

Book Review

Remaindered Life

By Neferti X. M. Tadiar

Durham, NC: *Duke University Press*, 2022, 456 pp., \$31.95 (paperback), ISBN: 9781478017769.

Casting the global present as both the aftermath and perdurance of decolonization, Neferti X. M. Tadiar's *Remaindered Life* offers a profound and timely intervention on modes of life-making and survival, and the concepts of disposability, waste, and value. At its core, *Remaindered Life* develops a theory of imperialism, advancing our understanding of the present moment by arguing that the reproduction and dispossession of certain modes of life is necessary for the accumulation of capital globally. Anchored by five sections that each build a distinct yet intertwined picture, Tadiar develops her argument by situating her discussion at both the global and the local, in the historic and the present, and in both abstract and material ways. Simultaneously, it is a book about survival and life-making, and a book about dispossession and life-taking – written in a deeply theoretical and yet also poetic form.

Tadiar begins this book by retelling the oft-cited story of the global capitalist present, proposing that we are in an era of limitless accumulation and endless war waged by “the assumed and would-be inheritors of colonialisms bequest – valued life” (p. ix). However, the form of war to which Tadiar is referring is not simply the spectacularized military action to which the term is most often associated. Rather, Tadiar recounts a feminist and anti-colonial tale, which centres war as both a means of governance and as the continuing violence of imperial dispossession. That is, imperial dispossession that actively and relentlessly wastes and/or expends the lives of those referred to as the “becoming-human”, in the everyday. Indeed, for Tadiar, war not only “suffuses the very way we live and experience this time” (p. 83) but is central to both her conceptualisation of the human – as “no more than the life form of value” – and to her argument that imperial dispossession is necessary for the (re)production of global capitalist order.

From this starting point, Tadiar renders a compelling explanation of the dialectic of waste and value, and of the modes of life associated with it – between valued life, or “lives worth living”, and disposable life, “lives worth expending”. It is then through the careful discussion of the categories of waste and value – and having explained the ways these categories “operate through complex local and universal systems for calculating social worth (sex- gender, race, ethnicity/nationality, sexuality, religion)” (p. 6) – that Tadiar is able to move us beyond binaries to address that which exists in excess or in the remainder. Underpinned by her preceding scholarship, which developed the concept of ‘life-times’, Tadiar (2012, 2013, 2022) eloquently writes in the preface that *Remaindered Life* is:

“... a tale told not about but rather from the side of remaindered life, the activity and sociality of living that is not exhausted in the expenditure of the life-times of others — leftover practices and forms of living that remain superfluous to the production of valued, and even of disposable life” (p. xii).

Inextricable from the dialectic of waste and value, remaindered life is, then, “modalities of living that exceed the necessary reproduction of the becoming-human as a resource of disposable life for capital” (p. 14). As a heuristic and viewpoint rather than an identifiable object, Tadiar offers hope while also warning that what is remaindered in the present may not be in the future.

Tadiar masterfully engages with wide-ranging issues, contexts, and figures. As a feminist geographer, interested in labour, migration, and social reproduction, I was particularly drawn to

Tadiar's discussion of servitude, serviceability, and the spatio-temporal splitting of migrant workers' life-times. While situating the importance of overseas foreign workers in the economy of the Philippines, Tadiar explains how the nation's economic transformation produced "migrant citizens", martyrs, and "value-making subjects" (p. 174). Migrant workers not only contribute to the economic and social production and reproduction of their host countries but through remittances (broadly understood), they also play an essential role in real estate investment, urbanisation, and social reproduction in their 'home' countries. While these ideas are themselves not new, Tadiar deploys her conceptual vocabulary and theoretical underpinning to explain how "migrant workers parse out their life-times between waste and value" (p. 179). To explain further, while migrant workers might temporarily experience life-times of waste in a host country, having moved from a place where they otherwise form part of an expendable population, this might, in turn, enable them to experience lives worth living upon their return, even if fleetingly. The spatio-temporal splitting that Tadiar describes provides important insights into the dynamism and flux within the global order and offers important insights for those of us interested in development and the relationships between the Global South and Global North. While theoretically dense at times, it is within the discussion of different global contexts and experiences that *Remaindered Life*'s broader argument becomes tangible.

Given the urgent and dire situation in Gaza as I write this review, it feels important to end this review rather untraditionally, by amplifying Tadiar's analysis of the imperial violence, dispossession, and war that was taking place in this "open prison of occupation" (p. 58) long before the spectacularized acts of violence that we have seen in more recent months. For instance, when discussing the calculations made by the Israeli Ministry of Defence to determine the minimum subsistence required for existence without malnutrition or humanitarian crisis, Tadiar centres reproduction and explains how the lives of Palestinians in Gaza are conceptualized as "a single quantitative unit of measure" (p. 218). When even the most basic concern for humanitarian crisis in Gaza has now ceased, the expendability of life and life-times is stark. As Tadiar (2023) eloquently summarized in a more recent roundtable discussion (that was later published in Positions):

"Feminism allows us to see then this ongoing catastrophic devastation inflicted on the Palestinian people as an intensification of a repeated logic of imperial, settler colonial dispossession required for the preservation and expanded reproduction of this monstrously iniquitous global order of life ... as feminists, we see that zones of war are also zones of living... We are moved to notice and tend to the world-making life-making of the dispossessed – the life that the poet Rafeef Ziadah says Palestinians wake up every morning to teach the rest of the world – as the grounds of an abolitionist, demilitarizing, decolonizing feminist project of radical planetary transformation. In this way, freeing Palestine frees us all."

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2024.2384714>

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