

significance of Valdés' editorial vision. Her concluding remarks call for the urgent need to relearn Caribbean "shared histories and cultures" (248) by "re-considering Haiti in relation to the Hispanic Caribbean from the perspective of the humanities" (251). This form of relearning challenges "the categoric simplification imposed by the academy" (248), bringing critical attention to the complex entanglement of cultural and linguistic borders.

Gabriel Bámgbóşé

Works Cited

Garuba, Harry. "Teacherly Texts: Imagining Futures in Nuruddin Farah's Past Imperfect Trilogy." *boundary 2*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2017, pp. 15–30.

Valdés, Vanessa. *Oshun's Daughters: The Search for Womanhood in the Americas*. SUNY P, 2014.

Arundhati Roy. *Azadi: Freedom. Fascism. Fiction*. Penguin Random House, 2020. Pp. 256. CAD \$26.95 (hardcover).

Arundhati Roy's *Azadi: Freedom. Fascism. Fiction* is a timely critical collection that scrutinises the rise of Hindu nationalism and the injustices enacted by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his regime. Embodying resistance and the rhythms of the chant for *azadi*—or freedom—the text consists of nine essays, originally delivered as separate articles and lectures, that tackle a wide range of topics including the Kashmir occupation, the politics of translation and multilingualism, the dangers of being an outspoken artist, and the rise of the rape and lynching of Muslims, Dalits, and members of other religious, low-caste, and Indigenous communities in India. In an approach similar to that taken in her previous collection, *My Seditious Heart* (2019), Roy asserts a confident examination of contemporary India, one in which India's Nazi-and-Mussolini-inspired Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)—or what she terms the mothership of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government—remains ubiquitously in view. If anything, *Azadi* is a continuation of *My Seditious Heart*: it catalogues violence to the point of seemingly abject melancholy in the face of pervasive authoritarianism exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Roy's work exemplifies, through its discourse and materiality, the importance of language and writing as a means of taking a position in the face of social injustices and deconstructing a nation's imagination of itself.

Though Hindu nationalism and the façade of Indian democracy are not new subjects, Roy retreads important ground with a sense of urgency by

following current events in *medias res* between the years of 2018 and 2020. Using a theoretical and literary lens, Roy showcases India's intrinsic multiplicity and complexity despite the forces that seek to transform the country into a singularly Hindu, patriarchal, monolingual, and monocultural state. Indeed, it is hard not to be disillusioned by the layers of systemic violence and traumas she describes. Yet by engaging closely with history, fiction, autobiography, linguistics, legislation, and journalism, Roy emphatically gestures toward reimagining the world in new terms; she emphasizes hope and the power of language, literature, and "people who are prepared to be unpopular" (202).

Central to her collection is the essay "The Silence is the Loudest Sound," which documents the violence, censorship, and pragmatism enacted by the Indian government during the Kashmir siege and lockdown on the night of 4 August 2020. Even before the public overturning of Kashmir's special status in Article 370 of the Indian Constitution,¹ military forces were already barricading seven million Kashmiris into their homes and cutting off communications, magnifying the silence of a nation within a nation and the misuse of Indian broadcasting under a fascist regime. Through her discussion of these conflicts, Roy deconstructs the history and language of protest and challenges the idea of India's supposedly monocultural image. Perhaps most interesting is how Roy showcases the irony and veracity of the text's titular protest word, *azadi*—a linguistically Persian word used during the Iranian Revolution and Indian feminist movements of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. This word, with all its complicated essence in India, has become the slogan for new uprisings and has been simultaneously repurposed by Kashmiris within their Urdu chant for independence and by Indian protestors who demand justice on issues such as poverty, hunger, patriarchy, the caste system, and repressive government legislation such as the Citizenship Amendment Act.² Roy artistically showcases how the language of protest in India is not strictly in Hindi but rather consists of a decoupage of words derived from multiple languages within the region including Sanskrit, Malayalam, English, Urdu, and Persian.

In "Intimations of an Ending: The Rise and Rise of the Hindu Nation," Roy continues to follow the compacted trauma of occupation, tiered citizenship laws, and environmental privatization and plunder in India, all amidst the rise of capitalist exploitation despite one of the biggest economic crashes in world history. She writes to the Indian public: "[I]t is becoming more and more difficult to communicate the scale of the crisis even to ourselves. . . . [F]or the sake of credibility and good manners, we groom the creature that has sunk its teeth into us—we comb out its hair and wipe its dripping jaw to make it more personable in polite company" (108). Consequently, *Azadi* generates a

threefold cultural discourse: first, as a constructive and public intervention on present matters; second, as a digestible and informative read for foreign audiences and those in Western academia; and last, as an ongoing critique. Roy describes her book as an active record-keeping of turbulent political ruptures, which she hopes will be of use to future historians (2). She thus highlights the multiplicity of mediums in which the power of writing and language can be publicly produced and disseminated toward real-world benefits.

With India ranked as the fifth most dangerous place for journalists in the world by Reporters Without Borders (Roy 80), the value of this book lies in the methods Roy uses to record cultural histories and events. Though it is a slim volume, *Azadi* reasserts the importance of writing and journalistic integrity. Roy states: “Real reporting about ordinary people’s lives [comes] mostly from the journalists and photographers working for the international media. . . . The reporters, mostly Kashmiris, working in an information vacuum, with none of the tools usually available to modern-day reporters, [travel] through their homeland at great risk to themselves, to bring us the news” (126). This example is reflected in her footnotes, which are rife with national and international news articles that criticize or bypass the rhetoric and censorship of dominant Indian news-media outlets that are complicit with government corruption. Despite the collection’s cogent critiques, however, much of its content is broad and repetitive. This is most likely due to the fact that the essays and lectures appeared beforehand as separate works concerned with similar topics. Likewise, there are certain points of discussion that the average reader may not be familiar with due to the collection’s regional context. Nevertheless, *Azadi* remains a compelling series of provocations on how to document resistance while reimagining the possibilities of a just democracy.

Maryam Gowrali

Notes

- 1 Article 370 of the Indian constitution gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir, a region located in the northern part of the Indian subcontinent, and conferred it with the power to have a separate constitution, a state flag, and autonomy over its internal administration.
- 2 The Citizenship Amendment Bill was passed in Parliament on 11 December 2019, becoming the Citizenship Amendment Act. This Act stipulates pathways to Indian citizenship for persecuted religious minorities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. However, the law does not grant eligibility to Muslims, an omission that has attracted global criticism for

being fundamentally discriminatory and a further push to marginalize the Muslim population in India. Activists have protested the Act on the basis that it is the first step toward delegitimizing and criminalizing not just Muslims but hundreds of ethnic or Indigenous minorities.

Works Cited

Roy, Arundhati. *My Seditious Heart: Collected Nonfiction*. Haymarket, 2019.

Karina Vernon. *The Black Prairie Archives: An Anthology*. Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2019. Pp. 593. CAD \$44.99.

In a recent lecture, the novelist Suzette Mayr described the “electrifying” effect of reading Cheryl Foggo’s *Pourin’ Down Rain* (1990) as a Black person living on the prairies. She noted that Foggo’s book brought to light the crucial and long-standing presence of Black families in Alberta. Like Foggo’s biographical work, Karina Vernon’s *The Black Prairie Archives* documents Black presence on the prairies to show that Black folks are not an anomaly but are rather part of a larger web of reciprocal social relations. To demonstrate how these relations have been forged, Vernon meticulously engages with the works of sixty-one Black authors who have produced oral literature, experimental poetry, autobiography, history, and ethnographies. Vernon explains that an archive “as blackness” is a method of engagement with these modes of writing that empowers community members “to tell the story they want to be made public” (5). This process of engagement is radically different from and in opposition to an archive “of blackness,” which “constructs blackness as an object of knowledge in the European archive” (5). By gathering an archive *as* Blackness, she not only reminds readers of the complicated ethics of presenting stories about Black communities that require a lengthy and necessary process of securing permissions from authors but also brilliantly challenges the dominant national archives *of* Blackness. This distinction between archives of Blackness and archives *as* Blackness is a central point in Vernon’s introduction to the anthology.

The introduction admirably attempts to redefine the last 150 years of Black presence on the prairies. Vernon provides a fresh lens through which to scrutinize the state archives and simultaneously proposes a different archive that purposefully constructs a radical shift in the way the prairies are perceived. The prairies, she rightly argues, have been mainly imagined through a so-called “prairie realist” school of writing. Writers working within this genre, who are mostly men, and all white, have produced a “sanitized and bounded”