**Keisha-Khan Y. Perry**, *Black Women against the Land Grab: The Fight for Racial Justice in Brazil*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013. ISBN 978-0-8166-8324-6 (paper); ISBN 978-0-8166-8323-9 (cloth)

This book is fabulous reading: rich ethnography and well-informed analysis in combination with sophisticated, theoretical discussions.  It's also alive with the indignation and anger of the black author against the racism and colonialist practices that still inform everyday life in Brazil today.  She follows the tradition of engaged ethnographies about Brazil written by Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992), Donna Goldstein (2003), and Sarah Hautzinger (2007), and the less well-known study of sterilization of poor women in northeast Brazil by Anne Line Dalsgaard (2004) - all sensitive, in-depth studies of the lives of marginalized people in Brazil, especially women.  They show not only women's oppression but also their agency, sense of humour, and enormous creativity and strength.  The representation of women's political agency in the context of their marginalization makes these books important contributions to political anthropology and geography.

What sets Perry's book apart from the other ethnographies is the link with her personal lifestory as a Jamaican-born African American.  She is very explicit about her personal position, starting the book with an incidence at a bank in Brazil where she, as a black person, was hindered by security personnel from passing the entrance door.  Although some readers might criticize the extent of self-referentiality in the book, in my view it is enriching and indispensable in a study that bears such a close relation to the personal life of the researcher.

In discussions today, 'land grab' is mostly used to refer to large-scale acquisition of territory to secure the production of food or biofuels.  However, Perry uses the term 'land grab' for urban renewal programs in Salvador de Bahia (Brazil), that remove poor residents from valuable inner city land to the outskirts of the city.  It is a common phenomenon throughout the world that lower class housing is removed for reasons of real estate redevelopment, clearing space for middle class settlements and 'beautification' for bourgeois

interests and tourism.  As David Harvey's (2008) 'accumulation by dispossession' has it, bourgeois urban development plans deny the poor their right to the city.

However, Perry demonstrates that in Salvador this exclusion of the poor through urban renewal programs has racial dimensions.  Black people are removed from their houses in deprived, run-down inner-city neighbourhoods to make the area available and attractive for tourists and the white upper classes.  Today Salvador is an import tourist site as during colonial times it was a major port of entry for African slaves who were brought to work on the sugar and tobacco plantations.  This large scale tourism commodifies and consumes black culture as folkloric representations of the past.  This results in the perverse situation that tourists enjoy the sanitized version of the black heritage, while simultaneously the descendants of the black slaves are expelled from their houses and land.

Even though the large majority of the population in Salvador is black, it is difficult to find blacks in positions of political and economic power.  Most black people live in marginalised poor neighbourhoods, often in the centre.  Perry's book documents the fear of removal of the residents of one of these neighbourhoods, Gamboa de Baixo.  Their fear of removal is realistic considering that the population of Pelourinho, the historic centre of Salvador, has already been removed and that the coastal area, where Gamboa de Baixo is situated, is considered prime real estate.

Perry shows that protecting the possession of their houses and land is not an easy endeavour as official papers are often lacking.  In addition, the black population and their neighbourhoods have to deal with the public image of being criminal and dangerous.  So, the residents of these neighbourhoods have to combat the image of collective pathology while struggling to gain access to vital urban resources such as housing, land, and basic sanitation.

Interestingly, Perry shows that the neighbourhood association in Gamboa de Baixo is led by black women, who are the central figures in grassroots politics.  The book follows them in their struggle to maintain their houses and land.  To that end, they have recourse to a wide variety of means. Among other strategies, they strike alliances with NGOs, the MNU (official black movement in Brazil), politicians, political parties, and the School of

Architecture at the Federal University of Bahia.  The women make strategic use of the media and regularly feature in the local newspaper.  The strategy of 'making noise' and generating media attention seems the most effective, and the women are well aware of it.  As one of them said: "When we conversed, things were not resolved.  They only were resolved when we went crazy."  If they feel it is necessary, they sometimes turn to more drastic interventions, such as confronting the police and state officials during meetings and group demonstrations.  Other actions include taking a social worker hostage, or closing down the highway.  So far, their strategies have been effective in the sense that the black women of La Gamboa de Baixa have managed to avoid removal.

Perry analyses her material along gender and racial lines.  She argues that in academic literature too little attention is given to the central role of black women in political activities at the grassroots level.  This same bias can be found in media coverage that tends to focus on the 'heroic' role of men, rather than seeing the heroism of women (such as the incident where Amilton, the driver of a bulldozer, steps down and refuses to demolish the house of Telma, who had decided to stay in her house that was indicated for demolition; this event received enormous media attention in which Amilton was considered to be the hero rather than Telma, who had the courage and strategic sense to stand up against the system and stay put in her house).

I concur with the author that academic analysis does not pay enough attention to the diversity of manifestations of grassroots politics.  There is a focus on formal, collective, and institutionalized politics, generally dominated by men. Yet, as Perry argues, we should ask "how people organize politically for land rights amid rampant police and drug-related violence" (p.xvi).  In this light I also agree with Perry that the religious practices of these women should be analysed as an important dimension of their political agency.  Their resistance against the violence of land evictions is deeply connected to freedom and liberation ideologies expressed through Candomblé[1] and their practices at places of worship (such as *terreiros*).

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1  A syncretic religion, bringing together beliefs from a number of African regions.

Considering the relevance of her work for analyses of the 'politics of the poor', I find it a pity that the author does not engage more in these debates and focuses her theoretical discussions around questions of gender and race. In the field of grassroots politics, much attention is paid to politics 'by other means' and 'by other actors' in order to theorize the multiple ways in which marginal people express their political agency (Auyero 2001; Chatterjee 2004). The field examines how, through a combination of formal and informal means, people at the grassroots level try to influence the interventions that affect their lives (Gay 1999; Lazar 2004). In particular, slum and urban renewal studies is rich in theoretical reflections about the multiple ways in which poor slum residents carve out a space to express their political agency (Benjamin 2008; Roy 2009). Perry's ethnography would offer beautiful material for these theoretical debates.

Perry situates the events in Salvador within the global historical struggle for emancipation of black people in the context of racial domination. She offers a strong analysis of racial relations in Salvador, which in my view is relevant for other parts of Brazil as well. In northeast Brazil (the area of Recife), for example, I also was struck by the continuing ideology of racial democracy and the widespread denial and down-playing of racism as a continuing organizing factor in society. Perry talks about "state-sponsored racism and violence towards blacks in the forced demolition of urban neighbourhoods and the relocation of blacks to the periphery of the city" (p.xv). She refers to urban development as the spatial dimension of the whitening project executed by the white elite of Salvador (p.43). I can imagine that her strong statements about 'state-sponsored racism' and the comparison of antiblack racism in Brazil with apartheid in South Africa (p.xiii) will not always be received with much enthusiasm. It's one thing to say that slum clearance has exclusionary effects with a racial dimension, and another to say that this is state-sponsored racism. Although to a large extent I agree with Perry's analysis that spatial exclusion is at the core of gendered racial stratification, I wonder whether these strong statements do not simplify the analysis and antagonize discussion partners in an unnecessary way. On the other hand, in an environment

in which racism is so present and at the same time denied on a large scale, these uncompromising positions might be necessary.

The book pays homage to black women who stand up against the system and its injustices - strong black women, who do not receive enough attention in mainstream academic debates. Perry offers an urgent analysis of the political economy of black diaspora communities and, in particular, the political struggle of black women against exclusion and racism. Furthermore, her study is of utmost importance for discussions of grassroots politics in general, and around urban renewal in particular. As such this book is a significant contribution to political anthropology and geography - obligatory reading for anybody interested in racism, grassroots politics, and the exclusionary effects of urban renewal.

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