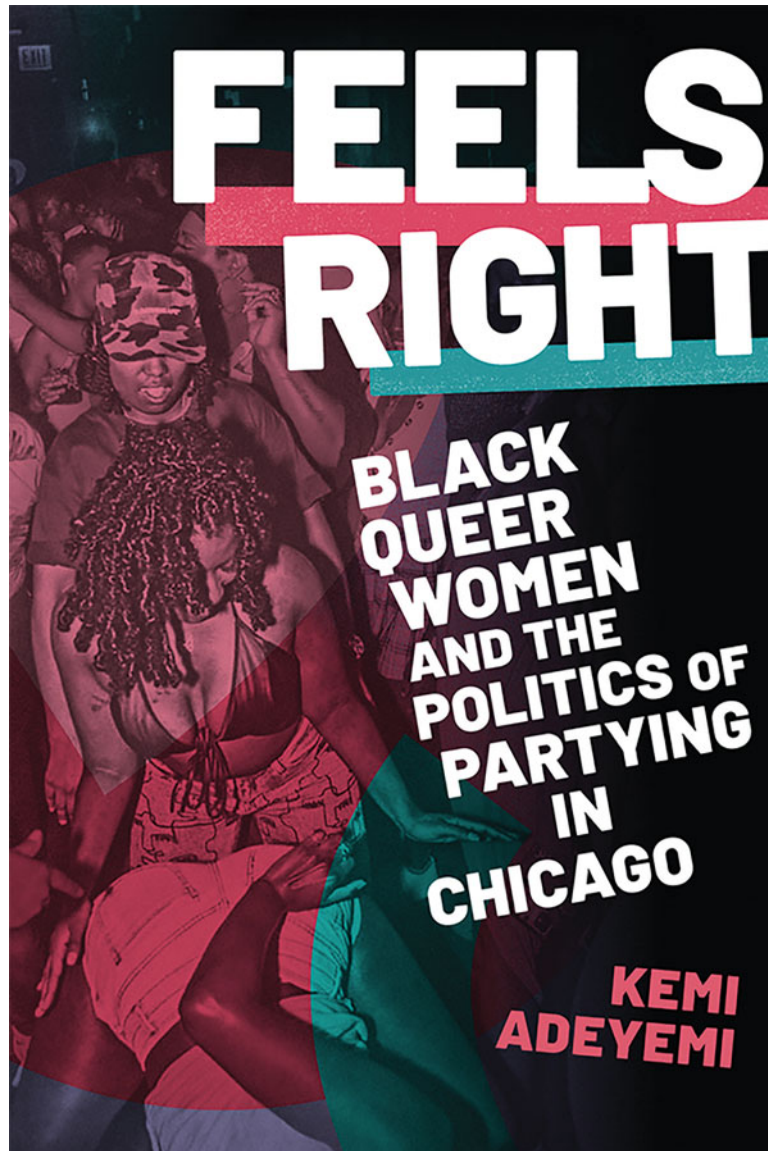


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Book  
Reviews



## FEELS RIGHT: BLACK QUEER WOMEN AND THE POLITICS OF PARTYING IN CHICAGO

by Kemi Adeyemi. 2022. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 176 pp.  
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The cover of the book *looks* like the Chicago I know. In fact, I thought the person with the camouflage hat covering their eyes and glancing down to gaze at the woman grinding into them, who is also holding onto and grinding into a faceless booty covered in denim shorts, was my barber. I conferred with friends who quickly corrected me, but we cannot see the person's eyes, so as far as I'm concerned, the camouflage-hat person used to be my favorite barber. However, the dancing bodies on the cover are not what reminds me of my beloved Chicago; it is the predominance of red, black, green, and white shouting the title: *Feels Right: Black Queer Women and the Politics of Partying in Chicago*. On my many walks and drives through Chicago's South Side, I encountered the same red, black, and green awnings announcing Black owned bookstores and novelty shops. As long-standing gems of Black communities, these independent businesses exist throughout the United States, gesturing back toward a Black Nationalist pride that persists in the face of neoliberalist threats to obliterate their existence. Similarly, the tension between the sepia-toned dancing bodies crowded together on the left side of the book cover, and the bold white title of the book with commanding thick red and green striped underlines, viscerally captures what Adeyemi's Black queer feminist ethnography theorizes as the labor Black queer women exert to form community and safely party together.

Throughout *Feels Right*, Black queer women in conversation with Adeyemi describe how they persist inside of a city governed by neoliberal politics that rely on Black cultural production to foster good feelings for middle- and upper-class white city dwellers, while systematically oppressing its Black citizens. Adeyemi intentionally prioritizes the voices of her interlocutors and rigorously

advances Dwight Conquergood's dialogic performance. Dialogic performance privileges the conversations *between* ethnographers and their interlocutors, over the ethnographer's stagnant interpretations of what was said in the field (26). Consequently, the text invokes the kinesis of the book cover, and invites the reader to navigate tight spaces *with* Black queer women.

Adeyemi introduces the text with an anecdote extracted from her ethnographic notes. She retells the story of "This Black Girl" who poured her drink on a DJ's mixer because the DJ was playing all Black music for an all-white crowd in Chicago's Logan Square. After successfully halting the party, This Black Girl "jumped into a taxi" and returned safely to the South Side (2). Adeyemi juxtaposes This Black Girl's escape to the South Side against the Black queer women in this ethnography who employ *slowness* in chapter 1, *choreographies of support* in chapter 2, and *the Black queer ordinary* in chapter 3, to sustain queer Black communities inside predatory gentrification that predetermines the boundaries and localities of and for Black citizens. Adeyemi's skillful juxtaposition elucidates the complexities of Black queer women partying in a geographically stratified neoliberalist city. Rather than summarize the chapters, Adeyemi uses the introduction to meticulously establish neoliberalism as the primary antagonist Black queer women confront in their efforts to find a place that "feels right" (8). She invokes performance studies scholars Ramón Rivera-Servera, Marlon Bailey, and Kareem Khubchandani, amongst others, to situate her work inside a lineage of ethnographies focused on how the queer dance floor becomes the space where "good feelings" are fought for and negotiated (11, 144). Adeyemi anticipates questions and critiques around the instability of nomenclature and explains that she uses "Black," "queer," and "women" to help her analyze how the terms "often organize peoples' experiences of their bodies and identities but also their experiences of queer nightlife and the possibilities of Black queer community in Chicago" (29). The theoretical foundation she establishes in the introduction allows readers to submerge themselves inside of the dialogic performance

Adeyemi endeavors to narrate in conversation with Black queer women who organize and party in Chicago. Before we enter, we understand there is no escape, nor future utopias, just Black queer women laboring to create community on and off the dance floor without succumbing to the pressures and exhaustion from navigating across a neoliberal city.

Adeyemi names the three chapters in the book after the parties and the strategies Black queer women mobilize to sustain and activate community. She interviews Black queer women partygoers, promoters, and DJs and lets their experiences narrate the tension between dancing and community formation, and the parties' increasingly gentrified geographic locations; capitalistic demands for expansion; and desires for ordinariness. Chapter 1, "Slo 'Mo and the Pace of Black Queer Life," as the title indicates, centers around Slo 'Mo, a party in Chicago's historically Puerto Rican-rapidly-turned-hipsterville Logan Square. In this chapter, Adeyemi mobilizes slowness as a framework to theorize the contrast between Black queer women slowing down to dance to mid-tempo R & B tunes and the rapid gentrification of Logan Square. Their slowness elucidates how persistence and endurance as opposed to the grand narratives of revolution allows the community to be present for one another (61). Slowness facilitates sustainability in Chicago's Logan Square, while the hyperfocus on dance, and image, motivates the Black queer women dancing in the Hyde Park neighborhood on Chicago's South Side, the focus of the second chapter.

In chapter 2, "Where's the Joy in Accountability? Black Joy at Its Limits," Black queer women enact what Adeyemi describes as choreographies of support through the multiple cyphers the dancers construct on Party Noire's large dance floor to celebrate and encourage Black Joy, and the collective systems of accountability the Black queer party organizers developed to govern and protect the party space. As a Hyde Park resident for the thirteen years I lived in Chicago, I had a visceral reaction to her descriptions of the accelerated gentrification of Fifty-Third Street and the labor the Black queer promoters endure to prepare the mostly white staff for the Black queer partygoers at the *Promontory* night club. I never partied at Party Noire; like all the parties featured in this

text, it caters to crowds well under thirty-five, but I've seen the sleek photos on Instagram posted by my friends and the professional photographers on site. Adeyemi's interlocutors critiques of Party Noire's slickness, and expense; the infiltration of aggressive, cis-hetero men into the space; and the hyper surveillance and marginalization of the working-class Black and Brown bodies relegated to the margins of Hyde Park, challenge the promoters' intentions to cultivate Black Joy. In Hyde Park, Black Joy circulates as an affective product for middle- and upper-class consumption. Through dialogic performance, the readers experience the distinct positionalities of party goers and party throwers committed to maintaining space for Black queer women to gather and celebrate one another. Adeyemi shares their interviews to elucidate how both sides articulate strategies for developing mutual support systems and the stalworth agility required to combat the pressures of neoliberal capitalism.

Adeyemi's commitment to dialogic performance fully emerges in chapter 3, "Ordinary E N E R G Y," and the conclusion, "An Oral History of the Future of Burnout." In both chapters, she allows the interviews to narrate the lived and desired experiences of partying as Black queer women in Chicago. In chapter 3, Adeyemi advances the "event-potentially-matrix" to describe how performance studies scholars rely on Black queer life to provide spectacular events that allow us the opportunity to differentiate the quotidian from the spectacle. Instead, Adeyemi argues for a methodology of the Black queer ordinary that moves the discourse away from liberation to one of sustainability (106). As a weekly event, E N E R G Y resists the urge to be spectacular and instead provides space for steady, weekly, often mundane partying. She does not identify the neighborhood in which the party takes place, which helps to further color its regular-ness; it could be anywhere, anytime, on any day. Adeyemi employs the methodology of the Black queer ordinary by centering description and long quotes from E N E R G Y's party goers to give readers the feeling of the party. She cites poet and essayist Claudine Rankine and theorists Saidiyah Hartman, Savannah Shange, Zora Neal Hurston, and Katherine McKittrick as examples of Black feminist scholars who mix methodologies and engage a critical distance between events and

people to elevate the ordinary and offer a protective veil of opacity for their interlocutors who make their work possible. She further pushes the experimental in the conclusion by scripting the interviews in direct conversation with one another, making it seem as if all the Black queer women in the ethnography gathered to share their collective experiences. What emerges are sensorial descriptions of exhaustion and burnout from creating and attending parties, and palpable desires for different kinds of parties. The book concludes with a cacophony of voices imagining alternatives to Black queer nightlife and its entanglement with capitalism.

*Feels Right: Black Queer Women and the Politics of Partying in Chicago* is an invigorating addition to the growing scholarship elucidating the labor Black queer women perform to sustain and create Black communities. It inserts Black queer women into the scholarship on queer nightlife that largely focuses on white queer men. As a dance studies text, it exemplifies how to dance alongside and do ethnography with care and respect for the people who invite us into their communities. I am thoroughly struck by how Adeyemi rigorously operationalizes the theories she creates to describe the strategies Black queer women deploy to party and navigate within the trappings of neoliberalism throughout Chicago. She *slowly* and methodically outlines the insidiousness of neoliberalism to ensure that her readers can identify it as it seethes through Black and Brown neighborhoods in the United States. She *choreographs support* for the Black queer women in her ethnography and the Black queer women reading the book by centering their words, experiences, and desires, and seemingly resisting academic training that demands we analyze our “subjects” to death. Black queer women in this ethnography emerge as multifaceted, *ordinary* human beings for whom dancing is both quotidian and spectacular.

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## STAGING BRAZIL: CHOREOGRAPHIES OF CAPOEIRA

by Ana Paula Höfling. 2019. Middletown, CT:

Wesleyan University Press. 225 pp., 40 illustrations.  
\$8.25 paper, ISBN: 9780819578815  
doi:10.1017/S0149767723000232

Ana Paula Höfling’s book, *Staging Brazil: Choreographies of Capoeira*, is an absolute pleasure to read. In her exquisitely-researched monograph, Höfling makes a critical intervention into studies of Brazilian capoeira—an African diasporic “street-fighting” practice as well as an art presented in folkloric shows for tourists. So often, both popular and scholarly discussions of movement practices in the African diaspora are conceptualized in contrasting terms such as traditional/modern, authentic/impure, and rescue/loss. Höfling’s book historicizes how such binaries came to be between 1928 and 1974, and offers alternative readings outside of these perceived oppositions. She breaks with the overarching tradition/modernity binary by showing that capoeira is a creative cultural process rather than a static form. In other words, culture is not a noun but a verb, and moving bodies activate it. She argues that the narratives of rescue, loss, and authenticity, so often tied to past studies of capoeira, have obscured the very innovations that contribute to the vibrant, complex capoeira histories that upend these opposing constructions.

In order to write a different history of capoeira, Höfling herself had to recognize the limits and the pull of the binary narratives. Her diligent archival research moved her beyond the vague oral histories she had gathered from interviewees who were unable to answer her initial questions about the foundational principles of capoeira. Throughout the book, Höfling situates capoeira within the historical context of the African diaspora, the enslavement of African people, the criminalization of capoeira, and syncretism. She introduces readers to the innovators of two practices of capoeira: Mestre Pastinha, who developed capoeira angola, and Mestre Bimba, who developed capoeira regional.

Höfling notes that, early on, their practices were not that different from each other, according to the manuals she analyzed in her research. It was in 1936 that folklorist Edison Carneiro published an article positing that capoeira angola was the more “pure” and “Angolan” capoeira, a tradition perceived to directly embody Angolan techniques without crediting Mestre Pastinha with any innovative alterations.