

P R E F A C E

Critical Ethnic Studies Editorial Collective:

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The canvas is dripping with blood. The abstraction suggests a decolonization without guarantees, meaning its goals, strategies, and imaginings of alternative futures in multiple sites and scales are unpredictable, contingent, and stubbornly difficult. The corporeality of blood, on the other hand, makes concrete decolonization a project that is urgent, agonistic, and structured by violence. This dialectic of decolonization is also evoked by what is rendered in black—billowing featheriness versus piercing bolts of lightning.

Critical ethnic studies is a project saturated with the pasts of our making and the expectations for our futures yet to come. Our efforts to render that project here is, like the painting *Decolonized* by the Puerto Rican-born artist Sophia Maldonado, a narrative that is not singular but part of a larger oeuvre of thought that is instructive but not exhaustive. This anthology might be read as emblematic of a time, a place, and a group, but we encourage readers to consider it a meditation rather than a symbol. As such we begin with our meditations on this collection—filtered through Maldonado's art—which urges us not merely to write and think about but also to see, smell, and feel



FIGURE FM.1. Sophia Maldonado, *Decolonized*, 2013. Acrylic and urethane on canvas. 84 × 108 inches. Image courtesy of Sofia Maldonado and Magnan Metz Gallery.

the violence, beauty, dissonance, and desire that undergird the formation of material and political landscapes.

THE SHARDS, EXPLOSIONS, and layers that make up Maldonado's painting make it easier for me to articulate how we have been attempting to challenge the emphasis on the identitarian while creating a flexible yet politicized space of assembly within academia that in turn challenges the incarcerated nature of academic institutions and cultures.

Trusted and hallowed institutions, often the very ones that were articulated in founding iterations of ethnic studies and inculcated with presumptions of goodness—cities, conceptions of nature, blue skies in Maldonado's art, and identitarian politics, rights discourses, the law in the anthology—must be sites of decolonization.

Maldonado presents multiple struggles pasted elaborately across blue skies, covering nearly everything. These struggles are simultaneous, seemingly coordinated, and different in scale.

The blue skies gesture to a horizon beyond colonial violence, and the longing for such a horizon is tethered to a nonlinear and nondevelopmentalist rendering of decolonization.

... and then it seemed that something had happened—at first, akin to absolute disorder, total dysfunction, as if things were coming apart from the inside out, and we were part of an implosion, or perhaps a collapsing. For some it brought deep sadness, but not of the tragic kind. It was as if we were all being convinced—slowly, insidiously, but so, so effectively—that there were those with a future and those without. And the sadness was about being part of an aspiration to see the tomorrow that many knew was not theirs. That the ambition to enter that time and place meant that some were to be left for dead, forever gone to history, having been forced off the temporal coil itself. And now it seemed that the idea of freedom, the other side of the thing called decolonization that we had perhaps been invoking too easily—really, too freely—carried with it the gravity of someone’s obsolescence. We knew it would not be all of us who disappeared, and we were beginning to accept that as simple fact, something to be spoken but not talked about. They had started looking for ways to eliminate those without future, and now we realized, in this happening, that they were extending an invitation to us. I wondered if it was too late to RSVP my regrets.

Moments of calm and eruption keep the eye moving between colors and depths made possible through various layers and tones. Her brush strokes in black are open, which allow for the exposure of other surfaces, even as they are filtered through that blackness. The running paint signals the organized and anticipated messiness of her project—our project—and adds a wily movement, announcing that the work is unfinished.

THE ORGANIZED AND ANTICIPATED messiness of Maldonado’s project provided us, the editors, with a powerful point of departure, and we in turn invoke her work as an entrance into this anthology. Like our efforts in responding to *Decolonized*, we invite you to imagine through this image and our words your own spaces of possibility and contribute your ideas and energies to this critical experiment.