
“What makes a certain people a ‘diaspora?’” and “Where is the homeland?” are principal questions Axel asks in *The Nation’s Tortured Body.* Axel chronicles the formation of Sikh communities and the fight for Khalistan, an autonomous Sikh nation, and questions whether sharp distinctions can be made between diasporas and homelands. In fact, he argues, the limitations of some contemporary scholarship theorizing diasporas has been the tendency to treat the homeland as a point of origin. Such work is flawed, he asserts, because the paradigm in which it operates requires one to reduce the diaspora to that which is inauthentic, a replica. Challenging this logic, Axel inverts the paradigm and asserts that it is through the *diaspora* that the homeland is constituted. In this regard, he restores a sense of motion to theorizing the circulation of ideas, information, and, yes, bodies between diasporas and homelands. Yet, despite his criticism, Axel firmly insists that there are limitations to questioning the categories *diaspora* and *homeland.* In this way, Axel attempts to distance his work from scholars who have argued that homelands and diasporas are “imaginary”—work that he argues has resulted in an odd spatiotemporal duality, wherein the homeland is understood to be a lost relic of a past time, and the diaspora a present configuration—while also disputing the utility of constructing such firm distinctions.

Just as boundaries are inscribed on the homeland, Axel asserts, so they are on the body. Beginning with his title, which nicely juxtaposes nation and body, Axel beautifully weaves the two together throughout the book. Through both archival and ethnographic analysis, he demonstrates how the body not only carries the markings of sociopolitical and cultural change but also acts as an agent of these transformations. The politics of place, he suggests, meets the politics of body in the dialectical relation of the total body, which he identifies as the *amritdhari* (unwounded) man’s body, whose images were first circulated in colonial portraiture, and the tortured body, images of which began circulating on the internet as violent actions taken against Sikhs in India became common practice. The body thus signifies more than Sikh subjectivity; changes in representations of the Sikh body, Axel asserts, reflect the formation of the diaspora itself. His consideration of the relationship between the body, the diaspora, and the nation could have been enhanced by drawing more closely upon the richness of his fieldwork. Overall, however, Axel’s book is an impressive work that should be widely read among scholars of identity, nationalism, diaspora, or South Asia.

———Bridget Guarasci

The ways that sexual activity, ideas about race, and the construction of class sensibilities influenced each other are the central concerns of Kirsten Fischer’s *Suspect Relations*. Focusing on the experiences of ordinary people rather than the colonial elite, she uses court records and travel literature to study how the sexual conduct of Native Americans, Anglo-Americans, and African Americans, and public responses to that conduct influenced the construction of race and class consciousness in northeastern North Carolina during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In her first chapter, Fischer discusses the challenge that the alternative and comparatively egalitarian gender conventions of Native Americans and Quakers posed to the Anglican clergy as they attempted to impose their authority on the colonial population and to recreate in the American wilderness what they considered to be an orderly society based on patriarchal power. Then, using travel narratives, she turns her attention to the ways in which white men’s tendency to sexualize their encounters with Native American women and changing attitudes towards race influenced attitudes toward interracial sexual relationships and marriage. In the third chapter, Fischer explores how vulnerability to sexual exploitation shaped the work experiences of servant women. In chapter four, she measures whites’ growing concern about racial distinctions employing defamation of character and sedition cases as well as incidents of swearing and scolding, many of which focused on allegations of interracial sexual activity. In the last chapter, she argues that by the end of the eighteenth century, ideas about race had changed from the belief that racial differences were merely the product of culture and climate to a conviction that racial differences were hereditary and immutable. One result of this, she claims, is that ideas about racial difference were used to justify legally sanctioned violence against the black bodies, which were by that time viewed as fundamentally different from and inferior to the bodies of white colonists. Whipping, amputation, branding, and castration, she asserts, confirmed the legitimacy of ideas about racial difference. Throughout her text, Fischer is careful to discuss how ordinary people resisted attempts by those with social and legal authority to control their sexual activities. The ways in which they did so, she claims, were critically important to the development of ideas about race in colonial North Carolina.

Building on a model of analysis established by Kathleen M. Brown in *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1996), Fischer’s thoroughly researched, well-argued, and engaging book helps to nuance and expand our understanding of social relations and the construction of race ideology in the colonial South.

———Sylvia D. Hoffert

Few, if any, countries in modern history have been as willing as Turkey to adopt Western forms and life-styles without external colonial force. Beginning in the final days of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the nineteenth century, and continuing with increasing intensity during the early decades of the Turkish Republic, local elites were committed to importing Western modernity while nationalizing it. In *Modernism and Nation Building*, Sibel Bozdoğan traces the active role played by state-employed Ottoman and Turkish architects in this process as they literally “built the nation.” By bringing together rich historical and archival resources—from architectural styles of buildings to curricula of architecture schools, and from ceremonial building competitions to popular magazines—the author presents an innovative approach to the social, cultural, and political relevance of architecture, especially in a non-postcolonial nationalist project.

Bozdoğan insightfully argues that the key to understanding the architectural culture of the late Ottoman and early Republican states is to pay attention to the ambiguities and paradoxes these states confronted. Although Turkish architects promoted modern architecture as the most rational, functional, and appropriate to local needs and resources, its application in Turkey did not fit any of these criteria. The war-torn young Turkish Republic did not have the necessary economic means or technological resources to build the flat roofs, reinforced concrete constructions, and electrical systems that were seen as essential components of modern architecture. Furthermore, driving forces behind modern structural design in Europe, such as urbanism, industrialization, and mass production and consumption of housing, were not issues for Turkish urbanites. Local architects constructed modern-looking buildings with traditional materials and techniques in order to serve a referential function. The new structures were a reminder to the nation that achieving the level of “contemporary civilization” and making a break with an Ottoman past that was cast as Oriental, degenerate, and cosmopolitan, required a new architecture.

While modernizing the country in accordance with international standards, state officials and architects also aimed to nationalize it. A convenient way of accomplishing this goal was to argue that the vernacular houses built by Anatolian peasants were already functional, rational, and economical. As architects codified structural characteristics of rural Turkey, they equated the national with the modern. Yet the model houses that planners designed for the ideal nuclear families of the new nation—houses based on the vernacular models provided by peasants—were as decontextualized and alien to local life-styles as the imported design of cubic homes.

Bozdoğan’s major finding, that modernity is not passively internalized but rather actively translated into local cultures, agrees with recent scholarship on alternative modernities. The significance of the book lies in its much needed,
detailed, and concrete analysis of the complex processes through which modernity and its sister discourse, Orientalism, are negotiated and localized by non-Western elites. More importantly, it demonstrates that adopting Western forms does not necessarily signify a position of subordination, but can also be a source of empowerment.

———Esra Özyürek


One has to admire Circe Sturm’s courage to undertake what is undeniably the most volatile and sensitive issue in American Indian communities today. An anthropologist, Sturm conducted her fieldwork in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, where she solicited tribal members to speak about how identity politics work within the Cherokee Nation. To outsiders, “Cherokee” must seem a simple term, but Sturm shows that it is multitudinously complex. Cherokees whom Sturm talked to or heard others talk about were often categorized under rubrics denoting family heritage or phenotype (“white-Cherokees,” “full-bloods,” “mixed-bloods,” “black freedmen”). But as Sturm learned, these genealogical and racial labels simultaneously serve as metaphors describing how people behave and live.

The first half of Blood Politics provides a history of Cherokee ideas about family, race, and nationhood beginning with the eighteenth century. Since this section summarizes the work of other scholars, I found it less interesting than Sturm’s own material and insights, which lie mainly in the last four chapters. These chapters cover, in this order, the federal legacy and political struggles forming current tribal membership requirements, the social and cultural characteristics (speaking Cherokee, religious affiliations, social class, and residence) that diminish or add to perceptions of how much Cherokee “blood” a particular individual has, marital preferences, and the historic exclusion of black Cherokees from tribal rolls. Sturm concludes that blood—as in “Cherokees by blood”—has been a vital symbol coalescing a culturally diverse and geographically dispersed body of people into a single nation. But blood is a highly contentious symbol, full of holes and contradictions. Currently, tribal membership in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma requires proof of descent from any “Cherokees by blood” listed on the Dawes Rolls (but not on the Dawes’ Freedmen Rolls), produced at the turn of the twentieth century. However, Cherokees themselves realize that blood is only a proxy for Cherokee-ness and one that, for political expediency only, overrides competing beliefs that ground Cherokee-ness in culture and community. Meanwhile, tribal members’ high rates of intermarriage with non-Cherokees are fast whittling away at Cherokee blood levels, so that ever teensier fractions of Cherokee blood (1/2048) will continue to be recorded on the Certificate Degree of Indian Blood,
an identity card mandated by the federal government for members of federally recognized tribes.

It probably did not matter where Sturm did her fieldwork, since every tribe in the United States today faces these or similar challenges. As the first in-depth, book-length study to document the emergence of blood as the leading criteria for determining who is Indian, Sturm’s book will be essential reading in American Indian studies. Scholars who study race in human history should also look at this case study, where our already complicated and confused understanding of what “race” means takes some new twists and turns.

———Nancy Shoemaker