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pedagogies of crossing: meditations on feminism, sexual politics, memory, and the sacred

M. Jacqui Alexander; Duke University Press, London and Durham, 2005, 424pp., ISBN 978-0822336457, £15.95 (Pbk)

Pedagogies of Crossing takes the willing reader on an evocative and a provocative journey. Truly interdisciplinary, theoretically sophisticated, critically engaged and courageously reflexive, this text charts new and important courses for transnational feminist, queer and critical race studies. The collection's title honours the enslaved labour and conjures the indomitable spirits of continental African women and men, who, in millions, were forcibly transported across the Atlantic to the Americas and the Caribbean. Like the creek that ran into the river which then became the sea, 'Crossing' becomes a metaphor for so much that is powerful about this book.

Spanning a decade from 1994 to 2004, these essays are poignant and poetic narratives of an emergent lesbian and woman of colour feminist consciousness: 'a set of conflictual convergences of my own migrancy, rendered more fragile under empire, and the genealogies of feminist, neo-colonial, and "queer" politics that are simultaneously transnational, all reside here' (p. 8). Each of the contributions can and does stand alone, and the author encourages the reader to defy chronology when reading. However, when read from cover to cover, as I did, it is impossible to ignore the text's conceptual fluidity. With chapter five in Part II as the theoretical anchor, three interconnected themes provide the organisational structure: (I) 'Transnational Erotics: State, Capital, and the Decolonization of Desire'; (II) 'Maps of Empire, Old and New'; (III) 'Dangerous Memory: Secular Acts, Sacred Possession'. Sadly, I can not do adequate justice to all that is compelling in this visionary book. Having stated my textual limitations, I will engage with chapters one and two as well as a discursive strategy that Alexander utilises so effectively throughout but specifically in chapters four, six and seven.

As called for in chapter five, the two chapters in 'Transnational Erotics' draw the colonial, the neo-colonial and the neo-imperial into the same discursive space. Using the case study of the 1991 Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act in the Bahamas, 'Erotic Autonomy as a Politics of Decolonization' is a critique of the ways in which the state asserts itself as both a heteropatriarchal and a neo-colonial formation. Exploring unequal racialised and economic dynamics of power in white corporate gay

tourism/sexual consumer practices in the Caribbean and other 'developing' regions, 'Imperial Desire/Sexual Utopias: White Gay Capital and Transnational Tourism' poses a critical challenge to queer studies and queer movements to simultaneously 'imbricate shifting political economies, the politics of immigration and racial formation in these varied urban [domestic] and [touristic] landscapes' (p. 88). These two chapters eloquently and persuasively illustrate the paradoxes of neo-colonial state and imperial strategies as they pertain to sexual rights and economies. That said, addressing the differential and equally problematic practices of power at play in the political economies of 'First World' Black corporate gay and heterosexual tourisms in destinations such as Jamaica and Brazil would have provided additional food for critical reflection.

Regarding Alexander's discursive intervention, there are longstanding textual traditions in both feminist studies and anthropology, which incorporate either the autobiographical and experiential or the critically reflexive speaking 'I' respectively. Bold and innovative, Alexander mobilises the 'shifting I': 'Modulations in voice, therefore, are an opening that permits us to hear the muse, an indication of how memory works, how it comes to be animated' (p. 16). In chapter four, the brave voice of the scholar-activist exposes the limits of relative ivory tower privilege and prestige as they pertain to the gendered and racialised marginal status of non-tenure and temporary contract academics at the New School for Social Research, her former place of employment. By also recounting the counter-hegemonic resistance strategies deployed by the 'Mobilization for Real Diversity, Democracy and Economic Justice', a coalition which included herself, students, faculty, staff and subcontracted security guards, she illustrates how the global ideologies of 'empire' are reproduced and challenged within the local urban academic knowledge factory.

'Remembering *This Bridge Called My Back*, Remembering Ourselves' (chapter six), is a touching tribute to this groundbreaking collection that has been instrumental in the birthing process of so many feminists of colour, myself included. At the same time, by naming the psychic wounds of slavery and colonialism that provoke intercultural suspicion and inhibit solidarity among African American and African Caribbean communities [and I would also include immigrant, settled and refugee continental African communities] within and outside the academy, Alexander invokes what I refer to as a decisive gendered Pan-African diasporic consciousness: '... there is nothing that can replace the unborrowed truths that lie at the junction of the particularity of our experiences and our confrontation with history' (p. 275). This collective consciousness is forged from the lived realities and (post)colonial legacies of inter-woven histories characterised by metropolitan racism, sexism, heterosexism, class discrimination, xenophobia, Islamophobia and resistances. Though not explicitly referenced in her text, we also confront the contemporary urgency of unity when we witness persistent globalised, racialised and gendered inequities as manifest in the legal and social

exclusion of clandestine West African migrant women and men en route to Fortress Europe. We are reminded that different African diasporic formations are simultaneously part of the same unfolding historical macronarrative and localised specific manifestations of home, community, longing and belonging.

'Pedagogies of the Sacred: Making the Invisible Tangible' (chapter seven) invokes Spirit and in particular the spirit of Kitsimba from the Mayombe region of Central Africa, who is (re)membering the symbolic and real violence of 'the Crossing' that brought her to the 'New World' and bestowed her plantation slave name 'Thisbe'. Intertwined with Alexander's narrative of sacred subjectivity, Kitsimba transports the reader to places of (re)membered knowing, where the Sacred resides and practices: '... the cycle of action, reflection, and practice as Sacred praxis embodied marks an important reversal of the thinking as knowledge paradigm' (p. 307). Let *Pedagogies of Crossing* wash over you and through you. It is truly transformative and facilitates a pedagogical awakening for both teachers and our students.

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