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## BOOK REVIEW

**Maraj, L. M. (2020). *Black or Right: Anti/Racist Campus Rhetorics*. University Press of Colorado.**

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Beginning a monograph with the concept "mash up de place" is a project we can get behind. Because we are scholars in the field who are often discouraged from pursuing the research we pursue and engaging this research with the methods we engage; we are always going to sit up and listen when fresh new scholarship comes on the scene and says, "let's mash up de place!" Yes, let's. Yet those of us who truly commit to this work—not because it's on trend and the hottest new "turn" in the field or political landscape, but because it's the very work we know we must do if we and our people are to survive these toxic-ass institutions—we know, that mashing up de place is *work*, hard work—and as the professor says, "In style/content, race work exhausts" (9). But what Dr. Louis M. Maraj demonstrates for us all in his award-winning, admirable, and inspiring book, *he does the work*.

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As an introduction to the scope of the project, Dr. Maraj narrates aspects of his personal background—a self-described Black Caribbean im/migrant man from Trinidad and Tobago, and the ways in which this project represents his “ongoing effort to understand racialization in the United States: how it feels, how it works, how it moves, how it manifests, performs, and churns every day” (9). Professor Maraj goes on to powerfully state:

I continue to learn and live race, im/migrant-ness, and Blackness inside, outside, and in-between the classroom, as my US experience remains centered in and around educational institutions. I now also *teach* race, im/migrant-ness, and Blackness inside, outside, and in-between the classroom. I confront institutional whiteness on the daily...It won't go away. I won't go away. (9)

Helpfully (and this is especially the case for dissertating students looking for a prime example of how to blend interdisciplinary frameworks), Professor Maraj outlines the two major frameworks he will apply throughout the project. First, Professor Maraj says he very intentionally looked toward "African [I]ndigenous relational models of agency' particularly "The concept of botho or *Ubuntu* [that] 'requires respect and recognition of all things living and non-living' [...] This theory of relatedness and how it shapes humanness, nonhumanness, and the spaces in which these concepts occur pervade *Black or Right* in its examination of deep ecologies" (8-9). Second, Dr. Maraj is meticulous in his application of a "transdisciplinary Black feminist approach in order to highlight relational lived experience" (11). This section of the book contains a carefully curated literature review of scholars who should be required reading for any comps list or syllabus concerning a Black feminist lens; but what adds nuance to this literature review and makes Professor Maraj's work an imperative contribution to our field is his intentional transnational inclusion of African and Caribbean Black feminist scholars in this line up. Be it the limitations of the professors, the institutions, or whatever else, there are still too many students in US-based institutions not as familiar as they should be with Black feminist scholarship beyond the boundaries of this country's borders, and for our field, Professor Maraj's book widens our scope in welcome ways.

Ever a teacher, there are two other notable pedagogical moments in the introductory chapter. On page seventeen, Professor Maraj offers readers five key questions to consider as we make our way through the text, and when considering this text as a book to assign to students, these guiding questions can easily translate to unit-specific themes within a course in which this book and others like it could be the centerpiece. The other notable pedagogical moment occurs at the end of the introduction. Dr. Maraj poses a series of rhetorical questions concerning Blackness:

- How do we write its story if we become objects acting in it while being acted upon?
- How do we write its story if we do or don't claim humanity?

## Announcements (/announcements)

### Accessibility

To download a free dyslexia-friendly font, please visit OpenDyslexia (<https://www.opendyslexia.org/>) (not associated with JOMR).

To download a free ADD/ADHD-friendly font, please visit BeeLine Reader (<https://www.beelineapp.com/>) (not associated with JOMR).

- How do we write its story if we refuse to write its story? (21)

These "rhetorical questions" are not so much questions that might garner immediate discussion or answer by the conclusion of reading this book. Instead, as is the case with "rhetorical questions" they are best offered as what we believe is an invitational hand from Dr. Maraj, a gesture to perhaps continue the work he has begun in this book to pursue the questions he poses here through research and method that "mash up de place."

As the book progresses into its body chapters, particularly chapter one "'Are You Black, though?' Black Autoethnography and Racing the Graduate Student/Instructor," we were dismayed to see yet again another scholar of color having to make a case for *why* they are using storytelling, narrative, autoethnography, in/as their academic work/theory/method. As the professor says, "In style/content, race work exhausts" (9). We too have faced the same challenges to this chosen approach in our own pathways and look forward to the day when we no longer must spend time and space (see pages 24-27) verifying to the audience that there is indeed a legitimacy to this storytelling method and that it is legitimate and rigorous academic research content. But we also know why Professor Maraj provided the literature review (24–27), as he demonstrates in the contrasting viewpoints on autoethnography between Ratcliffe and Sharpe:

Ratcliffe's *Rhetorical Listening* notably deploys autoethnography as the first of several steps in her titular antiracist concept. Though she views auto-ethnography as "valuable," for her theory, it remains "admittedly limited in its perspective" and separate from "academic research" in disrupting white supremacy within our fields. (25)

And

Sharpe reminds us that despite knowing better, the academy often drafts Black academics into servicing our own destruction by adhering to research methods that do "violence to our own capacities to read, think, and imagine otherwise...We must become undisciplined" [...] To delve into that fracture, to undiscipline, I engage in a process of Black storytelling, of Black autoethnography. (27)

Offering this case for storytelling, backed up by the genealogy that Dr. Maraj draws on to support his claim, only strengthens the claim for the rest of us doing this work in the field. Thus, although we look forward to the day in which we can proceed in this field, unchallenged, with storytelling as method, we are grateful to Professor Maraj for this chapter which contributes strongly to the growing base for storytelling methodology in the field.

Shifting from the genre of autoethnography to hashtags, Professor Maraj presents chapter two, "Composing Black Matter/s: Hashtagging as Marginalized Literacy." Introducing us to some of the most exciting and cutting-edge scholarship concerning Black engagement with Twitter, Tumblr, and other online multimedia platforms, Dr. Maraj persistently reminds readers of the applicability of his African Indigenous and Black Feminist reading to these contemporary activist and literacy practices. Important aspects of this chapter are the review and introduction for students and teachers of the "Tumblr Commonplace Handbook" in which Professor Maraj offers his readers/learners access to an assignment that "functions as a semester-long project that combines digital media remix composition, critical thinking, and analytical writing through the use of hashtags and 'reblogging'" (58). Professor Maraj proceeds to offer parameters for the assignments, followed by student examples and his commentary on this work, confirming, "In composing hashtags, students thus open up their classroom education to a host of digital, activist, relational possibilities beyond the artifacts they read/write/analyze" (63).

The sheer intergenerational, multimodal, multi-genre approach to chapter three "All my life I had to fight: Shaping #BlackLivesMatter Through Literacy Events," is what was most resonating about this section of the book. There is something in this chapter for everyone. Pop culture? Check. Black feminist Civil Rights Icons? Check. Contemporary activist influencers, both lauded and notorious? Check. What is wonderful about a chapter like this, a chapter that surveys contributions from Kenrick Lamar, to the Combahee River Collective, to Tory Russell, to Du Bois, to Alicia Garza, to Assata Shakur, is that through the sustained application of his constructed African Indigenous and Black Feminist lens, Professor Maraj's threads a throughline tracing political and contextual moments worth analyzing and thinking through with the collected contributions of all the gifts these artists, thinkers, and doers have to offer. An era of particular focus in this chapter is colorblindness and neoliberalism; however, the beauty of the tapestry woven and modeled in this chapter is that it could be replicated and applied to other eras for analysis as well by students and other learners. This chapter was a particular joy to engage.

Chapter four, "The Politics of Belonging...When Becoming a Victim of Any Crime is No One's Fault," concludes with Audre Lorde's sobering words "remembering/we were never meant to survive" (132). In relation to the institution, to campuses, to programs and departments, we can attest to this reality from our own lived experiences of health failure and decline throughout our careers in these spaces. We are not meant to survive. But Professor Maraj has delivered a text that shines the light, another beacon of scrutiny onto the reality of our oppressively white supremacist institutions. Joining the litany of accomplished scholars who have courageously demanded accountability on the part of the institution and those who run

them, Professor Maraj, through this seminal text, has demonstrated his leadership in these discussions and efforts in disruption. We're here to mash up de place with him and we hope you are too.

*\*\*Oh, and fun fact, on page 10, in what some might say was a prophetic move, Dr. Maraj lists several of the CCCC Outstanding Book Award Recipients: Ratcliffe (2007), Inoue (2017), Kennedy, et al. (2018). Dr. Maraj was awarded the 2022 CCCC Outstanding Book for Black or Right: Anti/Racist Campus Rhetorics. Congratulations, Dr. Maraj! So well deserved!\*\**

— Benesemon Simmons and Aja Y. Martinez