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Review of Making Livable Worlds: Afro-Puerto Rican Women Building Environmental Justice

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Lloréns, H. (Author). Lyte, G. (Illustrator). (2021). *Making livable worlds: Afro-Puerto Rican women building environmental justice*. University of Washington Press. 207 pp. paperback. ISBN 9780295749402

Making Livable Worlds: Afro-Puerto Rican Women Building Environmental Justice centers Black Puerto Rican women's efforts to create just futures for themselves and their communities in the face of capitalism, racism, colonization, matriarchal dispossession, and environmental collapse. In this review, I provide key concepts and focal points of *Making Livable Worlds* and the classroom settings they could enrich, focusing specifically on the potential for (1) the concept of matriarchal dispossession to be used in a history or political science context, (2) the author's "decolonizing ethnography" for use in research methods classrooms, (3) Lloréns's critique of the myth of a homogenous Puerto Rico and focus on disparities in environmental wellbeing to enrich ecofeminist classrooms, (4) examples of intrinsic motivation to dismantle myths of inherent economic self-interest, and (5) activist efforts outlined in the book to energize aspiring activists.

Lloréns centers several issues of absence that could become valuable components of a history, political science, or feminist studies curriculum, beginning by introducing "matriarchal dispossession," a concept used to acknowledge the stripping of wealth, health, safety, ecosystems, history, and other resources from Black Puerto Rican women and the resulting matriarchal regeneration efforts by these women (p. 25). To illustrate this concept, Lloréns explores her family lineage and finds that, while she easily found information about her white ancestors, almost all information about her Black maternal ancestors was absent (p. 25). Occupational erasure was also rampant in ancestral records, with women's occupation being unrecorded despite the oral histories of their kin work in the informal sector, which capitalist and patriarchal expectations devalue (p. 28). Looking further into these histories, Lloréns illuminates how little is known about Black Puerto Rican families during slavery (p. 32). These concepts illustrate how historical knowledge of who has lived and how they have lived is largely dependent on who we consider human enough to keep record of. The concept of matriarchal dispossession can enable educators to consider real or perceived material situations (such as Black matriarchal power structures) without erasing their causes (such as the dispossession necessitating it).

Lloréns's concept of "a decolonizing ethnography" (pp. 15–18) centers the perspectives of those with deep connections to the subjects at hand and directs attention toward the topics that remain absent or invisible. Lloréns's advocacy for decolonization of ethnography is especially strengthened by the consistent practice of decolonizing methods throughout this piece. Accounting the process of engaging in "fieldwork versus home-work" (pp. 47–48, 58–65), critiquing the

violence involved in abstracting experiences of the Other (p. 48), and practicing “reparative narrating,” Lloréns work could enrich pedagogical discussions around Visweswaran’s “anthropology in reverse” (Lloréns p. 61; Visweswaran 1994 p. 102), Sedgwick’s “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading” (Lloréns p. 14; Sedgwick 1997), as well as Moraga’s “theory in the flesh” (Lloréns p. 61; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981), and equip students to engage more reflexively with their own research.

The conception of Puerto Rico as consisting of homogeneous people of color with generally equal opportunities and erasure of anyone who does not reflect this image (p. 157) is also addressed in this book. Lloréns proposes that understanding the way ecological catastrophes impact people differently based on race, class, gender, and disability statuses is essential to creating a socially just response to these crises. Lloréns critiques techno-libertarian solutions such as the expensive Tesla tiles referenced in Cohen-Blatter’s “Safety is ‘the Ultimate Luxury’” (2019) as a method to move luxury homes off-grid and toward complete independence from government services (p. 143). Referencing Alston’s “climate apartheid,” Lloréns argues solutions that alleviate symptoms of the climate crisis for individual wealthy people exclusively are counterproductive in meeting community needs, as this relegates climate adaptation to the realm of individual responsibility and leaves people without economic privilege to suffer first and worst. When read in conversation with Mohanty’s “Under Western Eyes,” students could use Lloréns’s examples to critique the myth of a homogeneous Puerto Rico in media representations and policy decisions. Students could then propose climate adaptation and mitigation solutions to center the experiences of the people typically impacted first and worst by environmental disasters.

Lloréns also challenges rhetoric of self-interest and individual responsibility through using consistent examples of people exercising their intrinsic motivation to help their communities. For instance, she accounts the communal and volunteer-based efforts of women in her family to cook and distribute pasteles and highlights an entire week-long environmental justice camp operated exclusively by volunteers and made available without cost (pp. 5–6). These examples could be used in an economics class to deconstruct the myth that self-interest is the sole human motivator which economies must be based around, and to invite students to explore alternatives.

Lloréns’s analysis of Afro-Puerto Rican women’s strategies to build and sustain community solidarity, care, and healing could also act a roadmap for future organizers with similar visions. Ecofeminist pedagogues could greatly benefit from adopting the decolonial perspectives explored in this book, which—as Lloréns illustrates—are often suppressed or absent. This piece provides valuable insight on how capitalism, slavery, matriarchal dispossession, ecological crises, and colonization relate to Afro-Puerto Rican women’s lives, and models

liberatory responses to these oppressive circumstances, empowering the reader to engage in further action toward similar goals of collective liberation. Through incorporating this book into their classrooms, teachers of political science, government, economics, history, sociology, gender studies, and race and ethnic studies could meaningfully deepen and complicate students' understandings of their fields. This book is well suited for use in sessions on environmental sociology, environmental justice and ecofeminism, feminist cultural studies, and transnational feminism.

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