

***DECOLONIZING DIASPORAS: RADICAL  
MAPPINGS OF AFRO ATLANTIC LITERATURE***  
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Relationality, relations, and coalitions across differences are central preoccupations for scholars of decolonial thought, particularly decolonial feminists committed to “futurities or worlds/[being]/otherwise” (7). *Decolonizing Diasporas* is an indispensable addition to the construction of a theoretical and methodological decolonial toolkit. Through a critical examination of diverse texts and audiovisual works, the book links “critical cartographies of Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone subjects in exile and diaspora through a relational framework that uses their resistance writings as a point of departure” (6).

*Decolonizing Diasporas* centers the literary and artistic production from the Latinx Caribbean and Equatorial Guinea, underscoring the “disparate material histories and distinct lived experiences” of Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone subjects” (8). Figueroa-Vásquez engages with the work of writers and artists in a “methodology of relationality” that is firmly grounded, but not tethered to, comparative ethnic studies. However, *Decolonizing Diasporas* goes far beyond a critical engagement with texts. It indeed “push[es] the

boundaries of decolonial thought” (1) by mapping diverse forms of resistance to “ongoing forms of colonialism” by “intellectuals, post/colonial subjects under coloniality, organizers and activists” and from “peoples who necessarily document often unacknowledged sets of histories: those at the “periphery of the margin (5).

The book’s chapters are organized thematically, and in each Figueroa-Vásquez engages with diverse genres: poetry, novels, essays, visual and sonic works, and a short story to unearth the “intimacies of colonial domination and erotic freedom practices; the act of faithful witnessing; the phenomena of dispossession, or what [she calls] *destierro*; the possibilities of a reparation of the imagination; and visions of Black futurities as apocalypses” (1). Rather than detail the texts that are the object of the book, I will highlight the main methodological and theoretical concepts Figueroa-Vásquez grapples within *Decolonizing Diasporas*. These concepts not only ground Figueroa-Vásquez analysis of the texts, but also provide the reader with a decolonial roadmap.

Before addressing the main concepts framing the chapters, I want to note what Figueroa-Vásquez terms “critical cartographies of racialization” (8). The concept operates to underscore the “disparate material histories and distinct lived experiences under ongoing forms of colonialism, including coloniality and settler colonialism” (8). Figueroa-Vásquez outlines “the relational cartography of racialization” to nuance how “practices of racialization manifest differently for black Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Dominicans, and for Equatoguineans” (9). Although these practices reveal anti-black violence, Figueroa-Vásquez shows us the “insurgent forms of resistance and the radical potential of Afro-furutures” within the diasporic Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone works she examines (22). She does so without flattening or homogenizing the very real

differences and commensurabilities that the “Afro-Latinx Caribbean and Equatoguinean diasporas” hold (22).

The first chapter explores the concept of “intimacies of coloniality,” by tracking the “physical, erotic, spiritual, cosmological, edificial, and emotional forms of domination and extraction” (35) within and across Dominican and Equatoguinean texts. Figueroa-Vásquez focuses on the femme body as a “site of resistance and knowing” by “center[ing] the movements, resistance, and freedoms that ... Black femme subjects undertake in the face of ongoing forms of political, structural, and gender violence that impact the intimate dimensions of their lives” (33). The intimate becomes a space of marronage, simultaneously rendered captive and eluded by “occupation, dictatorship, and coloniality” (183). “Intimacies” illuminates the dialogic encounter of counter-storytelling not only as a form of resistance, but as a decolonial heuristic that compels the reader to bear witness outside of colonial epistemological frames.

Chapter 2 is a continuation of that call to bear witness “to the lives, struggles, and oppression” through the construction of “a methodology shaped by the ethical task of witnessing faithfully within and across relations” (65). Crucial to this methodology is the act of recognition—not as a form of political rights seeking towards the state, but as a political practice that reveals and recognizes the experiences of those living in the underside of modernity. Figueroa-Vásquez evokes and engages with the concept of “faithful witnessing,” coined by decolonial feminist María Lugones. Faithful witnessing as political stance, method, and “feminist philosophical approach” allows collaboration and coalition building among oppressed peoples (68). This is perhaps the most crucial intervention of the book. *Decolonizing Diasporas* provides us a methodological toolbox with which

to analyze not only texts, but other forms of political and cultural production that seek liberation. Evoking other decolonial methodologies such as autoethnography and testimonio, faithful witnessing “makes visible the often-unseen consequences of the coloniality of power, knowledge, and gender,” as manifestations of differential/oppositional consciousness and praxis (69). It is in the framing of faithful witnessing that we can begin to build complex coalitions that center the knowledges of Black and women of color, and align those that are deemed “insignificant,” in the words of Figueroa-Vásquez. In doing so, we can reframe the “lens through which to recognize the assertion of humanity and dignity” amid colonial violence and its dehumanizing pursuits (70).

Chapter 3, titled “Destierro,” examines banishment, the impossibility of a return to “home” as a diasporic subject. The novels in this chapter “underscore the differing ways in which diasporic Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone subjects experience destierro” (89). As a Puerto Rican diasporic subject that knows all too well and writes about “the impossibilities of home,” Figueroa-Vásquez’s richly textured, nuanced theorization of destierro as a decolonial concept resonates. Figueroa-Vásquez (2020b) has elsewhere theorized destierro as a concept for “decolonizing work in diasporic contexts” (2). In her examination of the writing of exiled subjects, Figueroa-Vásquez offers the reader a methodology that “offers us a way to think through exile and diaspora in longer colonial historical and relational contexts while also prioritizing the various and overlapping forms of dispossession” that result from “being violently torn from the earth” (91). The third chapter closes with calls for reparations to address the condition of destierro, which Figueroa-Vásquez takes up in the fourth chapter, titled “Reparations.” Aside from the necessary material reparations that destierro

requires, there are those that are “unquantifiable”, “immaterial” (118). Figueroa-Vásquez explores these intangible forms of reparations through the concepts of “decolonial love” and “reparation of the imagination” that transcend colonial and settler logics and instead center communal and kin relationships (118). Figueroa-Vásquez draws from Chela Sandoval’s concept of decolonial love, as tool and praxis for political and social transformation, and as “a practice that bears witness to the past while looking towards a transformative future” (121). Thus, decolonial love is “an ethical reparation” (121), that operates in the context of Equatoguinean and Afro-Latinx diasporic texts. Like the other concepts she explores, reparations are built into the architecture of a future outside of coloniality, but also as part of a present process of naming to heal.

The final chapter, aptly titled “Apocalypso,” explores the present and future work needed to rupture the modern/colonial project, and trace what Figueroa-Vásquez terms “worlds/otherwise.” This break requires an engagement with a future unknown, by “thinking, writing, and acting” in ways that humanize the *dannés*, those “condemned by coloniality and ongoing forms of colonialism” (148). To frame and illustrate worlds/otherwise, Figueroa-Vásquez engages written and audiovisual work where Black women, girls, and femmes “are the epicenter of possible futures” (179).

It is only fitting that *Decolonizing Diasporas* final pages takes us to the sea, a central element in the archipelagic relations that Figueroa-Vásquez traces throughout the book. The shore as a conduit to a migratory circuit, as a starting and end point to the violence of destierro, dispossession, and enslavement. Yet these flows facilitated by currents, oceans, rivers, bodies of water, present possibilities for emerging solidarities and connections across

difference. *Decolonizing Diasporas* calls on us to pay “attention to the ways in which race, gender, and racialization” (182) operate within coloniality and colonialism, as well as ways to resist those logics, through the lens of Black and women of color feminists.

Transcending disciplinary and geographic borders, *Decolonizing Diasporas* is as much a methodological and conceptual guide than it is theoretical framework, praxical tool, and manifesto. Figueroa-Vásquez illuminates the decolonial possibilities within the Afro-Atlantic geographies it explores, and beyond. It shows diasporic and colonial subjects the fissures and resistances to coloniality through the reading of texts that show us how even amid and despite violence, dictatorship, and domination, worlds/otherwise are possible.