest of details makes the ethnography more compelling and demonstrates the power of anthropology and how anthropologists from outside of a community can grasp the intricacies of their host community’s social dynamics.

I particularly appreciated Gren’s discussion of “martyr” operations and Palestinian use of violence against Israel and Israelis. She identifies how suicide bombings, which ended in 2008, could partially be accounted for: “The politics of insecurity and arbitrary displays of power employed by the Israeli state were to some extent imitated by the Palestinians with the martyrdom operations, creating fear” (179). Yet, she also acknowledges the many Palestinians who did not approve of these bombings, with “arguments put forward against martyrdom operations, namely that it is both morally questionable and religiously prohibited to kill people, especially children” (183). Gren truly captures the political moment in which her research was positioned.

In my view, chapter 3, “The Making of New Homes,” is the strongest. While we do not gain a superrich and in-depth view into the internal worlds of individual Palestinians in general in the book, namely in deeply engaging in the subjectivities of particular narratives of individual experience, we move in that direction in this chapter. The analysis at the level of the home was necessary in order not only to focus on the macro (which is invaluable nonetheless) but also to expand our theorization of the political to include the home. Gren writes, “Home may not be a stage for fear and humiliation but may also be a place for the development of feelings of empowerment” (140). Palestinians take pride in their building of homes, both physically and in terms of their interior spaces for their families, in the

face of settler colonialism, home demolitions, and displacement. The refugees in Dheisheh, as Gren makes clear, have inherited those histories of dispossession. At the same time, they also must grapple with the salience of mutual support for each other while also the disappointment that comes with not being able to support each other as much as they wish they could. The moral dilemmas that ensue, and that Gren describes, affirms the humanity of her interlocutors.

I was deeply moved by the following line: “Politics is not ‘just’ about peace negotiations between political leaders, death tolls and destroyed infrastructure, the repatriation of refugees, or human rights abuses; it is about existence itself” (193). This is brilliant and so beautiful. At the same time, I wish that it had come earlier in the text, particularly to assist Gren in defining the political, as she makes the argument early on that these Palestinian refugees have largely been pushed outside of the political processes because of Israeli repression and Palestinian elite leadership.

Where the lack of Arabic-language knowledge becomes evident was in not properly translating the term “integrity” in the context of the Palestinian use in order better make the case that it should be such an anchoring concept in the ethnography. While the book overall handled all the material with great care and sensitivity, there were moments when the tone, writing style, and impact read as somewhat callous, and revealed a European gaze on the Middle East, such as with the author’s mentioning of growing “tired” of these people in the preface. Gren also quotes an interlocutor as saying, “Maybe there will be a nakba bigger than that one. Then you can write a new PhD, Nina!” (64). As a Palestinian reader, for whom the Nakba is a source of significant trauma, making light of it and instrumentalizing it in such a manner was a bit jarring. Furthermore, the urge to describe a mother who was not mourning the death of her son to argue that media representations (which ones was not clarified) are not nuanced in showing that not all Palestinian

mothers wail was not properly developed (79). We do not know anything about this mother while reading the text, how well Gren knew her, whether Gren had been with her throughout the mourning process, and what context we are missing.

Gren haphazardly compares Palestine and Colombia by quickly and only describing the latter as “another violent society” (61), fails to provide a nuanced and more complex explication of these Palestinians’ perception of and relationship to the UN Relief and Works Agency (32), and improperly accounts for the role of the Israeli occupation in the migration of Palestinian Christians (38), and such examples highlight that not slowing down a

bit with the writing, and trying to cover so many domain and details in one book, did have its drawbacks.

Nonetheless, this truly formidable work is an important contribution to Palestinian studies, and a piece of scholarship that is to be commended. Nina Gren helps restore the integrity of Palestinian refugees—to which they themselves are so committed—and she reveals the tenacity of Palestinian society. I feel grateful for this modeling of the best of anthropology and academic engagement in Middle East studies and beyond.

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