
Reviewed by Nikhil Pal Singh

Angela Davis is one of the most consistent and visionary intellectual activists working to enlarge our understanding of what she terms the “geographies and temporalities” of black freedom struggles. In this short but wide-ranging book of essays, speeches, and interviews primarily conducted in Europe and North America (and finely curated by Frank Barat), Davis offers typically comprehensive thinking on racist state violence in an era of neoliberal globalization. Davis is particularly attuned to the ramified effects of this violence across public and intimate spheres of social life, to the connections across continents needed to confront it, and to the legacies of past movements and struggles that continue to inform the work of human liberation.

Woven throughout these reflections, Davis calls for the development of new vocabularies to grasp the “complexities of racism” in the contemporary period. This includes recognizing the legacy of intergenerational harm extending back to chattel slavery, whose primary institutional locus in the United States today is a prison-industrial complex that houses well over two million people—25 percent of all the world’s prisoners, the majority black and brown. It also means naming (and shaming) the police power that kills with similar disproportion, and with impunity, at home and abroad. Davis foregrounds connections of this type, for example, between hyper-incarceration and cruel forms of criminal punishment, secret prisons and torture overseas, and the similar moral and affective valences animating the criminalization of blackness and Islamophobic threat inflation mobilized by the so-called war on terror.

Many of the documents in this book are speeches. Activist and organizer that she is, Davis frequently issues a demand to her readers and audiences: oppositional political thought and action needs to consciously attend to intersections of various kinds—between public and private violence, between struggles to change institutions and to transform the self, and to the tributaries that flow between domestic policing and overseas military violence. In this way, she re-accents the important black feminist concept of intersectionality, amplifying its attention to crosscutting dimensions of race, class, gender, and sexual domination at individual and communal scales, with an equal and insistent emphasis upon the international, transnational, and imperial lineaments of power that egalitarian, anti-racist, and anti-capitalist movements and struggles face in the present moment.

Of particular relevance to the readership of this journal, Davis points to connections drawn by activists around the exercise of militarized police power in Palestine, and in places like Ferguson, where protests against the police murder of Michael Brown in 2014 achieved sustained intensity,
right down to the fact that the same brand of tear gas canister is being used against protesters in each place. She notes that over many years Israeli police have established training partnerships with U.S. police, that the United States subsidizes Israeli military power to the tune of billions of dollars per annum, and that the same transnational security interests, including enormous, Western-based, multinational corporations like G4S are now invested in building walls and cages for our respective peoples, from the West Bank to the Rio Grande. In short, Davis’s work helps to highlight how official languages and economies that increasingly dominate a political landscape defined by permanent war and security against “terror” today provide one of the main vehicles and alibis for advancing calculated abandonment and organized dispossession of populations who have long suffered under the terms of racial hierarchy and colonial rule.

An important point here is that racism and colonialism are not only interwoven as constitutive dimensions within the international development of modern capitalist social formations, but have been reworked and updated under globalizing conditions. As Davis notes, this question was historically better understood by black radicals, from W. E. B. Du Bois to the Black Panther Party, than it is today, when we are led to imagine that racial discrimination is primarily a matter of individual attitudes, that colonialism is past, and that existing capitalism is the only horizon of reasonable struggles for justice. Du Bois, whom Davis recognizes throughout this work as a central intellectual forebear, once described colonies as “the slums of the world,” that is, places populated by peoples, upon which extractive economies backed by extreme police measures could be given the greatest latitude. Under neoliberal capitalism, this condition is emerging less as an exception than as a modality of rule, everywhere.

Ferguson and Palestine in this way are bellwethers, canaries in the coal mine. Only by connecting struggles in places imagined as discrete will it be possible to recognize and confront these renovated forms of spatial apartheid, and the renewed forms of racial/nationalist supremacy that increasingly hold sway in the shrinking kingdoms of Western prosperity—in the United States, Israel, Britain, and beyond. To do so, Davis writes, will require capacious frames that attend to our salient differences, while never forgetting that justice is everywhere and always indivisible.

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REVIEWED BY BEN WHITE

This book is a serious attempt to examine the issue of popular resistance in Palestine, and it does so in an admirably contextualized, historically aware, and detailed fashion. The authors come from a peace studies background: Marwan Darweish is a senior lecturer at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University, while Andrew Rigby is emeritus professor of peace studies and director of the Centre for the Study of Forgiveness and Reconciliation at the same university. The pair thus bring incisive knowledge and expertise to the topic at hand, applying lessons from