Myriam J.A. Chancy, *Autochthonomies: Transnationalism, Testimony, and Transmission in the African Diaspora*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020. viii +231 pp. (Paper US\$28.00)

The four consecutive consonants in “autochthonous” are difficult to pronounce; they lodge in one’s throat and produce a choking effect. The neologism in the title of this book by Myriam J.A. Chancy embraces that difficulty. With it, Chancy “tries her tongue” in a similar fashion to the way poet M. NourbeSe Philip wreaks havoc on the English language. Where Philip breaks apart words to unearth legacies of slavery and colonialism, Chancy augments the Ancient Greek words *autós* (“self”) and *khthón* (“earth,” “soil,” or “land”) into an expression of an autonomy that is particular to the African diaspora.

Thoroughly ambitious, philosophically rich, and rigorously interdisciplinary, *Autochthonomies* is a worthwhile read for students of Black studies, Indigenous studies, queer theory, and postcolonial criticism. Chancy aims at cultivating a reading practice founded in the intramural dimensions of the African diaspora. “That people of African descent can understand one another and ‘read’ each other’s cultural productions beyond and within postcolonial pasts/presents is often neglected in order to insist on the nonessentializing nature of racialization,” she contends (p. 6). Describing this particular capacity as a kind of “reading” enables her to establish an intimacy between texts from different corners of the Black world that reflects the broader continuities and disjunctures of the African diaspora. Each chapter gathers disparate literary works, cultural objects, and artistic forms to create unlikely “intra-diasporic” combinations. Rather than promote a new model for thinking about transnational articulations of Black culture, Chancy focuses her energies on the unending phenomenon in which the serial ruptures triggered by the Middle Passage “gave birth to rearticulations of what it meant to be African on new ground” (p. 14). This “new ground” is no empty territory to be claimed but, instead, a virtual terrain that takes shape in the realm of cultural expression. Chancy refers to this geographically unfixed site of continuous habitation as a “lakou/yard consciousness,” an allusion to the informal zones of sociality found across the Francophone and Anglophone Caribbean.

From the outset, it is clear that this book is far from a conventional study of African diasporic cultures. Part of the University of Illinois Press’s “New Black Studies” series edited by Darlene Clark Hine and Dwight A. McBride, *Autochthonomies* furthers the editors’ call for innovative advances in the field. Contributing to this, the book’s argument actually functions more like an invitation to readers to partake in what Chancy describes as an “interpretative journey.” This and the project’s overall unruly approach calls for an active reader,

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one who not only reads but *thinks with* the text and is willing to wager the risk of inquiry.

In each chapter readers are invited to enter the virtual field of a lakou/yard consciousness, not as a preestablished terrain but as a sensibility that one gains access to by way of the faint kinship or, as Chancy puts it, “af/filiation” between African diasporic texts. The first chapter situates African American science fiction writer Octavia Butler’s novel *Kindred* (1996) and White South African playwright Pamela Gien’s play *The Syringa Tree* (2003) at the convergence of race, disability, and the law found in the infamous case of South African double-amputee sprinter Oscar Pistorius, who was convicted of “culpable homicide” for the murder of his fiancée in 2014. Chancy does not read comparatively, but instead contends that together these texts open up an epistemological vantage point that resides outside of the racial logics of western modernity. From this perspective, subjects are complex social assemblages constrained by a liberal discourse of disability that reaffirms racialized and gendered conceptions of the human in the name of a posthumanist future.

Similar intradiasporic conversations are staged in each chapter with possibly the most impressive insight found in the discussion of the sonic visibility of Raoul Peck’s *Sometimes in April* (2005) that comes into view when Chancy reads that filmic account of the Rwanda genocide against Jean-Philippe Stassen’s graphic novel *Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda* (2000).

Any innovative approach has its limits. Chancy’s lakou/yard consciousness as a virtual field is not necessarily a common ground. One enters with no firm footing. That said, Chancy’s guiding principles for selecting texts get obscured by the intradiasporic dialogues she creates, while theoretical terms at times slip into metaphorical registers and hamper their conceptual force. But this does not negate the book’s call to attend to the *groundings*: the transient supports that “Others” find in each other and the Black sensibilities forged by the experience of being-rooted-elsewhere-together that Chancy captures with her runaway tongue.

Nijah Cunningham

English Department, Hunter College, New York NY, U.S.A.

nc1076@hunter.cuny.edu