

References

- Louis A. Pérez. 1999. *On Becoming Cuban*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
Louis A. Pérez. 2005. *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

John M. Kirk
Dalhousie University
Email: john.kirk@dal.ca

© 2014, John M. Kirk
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08263663.2014.940727>

Black women against the land grab: the fight for racial justice in Brazil, by Keisha-Khan Y. Perry, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2013, xxi + 213 pp., US\$25.00 (pbk), ISBN 978-0-8166-8324-6

Denouncing the myth of “racial democracy” in Brazil, Keisha-Khan Y. Perry’s ethnography of the Gamboa de Baixo neighborhood in Salvador, Bahia, makes explicit how state-sponsored racism and violence towards Afro-descendants negatively impact black urban environments. Through an examination of the extensive history of economic exclusion and social abandonment, the links between this systemic marginalization, class inequality, and urban renewal practices that target the removal and/or demolition of black communities are made apparent. In response, local environmental justice activists advocate for urban policy reform that includes the participatory and distributive rights of these marginalized and racialized communities, specifically with regard to material resources such as housing and land. By focusing on the women-led neighborhood activist group “Associação Amigos de Gegê dos Moradores da Gamboa de Baixo”, Perry argues that it is women’s participation and leadership that are fundamental to the success of these social action movements, particularly with regard to urban renewal projects and the associated displacement of poor, racialized populations.

These key arguments of *Black women against the land grab* are supported throughout the text as Perry explains how particular urban practices intensify the conflicts found at the intersections of race, gender, and class, including the specific (dis)placing of Afro-Brazilian cultural elements (Chapter 2), the ongoing police violence that targets marginalized and racialized communities (Chapter 4), and common gendered and racialized labor experiences of community residents, specifically domestic labor (Chapter 6). Together, these arguments strongly support her introductory assertion that “racism is part of the everyday experiences of Afro-Brazilians” (xii) and further her claims of institutionalized racism and violence. However, it is Perry’s discussion of the political mobilization efforts against these injustices, through the lens of women-led neighborhood activist groups in Salvador, that solidify her central argument around the politicization of place-based identities. By engaging in environmental justice practices, including the fostering of intra-movement relationships, the scaling-up of activities, and by actively seeking and gaining political support (Chapter 3), these women-led neighborhood activist groups are challenging and redefining urbanization policies while fighting for the rights of their racialized and economically-marginalized communities to spatial inclusion. Consequently, these women-led neighborhood activist groups are increasingly seen as community leaders by both local residents and within the wider urban society of Salvador.

Significantly, Perry identifies herself as a “scholar-activist”, able to objectively critique the neighborhood and social movements’ ideas and actions (xxi). Her ethnographic

honesty is apparent throughout this study, but becomes most obvious at two points. The first is in a discussion exposing internal community discrimination and the challenges it poses to the neighborhood associations (68–72). The second, more complex instance, is found within a larger narrative about community responsibility (Chapter 5), and details the acknowledgement within Gamboa de Baixo that certain residents do engage in illegal activities, thus complicating external relationships with the state. In providing ethnographic balance, this objectivity significantly increases the reader's confidence in Perry's activist and academic research conclusions.

Indeed, it is the richness of the ethnographic narratives and the obvious dedication Perry has for the movement that drive this study. Expertly interwoven into the text, the women's stories and Perry's analysis of them provide an excellent illustrative context for the important theoretical contributions she makes to the literatures on political movements, environmental justice, and urban studies. By deconstructing the complex politics that link race, gender, and class consciousness with urbanization processes in Salvador ethnographically through the voices of the residents, Perry consciously advocates for the importance of grassroots activism, and this is one of the most significant contributions this work will have for social justice scholars.

Unfortunately, much of this ethnographic material is based on events from the late 1990s and early 2000s, and is consequently now somewhat dated. Readers are left wondering about the current status of the Gamboa de Baixo neighborhood and its residents, as well as remaining curious about broader national events, including community displacements occurring within Salvador and throughout Brazil as the country prepares for the upcoming FIFA World Cup (2014) and Summer Olympics (2016). Perry's expert insights on these obvious connections would have been fascinating, and likely immensely useful for scholars and activists watching as events unfold in Brazil. However, that these forced land expulsions are ongoing and impending demonstrates the current and future political relevance of Perry's work as a historical account and, by this measure, her long-term research is a real contribution to both social change and social justice research.

Black women against the land grab lends itself naturally to a broad interdisciplinary scholarly base. Perry actively engages with "black feminist thought, critical race and diaspora theories, and urban studies" (xvii) and, in encouraging us to think about how space, knowledge, and power interact, makes a significant contribution to the environmental justice literature, in particular from the perspective of women of the Global South, addressing a significant gap in current research. The exceptional ethnographic narratives and the clarity of writing make this a monograph which could easily be incorporated into a senior undergraduate- or a graduate-level class across most of the social science disciplines. But these same qualities suggest that Perry's work could appeal to a non-academic audience, such as that of the international social and grassroots movement activists, thereby contributing to the broader ongoing struggle for worldwide social justice. "*A luta continua*" (169).

Katherine MacDonald
York University
katiem@yorku.ca

© 2014, Katherine MacDonald

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08263663.2014.940728>

Copyright of Canadian Journal of Latin American & Caribbean Studies (Canadian Association of Latin American & Caribbean Studies (CALACS)) is the property of Canadian Association of Latin American & Caribbean Studies (CALACS) and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.