

## Homelandings: postcolonial diasporas and transatlantic belonging

Mahendran Thiruvarangan

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Homelandings: postcolonial diasporas and transatlantic belonging**, by Rahul K. Gairola, London, Rowman & Littlefield, 2016, 255 pp., \$ 39.95 (paperback), ISBN: 9781783489732

Diasporic literary and film studies, in general, revolve around issues of cultural dislocation, cultural negotiations and cross-cultural translations and alliances that arise due to the entry of bodies from the global south, marked heterogeneously for race, culture, gender, class and sexuality, into the Western metropolis. In the line of works such as *Queer Diasporas*, a collection of essays edited by Cindy Patton and Beningo Sanchez-Eppler, and Gayathri Gopinath's *Impossible Desires*, Rahul K. Gairola's work is a rich addition to the repertoire of scholarship that throws light upon (the representations of) the experiences of black and brown queer diasporic figures in the West, a category of migrants under-represented in diasporic studies. The book, on the one hand, challenges a dominant trend in diaspora studies that views the diasporic subject as heterosexual, and, on the other hand, exposes the white-biases in queer studies and invites us to look at the latter discipline from the point of view queer of colour (migrant) subjects in the West.

Building on the works of acclaimed scholars like Paul Gilroy and Elizabeth Povinelli which elucidate the formation of cultural and racial subjectivities owing to mobilities facilitated by the Atlantic Ocean and the governance of those subjectivities under regimes of liberalism, Gairola, in the first chapter, invokes the Atlantic Ocean as a site that can help us understand and unpack the forms of racialized power that configure queer (diasporic) homes in the age of neoliberalism. The author notes that neoliberalism, by producing coloured subjects or 'meritocrats' who are willing to embrace and propagate its economic logic, creates the illusion that class mobility can enable one to surmount the racial and sexual oppression they face (20).

Gairola deploys the term 'home economics' to capture the ways in which Foucauldian ideas of governmentality and biopolitics conjoin in the site of home in ways of excluding certain kinds of populations, especially the non-White and non-heterosexual diasporas. As a way of capturing resistance to this form of marginalisation, the author invokes the idea or act of 'homelanding' which he describes as 'an active process of culturally resisting and reappropriating exclusive domestic ties that consolidate essentialist social articulations of the homeland' (17). Gairola sees in this process the creation of 'alternative modes of community and belonging' that interrogate the logic of neoliberalism (17).

The second chapter is devoted to the study of the Jamaican-origin diasporic writer Michelle Cliff's semi-autobiographic novel *Abeng*. In reading Cliff's text as a dialogue between her homeland's past and the present within which resistance is situated, Gairola notes that the Jamaican elite is complicit in neoliberal tourism which promotes and naturalises the objectification of the island nation. Cliff also inveighs against the mainstream education system of Jamaica for it, too, supports the agendas of hegemonic transnational forces. In framing the text as resistant, the author identifies instances in *Abeng* where queer black women challenge the powerful racist, capitalist, heteronormative system that subjugates them in multiple ways.


Continuing his analysis of transgressive representations, Gairola shifts our attention to films in the third chapter. In his cogent study of the films *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Sammy Rosie Get Laid*, Gairola juxtaposes homes that buttress neoliberal ideologies with home sites that pose a challenge to neoliberal, racist, heteronormative ideologies. The racializing apparatuses of neoliberalism promoted by Margaret Thatcher which interpellated

Pakistani or Indian merchants as new the meritocrats is deconstructed in this chapter. Gairola identifies in the films he studies alliances that work against the divisive ideology of neoliberalism. His close analysis of the various shots in the movie *Laundrette*, for instance, demonstrates that even as the working class is divided along racial lines, the divided subjects mutually recognise each other and the exploitative system which is their common enemy.

Moving from the diasporic West to South-East Asia, the fourth chapter zooms in on the ways in which Jessica Hagedorn's novel *Dogeaters* offers a counterpoint to the neoliberal influence the US empire had on home-making in the Philippines. Eschewing capitalist processes of accumulation of wealth and property, the two transgressive characters in the text Daisy and Joey contend that 'a new home must be forged through political solidarity across different identities' (21). Gairola sees this novel as a politically charged text in that it interrogates and responds in compelling ways to heteronormative, white-supremacist notions of home that the extravagant lifestyle of the pro-US kleptocratic ruler Marcos and his wife Imelda represented in the Philippines.

In Chapter V, Gairola reads Jackie Kay's *Trumpet* 'as a cultural text that articulates resistance to heteronormative homes in the United Kingdom' (25). Contextualizing the novel in relation to the advancement of neoliberalism under the Labor regime of Tony Blair, Gairola identifies the importance given to queer black masculinity in the text, its ability to see in adoption an alternative way of home-making, its rejection of whiteness 'as the racial ideal of British belonging' and its interest in challenging fixed ideas of race as the strengths of the text (202).

What makes Gairola's analysis praiseworthy is his critical acumen to read the ways in which queer of colour figures pry open the different socio-political moments and neoliberal milieus that the literary texts and films under consideration turn their spotlight on. The author is successful in delineating the specific aspects of the neoliberal political regimes that ruled the UK, USA and the Philippines and the hegemonic connections and networks that existed among them. As a counterpoint to queer activism that are blind to the workings of class power and racialisation, Gairola's book, which offers a central place to the economic exploitation working-class, black and brown queer figures face and their articulations of resistance, is a refreshing read. The author could have used in-text citations sparingly, especially in the first chapter, as they sometimes disrupt the flow of his analysis and make the reader feel a tad disoriented. Yet, it is certain that the theoretical and political significance of Gairola's work will be felt in not just queer studies and diaspora studies but also American studies, globalisation studies and postcolonial studies that focus on South and South-East Asia.

Mahendran Thiruvarangan  
University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka  
The Graduate Center, City University of New York, USA  
 tmahendran@gradcenter.cuny.edu

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