BOOKS IN BRIEF


If Old Empire racialized and commodified, and enslaved, indentured, and exploited the “other” for capital accumulation, the New Empire too has automated her and turned her into an instrumental machine, for the same purpose. Comparing classical colonialism with the militarized world of the present brings out resonances with Nomi Stone’s argument in her remarkable study *Pinelandia*. The book explores the intersectionality of poetics and anthropology to explicate the shift in warfare to another genre of role-playing games of the everyday, since the launching of the Global War on Terror (GWOT). The author’s intriguing approach to interrogating Empire’s war tactics since the counterinsurgency of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq points out that the American military’s total reliance on machine technologies has “militarized human beings” (16). Culture, like information, is being manipulated by the military, compressed into “observable operational possibilities,” to learn and understand culture as “a surgical machine implementing US policies downrange” (22). Although the text, both ethically and analytically, is a representation of a “broader archipelago” rather than one site alone, Stone had conducted fieldwork across the US, between 2011 through 2013, during which time she observed mock villages and training classrooms (23). The book comprises six chapters, with a Field Poem preceding each chapter, an introduction, a conclusion, and an epilogue.

The idea of Pinelandia, an innovative, dynamic structure that was launched in 1952 and expanded since 2000, consists of physical sites across the US that simulate enemy villages – with 15 sites in central North Carolina. The sites focus on the “Cultural Turn” (11), which reconceptualizes the knowledge of culture into “warfare’s accomplice” (22). The simulation of all the details of a real-life Iraqi (or Afghani) village is complete with signs in Arabic: houses with prayer rugs and fake bullets, a corner store, mosque, hospital, and cemetery with Iraqi residents as role-players. Having aided the US during the war in Iraq as interpreters, contractors, or laborers, their entry into the US was facilitated by Washington. Allowed to enter in return for their services, they are hired as cultural role-players, “helpful tools” (16), to train American Special Forces Community (Green Berets) and the
Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations, in preparation for deployment. Dressed in traditional garb and enacting simulated actions of a warzone, they inform and coach future American combatants in “cultural literacy” of wartime, while distancing the outcome (9). Stone concedes that essentialized cultural knowledge is not new, for militarism has been intertwined with culture and the human sciences since the 1950s. But she hopes that Pinelandia will demystify America’s engagement with its unending wars and interrogate anthropology’s complicity with militarism, which seems to accept and normalize America’s commitment to war. As one training soldier informed Stone, both American soldiers and Middle Eastern role-players are enlisted into the larger apparatus of Empire. Embedded into the new imperial projects are the old Empire’s conjunction of “settler colonialism, racism, economic hegemony and political interventions” (15). Pinelandia will be of interest to students and scholars of anthropology, history, empire and war studies, and global and cultural studies.

Kelly, Jennifer Lynn. Invited to Witness: Solidarity Tourism across Occupied Palestine.

Invited to Witness is a brilliant innovative study of Palestinian resistance. Solidarity tourism emerged post-Oslo II in 1995; it is replete with anti-colonial strategies against Israeli settler colonialism, US imperial investment in the Middle East writ large, and Orientalist tourism. The 1993 Oslo Accords allowed the Palestinian Authority (PA) to establish a Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. Although Oslo resulted in the fragmentation of the Palestinian Occupied Territories (POT), the construction of the Wall, and the increasing settlements, checkpoints, and expropriation of land, among other abuses, Palestinians devised this alternative form of resistance as a countermeasure to the depoliticization of the PA and the increasing violence against them. Tourists and delegates, of a particular kind, especially from the US, are invited to witness the impact of Israel’s violence first-hand, and then invited to go home and spread their accounts about what they had witnessed (p. 4, italics in the original). Kelly defines solidarity tourism as a refashioning of conventional forms of travel into which embedded are the tourists’ needs to connect with and understand a specific social movement and the guides’ desire to nourish solidarity with the Palestinian cause. She informs us that the two intifadas of 1987 and 2000, which launched Palestinian resistance onto the world stage, increased tourism to Palestine. Palestinian tourism guides restructured this alternative resistance away from past violence to refocus on the colonial violence “as an uninterrupted stream of dispossession, an ‘ongoing Nakba’” (7). Stone is
aware of the ambivalences of solidarity tourism while other coexisting categories of resistance are ongoing, such as resisting military occupation, remaining on the land while threatened with exile, and navigating mobility around the fragmented geographies of settlements (11).

The book is in seven chapters, with an introduction, conclusion, and several pictures. Building on ethnographic fieldwork in Palestine, feminist analysis that foregrounds Palestinian women’s organizations, and queer affect studies, Palestine here is “defined by its people”: Palestinians in Israel proper, East and West Jerusalem, the West Bank, Gaza, and the “six million in the diaspora” (19). Kelly’s inclusive definition of Palestine is strategic on her part. Rejecting the geographical and historical divisive borders that have been imposed on the Palestinian people, the definition insists on the unified desire of All Palestinians, regardless of where they reside.

Chapter 1 explores the archives of solidarity tourism during the first intifada (1987–1993) during which time this new phenomenon emerged, when testimonies’ report-backs and speeches, etc. were ignored because tourists wanted “to see for themselves” (18). Then, tourists’ witnessing was transformed into a research venue, a practice that continues to undergird solidarity tourism in the present. Chapter 2 looks at the origin of the idea of solidarity tourism, which emerged after the establishment of the PA and the Ministry of Tourism. Then, tourism was re-conceptualized as a viable form of resistance to rally international support for the Palestine cause. In Chapter 3, Kelly looks at the olive-planting program in the West Bank to contravene Israeli contemporary actions with past afforestation after 1948. Jerusalem, the “multiply occupied city,” is the focus of Chapter 4. Included in this discussion are the Israeli government and settlers’ actions in and around Jerusalem, to reveal the exploitation of land, expropriation of Palestinian properties, and archaeological excavations under Palestinian homes, the consequences of which have been “combined isolation, fragmentation, and expulsion” of Jerusalemites (18). Chapter 5 deals with solidarity tourism in two areas: two villages and the mixed cities of Haifa, Jaffa, and Nazareth, to project what the refugees’ return to these sites could look like. The village of Imwas, expropriated in 1967, and ‘Ayn Hawd, overtaken in 1948, connect what happened in 1948 with what has been happening since 1967 so that tourist guides demonstrate the reality of the expansionist Israeli policy in the POT. Similarly, the subject of Chapter 6 focuses on Gaza, which has been under siege, aerial bombardment, and total isolation from the world at large, for 15 years. The chapter considers virtual and celebrity tourism, guerrilla art installations, and Palestinians’ responses to these forms of tourism, on the ground and in the diaspora (19). The final chapter relates the responses of US tourists, the implied ethics of their witnessing, and their role as witnesses. Kelly’s unpacking of the nuances of Palestinian Americans is excellent,
for their entry into Palestine as “tourists” is fraught with criminality, racial profiling, detention, deportation, and intimidation, along with the paradox of joy and trauma.

Invited to Witness is a valuable addition to the scholarship about Palestine and Palestinian resistance in the face of this intractable conflict. It would be of interest to scholars and students of Palestine and Middle East studies, history, political science, anthropology, and peace and conflict resolution.

Translated from the Arabic by Chip Rossetti. 180 pages. Paperback $16.95

No Windmills in Basra by award-winning Iraqi novelist and short story writer Diaa Jubaili (b. 1977 in Basra, Iraq) is a collection of short stories, known in English as “flash fiction” (xiv). The tales are thematically organized into seven categories: Wars, Love, Mothers, Women, Children, Poets, and Miscellaneous. Each category includes a minimum of seven stories, with 21 for the miscellaneous section. The overarching theme of the stories focuses on the Iraqi reality of war over the last four decades – from the Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988) to the Gulf War (1990–1991) to the American Invasion and Occupation (2003–2011). Stylistically, this is a new genre for Arabic fiction, according to Jubaili, one that “is still in its stage of growth” (xiv).

Combining Arabic folk tradition with fantastic elements, along with the strange, weird, and irrational, the tales delineate a Kafkaesque reality akin to the magic realism of Latin American literature. For Jubaili, the odd subject matter – the Iraqi reality – provokes questions and dazzles the reader, in addition to the poetic language, aesthetics, and surprising endings. For example, Mubarak in “Flying” is a security guard of a chicken farm who loves flying; he ends up dying from an American airstrike “like a high-flying bird” (21), a tragicomic death. Another story, titled, “The Salt Works,” depicts young Jamal who was turning into a salty creature. He and his family were not concerned, for his mother had all the salt she needed for her cooking and even gave the extras to her neighbors. His abnormal condition was tolerable until he was conscripted in 1980 during the Iran–Iraq, during which he vanished. The sad ending of the disappearance of his body is a surprise to the family and the reader alike. Another story, “The Cross Out Olympics,” depicts Khaldoun who has a problem with burping, where he identifies the food he

has had from the smell of his burps. After he was drafted and the soldiers in his platoon were all killed: “Smoke rose up from his torn body, until he fell to his knees and burped for the last time, bitterly crying out, ‘Deeeaaaaaath!’” (26).

An emotional plea for the lost nation is painted by the story of the six-month-old baby Wasam, who lost his hands and family in the 1991 Gulf War. He ends up being adopted by an Australian family who call him Mark. He grew up in a loving environment and adapted so well to his condition that he could write with his right foot and even use the computer and participate in hobbies and other school activities. When in 2003, his family saw fit to tell him the truth at age 13, with the presence of a psychiatrist. His reaction was unexpectedly calm and collected. That is until the psychiatrist produced a world map and Wasam kissed/sucked the spot where Iraq is: “His kiss made a sound much like the sound of someone putting his lips around his mother’s nipple for the first time,” reclaiming his native land (29).

In contrast, “Death of the Author” ends on a humorous note. Novelist Aziz is ending the story he is writing when one of the characters steps out to announce “The author is dead,” the news of which prompts the other characters to step forward to celebrate and light a candle for Roland Barthes, except for one sad character. Another character consoles her by saying, “After all, he was a religious author who was about to consign us all straight to hell!” (159).

No Windmills in Basra is a welcome addition to this new genre in Arabic literature that will interest and move many readers for its inventiveness, imagination, poignancy, and deep emotionality.

Hardcover $22.95

Building on Max Weber, renowned political theorist Wendy Brown is able to diagnose the nihilistic state of the modern world and to suggest ways of bypassing the unethical breakdown of boundaries. Brown does not invent the wheel. She instead reads the deteriorating domains of knowledge and politics with Max Weber’s two last lectures, the Vocation Lectures, which were delivered in 1919 before he died in 1920. In these lectures, the German sociologist analyzed the nihilistic times Europe and the rest of the world more generally were experiencing from post-World War I (1914–1918) and the Russian Revolution (1917), and into World War II (1939–1945), and beyond. He highlights the oppositional relationship between the two domains of politics and knowledge, but Brown sees them as intertwined. She defines the condition of nihilism as “an attitude in which everything, human life above all [social, economic, and political], is without essential meaning or value” (21). According to Weber and Nietzsche, nihilism, “modernity’s inevitable
“excrescence,” resulted from the Enlightenment’s valorization of reason and science rather than the religious faith of monotheistic religion whose basic belief is an omniscient and omnipotent God (22). A deep, astute philosophical analysis, Nihilistic Times comprises two chapters, titled, “Politics” and “Knowledge,” an introduction, and an afterword. This brief review will not do justice to Brown’s brilliant analytical reading of the contemporary scene with Weber’s iconic lectures. A brief summary of the introduction in which she articulates her diagnosis of the contemporary scene should whet the readers’ appetite.

Brown traces the origins of the “disorienting contemporary condition” (2) to the effects of the Enlightenment that has undergirded modernity and its effects, all of which have unsettled truth from value and cheapened values. What informs truth? She asks. This shift arose when religion and traditional truth have been replaced by empirical science and economic prosperity, a shift that has delinked knowledge from humanity’s well-being, values and their protection. Basic values, such as emancipation, progress, collective well-being, and values and their protection have assumed a lesser position in today’s conceptions of politics and knowledge. The result is the contemporary crisis of modernity: from modernity’s rationalities and forms of power to “human machineries” of control, to the devaluation of value and values, to democracy’s inability to resist or change these developments, and to the challenge to responsible education and political leadership (7–8). Modernity has over-valued science as truth, and material prosperity has been perceived as the ultimate goal of human well-being. Brown objects, saying that science teaches us neither what to value, nor how to go about practicing our values, or how to lead a good life. In the contemporary political realm, we are witnessing the rise of anti-democratic political rights across the globe, and the dominance of “autocracy, theocracy, violent exclusions, or racial, ethnic, and gender supremacies” (2–3). Corruption in politics and politicians, manipulations of digital technologies, political and economic transformations, and existential environmental threats to the earth and humanity are some of the examples she mentions.

Brown concedes that although the contemporary context differs from Europe between the two World Wars, the world condition in the twenty-first century resonates with that of the European in the early twentieth century. Moreover, Weber’s concerns with education, the university, and politics in Europe of the interwar years and their aftermath specifically compare well with the contemporary scene. Brown shares Weber’s educational concerns, citing the present issues of hiring and promotion, the politicization of scholarship and classrooms, anti-Semitism and other exclusions, low standards of teaching and hyper-specialization, and the focus on capitalist values. Of particular interest to Brown is Weber’s discussion of the charismatic leader, whose inner ideal qualities empower him or her to step beyond the dominant, crude Machiavellianism that is prevailing in every cultural
domain. The inner traits of the ideal and heroic leader stem from basic premodern ethos: responsible, far-sighted, restrained, and ethical, one who bases his actions on concrete contexts rather than abstract principles. A charismatic leader is steadfast and sober, resisting “cynicism, fatalism, and despair” (34–35). He pursues a “calling,” “a cause” in order to “renew and redeem human capacity to shape or direct common life in accordance with the capacity to create value” (35–36). I can think of very few historical figures who would qualify for Weber’s attributions of a charismatic leader: Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Although this discussion refers to modern Europe, it is pertinent to countries in the Global South that have embraced European modernism, especially as liberalism has veered into neoliberalism and globalization.

_Nihilistic Times_ is a short but dense philosophical theorization of the contemporary chaos that we are currently experiencing and a thoughtful critique and guide to how humans could bring order to the world. The book would appeal to scholars and graduate students in philosophy, education, political science, and the social sciences.