

*Book Review Symposium*

**Brenda Parker**, *Masculinities and Markets: Raced and Gendered Urban Politics in Milwaukee*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017. ISBN: 978-0-8203-3511-7 (cloth); ISBN: 978-0-8203-5032-5 (paper)

I was absolutely delighted and grateful to be part of an “Author Meets the Critics” session at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Geographers in Boston in 2017; I sincerely think that the session could have been easily called “Author Meets Their Feminist Killjoy Fans”. I would like to thank to Heather McLean for organizing the session and inviting me to write this review.

In *Masculinities and Markets*, Brenda Parker, as a politically engaged researcher and community organizer, provides grounded theoretical and empirical tools to problematize the power relations in contemporary urban landscapes. Parker’s arguments respond to Peake and Rieker’s (2013: 2) call for the “urgency of feminist questionings of the urban in this ‘21<sup>st</sup> century of the city’” within the geographies of knowledge production. One of the most compelling strengths of Parker’s book is her complex and nuanced understanding of urbanism and urban politics by rigorous incorporation of critical urban, as well as Black and Chicana feminist, theories. Parker’s novel focus on power relations, histories, and geographies in Milwaukee’s urban politics questions the dominant discourses in urban theory. In this respect, I read Parker’s work as a significant intervention to contemporary understandings of race and gender politics, and the constitutive and detrimental effects on urban subjectivities. These effects, as Parker meticulously demonstrates, can help us to articulate the “history of the present” (Foucault 1977) in Milwaukee as well as other cities. She does this by untangling invisible histories and

geographies via theorizations of urban neoliberalism. In this respect, Parker's book is inventive in its understanding of ontologies and epistemologies of the urban and urban subjectivities.

Scholars, especially feminist urbanists, have been contesting the messy relationship between cities and citizenship with regards to social groups' claims to right(s) to the city (Lefebvre 1996; Purcell 2003). These claims to social and urban citizenship have represented a significant intervention to social movements, as well as urban policy making processes (Klodawsky et al. 2013; Siltanen et al. 2015). Parker's book successfully addresses the constitutions, contestations, and transformations of urban "market citizenship" (p.29), practices, and strategies, in and through the gendered and racialized spaces of Milwaukee. In so doing, she establishes the neglected connections between urban politics and citizenship and geographies of justice and care. In her book, the interrelation between the urban political economy approaches and urban subjectivities is also analyzed critically, with a focus on various tensions and contradictions of gendered and racialized capitalism.

Parker's move to address the silences and imbalances of contemporary political economy approaches to theorize the urban is also unprecedented. By using an urban "feminist partial political economy of place" (FPEP) approach, she explores practices and inequalities surrounding race, gender, class, and poverty in Milwaukee. Like many of its counterparts, Milwaukee has been transforming from a manufacturing city into a post-industrial city, with a current emphasis on creative industries. This economic transformation, accompanied by the introduction of intense and extensive neoliberal policies over the past two decades, has had significant and detrimental impacts on the social reproduction of various communities in the city, especially racialized working-class communities. In this period of socioeconomic transformations, Parker diligently shows us how urban citizens are individualized, marginalized, and abandoned in a traditionally progressive city with a strong history of political organizing. Parker reminds us that excluded groups' insidious marginalization via neoliberal urban politics makes the creative class and its politics possible. Like many other exclusionary spaces and cities,

the success of racialized and gendered urban politics depends on the continuous and deliberate discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization of those who don't fit into the normative desires of privileged city builders. This systemic marginalization not only has detrimental impacts on the social reproduction of urban life, but also on urban development projects. Parker underlines the significance of understanding these struggles via the materiality of social reproduction in contemporary urban landscapes. The strength of Parker's analysis is her zealous sagaciousness and understanding of new subjectivities within neoliberal governmentalities, as well as her strong claims regarding the unpacking of materiality and practices of intersectional feminist theory and politics.

Parker's epistemological interventions are consistently fresh and provocative in intersectional urban theorizing. Throughout her book she systematically dismantles our dominant ways of knowing, doing, and organizing urban knowledge production. What is distinct about Parker's research is her diligent demonstration of how certain institutionalized local power structures can be a significant challenge to contest and resist power relations. Yet she brilliantly maps out the unreasonable tensions, conflicts, and complexities of community building against these dominant discourses and practices. For those of us who tirelessly work with our friends and allies to negotiate patriarchal and racist local power structures, Parker illustrates the significance of collective organizing and an ethics of care. Through her brilliant theorizing, as well as her incorporation of creative feminist work, Parker helps us to dream, to hope, and to act during times of despair.

Parker's book is also about the political possibilities arising out of the messiness and complexities of conducting research, including navigating diverse emotions, positionalities, and spatio-temporality, when the everyday life of different groups becomes entangled. Parker acknowledges the complexities of these relationships. However, she reminds us of the significance of how knowledge production is embedded in relationship building around radical

vulnerability, accountability, responsibility, and collective ethics of care. Our unexpected and amicable encounters with each other are significant stories for the alternative imaginary.

What makes Parker's contribution to "doing" urban ethnography notable, is her accessible and uncluttered language. Her language in the book pushes the imaginary yet material boundaries of the academy, activism, and community organizing. Parker's grounded research and activism are also inspiring for community organizers, activists, and researchers, especially during these troubled times, as she gives us the possibilities of alternative communities and radical urban imaginaries.

I would have loved to have read more on Parker's positionality and reflexivity regarding dealing with the challenges of conducting intersectional urban ethnography in a contested landscape like Milwaukee. I very much look forward her analysis on navigating the tensions of power and praxis, including ways of creating resistance against the processes of "silencing feminist killjoys" in her future work. I want to finish this review by commenting on Parker's academic kindness and generosity. I have had the privilege of working with Parker on several academic occasions and would like to note that in an era of neoliberal academic subjectivity, Parker's commitment in creating a community supportive of critical urban scholarship is exceptional. I am already incorporating her work in my undergraduate and graduate teachings, and very much look forward to being inspired by her future work.

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