

1 SONJA SCHILLINGS, *Enemies of All Human-*  
 2 *kind: Fictions of Legitimate Violence*, Re-  
 3 Mapping the Transnational: A Dartmouth  
 4 Series in American Studies (Hanover: Dart-  
 5 mouth College P/UP of New England, 2016),  
 302 pp.

10 Can acts of violence ever be legitimate, and  
 how have claims of legitimate violence been  
 theorized and represented in legal theory and  
 philosophy on the one hand, and in (Anglo-)  
 American narrative on the other? And how  
 are legal-theoretical and literary discourses  
 related? These are the guiding questions Son-  
 15 ja Schillings asks in her monograph *Enemies  
 of All Humankind: Fictions of Legitimate  
 Violence*, which is based on her dissertation at  
 the John F. Kennedy Institute (FU Berlin) and  
 published in the *Remapping the Transnational*  
 series of Dartmouth College Press, a prime  
 location for transnational American Studies.  
 The issue of legitimate violence has vexed  
 20 political theorists and philosophers, histori-  
 ans and legal scholars in the West ever since  
 classical antiquity. Taking heed of the many  
 discursive sites in which it has been debated,  
 this interdisciplinary study traces answers  
 that have been presented from antiquity to  
 the present day through examining the “hostis  
 25 humani generis constellation,” as Schillings  
 calls it, the idea that there are “enemies of all  
 humankind” against whom any form of vio-  
 lence—thus cast as universally defensive—is  
 sanctioned. Its scope is impressive not only  
 with regard to breadth (the texts discussed go  
 far beyond the Anglophone world and reach  
 back *ad fontes*) but also to theoretical depth,  
 which makes it all the more remarkable that  
 it never loses sight of the fundamental, even  
 foundational question of legitimate violence  
 in its political, social, and cultural dimensions,  
 especially also with regard to its (post-) colo-  
 30 nial entanglement in imperial contexts.

In the course of her study, the author dem-  
 onstrates how ideologically and theoretically  
 flexible and adaptable the “hostis humani  
 generis” constellation has proven through  
 the centuries—more specifically, the *pirata-*  
 40 *praedo*-innocent triangle in which *praedo* rep-  
 resents the possibly legitimate, *pirata* the ille-  
 gitimate pole and innocents are needed as the  
 to-be-legitimately-defended. The three most  
 important focal points that Schillings explores  
 in four parts are the age of early modern col-  
 45 onial expansion, the nineteenth-century  
 frontier, and contemporary scenarios of in-

ternational terrorism. In its *urform*, the pirate  
 was the figure that came to be constructed as  
 (almost) congruent with the enemy of all hu-  
 mankind, but Schillings convincingly argues  
 that the flexibility of the constellation has not  
 been limited to any specific historical agent.

After a concise introduction, in which the  
 author defines central terms of her study and  
 situates its design by comparing early mod-  
 ern and contemporary piracy and civilization  
 debates, the first part, “The Emperor and  
 the Pirate: Legitimate Violence as a Modern  
 Dilemma,” highlights the centrality of legiti-  
 macy in modern constructions of piracy by of-  
 15 fering three (re-)readings of the famous anec-  
 dote in St. Augustine’s *City of God*, in which  
 a Mediterranean pirate is reported to have  
 questioned Alexander the Great’s categoriza-  
 tion of piracy as one in which power relations  
 are decisive. Despite a narrowing-down of her  
 focus to really only three passages in *City of  
 God*—the context of the anecdote in the book  
 itself is left uncommented—the author shows  
 how writers like Charles Johnson and Charles  
 20 Ellms have appropriated the tale in the con-  
 text of Atlantic piracy and the slave trade, re-  
 spectively.

In the next part, “Race, Space, and the  
 Formation of the *Hostis Humani Generis*  
 Constellation,” Schillings explores the ra-  
 cialization of the constellation on the ‘Bar-  
 25 bary’ coast in the sixteenth and seventeenth  
 centuries before turning to John Locke’s and  
 William Blackstone’s theories of a racialized  
 “Invader in the State of Nature” (67). Behind  
 this background, she reads James Fenimore  
 Cooper’s *The Deerslayer* with a focus on its  
 conception of legitimate violence through the  
 lens of the *pirata-praedo*-innocent triangle  
 and the “two-civilization model” of white-  
 European vs. “red”; Schillings concludes that  
 in the nineteenth century, “the increasing  
 proximity of the two models of civilization  
 would culminate in the creation of a third,  
 specifically American” which “take[s] up the  
 central premise of narratives from the early  
 nineteenth century—namely, that the United  
 States constituted a national state of civiliza-  
 30 tion that had risen beyond piratical European  
 imperialism [...] a specifically American state  
 of nature [...]” (122).

This diagnosis is expanded in part three,  
 “The American Civilization Thesis: Internal-  
 35 izing the Other,” debating Frederick Jackson  
 Turner’s frontier thesis as a model of civiliza-  
 tion. As a consequence and in the Cold War

1 context of Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest*,  
 2 the democratic frontiersman represents the  
 3 *praedo*, while the totalitarian Leviathan is  
 5 a Communist *pirata*. The chapter continues  
 with a lucid discussion of the genderedness of  
 the constellation, in which the "pure woman"  
 is needed as an "innocent" to justify her violent  
 defense against any *pirate*, and it is this  
 insight that informs her re-reading of Richard  
 Wright's *Native Son* as a protest novel (the final  
 10 subchapter in this part) through this "Pure  
 Woman Paradox" (a terminological coinage  
 to remember, with potential to add to current  
 feminist discussions of violent abuse).

15 In the fourth and final part, titled "It Is  
 Underneath US: The Planetary Zone in Be-  
 tween as an American Dilemma," Schillings  
 turns to two very different war novels: Kurt  
 Vonnegut's metafictional *Mother Night* (1962)  
 in the context of both WWII and the Vietnam  
 War and Mohsin Hamid's much-discussed  
*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* of 2007 as a  
 20 response to George W. Bush's War on Ter-  
 ror and the subsequent return, in "sweeping  
 triumph," of the essentialist perspective on  
 legitimate violence" (220) in the aftermath of  
 the 9/11 attacks, cast as "crimes against hu-  
 manity." Mohsin, in Schillings's reading, "de-  
 liberately uses the *hostis humani generis* con-  
 25 stellation to expose essentialist US reactions  
 to 9/11 as unsustainable and immature" (223).  
 At the end of her study, Schillings summarizes

the "interpretive breaks" (238) of the constel-  
 lation and takes her explorations to eventu-  
 ally conclude that "any contemporary text  
 that raises questions of legitimate violence is  
 contextualized by a discursive history of the  
 answers that *hostis humani generis* has helped  
 formulate as persuasive" (244), emphasizing  
 how important the constellation is and has  
 been "as a central cultural resource for mean-  
 ing making." A minor weakness in terms of  
 readability is perhaps the book's tendency to  
 meander back and forth through space and  
 time; in addition, its theoretical rigor and  
 density make it sometimes difficult to follow  
 the argument, especially at points where it re-  
 mains unclear which historical interpretation  
 (e.g. of the early modern pirates, which are  
 hugely diverse but are not debated here) it is  
 based on, or when it switches back and forth  
 between different levels of analysis (literary,  
 historical, theoretical). Third, the selection  
 of her primary texts is not always conclusive  
 (why *The Deerslayer* rather than one of Co-  
 oper's nautical romances, in which piracy plays  
 a decisive role?). In sum, however, there is no  
 doubt, at least for this reader, that Sonja Schil-  
 lings's impressive study will be fundamental  
 for studying Western conceptions of and rela-  
 tions with violence, in American Studies and  
 beyond.

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