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Sovereignty Unhinged

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DEBORAH A. THOMAS AND JOSEPH MASCO,
EDITORS

Unhinged

An Illustrated Primer for the Study
of Present Intensities, Disavowals,
and Temporal Derangements

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Acknowledgments

As is the case for all edited volumes, these essays appear together now after a long and collaborative push. We initially convened at the 2015 American Anthropological Association meeting in Denver, under the auspices of a double panel titled “What Sovereignty Feels Like.” We were interested in bringing together a range of scholars who were trying to think sovereignty beyond political economy and beyond conventional models of self-determination, and instead in relation to affect, emotion, and the senses. We hoped that such an interrogation would lead us to understand something new about our contemporary conditions, and about the ephemeral and nonlinear way sovereignties might surface and circulate. We were so energized by our gathering that we continued to think together. Thanks to the Marion R. and Adolph J. Lichtstern Fund at the University of Chicago, we had the opportunity to convene in Santa Cruz at Danilyn Rutherford’s beautiful compound to flesh out our own essays and to brainstorm toward an introduction and intervention. There, our conversations were supplemented by fantastic food and extraordinarily bracing body surfing! And as we continued our work together and the collective condition worsened with the rise of authoritarianism, climate disruption, and a global pandemic, its purview also grew as we invited additional interlocutors and additional modes of expression.

We are grateful, of course, for the patience, diligence, and brilliance of all the contributors represented here, and for the support and guidance of Ken Wissoker, Joshua Gutterman Tranen, and Chad Royal at Duke University Press. We also want to thank the University of Chicago and

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Introduction

Feeling Unhinged

JOSEPH MASCO AND DEBORAH A. THOMAS

Prodigy is, at its essence, adaptability and persistent, positive obsession. Without persistence, what remains is an enthusiasm of the moment. Without adaptability, what remains may be channeled into destructive fanaticism. Without positive obsession, there is nothing at all.

—Lauren Oya Olamina in Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*

The words in the epigraph to this chapter, penned by Lauren Oya Olamina, the protagonist of Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993), constitute the first insight from "Earthseed," the emergent text that guides the movement she seeks to bring into being, a new mode of survival on an increasingly unstable and violent North American continent. *Parable* is set in 2024, now less than one year from the present, but thirty-one years from the original publication date right at the end of the Cold War, a moment well into the crack epidemic, heading toward the peak of prison-industrial capture, as scientists began to frantically alert the world to the coming climate disruption, to no avail. *Parable of the Sower* chronicles the destruction of society as we know it—the endgame of the mass suffering wrought by the various exclusions of capitalism, colonization, and nationalism—and the pilgrimage of Lauren, and those she meets, toward a self-reliant togetherness rooted in a philosophy grounded in the principle of change. Lauren herself is afflicted by "hyperempathy," an "organic delusional syndrome," the result of her mother's drug addiction while pregnant with her. As Lauren describes her condition: "I feel what I see others feeling or what I believe they feel" (12). In a world that has already become undone, hyperempathy is a constant

and painful burden for Lauren, a vulnerability that drives her to imagine and pursue the possibility of building a less violent social order elsewhere, perhaps farther north on the Pacific Coast, perhaps off world. Throughout *Parable*, we follow Lauren's motley crew as they fend off the miserable, the homeless, and the wretched who would kill them for food or supplies or weapons, and as they avoid those who have been ingesting a new drug that causes them to set fires (Butler's icy recognition of the increasing number of people in American life who have no interest in building or preserving anything at all). Lauren's group moves along the Pacific Coast northward as they attempt to get outside of the normative violence of a broken economy and failed national security state to create something new and outlandish. We are interested, in this volume, in exploring the possibilities and limitations of that new and outlandish world. We have no interest in the restoration of prior conditions or nostalgia for past times but rather focus our attention on the challenges of enduring violent present conditions and building meaningful social connection in the midst of rebounding forms of trouble.

The contributors to this volume came together to probe a series of questions: What is the political ground of the present? What is its horizon? How do we imagine sovereignty in languages other than action, agency, and control? What insights does affect, as a lens, give us in thinking through moments when something that feels like sovereignty occurs, or is felt to be absent? How do we avoid the political and historical capture that makes one complicit with a problem rather than creating the conditions of possibility to confront it? We wanted to more fully understand the ways sovereignty is lived and enacted in the realm of everyday practice, and the ways in which this might reflect an aspiration for a new arrangement of our normative understandings of the spheres of both the geopolitical and the interpersonal. From a range of vantage points, the essays included here take seriously the affective dimensions of these practices and aspirations in order to illuminate the epistemological, ontological, and transnational entanglements that produce a sense of what is possible—politically, economically, and socioculturally—in a post-9/11 militarized world infused with the violence of global capital, with accelerating climate disruption, and with resurgent racisms and exclusions. We are interested in the afterlives, and the new lives, of twentieth-century notions of states, activism, and agency, and in how twenty-first-century ideas about citizenship, relationship, and responsibility are being reconfigured in unpredictable ways. As ethnographers, we are also curious about what different forms of scholarly expression are necessitated by our changed condition—often cast as postpolitical, neoliberal, or

late industrial. In such a deeply troubled era, how might scholarship work to transform rather than reiterate existing ideas about self-possession and awareness? What new genres of investigation or care, of writing or visualizing, are needed to engage living within the giant problem spaces otherwise known as economy, security, ecology, or politics?

We have called this volume a primer as a way of signaling our ambitions but also acknowledging our limitations. *Primer* has several connotations. In one context, it refers to the short nucleic acid sequence that constitutes the starting point for DNA synthesis, the molecule that begins a polymerization process. In this sense, a primer is a catalyst, the impulse that allows for the creation of something new. Primer is also that first coat of paint, a preparation that prevents overabsorption and the development of rust, that improves the coverage and lasting effect of the second coat, which is the main event. But a primer is also an elementary textbook that serves as an introduction to a subject of study (Harney and Moten 2013). Our project then is provisional and hopefully catalytic, a first approach that also points to a vast field of future study. But our field of study here is also speculative and hard to grasp, oriented toward the modes of feeling and anticipation that constitute the experience of navigating troubled times. In terms of social theory, it is counterintuitive. If one were to read a classic primer on sovereignty, for example, one would expect to see references to Hobbes, to the Treaty of Westphalia, to Wilsonian notions of democracy, and perhaps to figures like Weber and Schmitt.¹ These texts tell the story of sovereignty through the lens of the executive; they have an investment in making the figure of sovereignty a special entity, a singular form, often stacking race, class, and gender in a specific historical configuration (as Sylvia Wynter might put it, constituting a genre of the human via both hierarchy and exclusion).

Anthropologists have been compelled instead to explore the more diffuse, uncertain, complex ways people experience sovereignty and the challenge of navigating both uncertainty and survival. Stimulated by Michel Foucault's biopolitics, Giorgio Agamben's notion of bare life, and Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomic networks of force and possibility, political anthropologists have borrowed from political philosophy the conceptualization of sovereignty as domination, but have reframed this in terms of process and practice, more as performance than product (Hansen and Stepputat 2006). In doing so, they have been attuned to the entire universe of other concurrent processes, the intensifications of agency, the regimes of care and engagement, the temporal and spatial derangements that are not recognized traditionally as forms of sovereignty but that are, in fact, where most of us are

living most of the time. We thus present analyses of sovereignty *unhinged*—unhinged from master narratives, unhinged from normative disciplinary frames, and unhinged from pragmatic developmentalism and utility. We are asking about what happens when the autonomous, rational subject is no longer the starting point of analysis (or policy, or transformation), and when we begin instead from the energies, excesses, and ambitions of being out of order, dislocated, even hysterical or mad.

This unhinging of sovereignty rests on a different theoretical lineage, one in which international relations, political economy, and the management of populations feature less prominently than embodied and phenomenological approaches to Being, and one in which violence has been central to its exercise and performance (Mbembe 2003). We ground this lineage within historical-ideological and onto-epistemological phenomena that produce whiteness, maleness, and Europeaness as the apex of humanity (Wynter 2003), the epitome not only of transparency and universality but also of determination and causality (Ferreira da Silva 2007, 2017). In other words, we begin with an understanding that, having defined itself as universal reason and absolute perspectivity, the interior humanity against which all exterior Others are compared and measured (and found wanting), Western European empire inhabits the expression of sovereignty, the conquest and disavowal of what Édouard Glissant (1997) has called “relation” (the basis of the right to opacity and the foundation of freedom), not only within Europe but also throughout the postcolonial world.² This sovereignty is obsessed with security because its conquest, cannibalism, and disavowal of exteriority are never seamless nor complete. It requires constant work to install a singular concept of the human and a world order based on property relations, and this work is always potentially undone by that which fails to recognize it, by that which refuses it in intentional and unconscious ways.³ Put differently, the Euro-American logics of sovereignty are both delusional and crazy-making, demanding a singularity of life out of a vast multiplicity, creating and then naturalizing hierarchies that function only through dehumanization and exclusion.

If this is our baseline, confronting our contemporary condition requires a formulation of sovereignty that resides outside the normative parameters of perfectible governance, one that is rooted not in Being or History but in nonlinear temporality and nonutility. We take our cue here from Georges Bataille ([1991] 2017), who felt that sovereignty should be grounded in immediacy rather than future thinking, consumption rather than production, and the desire for nothingness rather than attachment. For Bataille, the

early twentieth-century anthropology of noncapitalist societies provided important keys to thinking about relations between subjects and sovereigns. He was particularly compelled by ethnographic representations of the potlatch, as these appeared to him to counter the exigencies of mercantile (and industrial) capitalism whereby labor was oriented to future accumulation, for Bataille a form of both literal and figurative slavery. Through an unproductive sharing of wealth—and by “unproductive,” Bataille means a wealth that is not accumulated for future gain—both the sovereign and the subject experience the primacy of the present, the miraculous excess, and the festival of life. Death, in this view, or the release of the fear of death, is the ultimate sovereign experience, and the states of laughter, sadness, rapture, anger, ecstasy, intoxication, horror, disgust, fear, magic, and eroticism all represent affective encounters with a nonexceptional sovereignty. To refuse conventionally iterated sovereignty for Bataille’s sovereignty “*in the storm*” ([1991] 2017, 342) is therefore to seek a life “*beyond utility*” (198) and beyond the engulfment of recognition. What he called the “*human quality*” should not be sought in the language of either democratic rights and responsibilities or socialist collectivity, but in the one “who refuses *the given*” (343).⁴

This iteration of sovereignty abandons the world of projects and eschews the expectation embedded within the temporality of the future anterior or the notion of progress or the politics of recognition. In disrupting the disavowals and deferrals that undergird imperial Being, it creates the conditions for meaningful forms of life by nullifying the normative relations that uphold Being as the ground of subjectivity and governance. This is particularly resonant throughout the so-called postcolonial world, where, as Achille Mbembe has argued, we continue to deal with a form of governmentality in which “sovereignty consists fundamentally in the exercise of a power outside the law” (2003, 23). There is, of course, a long list of scholars who have critiqued the *post* in *postcolonial*, and who have limned the continuation of imperial relations of domination, even as these have shifted over time. While this scholarship ordinarily laments the failure to remake formerly colonial relations from the ground up, Yarimar Bonilla (2015, 2017) has suggested that exploring enduring forms of nonsovereignty should instead provide grounds for new theoretical and political openings. “The notion of a sovereign state, and its attendant sovereign individual who speaks and acts autonomously,” she writes, “is thus giving way to the recognition of the non-sovereign nature of most social relationships—political, intimate, and affective—all of which require brokered and negotiated forms of interdependency and a relinquishing of autonomy” (Bonilla 2017, 333). Indeed, if the practice of sovereignty

must lie in nonutility, then its aim cannot be the seizure of state power, but instead its refusal and abolition through what Savannah Shange has called a “messy breakup,” a “rending, not reparation” (2019, 4). In other words, agency and sovereignty are not the same thing, which opens up the conceptual space for ethnographic inquiry explored in this book.

Paying attention to affective intensities, the spaces in which nonutility thrives, refusals of the terms of recognition, and moments of flagrancy is our way of getting at the unhinging we seek to identify, a way of thinking beside and beyond presumptions of possessive individualism, and a way of siding with Nietzsche’s madman. Thinking sovereignty in relation to affect rather than the ways we’ve been given (ways that have made possible certain imaginations but foreclosed others) offers a conceptual space for analyzing historical formations as dynamic, and as simultaneously constrained by the institutions, economic realities, and political conceits of different eras. We are interested, then, in the spark of self-possession that feels like sovereignty and offer here a variety of vantage points—the necessary first draft and hopeful catalyst—for an emerging ethnographic methodology of current conditions.

An earlier generation of scholarship on affect was oriented toward thinking about what mobilizes people to act, identifying the prepolitical animation that moves people to care about something and activate attention, care, politics. That was the moment of the AIDS crisis, the aftermath of the first US invasion of Iraq, the post–Cold War moment of globalization, theorized in both romantic and destructive terms (Staiger, Cvetkovich, and Reynolds 2010; Ahmed 2004; Sedgwick 2003; Massumi 1993). As we’ve settled into a normalized kind of neoliberalism, trade blocs are gone, China is ascendant, and the United States is simultaneously withdrawing from global alliances and intervening in new ways via covert actions. All are affected by the sheer social force of information technologies and finance capital. We are one generation into the demobilization of a more radical historical vision of inequality. Platforms like #MeToo and the Movement for Black Lives have overcome some normative social silencings, yet the proliferation of presentism buries a deeper understanding of why things are the way they are. Too often the call to crisis is merely an effort to reestablish the very conditions of possibility for that violence (as Donald Trump might put it, to make “America White Again”) rather than a way to assess foundational logics, structures, institutions, or ambitions (Masco 2017).

How, for example, should we parse the affective intensities and challenges of a summer like that of 2020, in which unprecedented public protests against anti-Black police violence took over US cities that were also in

lockdown under COVID-19 pandemic protocols, creating loss of jobs and evictions while in many regions of the world people were also navigating the challenges of extreme weather events—involving heat, hurricanes, and fires? What are the techniques of survival in such a multiply-threatening moment, the forms of self-activation that Lauren Berlant (2007, 759) would have called modes of “lateral agency,” not sovereignty, where agency “can be an activity of maintenance, not making; fantasy, without grandiosity; sentience, without full intentionality; inconsistency, without shattering; embodying, alongside embodiment”? In other words, when does exhaustion produce zones of personal and interpersonal creativity, modes of engagement that matter to managing the compounding dangers and stresses of the moment, which in so many cases lead to forms of self-sacrifice?

In response to the current twenty-first-century moment, the affects we explore here aren't explicitly instrumental. Most of our contributors feature a problem that people are not going to be able to solve, and each chapter considers how people manage that state of being (abject, captured, or fatigued, but also creatively attempting to create new worlds, or to move within violent orders of being). Our focus is on bringing affect, agency, and politics into a more nuanced relation than has been conventional. We are asking readers to be caught, as all the subjects in the book are caught, without an easy answer about what the effects of a particular political moment can be. How, for example, can one solve the violence of capitalism or imperialism (or the multigenerational fusion of the two in what Karuka [2019] has called “shareholder whiteness”)? Individuals are, instead, always inside these problems working with all available resources to navigate the resulting turbulence while also seeking opportunities for positive world making or more provisional modes of relief.

Affect, on its own, is not a political project of any kind. As Jessica Winegar shows us in chapter 1, moments of collective euphoria might actually do political work, but this doesn't necessarily lead to the consolidation of a new disposition, and it may, instead, reveal the limits of intensity (psychically and physically) as people become literally exhausted. The upside-down temporality and bodily adjustments in Purnima Mankekar and Akhil Gupta's essay also generate new forms of imagination and wonder (chapter 5). And sometimes the steamroller of the corporate NGO might not actually reach its expected destination, as Arjun Shankar demonstrates in chapter 7, and the lunch ladies negotiating vulnerability at every level can unexpectedly keep their jobs. The deranged spatiality and temporality of late modernity enables these fatigues, innovations, hopes, and surprises, and ethnographic

attention to them helps us to understand which parts of these derangements people are negotiating at particular moments, and how they theorize and act on them. As Bonilla puts it in chapter 4, the world is filled with preexisting disasters that new emergencies ride on top of—the earthquakes come after the hurricane in the midst of a pandemic in Puerto Rico, leaving the vulnerable even more so or, at times, allowing those most experienced in emergency conditions to lead the way to a different dispensation.

The contemporary context points us to the contingency of local action, one in which our current concepts like endurance and precarity, though evocative, are not sufficient. Affect, as we present it, reflects the capacity to act and be acted upon (in the Arendtian sense) but not with a particular telos (Berlant 2007). In a way, then, we also want to imagine new forms of agency without knowing what they will look like, without relying on the neoliberal idioms of choice and resilience (Evans and Reid 2014). How might we understand possibility as simultaneously emergent with perception, limit, strength, opportunity, and loss? How can we see the mechanisms by which these possibilities are shared or transmitted, but not always consciously? We want to foreground unpredictability in everyday life today, the inability to predict or map effects with the kind of precision and dogma that post-structuralists may have felt was possible. We are trying to map the possibilities of some sort of collectivity that could come into being, some kind of world making that has also to do with the recuperation of vulnerability in relationality, of engagement without possessive individualism, of lives lived in the tangle of preexisting modes of violent relation. Following Lauren Berlant (2016), we are interested in recognizing the broken modes of sociality that are informed by dominant projects of militarism and capital while also attending to how individuals come to navigate social orders with diverse projects, expectations, and techniques but with little expectation of control or mastery. If we take “What does sovereignty feel like?” rather than “What does sovereignty look like?” as our organizing question, we put a microfocus on instability, on undoing, on the ways sovereignty encompasses different (sometimes divergent, sometimes convergent) intensities and temporalities, and therefore on how people are experiencing a moment or condition; we don’t assume this is knowable without doing the investigation.

Our primer (part investigation, part first-layer methodology, part affective recruitment, part provocation for future study) is thus designed to elicit an approach, rather than an endpoint, mode, or theory. This method helps us find where to locate the ground to which we want to move, and to live in and through the everyday with attention. We seek a method that helps us

see five hundred years of European modernity and the West as a project of exclusion that might always have been otherwise, that leads us to appreciate the condition of our condition without resorting to totalizing narratives (of revolution, of science, of imperialisms, of Afropessimisms, of Anthropocenes). We strive, instead, for a way to sit in uncertainty and still engage in forms of nonteleological world making that have an unpredictable range of affective possibility. As a result, we are inclined toward the spheres of the intimate, messy, and chaotic, and toward the everyday rather than the eventful (Das 2006). We attend to the quotidian enactment, refusal, exhaustion, and consolidation that characterize moments in a duration of political life.⁵

I mean he's like . . . like a symbol of the past for us to hold on to as we're pushed into the future. He's nothing. No substance. But having him there, the latest in a two-and-a-half-century-long line of American Presidents make people feel that the country, the culture that they grew up with is still here—that we'll get through these bad times and back to normal.

—Lauren Oya Olamina in Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*

In this quote, Lauren Oya Olamina is speaking about their new president, Donner, an advocate of state privatization, of short-term thinking and a narrow pursuit of profits, a law-and-order executive that promises new jobs and opportunities but delivers workers into toxic spaces, violent labor relations, and racisms but who also signals a still present (if objectively barely functioning) federal state. The continued existence of a president, an individual occupying the position of chief sovereign and thereby maintaining a connection to the more robust nation-state politics of the past, reminds Lauren of a world committed to a social contract based on the lost assumption about an ever-improving collective future and security. But she is clearly skeptical, drawing our attention to Donner's supporters' illusory sense of progress and perfectibility, challenging their belief that the "normal" to which they strive to return is indeed desirable, that it isn't itself fatally flawed, constituted through a series of disavowals of the processes that have been the foundation of the modern world—imperialism, colonization, genocide, and plantation-based slavery. Writing in the wake of the Reagan-era political realignment, Octavia Butler was all too aware of the vast populations inside the United States being readily abandoned by the neoliberal turn, aware of the hollowing out of civic society and infrastructures in support of wealth consolidation and expansive militarism, well aware of false nostalgia for

a United States that could be imagined as uncontested but only for those implementing Jim Crow, native dispossession, and extraction regimes.

Thus, we work in *Sovereignty Unhinged* to challenge political, economic, and psychic orders that protect some while leaving others to negotiate advancing necropolitical disorders, exclusions, and abandonments. These are the disavowals that produce the themes that commonly permeate the essays in this volume. We are confronted with out-of-joint temporalities and radical disjunctures; palimpsestual dislocations and compressions; gaps, lags, and emergent relations. We are also facing difficult spatial reckonings, reorderings, and hauntings, with unpredictable movements and claims-making across both real and imagined boundaries. And we are forced to contend with the realm of the body and the meanings attached to its physicality, management, performativity, and limits. In *Parable of the Sower*, these tensions are viscerally explored as Lauren is violently forced out of her fragile gated compound and out onto the open road, walking the dangerous route from the loss of one community to the almost impossible founding of another. Following Butler's attention to the circuits of empathy and violence, change and crisis, capture and choice that inform Lauren's hazardous journey, we have grouped our chapters under the pull of opposite impulses: "Capture/Escape," "Breaking/Making," "Exclusion/Embrace." Each section explores how modes of collective identification, labor, and subjective experience are activated and experienced against the contingencies of social dis/order. Each chapter tracks from a distinctive perspective the destabilizations and intensities informing how individuals navigate the simultaneity of violent conditions while maintaining a focus on the always available potential for positive world making.

We feature Lochlann Jain's artwork, which not only undoes normative understanding about self-possession but also offers a visual register of non-sovereignty focused on the project of breathing. Jain's *The Lung Is a Bird and a Fish* project details the modes of biological capture in an industrial age that links organisms via the increasingly vexed necessity of respiration. Jain offers us an illustrated exploration of industrial life itself, focusing on the promise of good air, easy respiration, reliable breath. Jain links the laboratory animals whose bodies are mobilized by researchers to understand compromised breath (from asthma to emphysema) to the concentrations of airborne toxicity that index race and class with ferocious specificity. As Alison Kenner (2018) has detailed, the terrors of an asthma attack create a haptic of environmental reasoning, a mapping of the spaces, interiors, weather conditions, and season that shut down breathing in a painful seizure. "Breathers,"

as Tim Choy (2011, 145) would remind us, are a class of living beings that are linked via the ways that air distributes harms unequally and represent the ultimate revolutionary class. As Kenner shows, asthmatic attunement requires learning urban space via constrictions in breath and deploying science (i.e., the inhalers that Jain shows are developed via animal bodies in laboratory tests) and new kinds of self-knowledge (i.e., practiced forms of holding the body and controlled emotions and thoughts, as one tries to move through a sudden spasmodic loss of breath). Breath is a nonsovereign necessity, producing contemporary derangements linking the bad smog days in Delhi and other global cities to specific neighborhood conditions of toxicity to climatic disturbances on hemispheric and even planetary scales.

Via art and research, Jain connects basic scholarship on oxygen to the development of laboratory practices that create choking animal subjects, to innovations in gas and chemical warfare that target breath itself (see also Sloterdijk 2009). In Jain's work, the suffocating subject is revealed as a fully modern achievement—nonsovereign, in pain, and linked inextricably, if unevenly, to other beings via science, warfare, and shared industrial atmospheres. Jain asks us to take account of the hidden connections between differently breathing beings, to see a shared relationality to destabilizing environmental conditions and to interrogate the contemporary practices that harm in the name of knowledge, profit, or power—themes that criss-cross chapters in this volume. In this way, Jain, alongside Christina Sharpe (2016), attunes to the everyday challenge of respiration in our historical moment, of breathing in a world still infused with racisms, sexism, and homophobia and structured by violent orders of policing and toxicity.

The first section of essays—"Capture/Escape"—attends to the messiness of revolutionary projects, the problem of historical violence, and the unpredictable aftermaths and by-products of nationalism. In it, Jessica Winegar, María Elena García, Deborah Thomas, and Yarimar Bonilla raise questions about the ghosts of imperialism, civil war, and revolution in relation to contemporary dynamics of normative sovereignty regarding regime change, the production of consuming rather than critically engaged subjects, and the replacement of local expert knowledge with state forensics designed to manage processes of death. Here we ask: What happens to revolutionary energies—the collective effervescence that can constitute a new social order—as they become coded into state institutions, policy, and policing? How does the promise of a radical break with the past become undone in the implementing of a new social order, often renewing long-standing violences within new languages, codes, and silences? How does feeling free

secure the very possibility of sovereignty but also show its limitation in that it is so impossible to hold on to?

In formal state-based politics we show that ambitions for the unhinging of sovereignty are foundationally linked to psychosocial and affective distortions, fields in which the violence of political life is miscast as love, aesthetics, or silence via modes of either amplification, silencing, or forgetting. Jessica Winegar asks us to understand love for the leader, the euphoria of projective attachment for the very idea of a figure that could hold the promise of making a new political order out of the disappointment of a destabilizing revolutionary moment. The overdetermined affect Winegar finds for the newly installed President Sisi—a kind of collective love suffused with erotic desires and misrecognized hope—is a register of the unstated fear of a world without a strongman, a world where violence is no longer organized via recognizable parties and politics, instead of a revolution, a constant unraveling. The promise of Tahrir Square in 2011, the euphoria of overthrowing a dictatorial regime, enabled an intensity that people want to maintain but with new attachments and misrecognitions as the brutality of a new political order secures power. Winegar tracks the polarities of love and disgust that follow in Egypt, modes of affective displacement that have the intensity of revolutionary energy but no longer organize the spark of revolutionary political demands.

Love, here, is not primarily the sustained commitment to others that Octavia Butler's Lauren seeks to cultivate in a violent world, despite her hyperempathy for other people's pain, but rather a mode that overrides and resists the violence of the present. Similarly, María Elena García explores, in chapter 2, the recent production of a Peruvian cuisine for international connoisseurship, a seemingly depoliticized love of flavor and taste that politicians and public figures turn to as a way to change the narrative, to move away from political unrest and decades of conflict to focus on foodways as a form of togetherness. García shows how the entry of Peruvian cuisine into the global marketplace offers a powerful way for Peruvian elites to launder and erase Indigeneity while also riding on its foundational aesthetic forms. A Peruvian nation focused on aesthetics and markets emerges in her account that can no longer imagine a speaking role for Indigenous people in the national narrative; instead, Indigenous subjects are offered up as mute witnesses to the repurposing of their foods for an international consumer. But here the derangement is doubled, as cuisine offers a positive image of Peru, a desirable commodity form that can compete with other international culinary regimes at an aesthetic level and thereby offer a compelling multicultural portrait of the nation, but it does so by repurposing and commodifying Indigeneity itself, rendering it an

apolitical domain of taste, texture, and color. Love, here, is deeply connected to political erasure, to a branding operation that uses Indigenous aesthetic forms and symbolism to remake the national image as tasty, not unequal; as cosmopolitan, not divided; as safe, not violently contested.

The propaganda of history as enabled by violent erasure also informs Deborah Thomas's chapter, which traces the relationship of death and sovereignty in a garrison community in West Kingston, Jamaica. Connecting US War on Terror policing practices in the hemisphere with the *longue durée* histories of colonization and the plantation in Jamaica, Thomas asks about forms of "nonsovereign death." Here the state's ability to kill is matched by the state's ability to forget and erase, leaving residents of a garrison violently attacked by state authorities with unacknowledged dead loved ones, with haunted relations to space and place that are informed by the long histories of the plantation, racial and gendered codes of violence, and colonial modes of spatial control. Unpacking the ongoing negotiation of a 2009 extradition order from the US government that led to a police assault on a historical garrison community, Thomas asks how those caught in the aftermath understand their relation to violence itself, how ghosts of the long dead inform those recently killed, and how the (post)colonial state continues to inform contemporary life in Jamaica, rendering some lives nonsovereign and expendable in the wake of the plantation, but also capable of and invested in vast community mobilizations, diverse modes of interpersonal care, and complex memory work. Here, affect and memory are archival projects, stored in individuals as they negotiate violent state projects that demand official forgetting and complacency. In this way, Thomas asks where the plantation continues to reside, where the logics of imperialism are stored and felt, and how individuals come to rely on complicated forensic practices in search of memory, community, and repair.

In her reflection on the multiple emergencies in Puerto Rico, Yarimar Bonilla asks us to consider preexisting disasters, meaning the legacies of past violent events as well as the ongoingness of structural abandonment across economy, politics, and social exclusions. For people living on an island experiencing not only ocean rise due to polar ice melt but amplified hurricanes due to petrochemical emissions, the question of how to identify the cause of crisis is rendered simultaneously corporate, imperial, and planetary. Bonilla assesses the intersubjective experience of long-term neoliberal austerity measures in the ongoing aftermath of hurricanes, earthquakes, and a global pandemic in Puerto Rico—showing how impossible it is to sort out cause and effect in the midst of a multifaceted emergency.

Demonstrating that there are no “natural disasters” anymore in a world destabilized by global warming, global capital, and US imperialism, she contemplates the tactics and survival challenges for those living in a state pushed into failure—focusing on exhaustion rather than resilience, commitment rather than abandonment, living on rather than surviving.

Between the first and second sections lies Leniqueca A. Welcome’s visual intervention. Photocollage, for Welcome, has become both a modality of refusal and an invitation to looking otherwise. Through collage, Welcome conjures ethnographic insight from uncertainty, witnesses without laying bare, and offers new possibilities through juxtaposition, while also respecting the opacity of her interlocutors (Glissant 1997). With *Wading in the Thick*, she presents four collages that grapple with life and death, and with the afterlives of death, in ways that upend the forensics of surveillance and capture. The images here, in their intentional nontransparency, offer thick forms of ethical relation; they are moments in a conversation among the producers and consumers of the images and the images themselves. They encourage viewers to feel rather than identify; they incite confusion; they disrupt normative expectations about time, space, and agency; they enact repair. Paired with textual ethnographic snapshots, the collages are not illustrations but juxtapositions that invite us to perceive askew, to experience the asymmetries of life, love, and attempts to be recognized as human.

God can’t be resisted or stopped, but can be shaped and focused. This means God is not to be prayed to. Prayers only help the person doing the praying, and then, only if they strengthen and focus that person’s resolve.

—Lauren Oya Olamina in Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*

Our second section—“Breaking/Making”—seeks to limn the complexity of being in and counterimagining the possibilities of the current economic moment, confronting the lived contradictions of laboring in a globalized world, suffused with the violence of petrochemical and financial capital, and related forms of war. In this late industrial moment, where supply-side logistics organizes geopolitics via unequal markets that both distribute climatological insecurities on an unprecedented scale and make employment a provisional condition tied to foreign profits, derangements and dislocations abound.

The task of navigating both opportunity and abandonment in the highly contingent spaces of temporary workforces and deindustrialized labor is the subject of Purnima Mankekar and Akhil Gupta’s contribution in chapter 5,

which follows the enthusiastic but upside-down world of service call centers in India. Here, the arrival of new kinds of jobs in call service centers for multinational corporations whose customers are largely in Europe and North America offers an exhilarating opportunity for workers but at an unusual price. Inverting their lives to work in the time zones of customers on different continents, the pleasures of high-tech jobs (involving not only pay but also daily connections to people located all over the globe, with all the imaginative possibilities energized by overcoming time and space in this manner) are gained. However, the job also requires many to give up normal access to family and friends at home, to a life organized by local rhythms and established time horizons.

Perversely, life in the call center after a few years can produce a feeling no longer of radical mobility but of stuckness for those who have not risen in their career position but also have traded away the continuities and connections to local family and friends. Mankekar and Gupta identify an affective force of possibility that call centers can unlock for individuals, a freeing of the imagination which nonetheless requires constant negotiations of “being out of joint.” Being out of joint is an increasingly collective condition in the twenty-first century. This forces individuals into a daily negotiation of social, environmental, and economic disorders and their compounding effects—creating a modern subject that is neither sovereign nor in control but rather one that attempts to navigate both physically and psychically a wildly contingent world and its distributed violences—and does their best every day to make it work.

Sovereignty as interdependence (not freedom) is the theme of Jessica Cattelino’s contribution, chapter 6, on the settler state conditions of the Everglades, a region crucial to Indigenous worlds that is undergoing massive transformation due to the combined forces of global warming, tourist economies, and water demands from urban centers. Underscoring the multiplicity of Indigenous sovereignties, as well as the continuing paradox for native communities negotiating state and federal law from “domestic dependent nation” statuses, Cattelino considers how the Seminole Tribe of Florida navigates radically shifting legal and ecological terrains. She explores the rise since the 1980s of both casino gambling and a new water politics that force multiple, constantly troubled sovereignties to be mobilized in the same territorial region, constantly in tension, mobilizing for good relations. For the restoration of the Everglades—that unprecedented attempt to sustain its ecological form even as erosion and ocean rise threaten to submerge the entire region—activates all claims, making land and water

rights increasingly contingent, though vital, formulations that try to moderate the flows of water and earth.

In short, Cattelino invites us to try, just try, to be sovereign over water, the irresistible flow that enables life itself, and to do so from within a politics of good relations toward the earth. In the hyperviolence of the settler colonial state, now magnified by the force of global warming, which promises to push all coastal communities underwater in the coming decades, Cattelino offers the startling proposition that true sovereignty resides in dependency: that is, in collaborations across political lines and in support of a vast set of more than human relations that constitute all the forms of life, both on and in between water and land. How to define and act in support of ethical community relations under conditions of massive ecological transformation is an ongoing challenge for those navigating the violent and long-standing settler colonial legal paradox; it is also an increasingly urgent collective project in the twenty-first century, as the atmosphere heats, the ice melts, and the oceans rise.

In the turbulence of ecology/economy, these once seemingly separate domains are now fused via the historical work of petrochemical capitalism, bringing formally into question the viability of the Euro-American commitment to creating futurity. What are the tactics of survival, the modes of flexible reaction and counterreaction to radically destabilizing conditions, the ways of staying sane and active as one is bounced, struck, or hijacked by the combined force of petrochemical economies, superheated ecologies, and national politics? Here, we need Arjun Shankar's ethnographic engagement with the lunch makers in a school in Advisandra, India, local women paid by the state to make sure each child in the school has a good hot lunch (chapter 7). A modernization project tied to the intimacy of food, the hot lunch program provides a classic social contract between citizens and the state—life support via institutional organization. But here, Shankar's ethnography troubles such a claim: the cooks have not been paid in months (and are barely making it when they are paid), and a proposal to outsource the food contract to a Hindu religious organization threatens to replace them altogether. The contradictions of the Indian state—as the largest democracy, as well as a quickly neoliberalizing state that is also number one hundred on the Global Hunger Index—leave children in the most precarious of positions. Thus, the lunch makers are at the fulcrum of multiple national projects—both mobilized and expendable, as contracts get written and rewritten. But the new food contract requires standardized lunches, and the roads that allow the school to be connected to these larger national projects are not

yet built. Shankar follows the lunch makers as they navigate the turbulence of national infrastructures, religious projects, and national promises, tuning into the affectively charged and gendered modes of concern, of capacity, of imagination that allow the cooks to carry on, with or without pay, despite a lack of job security—but with the very real pleasure of feeding schoolkids, feeling sovereign by being together for others over their stoves.

Labor is transformative of far more than psyches and imaginaries. As Alex Blanchette demonstrates in chapter 8, on the embodied forces of the twenty-first-century factory farm, workers are physically remade through contact with the pig. Closely examining the effects of repetitious slaughterhouse work in an industrial hog operation that organizes millions of animals in the United States, he considers the emergence of a system for the maximal extraction of value, from not only the pig but also the worker. The inability to standardize the pig's body perfectly for human consumption, despite decades of trying, means that the slaughterhouse cannot be fully mechanized. Instead, it needs the expert craft of people assigned to work the human/animal interface. The speed and volume of this factory system forces employees to work well past the limits of the human body. "Breaking in," as Blanchette shows, is simultaneously a conceptual and embodied process for workers, as they learn not only the techniques of working with pig bodies but also to endure the transformation in their own bodies—as hands, fingers, and tendons are worn down and remade to match the haptic feel of the animal. The slaughterhouse exposes a brutal and explicit necropolitics via an instrumentalization of biological essence on a mass population scale. The dream of the perfect factory, fully automated and without any waste, is relocated here to the cuts and repetitive stress injuries of workers, who have found ways to value each cut as a mode of self-sacrifice to worker security. In this way, Blanchette reveals how the bodies (of both pigs and people) are captured by an industrial concept that seeks maximal extraction at every stage, remaking the conditions of life, for living, and for death.

These are also the themes that Lochlann Jain explores in his contribution on the multispecies politics of breathing, which sets up our final section.

It's no small thing to commit yourself to other people.

—Lauren Oya Olamina in Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*

Our third section—"Exclusion/Embrace"—explores how we think about individual capacities in political moments in ways that are not naive in terms

of the stakes, and that explore what it takes to mobilize through fatigue, exhaustion, and frustration. It grapples with the problems of knowing and not knowing, capture and refusal, and it seeks to hack political liberalism within anthropology and beyond. What would happen if we were to suspend the logics of otherness that inform anthropology, that are organized under what Trouillot (1991) called the savage slot and what across the twentieth century became area studies? What if the historical moment of the early twenty-first century creates problems and lives suffused with violent collective conditions that can only be lived as isolated beings? An unhinged anthropology would not mobilize difference as a way to study normative centers, metropolises versus peripheries, small-scale cultures versus national ones, seeing the vast range of ideas about the world as containers that stack in relation to one another—like the perfectly ordered world of supply-side logistics. Such a project would tune into radical difference that demands to not be understood and ordered, refusals of such an absolute kind that they move outside of language. They might also focus in on explicit forms of identification that disavow collectivity, that produce massive harm to both self and world and do so with illiberal glee.

Here, Octavia Butler's notion of hyperempathy figures the problem directly—marking a special kind of connection to the pain of others. Lauren's agony at seeing others in pain, and the literal indexing of another's bodily suffering to her own, signals the capacity for a full identification with another person, an absorbing on sight of their state of being and a sympathetic harmonizing with them via the physical act of sharing, not removing, their pain. But Butler does not allow so complete a recognition: Lauren's hyperempathy is marked as her "perception" of other people's pain, rather than an identical incorporation. Thus, it is felt but imagined, real but also staging the question of how much an individual can know another person, of how empathy actually works, and of how much solidarity in difference is actually possible. For our purposes, Butler's notion of hyperempathy poses the question of sharing and investment across radical difference but without full understanding. Might an unhinged sovereignty be located in being unknowable to others, in a life without recognition? We explore in this last section the modes of self-awareness in conditions of derangement that nonetheless affectively inform something like hope, unpacking some contemporary logics of negative deferral while seeking the infrastructures of mobilization that have the capacity to shift the world.

The inescapable derangement of US racial politics is explored in Kristen Simmons and Kaya Williams's "mixtape for America," a narrative and

musical experiment that explores the vibrational forces of activism and survival in the time/space of institutional racism (chapter 9). It offers an ethnographic reflection on being caught in the dangerous moment of anti-Blackness and Indigenous dispossession, finding white supremacist formations across universities, urban landscapes, and racial justice protests. Instead of advocating for a revolutionary project that allows a perfect release from the foundational violences of the American political project, they focus on the affective intensities and musical soundtracks that allowed them to endure. Simmons and Williams explore what it feels like to be under a sign of erasure, as well as the way that music offers the constant invitation to fugitivity and a shared vibe. Here, music is more than a lifeline—it is a way of thinking with others, maintaining memory, and recognizing political struggles as harmonically collective. Music is also, of course, a means of calming and enlivening one's nervous system—of adding energy or soothing frayed nerves. From Standing Rock to the Movement for Black Lives, from Chicago to New Orleans to Nevada, Simmons and Williams consider the qualities of atmosphere—from the moment of easy breathing with beautiful others to the loss of breath that can come from the police boot or the university administration or the seminar table. By adding a soundtrack to everyday life, Simmons and Williams assert how music can transform the all-too-frequently broken and racist everyday into something life affirming, even exhilarating, infused with shared potential.

Danilyn Rutherford begins chapter 10 by asking provocatively, “What if the other others—the ones beyond the pale of citizenship and even humanity—were actually rulers of the realm?” This might mean that those who refuse recognition, who remain stubbornly opaque, non-hail-able, have a mysterious power, one we might call sovereignty. For Rutherford, the bad subjects, those who do not respond when called, can be found everywhere. Her chapter considers the frustrations of colonial explorers in Papua New Guinea when their first and absolute display of power—the shooting of a gun (then an unknown technology in the region)—turns out to be of no interest to locals. Papuans simply refuse to connect the killing power of the gun to the Dutchman to the state and to empire in the logical chain of colonial power—a spectacular form of nonrecognition, the unwillingness to be in awe or, as Rutherford puts it, a decision to “turn their back” on the Dutch explorers’ message. Rutherford then considers the sovereignty of those who cannot talk, of those disabled and in need of constant physical care, who nonetheless generate a social field around them evoking pleasure as well as shifting political outcomes. Providing a series of ethnographic encounters

between her daughter, Millie, and state representatives and classroom teachers, Rutherford considers Millie's effect on people; that is, her nonspeaking yet affectively charged effectivity. She limns the experience of a subject who cannot be hailed in reliably intelligible ways but who nonetheless shapes the world, linking speaking subjects through their uneasy efforts to confront a radical otherness who nevertheless extends compassion, care, and love. Here vulnerability, not control, is creative, generating social relations and modes of address that are not captured in language—showing that Millie's self-ownership, her performance of a radical opacity as Édouard Glissant might put it, opens up the possibility of different orders of being, multiple worlds within worlds, and surprising modes of collectivity within alterity based on social commitment, love, curiosity, and care.

But if the social order is organized not only by so-called possessive individuals, by the gun-toting officials, but also by vulnerable subjects whose ambitions are difficult, if not impossible, to decipher, then what is ultimately collective about a historical condition? Joseph Masco asks this directly, assessing the state of US politics in 2018, right at the middle of the Donald J. Trump administration, at a moment when claims to a collective belonging (across race, gender, class, and immigration lines) were being undermined in particularly violent ways by the state. He asks what is the condition of our condition, interrogating the forms of collectivity and exclusion that have always informed the American project but that are being recontextualized by changing conditions in the twenty-first century—across finance, militarism, and the environment. The strident calls for white hegemony in the Trump era, the attacks on inclusion and democracy itself, are indexed to radically shifting material conditions in the United States and efforts to maintain an exclusionary nationalism. He shows that, while the United States maintains unprecedented financial and military power, pain—psychic, economic, physical—has extreme new metrics that amplify foundational violences, creating an ever deadlier circuit.

Asking why the United States in the twenty-first century has not only the world's most incarcerated population but also the most drugged, in chapter 11 Masco considers how it is that collective life has been so thoroughly hacked by narrow political and class interests that are avowedly antidemocratic. In such a world of escalating pain and abandonment, illiberal desires can be weaponized, a way of doing double injury to the collective life of people and the idea of governance itself. The failures of the state to deal with deindustrialization, boom-and-bust capitalism, and global warming while pursuing permanent warfare has created an intensified dynamic

around race, gender, and citizenship that Trump exploits under a logic of theft. Masco considers the arrival of a “suicidal whiteness”—that is, one that embraces the very projects that collectively injure (guns, petrochemical capital, tax breaks)—in the name of protecting an imagined superior racial status. Acknowledging the masses of injured, sick, and addicted bodies in the twenty-first century, the chapter considers the intense psychosocial investment in a whiteness that not only refuses a politics of equality but that readily encourages the destruction of the world rather than change. In this way, Masco considers the structural emergency of American life. His assessment of the United States in the fall of 2018, a period of seemingly maximal danger across many social conditions, marks also a moment before the emergence of COVID-19; that is, a short time before a global pandemic would systematically amplify every existing deadly relation. What, then, might be the affective and embodied forms of the emergencies still to come, the ones in formation but not yet in sight?

All that you touch,
You Change.

All that you Change,
Changes you.

The only lasting truth
Is Change.

God
Is Change.

—Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*

In *Parable*, the center of Lauren Oya Olamina’s Earthseed gospel is change. In our view, change requires accountability. This is not the accountability of double-entry ledgers, so central to the imperial project (Carby 2019) and capitalism (Poovey 1998), but an accountability that resides outside the normative parameters of perfectible governance, and emerges from affective recognition and hope. It is not the logic of insurance, which emerges out of bought and sold bodies (Ralph 2015), but rather the commitment to the possibilities of solidarity and even love for strangers. Hope, here, is not rooted in progress and perfectibility, but is an everyday practice of care and attention, an emphasis on the specificities and complexities of particular times, places, people, and relations. This moves us into uncertainty and

outside of both the liberal and illiberal narratives of counterrevolution. It moves us into a jazz fugitivity, as Michael Ralph argues in his afterword, an improvisational politics that refigures the value of life and reorients the temporality of breath. Our investments here are in the present, but we understand that futurities condition the present in ways that often determine affects of sovereignty, freedom, love, loss, and possibility.

As we move beyond a political economy frame to attend to the psychic and affective dimensions of historical experience, we are interested in how a notion of sovereignty gets activated and deactivated over the course of a lifetime and within the struggle of the everyday. We are making historical legacies multiple, thus embodying different political valences. We are attempting to model a way to engage long histories of violence through a notion of daily practices and commitments in order to demonstrate the moment-to-moment deployment of these forms of violence and people's agency in trying to build new worlds. And in thinking through relation, we argue that nothing is singularly local. Indeed, the forces that shape earthly conditions today—racism, militarism, financial capital, and carbon and other forms of toxicity—are planetary formations that inform individual lives with differing intensities and concentrations of both fast and slow violences. Thus, we make the body central in thinking about qualities of life and living to undo the concepts that can authorize ethnography, the modes of theory that flatten human experience by assuming rational choice, that deny the power of affective experience to determine the qualities of life or that reject the psychic complexity of social encounters. The kinds of sovereignty we are thinking through are produced and apprehended through sensory regimes that shape the forms of agency and self-formation that are possible at particular moments, and we believe that attending to these sensory or affective regimes begins to undo the “savage slot” (Trouillot 1991) mode of anthropological analysis. We explore the affective terrain whereby world making is evident, in the moments of attention that lock a body into a larger frame of reference that matters. And in the twenty-first century we know that people have phenomenal powers, altering the very composition of the earth, shifting the weather, changing the terms and qualities for life itself. *Sovereignty Unhinged* explores how individuals navigate and live in a world filled with fast and slow violences but also endless opportunities for reworlding.

Parable ends not with an Earthseed insight but instead with verses from the gospel of Luke (chapter 8:5–8), with the story of the sower: “A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell

upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. And some fell among moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And others fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bore fruit a hundred fold.” What forms of affective recognition are we sowing today, and what forms of unhinged sovereignty might we reap from them?

Notes

- 1 See Getachew (2019) for a discussion of the incompatibility of these notions with the kinds of anticolonial sovereignties that were envisioned from the mid-twentieth century through the 1970s by (inter)nationalists like Nkrumah, Williams, and Manley.
- 2 See also King’s elaboration of conquest as a conceptual frame, as “a milieu or active set of relations that we can push on, move around in, and redo from moment to moment” (2019, 40).
- 3 Here, we are thinking about refusal in two ways. First is its articulation by Black feminist scholars for whom refusal is a practice rather than an event, a creative, “nimble,” and ultimately unpredictable modality through which subjects are, unconsciously and otherwise, “refusing the terms of negation and dispossession” (Campt 2017, 96) in which their lives are rendered valueless. Second is the sense of refusal proffered by Indigenous scholars and other anthropologists for whom refusal is somewhat more intentional (Simpson 2007, 2014). For these scholars, refusal marks a position of optimism and hope on the part of anthropologists’ interlocutors, and a methodological limit for anthropologists themselves. It is “a political stance” and a “generative act”; “it is an effort, at least minimally, to redefine or redirect certain outcomes or expectations or relationships” (McGranahan 2016, 334). See also Ortnner (1995b).
- 4 For more on rights as perpetuating relations of domination, see Hartman (1997).
- 5 In her theorization of “slow death,” Lauren Berlant (2007, 757) resists the logics of sovereignty, writing: “We need better ways to talk about activity oriented toward the reproduction of ordinary life: the burdens of compelled will that exhaust people taken up by managing contemporary labor and household pressures, for example; or spreading-out activities like sex or eating, oriented toward pleasure or self-abeyance, that do not occupy time, decision, or consequentiality in anything like the registers of autonomous self-assertion.”