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*Black Women Against the Land Grab: The Fight for Racial Justice in Brazil*, by Keisha-Khan Y. Perry. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013. \$25.00, paperback; \$75.00, cloth. 224 pages.

Reviewed by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

In preparation for the 2014 World Cup soccer games, the Brazilian government initiated evictions of poor families from land and properties that stood in the way of the massive rebuilding and construction projects that were underway. The practice of evicting and relocating the poor and, often, dark skinned, inhabitants from the central city to the periphery did not originate with the pending World Cup games. According to anthropologist Keisha-Khan Perry, however, the struggle against land evictions and for the human right to decent housing is longstanding in the movement of ordinary and black Brazilians for the “right to the city.” And black women, Perry argues, are in the forefront of the movement.

Perry’s book is both timely and important. It is also theoretically rich, exploring the history and politics of local movements against the land grab from the lens of a poor

black coastal neighborhood called Gamboa de Baxio in the city of Salvador, Bahia. This is a story not only of resistance, but also of a movement led by black woman against Brazilian “urban renewal” and relocation.

Perry situates her book in the evolving scholarship on race in Brazil, and in Latin America generally. By focusing on the struggles and organizing capacity of black women, Perry challenges discourses that describe Brazil as a racial paradise or racial democracy. Her engagement with the existing literature demonstrates the extent to which descriptions of racial egalitarianism in Brazil have been debunked, only to be replaced by new racial myths. The most important of these new myths is that black politics centers mainly on demands for cultural inclusion, to the exclusion of political organizing. Focusing on the struggles of black women accomplishes two things. First, it demonstrates that black political demands exceed the cultural component and instantiates black Brazilians as political subjects. Second, black women as central actors disrupt normative narratives that underestimate their agency in struggles against exploitation and oppression while also challenging the invisibility of black women’s contribution to political organizing in Brazil.

Salvador is an important coastal city with a thriving tourist industry that is central to its overall economy. Ironically, it is also known and celebrated as a black city with the largest black population in the world outside of Africa. Perry interrogates this irony by looking at the “visibility” and “invisibility” of blacks in Salvador as local officials use the city’s blackness as a selling point for tourism while simultaneously driving out poorer

black citizens. In other words, according to Perry, the cultural artifacts of blackness, including martial arts like capoeira, festivals like Carnival, and ethnic food like feijoado, are major tourist attractions, but the physical presence of poor blacks is not.

Black women operate on the margins of Brazil's economic order, with the result that they are disproportionately impacted by the state's urban land grab policies. Perry highlights the dialectic of racial and gender oppression in this process. While race and gender are a source of oppression, they are simultaneously a basis of unity and organization. The struggle against land grabbing becomes racialized and gendered not only because of the identity of its leading agents, black women, but also because of how the state justifies its attack on black communities. The community of Gamboa de Baxio, the focus of Perry's study, literally exists beneath the main drag of the wealthy area of Salvador, Contorno Avenue. Gamboa is described in decidedly racial terms as a dirty, unhygienic place, teeming with drug dealers and other criminals. These descriptions are intended to justify the terrorism and brutality of the police as well as the government's aggressive "slum clearance" posture, which is couched in the language of safety.

Racism, along with political and economic marginalization, keeps black Brazilians disproportionately impoverished. This poverty affects the quality of housing, entices young men into the drug trade, and keeps black women trapped in low wage domestic work or prostitution. These conditions, in turn, become the basis for extra surveillance and violence by the state, as the Gamboa is defined as "dangerous" space. But Perry also demonstrates how

the black families of Gamboa draw on their own traditions to define their community for themselves. For example, black families' access to the sea is a critical aspect of their religious practice of Candomblé and motivates the struggle to maintain beachfront land. They are also a fishing community and dispersal to the perimeter of the cities would sink families deeper into poverty.

The traditions of community development unite the residents of Gamboa in their struggles to keep their homes and land rights. Perry theorizes that black women lead the struggle because "they constitute the *superexploited* ... producing a kind of political militancy necessary to lead social movements" (151). In other words, the material neglect that black women experience makes them both "pivotal and vulnerable to struggles" (151). These objective conditions, coupled with religious practices that emphasize the collective well-being over individual pursuits, have (so far) made Gamboa's struggles successful. Perry argues that the black women of Gamboa are less susceptible to cooptation for two reasons. The first is that there is a general understanding that black women stand to gain more through collective struggle than they may gain individually by abandoning their struggle against the state or by accepting personal favors. Moreover, both public and private official attempts at coopting women are much different from those aimed at men. Because poor black women in Brazil are hypersexualized, men attempt to bribe women with sexual favors while poor black men are offered material goods. This changes the susceptibility to cooptation and makes it less enticing for women. Finally, racial identity is also

important to the overall political development of these black women. As black political subjects, they have been deeply influenced by the black struggle against white supremacy in Brazil. The resulting consciousness empowers them to “feel capable of waging struggle against the state” (165), which, of course, is dominated by white men.

The women who lead the Gamboa community have been successful in staving off the efforts by developers and the state to drive them off their land, but it is a never-ending battle and as land becomes even scarcer the authorities will likely come under increasing more pressure to simply steal it. Moreover, as local economies become more dependent on tourism and expensive and speculative condominium development, poor black residents with desirable beach front property will be forced to continue to organize and maintain their fight for space in the gentrifying urban cores.

The chief shortcoming of Perry’s book is its lack of engagement with broader economic developments in Brazil. Perry states that the wrongly named “urban renewal” and “slum clearance” practices are products of neoliberal economic practices. However, she does not really explain how these practices differ from the initial development plans that created Contorno Avenue, for example. So while showing continuity with previous practices, the book is less effective in showing changes over time, as the political economy evolves. Brazil was the site of the first World Social Forum in 2001, both because it was a site of neoliberal driven globalization and because it was an important site of resistance. It would be interesting to know whether the attempts at land grabs

have increased over time because of an intensification of neoliberal urbanization. This, however, is minor criticism of a beautifully written book.

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*The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography*, by Jennifer C. Nash. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014. \$23.95, paperback. 219 pages.

Reviewed by Kirin Wachter-Grene

Jennifer C. Nash’s *The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography* is one of two books published in 2014 on black women in the adult entertainment industry; the other is Mireille Miller-Young’s *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography*.<sup>1</sup> They herald an increasing scholarly interest in black female sexuality, already evidenced in the work of Shayne Lee, Ariane Cruz, and LaMonda Horton Stallings. By engaging what she claims are two “under-theorized aspects of race: pleasure and performance” (4),<sup>2</sup> Nash pushes against what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham termed “the politics of respectability”<sup>3</sup> that has, since the nineteenth century, cloaked black female sexuality in “silence, secrecy, and invisibility.”<sup>4</sup>

As she explores in her Introduction and first chapter “Archives of Pain,” the residue of respectability politics has for too long

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