
Editors' Letter: Afterlives

Erica Robles-Anderson and Arjun Appadurai

If the previous issue was haunted by the question of Undead Texts, the present one opens with zombie politics. As we write these words, the US Senate is hearing closing arguments in the impeachment trial of President Donald J. Trump. The first Democratic primary electoral event, the Iowa caucuses, happens today. There are seven candidates on the ballot: a former vice president, three senators, two former mayors, and a former tech executive. Whether a more progressive or neoliberal wing of the Democratic Party will triumph is anybody's guess. Whether it makes any difference is a matter of debate. When these words are published it will be September 2020. The trial will be over and election season will be in full swing. The Democratic candidate will need to make themselves distinct and compelling in comparison to a political figure who may or may not stay in office postimpeachment. Writing with the future in mind is not an enviable position.

And yet, in this issue we shall try to make an intervention, to frame a set of questions and concerns that will shed light on the possibilities and emerging cultural forms in this moment of tremendous transnational upheaval. We begin with Adam Kotsko's essay on "American Politics in the Era of Zombie Neoliberalism." Kotsko argues that the impulse to understand President Trump as a fluke of American electoral politics ignores the deeper crisis in the legitimacy and logic of the neoliberal social order. The global financial crisis brought into sharp relief the contours of a political theology that animates power relations. In Kotsko's words, "The goal of the neoliberal order has never been to keep the state out of markets, but to keep it hard at work creating, sustaining, and redeeming markets, above all the 'market of markets' represented by the financial sector" (456). A worldview in which states *redeem* markets can only remain in place so long as an ethic of individualized freedom of choice is sustained. When subjects do everything right and still find themselves failures, freedom guarantees that they have only themselves

to blame. Trump, alongside most of his Democratic counterparts, represents an attempt to keep this deeply flawed order of value animated even as failures, crises, and exceptions increasingly become the norm. The jig is up, the flaws revealed; this is the meritocracy of the walking dead. It is from the apocalyptic possibility that the social order may be over that new possibilities for self-fashioning and collectivity emerge.

The articles in this issue present vital cases of lives, afterlives, and potentialities at work at the end of a social epoch. Alison Shonkwiler's article, "Neo-homesteading: Domestic Production and the Limits of the Postwage Imagination," is grounded in middle-class practices and fantasies in contemporary America. Shonkwiler analyzes the household, that emblematic signifier of the good life, as a site for understanding postwage possibilities. Neo-homesteading in the twenty-first century is neither an idyllic back-to-the-land movement nor an ethic of resistance to modern consumer capitalism nor even a fantasy of playing at the role of landed gentry. Rather, Shonkwiler argues, homesteading has always sought "to make leisure more productive and work more fulfilling" (468). In other words, the contemporary movement is neither a radical nor a romantic scene. It reflects a limit of imagination in which the conception of an alternative world asks how we can work differently while still celebrating an identity tied to work itself? Analyzing the rise of domestic production in a postwage world allows us to intervene in debates about platform capitalism, gig economies, and the fate of workers outside of the home. Shonkwiler reminds us that transformations in work will make new demands on families and household economies, often in gendered ways.

Jennifer Nash and Samantha Pinto look at political life and personal loss. In "Strange Intimacies: Reading Black Maternal Memoirs," Nash and Pinto call attention to the rise in market popularity of the maternal memoir, a genre that indexes the arrival of a liberal feminism that recuperates the value of a postindividual self born through motherhood. The authors invert and complicate the genre by analyzing black maternal memoirs of loss. Through a close reading of Sybrina Fulton and Tracy Martin's *Rest in Power* and Lezley McSpadden's *Tell the Truth and Shame the Devil*, Nash and Pinto show how the death of black sons turns black mothering into a site of political value. It is the height of unnatural circumstances—surviving a child killed at the hands of a racist state—that grants mothers the right to speak about how they became "a black woman trying to raise a black son" (506). In the most powerful moments these writers complicate the tendency to pathologize black matriarchal families or heteronormative kinship relations. In the disordered time of loss, in the "wake work" of public speaking, in tracing what

is required merely to survive, these memoirs become a way of understanding how deeply forms of identification and belonging depend upon personal loss.

In "The Dotcom and the Digital: Time and Imagination in Kenya," Henrietta L. Moore and Constance Smith think about the collective experiences during major transformations as filled with potentialities. These potentialities are actively embraced in the imagination and discourse of individuals. Well ahead of, beyond, and in excess of technological changes, narratives give meaning to events, life trajectories, and historical conditions. To be "dotcom" or "digital" in twenty-first-century Kenya has little to do with being connected to global networks through information and communications technologies. These terms index the style of their times. They delimit the horizon of possibilities. They mark the break between then and now. As Moore and Smith remind us, we need new selves to signal these breaks, "proper embodiment[s] of the epoch" (526). It is in this moment that a political figure like William Ruto could claim that being tried for crimes against humanity did not disqualify him from seeking the office of the presidency. After all, in a world of videoconferencing, why not "run Kenya from the Hague"? There is an eerie resonance between this "digital president" and the American "tweeter in chief." Perhaps our ethical imaginations and collective possibilities have much to do with technological styles.

The issue closes with Deepti Misri's article, "Dark Ages and Bright Futures: Youth, Disability, and Time in Kashmir." Written just prior to the Indian government suspending the semi-autonomous status of Jammu and Kashmir, the essay provides a textured understanding of contested futures during occupation. The scene is set in motion by the circulation of two calendars: One was issued by Jammu and Kashmir Bank. It depicts the bright and shiny futures of Kashmiri youth as emblems of achievement and inclusion through the state. The other is a countercalendar that plays against this grain by chronicling moments of resistance and oppression. January opens with a picture of Insha Malik, a girl who was injured by pellets shot into her home. In the wake of what may be the first mass blinding in history, Kashmiris must generate a vision of a future in which disability at the hands of the state is a norm. Misri theorizes the political potential of disability by analyzing how disability is produced. She shows how the time of social reproduction becomes increasingly out of sync with dominant temporal orders when social interactions outside of home are suspended. Gatherings are canceled and marriages are postponed, kinship orders are "queered." Staying within the family becomes a sign of arrested development or as evidence for the stereotype of the polygamous Muslim (as opposed to heteronormative Hindus). From here,

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queer becomes *crip*. Kashmiris are made strange through their disability to move in public space. This double pathologizing casts any Kashmiri desire for freedom as “dangerously queer” in sexual and national terms. It is in this context that the image of the ideal Third World calendar girl has meaning; it is here where crip futures are imagined. Misri calls attention to the critique of diversity and inclusion as precisely the way that the biopolitics producing disability are hidden from view. A child blinded by a stray rubber bullet is no fluke accident. It is a systemic outcome from the infrastructure of occupation. Postcolonial Kashmir will not be a democratic order of the able-bodied. Disability can be a basis of collective life once legitimate social order no longer requires returning to wholeness. Every new social order emerges from apocalypse. Only then do we discover that there are many kinds of afterlives and many forms of undead things.