

Book Reviews

THE NEW NOIR: RACE, IDENTITY, AND DIASPORA IN BLACK SUBURBIA, by Orly Clergé. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2019. ISBN: 9780520296787; 320 pp. \$29.95 paper.

Reviewed by

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There are so many layers and facets to *The New Noir* that it's hard to believe it fits within the covers of just one book. Clergé recounts history from the colonial era to the present, charts the migrations of Jamaicans, Haitians, and Black Southerners, does a multi-sited ethnography, and conducts 60 interviews with residents of neighborhoods in Queens and Long Island, New York. *The New Noir* is a work of urban sociology, and also of migration studies, Black Studies, comparative ethnic studies, and the sociology of culture. The book packs a powerful sociological punch, and it is also appetizingly readable. Clergé keeps the reader's mouth watering with each chapter title: Fish Soup, Callaloo, Children of the Yam, and Vanilla Black. These titles are not just empty flourishes. The chapter entitled "Blood Pudding," for example, recounts not only the house bombings and racial terror that Black people endured when they moved to Queens and Long Island in large numbers in the mid-20th century, but also the erasure of Native Americans, and the 17th and 18th Century presence of 1,300 enslaved Black people in Queens, and 1,000 enslaved Black people in Nassau County. The food references offer rich cultural metaphors for the complex social process that Clergé analyzes in the book.

A primary argument of *The New Noir* is that local places cannot be understood without adopting a global lens. Hence, although the book is about the "Black diasporic suburb"—as illustrated by a section of Queens pseudonymously called Cascades, and a section of Long Island called Great Park—the story reaches far beyond New York. As Clergé writes: "The racial caste system of Charleston, the uneven industrialization of Kingston, and the dictatorship politics of Port au Prince are interrelated global processes that have shaped Black migrant experiences and perspectives" (13). Of course Clergé could have also added sending cities and villages in Ghana, Nigeria, the Dominican Republic, and Colombia, but the book is already impressively comparative. The insight gained from integrating these groups and histories is a clear understanding of the contours of racial capitalism and its effects on traveling systems of stratification. For example, Clergé uses the label of the "brown middle class" to highlight similarities in skin tone stratification in Jamaica, Haiti, and the United States, but also to show how this bodily currency lost much of its power in the trip to the United States, especially for Haitians. Formerly upper class Haitians—driven out by the Duvalier regime—soon found themselves in the same

neighborhoods, workplaces, and social circles as people they would not have interacted with back home.

The most “urban” chapter of the book is the one mentioned above, entitled “Blood Pudding.” It covers the period from Dutch and British settler colonialism and the enslavement of Africans in the 1600s to the sizable growth of the Black population and the beginning of White flight—even from these suburban enclaves—in the 1970s. Older Black settlements were condemned and their residents displaced as developers bought up land and used federal subsidies to build new suburbs for White people leaving New York City. These Whites-only suburban developments in both Queens and Long Island then became the sites of bitter battles from the 1950s to the 1970s. One of Clergé’s interviewees who migrated from Trinidad in the 1960s recalled her experience integrating Cascades’ schools: “When we arrived that first time, the yellow buses arrived; all those White parents were out there calling us names and everything. And the police officers there did nothing. They were throwing stuff and everything” (98). The desegregation experience in Queens and Long Island was every bit as tumultuous as that in Little Rock, Birmingham, Boston, or Chicago. The full story, however, is not just the ugly details of how the desegregation (blood) sausage gets made. Clergé does an excellent job of balancing the assaults of White supremacy with the agency, creativity, and community building of Black people. A special treat in this chapter is the migration stories of Black artists, writers, jazz musicians, athletes, and activists to Queens and beyond. Dizzie Gillespie, Ella Fitzgerald, Billy Holliday, James Brown, and Jackie Robinson were just a few of those who moved to what came to be known as New York’s Black “Gold Coast.” W.E.B. Du Bois (whose grandfather was from Haiti) and Shirley Graham held their wedding reception in their Queens home in 1951, and Clergé includes a photo in the book. Another photo of Louis Armstrong playing the trumpet alongside a trio of boys on the steps of his Corona, Queens, home illustrates the quotidian activities of Black suburban placemaking.

The book is as much about Black people as it is about Black places, and another contribution of *The New Noir* is Clergé’s meticulous attention to the details of interethnic and class harmony and discord in Black suburbia. Many studies of the Black middle class focus on its relationship to poor Black people, but Clergé takes a new approach, arguing that her subjects’ “diverse class origins and various journeys to middle-class suburbia matter at least as much” (161). In “Fish Soup” we learn about distinction making among Black middle class suburban residents, especially along the lines of new arrivals to the middle class versus those with generational pedigrees. In “Vanilla Black”—my favorite title, but the chapter with perhaps the least persuasive content—Clergé proposes a “racial consciousness spectrum” to classify how Jamaican, Haitian, and the U.S. Black middle class suburbanites perform and situate their Blackness. On the other hand, Chapter 7, entitled “Green Juice Fast,” is essential reading for anyone wanting to understand what Jamaicans think of Black Americans, what Haitians think of Jamaicans, what Black Americans think of Haitians, and so on and so on. Clergé offers a sophisticated and smart analysis of how stereotypes, media portrayals, assumptions, and observations shape the attitudes of her respondents toward themselves and fellow Black suburbanites.

In the book’s conclusion, Clergé raises the question of the future of Black diasporic suburbs like the ones she studied. She asks: “Will Black millennials be attracted to suburban life or pulled into gentrifying cities? Will suburbs be receptive to us socioculturally

and economically?” (229). As novel and as pathbreaking as *The New Noir* is, Clergé ends with even more provocative questions. The cohesiveness of diasporic Blackness, the stability of the suburban form, and the vagaries of White reactions to non-White neighbors are all unknowns—not to mention the all-important X factor of Latinx residential patterns—but *The New Noir* takes a bold first step in launching this new field of research.

THE PATCHWORK CITY: CLASS, SPACE, AND POLITICS IN METRO MANILA, by Marco Garrido. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2019. ISBN: 9780226643144; 288 pp. \$30 paper.

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Until the mid-1990s, many urban sociologists assumed that mixed income living would necessarily lead to upward social mobility for the urban poor. But what if living in close proximity not only fails to ameliorate interclass tensions, but actually exacerbates them? This is the novel contention of Marco Garrido’s lucidly argued new book *The Patchwork City: Class, Space, and Politics in Metro Manila*. When shantytowns and middle-class enclaves are contiguous in urban space, residents withdraw into their respective territories and develop a fortified sense of class antagonism. This is what Garrido terms “boundary imposition”: residents in elite enclaves experience a sense of siege by virtue of their proximity to lumpen slum dwellers, with all of the moralizing connotations these words call to mind; and residents in what he calls “slums” acquire a sense of discrimination vis-à-vis their middle class neighbors, who effectively expel them from the domain of civil society.

More broadly, this is a book about how urban sociology can speak to political sociology. Garrido begins with a puzzle. In 2001, President Joseph Estrada became the first Asian leader to be impeached after many tens of thousands took to the streets demanding his ouster. In response, Estrada’s base in Manila convened a substantially larger march that lasted for a full week, but to no effect. The former march, remembered as Edsa II, was largely composed of Manila’s middle classes, the bulk of whom live in gated communities that proliferated in the city over the course of the 1990s. The latter march, Edsa III, was predominantly made up of the city’s urban poor, most of whom reside in massive informal settlements punctuating the landscape of elite enclaves. Hence the title of Garrido’s book: the patchwork city.

This might seem like a standard narrative of urban class struggle, but there is a catch: Garrido points out that Estrada not only worked against the material interests of the poor, but most public opinion leaders working in these settlements strongly opposed him. Plus, he had just recently been ousted, imprisoned, and convicted of plunder, with his widely disseminated mug shot displayed prominently on the first page of the text. How then should we understand the intensity with which shack residents supported Estrada? And

what does this tell us more broadly about the wave of populists currently overtaking executive branches on nearly every continent?

His answer deploys Rancière's concept of dissensus, which he understands as a problem of communicative action. "Dissensus is not a matter of different parties misconstruing each other's meaning," Garrido writes. "It has to do with them not being able to comprehend what the other is talking about. The object of dissensus is constructed in different and incommensurable ways" (4). The middle class viewed Estrada as a crooked opportunist who willfully manipulated an irrational urban poor. From an elite vantage point, this is a politics of the *masa*, the Tagalog word for "masses" that "connotes a vulgarity and backwardness associated with a lack of means, refinement, and 'proper' knowledge" (25–26).

But Garrido's project is to demonstrate that far from irrational, the urban poor are actors in their own right. He goes to great pains to show that there is a rational logic to the masses' support for Estrada, which he elaborates over the course of the book. Two distinct political worldviews come into conflict and are ultimately irreconcilable. Both are only "rational" from the perspective of each associated class. Far from passive dupes blindly tailing the middle class, Garrido's urban poor actively organized the mass mobilizations of Edsa III as a means of publicly articulating their class grievances. In Estrada's denunciation by urban elites, impoverished residents recognized their own humiliation. In a sense, they actively enlisted Estrada, rather than vice versa, as a means of challenging middle-class elitism.

This argument is carefully advanced over the course of the book's two parts. After laying out his argument in an introduction and two initial chapters, Garrido spends Part One explaining how the changing spatial makeup of Manila has facilitated class conflict. Shantytowns grew more than 40-fold over the postwar period, and in response middle class residents retreated to gated communities in the 1980s and 1990s. Instead of adopting the standard idiom of the dual city, however, Garrido argues that we should understand the patchwork city as characterized by what he terms "interspersions," emphasizing proximity rather than mutual exclusivity. Enclave residents feel under siege, imposing spatial boundaries on slum residents. They demand mobility controls on slum residents, whom they understand to be a "different kind of people" (107) defined by a sense of moral backwardness. Meanwhile, this stigma is experienced by slum residents as shame. If enclave residents experience proximity as a source of insecurity, the urban poor experience it as a source of discrimination.

Part Two of the book explains how this relational account of class formation translates into political dissensus. The middle class perceives itself to be "besieged not just territorially but electorally" by the mushrooming slum population (140). They represent the *masa* as selling their vote, whereas their own economic security allows them to act "rationally." But in a companion chapter, Garrido demonstrates that the poor yearn for a "sense of equality" (194), what he calls a "politics of recognition." Populist performance is insufficient to explain slum dwellers' support, as they rejected a whole slew of prior populists. It is this politics of recognition, a measured "taking [of] political positions based on their experience of class relations" (135), that explains why they supported Estrada but not, say, Arroyo. Of all of the concepts advanced in the book, the politics of recognition is the least developed, presented as "socially transformative" (195) and as the *sine qua non* of respectful engagement (239), despite numerous literatures contending otherwise: that recognition often comes at the expense of material redistribution (e.g., Fraser 2003), or

else that rather than helping people transcend poverty, it can lock them into a potentially repressive fixed identity (e.g., Coulthard 2014).

Ultimately, though, it was Estrada's ability to make slum residents feel recognized that catalyzed Edsa III. In the book's final substantive chapter, Garrido narrates the mobilization through both "truths at stake" (198), elite and subaltern alike. Riffing on Rancière, when the part who have no part force their way onto the discursive terrain of politics, they make themselves visible to both their erstwhile class enemies and to themselves, as well as rendering visible the class struggles at the heart of Filipino politics more generally.

Garrido ends the book accounting for a very different sort of populism: Duterte's recent rise on the backs of middle-class support. At the 11th hour, Duterte was able to cobble together a bloc that brought the urban poor into an alliance with the middle classes. Garrido explains Duterte's rise with reference to middle-class ambivalence toward democracy, as opposed to the case of Estrada, whose presidency was "possible because it empowered the urban poor electorally" (234). These actually read as quite comparable cases in which civil society recoils at the growth of mass politics. What then explains why the urban poor were marked as enemies during Edsa II and III but as temporary allies in the 2016 election?

This is a minor qualm, as it comprises fewer than six pages in an otherwise clearly argued book. It remains an essential read for scholars of urban politics, Southern cities, and contemporary populism, and it nicely complements the recent revival of scholarship on political articulation. Garrido's clear writing and careful organization will also make this book of interest to ethnographers, development scholars, and indeed, to sociologists of all stripes.

REFERENCES

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