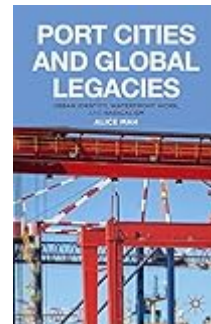


Alice Mah. *Port Cities and Global Legacies: Hardcover Urban Identity, Waterfront Work, and Radicalism.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 256 S. ISBN 978-1-137-28313-9.



Reviewed by Megan Maruschke

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Port Cities and Global Legacies

Alice Mah, associate professor of sociology at the University of Warwick, UK, recently published her second monograph, in which she explores the concept of global legacies at three post-industrial cities, Liverpool, New Orleans, and Marseille. These cities have all once been important ports in empires but have become marginalized following their collapse, the introduction of neoliberal policies, and the use of new technologies like containerization. Despite these changes, the memories of having once been a great port city endure among the communities, especially dock workers. Legacies of empire, capitalism, and casual labor practices have touched these places in particular ways, and these identities and memories can also be capitalized on by city officials eager to increase tourism or corporations looking to profit from this distinctiveness. This book explores the contradictory elements of these legacies, how they are remembered and utilized by various groups, and what attempts have been made to recover the past greatness of these ports.

Through her use of global legacies as the overriding framework for this book, Mah expands the work that has been done on this and related concepts, especially

lieux de mémoire and, in German, *Erinnerungsraum* Pierre, Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire*, Paris 1984; Matthias Middell, *Erinnerung an die Globalisierung? Eine ganz vorläufige Skizze zu den Portalen der Globalisierung als lieux de mémoire*, in: Kirstin Buchinger, Claire Gantet and Jakob Vogel (eds.), *Europäische Erinnerungsraum*, Frankfurt am Main 2008, pp. 296-308. . She focuses on the contradictory nature of these memories of having been a global port city and on the contested ways these memories are used. She explores how these legacies have shaped urban identities and political action in Marseille, Liverpool, and New Orleans through historical, sociological, and ethnographic research methods.

In part one of this book, she looks at urban identity and how it is represented in these cities. She treats the three port cities in combination with one another in this section, thereby dynamically drawing the reader's attention to the broader themes and topics. Chapter Two focuses on representations of these cities in pop culture: narratives of cities on the edge, noir literature and film, and music that captures the cities' character and identity. She uses the ideas of the blue and the black through-

out the chapter to express the mixed representations of these cities as exciting and progressive places but also as exoticized places of crime and poverty. She focuses on insider narratives but reflects on the way that her own status as an outsider affects her research. This chapter, therefore, also functions as a reflexive entry into the book for the author.

Chapter three expands on chapter two by exploring how these narratives of the cities' identities are used by companies in both market-driven waterfront development projects and port expansion projects. She claims that there are two dominant narratives, one about reconnecting the public to the waterfront and the other about reestablishing the past greatness of the port. But, critically, she notes that these projects, while appealing to the public through narratives about the public good actually prioritize private over public interests. In chapter four, she focuses specifically on the legacy of empire and colonialism and their portrayal in the cities' museums: Liverpool's International Slavery Museum, the Musée des civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée in Marseille, and plantation homes outside of New Orleans. In each, she analyses how the narratives presented in each museum relate to other museum offerings and are embedded in the broader social and political systems. Especially interesting is the contrast between the historic plantation homes in New Orleans that do little to condemn slavery but offer a personal glimpse into the daily lives of slave owners, while Liverpool's Slavery Museum offers a self-critical view of slavery that at the same time distances itself from this past through its international and broad focus.

Part two looks at waterfront work through the perspective of multiple generations of dockers. Chapter five describes the aftermath of the Liverpool Dockers' Strike. She recounts the generations of solidarity among workers, motivating the dockers to strike and, though they were fired for striking, motivating the fired dockers to now return to the docks in order to teach younger generations the importance of unionized labor. In chapter six she studies the dockers at Marseille-Fos, the newer container port. These workers, like in Liverpool, come from generations of dockers and represent a strong, politically relevant union. Yet, they have faced reforms over the last years and must reconcile their multigenerational legacy of 'regularized' casual labor with the increasing flexibility introduced through these reforms. Mah explains what seems at first to be a contradiction: 'part of the heritage of the Marseille-Fos dockers, in other words, included the casual nature of the work, but they wanted to have it on their own, unionized terms rather than on the terms of

their employers' (p. 149). In chapter seven, Mah focuses on black dockers (longshoremen) in New Orleans. Interestingly, this focus brings to light another curiosity: the history of segregation and the continued de-facto segregation between black longshoremen and white longshoremen and the long history of mutual cooperation between them. In this chapter, she explores this legacy as well as the legacy of the physical destruction of the black union hall, a cultural landmark in the city, during Hurricane Katrina.

Part three is the shortest section of the book, comprising only one chapter and the conclusion. In chapter eight she turns to the third theme of the book, radicalism. In this chapter, she looks at alternative politics in each city, focusing especially on a certain group: feminist and anarchist politics in an anarchist bookshop in Liverpool; cultural activists in Marseille supporting 'alternative' tourism of the city's impoverished neighborhoods; and environmental and civil rights activists in New Orleans fighting environmental racism. She concludes with an open reflection on the various global legacies in these three port cities.

One of the strong points of the book is her use of global history approaches that focus on connections, such as *histoire croisée*, and its application in a sociological work. There are many ways we can think of the connections: generational, former colonial networks, and alternative visions of shared spaces. For example, the history presented at each museum (chapter four), especially in Liverpool, portrayed each city as one in a network of global ports. In Marseille, there is an attempt to build a common history among these connections at the museum, which, Mah notes, falls flat.

Throughout the book, the author is rightfully careful to qualify her observations in terms of 'western port cities.' Still, one cannot help but see the broader similarities between these cities and other great colonial port cities 'in decline' like Mumbai and Kolkata. Despite the similar struggles and narratives presented in each city, Mah is careful to portray each 'case' in context as unique places important to the identity of her interviewees. Her portrayal of her research participants is sensitive and respectful, seeking to understand and interpret the contradictions they face in their daily lives. She does not seek to make universal claims but to explore the conflicted pasts of these cities and their residents' hopes for a brighter future. I highly recommend this well written and well researched book; not only has it made a significant contribution to research on legacies of port cities, but it is also enjoyable to read.

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