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**Book review: The critical surf studies reader, edited by Dexter Zavalza Hough-Snee and Alexander Sotelo Eastman, Durham, Duke University Press, 2017, 463 pp., \$31.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-8223-6972-1**

**Gazi, J.**

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**The Critical Surf Studies Reader**, edited by Dexter Zavalza Hough-Snee and Alexander Sotelo Eastman, Durham, Duke University Press, 2017, 463 pp.

This collection consists of eighteen essays distributed across four parts: Coloniality and Decolonization; Race, Ethnicity, and Identity; Feminist Critical Geography; Capitalism, Economics, and the Commodification of Surf Culture. The featured authors are drawn from a variety of academic disciplines and employ a diverse range of methodologies – including the application of critical theory and discourse analysis, the undertaking of longitudinal studies and practice-based endeavours, and the sourcing and critical interpretation of textual and visual archival documentation. With this selection the editors have certainly met their three stated aims of the volume: (i) to further consolidate surfing's scholarly legitimacy as a means of analysing social, cultural, and economic relations; (ii) to forge core disciplinary connections with the humanities and social sciences; and (iii) to respond to recent trends that champion surfing as an unquestionable, categorical, good. (Dexter Zavalza Hough-Snee and Alexander Sotelo Eastman, p. 7-8)

What makes this book especially interesting is that even though it is of course an anthology, the strengths of the individual texts come through when consuming the collection holistically. What the reader receives from taking the text as a whole is a cohesive, though necessarily dynamic, narrative concerning surfing's origins in Hawai'i, Africa, and Oceania, how colonial interventions came to suppress (to differing extents) these originary surf cultures, and how an appropriated form of surfing practice came to be disseminated and adopted across the globe. It can be discerned that four major strands of action emerged across the second half of the twentieth century to establish the image of surfing as an almost exclusively white, Western, and masculine practice: the production of a self-issuing visual culture (film and video, magazines, advertisements), the formation of competitive sporting associations (sponsorship pressures, practice constraints), the establishment of corporate surf brands (boards, surf wear, street wear), and the embracing of surf tourism (the gatecrashing and transformation of coastal villages across the globe in pursuit of the best waves).

These strands intersect with race, gender, sexuality, and class in myriad ways. For instance, the professional surfing competitions institutionalize a gender order that privileges 'muscular, heroic, and technically competent' surfing in its scoring (Glen Thompson, p. 171), while at the same time sidelining pro female surfers who do not fit into the 'happy-go-lucky, nonthreatening, playful, and, only incidentally, extremely talented, crew of girls' these professional associations wish to present (Cori Schumacher, p.291). '[F]or male surfers, performance is high capital, whereas for female surfers, appearance mobilizes capital', which is to say that gender conformism is tied to sponsorship deals from corporations that trade on ideals of heterosexuality in their branding (lisahunter, p. 275). In consequence, 'elite female surfers have yet to break from the babe idealization' (lisahunter, p. 271), and the risk of losing such precarious sponsorship has led to overt disparagement from within the female competitive community towards lesbian surfers who are perceived as failing to align with this commodified conception of "femininity" (Schumacher, p.286). Professional surfers are dependent on such sponsorship money to actually compete at all, given the expense of travelling to tournaments that take place around the globe – often at the cost of the locals who host them. For example, in the years following their hosting of a World Championship Tour (WCT) event, for which they were paid a mere fraction in comparison to locations in the Global North, the indigenous Chontal village of Barra de la Cruz, Mexico, 'has been transformed from a social democratic collective based on fishing and agriculture to a divided, neoliberal town centered around the surf tourism industry', and 'has struggled to curtail the myriad issues—environmental, social, and political—involved with the rapid growth of [such] tourism' (Zavalza Hough-Snee and Sotelo Eastman, p. 99).

Yet while critiquing how the above strands of action have come to disenfranchise practically everyone involved in surfing below the level of corporate ownership – from the local villagers turfed out of their popular surfing breaks (Clifton Evers), to the artisan shapers losing out to the automation required to serve an ever expanding market (Andrew Warren and Chris Gibson), to the young African-American surfers who endure racial microaggressions at Californian surf spots that exult in an "imagined community" of whiteness (Belinda Wheaton), and pro surfers of any ethnicity or gender should they wish to express creativity in their practice at competitive sporting events (Zavalza Hough-Snee and Sotelo Eastman) – various authors in this text also communicate proactive responses to this neoliberal conception of surf culture.

Isaiah Helekunihi Walker explores how competitive surfing plays an important role in the sovereignty movement amongst young Hawaiians seeking an autonomous government, given that 'Hawaiian surfers have already earned political independence in the waves and are universally recognized as an independent nation distinct from the United States' (p. 62). This is to say that though it became the fiftieth U.S. state in 1959, Hawai'i is nevertheless recognized as an independent region from the U.S. in almost every competitive contest and league in the world (Hawaiians compete *against* Americans). Walker's chapter explores how Hawaiian surfers view this as a 'national distinction' that 'provides symbolic redemption from the colonial occupation of Hawai'i' (p.80). In separate texts that crossover in content due to their collaborative activities, Kristen Comer and Cori Schumacher (a three-time Women's World Champion surfer and the volume's only non-academic author) describe the ongoing construction of a "surfeminism" – a counterdiscourse to that produced by a surf industry 'foundationally structured around trafficking in women's images, and [which] depends upon exploiting women surfers and their celebrity stars for maximum market share' (Comer, p.250). Such surfeminist activism has involved activities such as directly engaging and challenging Roxy, the largest female surf brand, over its "all sex, no surf" advertisements with some success: '[u]nder a paradoxical set of circumstances, official WSL [World Surf League] market research and grassroots activism intersected in reforming and revamping women's professional surfing' (p.295). Another counterdiscourse is put forward by Tara Ruttenberg and Peter Brosius who propose three strategies drawn from the field of post-development which aim to limit the potentially damaging impact of the recent turn towards sustainable surf tourism, which, '[b]y aligning itself with income-oriented, status quo sustainability, [...] runs the risk of becoming sustainability greenwashing while reproducing conventional forms of exploitation' (p.110).

There are some minor flaws in the volume, such as weak argumentative framing or the frontloading of information in a few of the essays, but all of the texts provide excellent insights and, taken together, produce a vivid image of the current state of surfing in its various facets. Given the importance of visual media production to the development of contemporary surf culture, which is expressed throughout the volume, and the absence of authorship from females of ethnic communities other than Caucasian, however, it seems to me that commissioning an article from Farhana Huq (whose work is featured in Comer's text) on the topic of surf filmmaking practice and online distribution would have been a good idea. As surfing is due to make its first ever appearance at the Olympics in Tokyo next year (assuming there will be a next year...) perhaps such an entry could be included in the inevitable second edition of this important volume.