



Book Reviews

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Sumangala Damodaran, Wiebke Keim, Amrita Pande, Ari Sitas, Nicos Trimikliniotis (with Gaëtan Cliquenois, Jan-Louise Lewin, Javier Perez and Sepideh Azari, Dina Dabo, Anubhav Sengupta), Abdallah Grifat, Sofia Saeed.

Scripting Defiance: Four Sociological Vignettes

Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2022, \$72.00 hardcover (ISBN: 978-81-950559-1-3), 540 pp.

Reviewed by: Lebogang Mokwena, *University of the Western Cape, South Africa*

Scripting Defiance is vast, notwithstanding the modesty of its subtitle – *Four Sociological Vignettes*. It comes in at 530 pages. It is fundamentally vast in ambition, with its breadth of empirical examples, and its ‘commitment to [burrowing] the deep historical lineages of the modern’ (p. 5). The title conjures the dramaturgical and performative: the scripted lines that performers learn, rehearse, and enact. The volume principally concerns subaltern groups’ agency in scripting ‘narratives of defiance . . . through [distinct] cultural formations’ (p. 15). These ‘significant scripts’ become the narratives new generations of activists can draw on, improvise, and rehearse in their quests for freedom. This is the core theme of the book.

The four parts of the book (‘vignettes’), comprising 11 chapters, are: (a) workers, migrants, and refugees, (b) deviants and defiance; (c) defiant dreams and scripts; and (d) authoritarian restorations. Its contributions range from the sociologies of health and reproduction, art and aesthetics, labour studies, cultural sociology, and migration and carceral studies, all with an eye to subaltern historical genealogies. For example, Simangala Damodaran’s chapter concerns workers’ defiant agency at global racial capitalism’s emergence, while Javier Perez details slavery and its afterlives as racialised criminalisation in Cape Town.

The book’s vignettes function as illustrations of insubordination and the ideological and policy theatres in which normative and counter-normative scripts vie. By foregrounding subaltern defiance through migrants, prisoners, sex workers, youth activists, and artists’ experiences and their structural conditions, the book avoids sociology’s structure/agency impasse. In this sense, rather than four, the volume elaborates five vignettes, the fifth being the elaboration of its ambitious epistemological contribution: enacting ‘another sociology . . . [that] amplifies a small and varied number of voices and ‘scripts’ for pragmatic and strategic issues’ (p. 15).

The multi-hyphenate identities of contributors (many of them scholar-creatives or -practitioners) manifest the volume’s aim of a post-disciplinary, perhaps ‘undisciplined,’

public-political sociology. Therefore, the volume itself defies hardening disciplinary and sub-field boundaries that cement and widen what ought to remain porous frontiers between the humanities, the social sciences and mass-based emancipatory movements. Indeed, these scholars' and activists' contributions elegantly vindicate phenomenological, interpretive accounts of the social as a thorough-going commitment to emancipation; what the authors conceive as 'human flourishing' (p. 15).

Nicos Trimikliniotis' chapter on migration and asylum, which gestures towards a global political sociology (p. 80), could have acted as a theoretical scaffold for the volume. As global political sociology, this chapter scripts defiance as a transcontinental knowledge project at the intersection of scholarship and pro-migration activism informed by migrants' lived experiences and movement across multiple geographies. This theoretical framing embodies the books' call for 'sustained upsurges of people that challenge the power structures or the norms of society . . . [and define] new normative orientations' (p. 335).

The book rightly highlights that the pandemic provided 'the best moment for a radical shakeup to redress the dismantling of health systems by building them anew, to curtail the destruction of the forests and subjugation of wildlife' (p. 13). Nevertheless, proponents of a post-humanist epistemological agenda might question the volume's commitment to disobedience. The contributions in the volume largely elide the ecological and non-human. This misses a vital opportunity to advance, and perhaps script, a resistance to the sacrifices (of earth, humans and things) made at the altar of capital and the concentration of intersecting injustices those living at the forefront of environmental degradation face.

Although the book pulsates with the vibrance of certain places and spaces, there are no contributions dealing with the natural world as a concrete, non-human figure, both vulnerable to and defiant of anthropogenic manipulation. Sitas documents the Antilles and its aesthetic and intellectual bequest to cubism, negritude, and the project of emancipation across the Black Atlantic; Trimikliniotis details migrant trajectories in pursuit of Europe; Brazilian *quilombos* and slave maroonage from sugar plantations feature in Damodaran's chapter. Nevertheless, geography (and the natural environment more generally) features as contextual: the location or space of human action. Consequently, the environmental possibilities, constraints, and responses to human intervention remain unaddressed.

For Sitas, a new social sciences and humanities tradition that centres people at a planetary scale can habituate 'new generations . . . [and] alternative dispositions' (p. 13). He notes: 'artists are not only part of the sustenance of movements but part of the defining groups of new normative orientations' (p. 335). What is missing today, he argues, are the specific intellectual and aesthetic contributions from alternative centres in the global cultural and economic periphery (for example, he describes early 20th-century Martinique or Calcutta) that corral creatives from different traditions and backgrounds into unexpected but catalytic social and cultural communion. He may find his call answered by writers such as Zakiyyah Jackson, who decentres anthropocentrism and calls on critical race theory and posthumanism in her work on black women's visual and literary works.

With chapters running up to 40 pages long, endnotes (a disciplinary norm) disrupted the reading flow in ways that footnotes might have alleviated. While there is a

comprehensive bibliography for the entire volume at the end of the book, this curtailed the reader's ability to deftly follow the scholars with whom the contributors are in conversation.

Despite its limitations and omissions, the book furnishes an experimental script that confronts entrenched and harmful politics, ideologies, and epistemologies. Given the scale of its epistemic ambition and its passionate articulation, *Scripting Defiance* will re-energise those looking for pathways to alternative futures and their promise of human flourishing. The volume will stretch the curious reader willing to actively rethink – and indeed resist – sociology's disciplinary and sub-field demarcations. Readers should refuse the temptation to focus on chapters most relevant to their interests to avoid foreclosing the volume's intellectual holism, which demands engagement with the 'polylectical, multi-voiced, and unique' (p. 18).

Acknowledgements

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Fiona Greenland

Ruling Culture: Art Police, Tomb Robbers and the Rise of Cultural Power in Italy

University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2021, \$35 pbk (ISBN: 9780226757032), 328 p.

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Fiona Greenland's *Ruling Culture: Art Police, Tomb Robbers, and the Rise of Cultural Power in Italy* is a meticulous and insightful work inviting the reader to look closer at the construction of Italian cultural power. The book won the Mary Douglas Prize for Best Book in the Sociology of Culture of the American Sociological Association in 2022.

Italy is often (self-)defined as the strongest cultural power in the world, for its particularity of being an 'open-air museum' and its cultural heritage recognized through the UNESCO List of World Heritage Sites. The study deconstructs this idea, which is often taken for granted, by looking at archaeology practices and investigating 'illicit' excavations of artefacts. For this purpose, the author explores multiple layers and scales of experiences, discourses, and practices from the unauthorized excavators' narratives to the laws protecting artefacts and forbidding illegal diggings in Italy. These two main foci are scrutinized chronologically, which sheds a light on Italian history where artefacts are used as part of political and cultural discourse from the end of the 19th century to Mussolini and finally in contemporary times with Berlusconi and beyond.

In the 19th century, explains Greenland, the acquisition of a significant number of Italy's artefacts by wealthy Americans contributed to building this myth of Italy as the place where culture and humanity starts, this period is referred to as 'The American Price'. It shows how the international attention given to the country's artefacts is part of a discourse of legitimization of cultural power. But in the early 20th century, laws were implemented to give the Italian State ownership over artefacts, reinforcing the value of