

## **BOOK REVIEWS**

**Michelle Castaneda, *Disappearing Rooms. The Hidden Theatres of Immigration Law*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2023. ISBN 9781478024262 (ebook), ISBN 9781478016991 (hardcover).**

*Review by Dan APĂTEANU*

"Disappearing Rooms" delves into contemporary immigration courtrooms, examining the author's experience within the immigration justice movement and the theatrical nature of these spaces. It sheds light on hidden, theatrical courtrooms where the coloniality of immigration law is deeply felt. The book discusses the paradoxes and crises in immigration law, aiming to challenge our perceptions and proposes a deeper understanding of the system. The courtrooms are seen as spaces where the complexities of the colonial project are theatrically displayed, and the tension between the law's authority and its reliance on those it excludes is highlighted. Additionally, it touches upon the inner experiences of those affected by the law's actions and the contrast between the state's power and the sense of inner wholeness experienced by the marginalized.

The first part of the book "Disappearing Rooms" scrutinizes the "Removal Room," located in a Manhattan government building, where immigrants checked in with ICE officials and faced potential detention or deportation. The chapter investigates the paradox of a space designed to hide the act of deportation yet paradoxically showcase removability. It dissects the scenographic elements and the emotional experience within this unsettling environment. The next part discusses the author's involvement in an accompaniment program, providing moral support and resistance against deportations. It explores the contradiction of immigrants seeking recognition while their very movement to the U.S. was unsanctioned. The final part concludes by reflecting on the story of a woman who vanished at the US-

Mexico border and the intertwining connections between the searchers and the searched, echoing the musical concept of accompaniment beyond physical confines.

Chapter 1 of the book "Disappearing Rooms" vividly portrays the stark reality of the "Removal Room," where immigrants checked in with ICE officials, facing potential detention or deportation. It explores the contradiction of a space designed to conceal deportations while paradoxically showcasing removability. The chapter exposes the disheartening dynamics within this environment and the transformation of accompaniment volunteers, emphasizing their impact on the room's atmosphere through silence and presence. It examines the policies and history shaping the category of "removable" individuals and the problematic portrayal of certain immigrants as criminals. The narrative reveals the dramatic experiences during accompaniment, detailing the efforts to disrupt ICE's control over the room and the subsequent changes in the accompaniment program. Furthermore, it highlights the racialization and hierarchy within the movement, reflecting the challenges it faces despite its original intentions.

Chapter 2 of "Disappearing Rooms" looks into the unsettling reality of family detention, focusing on the South Texas Family Residential Center in Dilley, Texas, designed for Central American mothers and children seeking asylum. The author highlights the absurdity of seeking protection from those who have incarcerated them, exploring the intertwining dynamics of recognition and elimination within this space. It traces the historical reforms leading to the establishment of family detention and the paradoxes arising from policies designed to detain specific Central American populations while ostensibly upholding humanitarian ideals.

The chapter details the visit to Dilley and the peculiar environment within the detention center, emphasizing the inherent contradiction where detainees were encouraged to seek asylum from a government they feared more than their home countries. It uncovers the tension between the government's offer of protection and the detainees' genuine fears, emphasizing the refusal of some to comply with the repressive system.

The narrative reveals the complexities and contradictions within family detention and questions the efficacy of a system that purports to provide safety while instilling fear. It brings to light the intricacies of seeking asylum within a space built on the logic of elimination and poses questions about the dynamics of accompanying individuals within this prison heterotopia.

Chapter 3 of "Disappearing Rooms" explores the complexities of asylum

decisions and the interplay between recognition and the right not to disclose one's story. The author introduces the film "A Well-Founded Fear," offering a glimpse into asylum officers' determinations and aiming to reveal the performative aspects of asylum-seeking within the legal process. The chapter reflects on the students' critical perspectives regarding the power dynamics involved in asylum decisions, particularly addressing the asymmetry inherent in these scenarios.

Also, it inquires into the concept of recognition, drawing from philosopher Georg Hegel's views on human development and contrasting it with decolonial theorist Frantz Fanon's stance on recognition within colonial society. The chapter highlights the dual nature of colonialism, emphasizing how the process of seeking recognition aligns with the colonial state's imposition on the colonized to fit into the colonizer's perspective.

The discussion further dissects the asylum system, revealing its universal eligibility for protection while still reinforcing the territorial sovereignty of nation-states. It touches upon the tension between asylum law and the autonomy of marginalized groups, shedding light on how the asylum system doesn't aim to address the global inequalities stemming from colonial histories and often fails to cover those migrating for economic reasons. The chapter navigates the complexities of distinguishing asylum-seeking from unauthorized migration within the asylum advocacy sphere.

"Disappearing Rooms" underscore the stark realities within immigration systems, shedding light on the paradoxes and contradictions within these environments. The portrayal of the Removal Room highlights the contradictory nature of spaces designed to obscure deportations while emphasizing the individuals' removability. Accompaniment volunteers' transformations and the challenges faced by the immigration justice movement reveal the complexities and racial hierarchy within these systems. Similarly, the analysis of family detention illuminates the juxtaposition of seeking asylum from the very authorities who impose incarceration, thereby engendering an environment filled with complexities and contradictions. Moreover, the exploration of asylum decisions and the concept of recognition within the colonial framework accentuates the limitations and tensions within asylum systems, reflecting the failure to address global inequalities and the struggles faced by marginalized groups seeking asylum and protection, thus highlighting the intricate complexities and challenges within these spheres of migration and justice.