

BOOK REVIEW

When Time Warps: The Lived Experience of Gender, Race, and Sexual Violence

Megan Burke. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019
(ISBN: 978-1-5179-0546-0)

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In *When Time Warps*, Megan Burke tackles the question of temporality in the making of a feminine existence. Using Simone de Beauvoir's "becoming" a woman as a starting point for their analysis, Burke explores the ways in which white-supremacist and other sexual-domination ideologies function in time-space to create "feminine existence," or the lived experiences of cisgender women. In each of the six chapters, Burke connects each act of making the feminine to occurrences of sexual violence, arguing that feminine existence is inherently strapped to sexual (or arguably, *sexualized*) violence. Their mission is to unpack the temporalities associated with femininities, allowing for the resistance of nonnormative gendering in feminine lives.

The six chapters, including a prologue, are organized around "triad temporality," or, as traditional phenomenology posits, past, present, and future (11–14). The prologue comprises chapter 1, on becoming; chapters 2 and 3, on colonized time, covers the past; chapters 4 and 5, on the dissolution of awareness of colonized time, discusses the present; and chapter 6, on remapping feminine time, is on the future. Burke employs triad temporality to argue that women should and do indeed experience time outside the temporality of men. It is their response to traditional phenomenology's argument that women, as Beauvoir had originally suggested, do not have distinct temporalities and are always attached to the present in accordance with men's time.

In chapter 1, Burke engages with Beauvoir's concept of "becoming" a woman to illustrate that the woman is realized through time. Burke anchors their analysis in Judith Butler's and Sara Heinämaa's responses to Beauvoir, describing Butler's performativity and Heinämaa's deconstruction of the sex/gender binary within become/becoming discourses against Beauvoir. Although Burke accepts Butler's stylized, repetitious acts as "becoming," they situate their analysis within Heinämaa's phenomenological take on engendered temporality, viewing "becoming" as a "gesture" to womanhood and its social meanings rather than a construction of a subject interpellated into being. By foregrounding Heinämaa's understanding of Beauvoir's "becoming," Burke is able to articulate a different question apart from performance as "becoming," asking instead, "How is woman a particular *lived experience* of time?" (24, italics my own). They do not focus on the making of a subject, but instead emphasize the lived experiences of woman, for instance, sexualized violence (for example, stalking, creepers) felt

by women in affective ways. At the end of this chapter, Burke returns to Beauvoir's "becoming," reifying Beauvoir's "becoming" as "anticipatory temporality" (26); that is, woman is always in anticipation, or dependent upon, man. Sexual violence, therefore, "snap[s]" women into the present moment, extinguishing the possibility for triad temporality for women. Their present time relies upon man's perpetration of violence. Burke concludes by setting up their following chapter on colonial time-space, suggesting that gender (womanhood) is already enmeshed in sociohistorical temporalities.

In chapter 2, Burke draws on María Lugones's colonial/modern gender system to argue that female, as one's biological sex, refers to the past, whereas woman, as one's gender identity, refers to the present. Lugones suggests that the sex/gender system is premised on colonization; when one becomes a woman, she also takes on the colonial understanding of (white) womanhood. Burke takes Lugones's argument and applies it to sexual violence experienced by enslaved Black women. They suggest that enslaved Black women's futurity is dependent upon their ability to procreate, chaining them to the past. They write, "It is thus not that colonized females are not taken to be capable of a future but that their future must be destroyed, often through rape, in order to anchor them to the past and mark them as sexed" (56). Burke then returns to several present-day cases involving sexual violence against women of color, elucidating that the state, as masculine and white, physically and sexually violates women of color to entrap them in the masculine state's time, extinguishing women of color's own temporalities.

In chapter 3, Burke claims that two primary rape myths, that of stranger rape and that of the Black man as rapist, are in fact the same myth. Relying upon Angela Davis's argument that the "Black men are rapists" myth shapes white women's experiences, Burke suggests that feminine existence, enmeshed within fear of sexual victimization, constructs womanhood as white. They write, "[T]he reason many women talk like, look like, move like, think like, and desire like woman is a result of the way the myth produces a limited and seemingly fixed field of recognition for the gendered subject position 'woman'" (77). Because feminine existence is a "conduit of racist practices" (80), non-Black and nonwhite women of color may also be persuaded to take on the mantle of white womanhood, inadvertently embodying colonialism and racism.

In chapter 4, Burke examines the present temporality of feminine existence as constituted through the past. They begin by deconstructing Butler's argument in *Gender Trouble* that gender comprises repeated acts over time and elicits sedimentation, or the reification of past gendered acts to manifest in the present as the gendered body, as the basis for which present-day feminine existence comes into being (Butler 1990). Leaning into Jacques Derrida's interpretation of time to analyze Butler's concept of performativity, Burke suggests that sedimentation is the process by which anonymity arrives. In other words, "the temporal movement of sedimentation that allows a particulate me to be at home in the world" derives from past repetitious normative gender acts in the present (98). Anonymity of normative gender is thus responsible for establishing that the gendered woman practices feminine existence but in ways that are invisible to her being. As a result, any deviance from normative gendered acts sharply comes into being as "excessive," exuding an overspill of time when resisting normative gendered experience (and thus, as Burke argued earlier, the colonial and racist underbelly of feminine existence).

In chapter 5, Burke takes on hauntology to explore women's attachments to rape in the present moment. Burke defines hauntology as "what is in the now is a product of ghosts that are invisible in the present" (109). From a young age, girls learn about rape; even without knowing sexuality, they understand the dangers of rape (most often,

stranger rape) by living in fear of it and actualizing the specter of past warnings of rape in the present, such as holding keys between their fingers to ward off dangerous potential rapists. Burke points out that these motions can be present even if the individual woman has not experienced rape herself; it is the “absence” of rape, manifested as the *potentiality* of rape to harm, a normative threat, that constructs the feminine. In the case of survivors, Burke nods to trauma theory as Judith Herman and Bonnie Burstow describe, acknowledging that the lived experience of sexual trauma does indeed rupture time even if the actual event of rape has passed. They quote from Susan Brison that living as a survivor, particularly one who experiences flashbacks or a “freezing” of time, demonstrates the spectral haunting of past rape in the present time (118–19; see Brison 2002). At the end of the chapter, Burke proposes feminist “ghostbusting,” that is, “a rupture in the present presence of things—the way things are—that necessitates a temporal shift” (122). Ghostbusting exposes the trauma experienced by living under the threat of rape (including repeated trauma), trauma from negative disclosure reactions, and trauma from institutional betrayal (or “secondary victimization”). The exposure makes it possible to address the affective qualities of the specter of rape, damaging its dangerous potentiality, and constructs a “feminist politics of temporality. . . that refigures the content of that which is not-present in order to realize an open relation to the past, present, and future” (123).

In their final chapter, Burke attempts to develop a feminine and feminist existence premised on freedoms from the constraints of colonization and racialized and heterosexualized rape myths and hauntings. Taking the lead from Lisa Guenther’s *Solitary Confinement* (Guenther 2013), Burke suggests that feminists should change the structures making feminine and gendered existences by “do[ing] time” as opposed to being “hurled” to the “passive present,” or pushed *through* time (137). *Doing* time consists of delaying or hesitating to take on the normative qualities to feminine lived experiences, which punctures the habit of normative sedimentation (as explored in chapter 4). Burke concludes by suggesting that feminists who seek to subvert normative feminine existence refuse normative time premised upon rape myths.

Although I believe that Burke’s monograph is an important text for scholars seeking to unravel the complexities of race and sexual violence, it nevertheless reifies the question of women of color in continental philosophy. Most significant is Burke’s use of Beauvoir to argue that becoming a woman is inherently linked to colonial and racist discourses. To be sure, Burke qualifies their use of Beauvoir early in their text; they employ Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* as a “methodological resource” rather than a template for feminist of color philosophy (7). However, they also situate *The Second Sex* as the “founding text of feminist phenomenology,” privileging Beauvoir over other feminist phenomenological thinkers, particularly those of color (6). Burke often draws upon thinkers of color such as María Lugones, Sharon Patricia Holland, and Sara Ahmed, and though they do indeed ground Burke’s analysis within women of color feminisms, Burke frequently uses them as secondary sources to supplement Beauvoir and other white philosophers. Noticeably, Black feminist philosophers have already engaged in the race/gender analogy posited by Beauvoir, for example, Kathryn Sophia Belle in *Convergences* (Belle 2010). Burke does not acknowledge these voices in their analysis, however, an oversight that repeats the problem of white people speaking for women of color.

To further justify my point, in Burke’s analysis of the specter, white women’s perspectives of rape as a heterosexual crime, including those of Susan Brownmiller and Catharine MacKinnon, are all privileged over women of color’s experiences of spectral

violence, with race and genderqueer identities syncing as an afterthought to their theorizing. The privileging of white voices over women of color voices is in spite of Burke's analysis of colonial time in feminine existence, and the misstep reiterates the colonizing whitewashing of radical feminist histories, wherein radical feminists of color are read as a minority instead of the core to much early radical feminist momentum (Baker and Bevacqua 2018; Kim 2018). Differences in lived experiences with rape are homogenized in ways that do not adequately disentangle multiple temporalities in feminine existence.

If we were to suspend our disbelief and use Beauvoir to understand feminine of color temporalities, other questions remain unanswered. In chapter 2, Burke makes a sound argument that state-sanctioned violence against women of color channels linear temporality but does not offer a critical analysis of gendered, state-sanctioned violence. Certainly, the state as masculine, heteronormative, and white is nothing new. Jasbir K. Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages* makes a similar argument (Puar 2007), though Puar's contributions to this discourse are brushed over quickly in Burke's text. If one were to seriously investigate state-perpetrated sexual violence, I would have wanted to see a deeper critique of the state beyond the static label of "masculine." Indeed, though Burke does comment, during one analysis of rape against a woman of color, "the perpetrators [police officers] need not even be white men so long as they bear a uniform of coloniality and enact the power of the state" (61), surely it would be prudent to provide a more expansive explanation of the connections between masculinity, heteropatriarchy, whiteness, and the state.

Moreover, in chapter 5, Burke makes the claim that "flirting with danger" of rape parallels women's sadomasochistic desires at the same time they experience the hauntings of rape. Though I do not wish to dichotomize sadomasochism and sexual violence (see Sexsmith 2016), entangling queer possibilities with sexual violence hauntings seems to reinforce, not subvert, the myths of heterosexual (male-perpetrator/female-victim dyad) sexual violence as the only form of rape. What is the purpose of unpacking the temporalities of rape if it is used to underwrite the mythmaking one seeks to eliminate? Perhaps Burke meant to suggest that the specter of rape leaves behind a *residue* on present feminine existence; however, their analysis of the past markings of rape in present-day sadomasochism remains unfinished.

Finally, one grand challenge to Burke's thesis is the concept of the indeterminacy in/of time. For Burke, in order to "do time" and step outside of normative gender constructions, the self must "actualize a me, that [does] not require deep sedimentation" (143). This refusal to perform and live as normative genders enables one to refute the colonizing tendencies of feminine existence and repackage time around woman as the feminine unattached to racist rape myths. I recognize the allure of puncturing performative and lived habits of normative gender through negation, but I am skeptical that a complete refusal can do much to realize a "difference" in the way we shape time (128). Particularly for Native women, but applicable to women of color more generally, the past holds many embodied practices that restructure time to meet cultural and racial minorities' movement in time (see Harjo 2019, 28 for an example of "kin-space-time"). Women of color understand that the past reconstitutes and honors survivors who have experienced violence before the present sedimented feminine self. To take queer of color theorist Roderick Ferguson's understanding of racialized time, it simply depends on when we demarcate the "past," if it includes or refutes colonial histories, and in what ways (Ferguson 2003).

In part, Burke's argument buckles at its closure because it relies upon a white foundation. Because, for Burke, time is situated upon the experiences of white women, such

as Beauvoir's understanding of feminine existence as attached to men and marriage, they and other white people may refuse this colonizing time without many consequences. However, for women of color, feminine existence is not situated solely upon white women's movement through the world; sexual violence hinges upon both racialized and sexualized power, as well as the knowledge of violence that came *before* colonization. To refuse normative time and live on indeterminate time is not possible for women of color, who must always trace their existences back to their minority gendering to live as feminine.

Despite my reservations about Burke's text, I would recommend reading selections from *When Time Warps*. Chapter 3 does an outstanding job exploring the similarities between the stranger-rape myth and the "Black man as rapist" myth. Burke's argument here is simple, yet it enables the reader to develop a comprehensive portrait of the invisibility of rape myths' impacts on feminine existence. Such an argument is helpful for antirape activists by identifying the racialized elements to the stranger-rape myth and enabling them to address racist and sexist myths together. In addition, although I am cautious about overly relying upon Burke's thesis, the book overall does an exemplary job of assessing time for sexual violence survivors. Thinking critically about remaking and blending time can be a useful exercise to understand the attachments of normative time that trauma produces, and this alternative understanding of rape may support survivors by detaching (hetero)normativity from rape survivorship. This text may therefore well serve antirape researchers who seek alternative remedies to violence, particularly queer-affirming remedies.

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