Introduction

In a small town in the US South, a 92-year old grandmother collects obituaries in a scrapbook to document those who died young after decades of long and gruelling hours working in the toxic environment of an aluminium smelting plant. In the segregated company town of Badin, North Carolina, US, the industrial plant and its lethal wastes have for generations discriminately poisoned the Black workers and the families that loved and supported them. Their stories are mostly forgotten now even by their children, who moved away from this ‘sacrifice zone’ (Lerner 2012) of capitalist development. It produced millions of tons of aluminium for urban infrastructure, military equipment and everyday products for 90 years. Meanwhile, in the US agricultural heartland of Iowa, families struggling with dramatic changes in their communities hold onto a cruel optimism (Berlant 2011) that they can maintain the good life of comfort and stability as rapidly intensifying global capitalism shifts the demographics and economic opportunities in their towns. Riling up embodied fears numerous threatening ‘others’, Donald Trump promises that he understands them and can protect them from this uncertain and threatening world. Embodying whiteness and a revanchist masculinity, he extracts their fears and distills them into an external threat that has a supposed solution: a strong defence against outsiders and America First policies to restore a golden era (Gökanksel and Smith 2016).

In this chapter, we argue that the vignettes above teach us as much about geopolitics, or the relationship between politics, international relations and geography, as do studies of Cold War rhetoric or the ‘War on Terror’. Building on work in feminist geopolitics, we develop intimate geopolitics as a framework for understanding how of gender and race function in the contemporary US. We argue that the study of geopolitics is greatly enriched by attention to how international geopolitical relations between states are manifested in the relationships between people and populations on the ground, particularly as colonial hierarchies of race and gender structure our ways of knowing and being in the world (Lugones 2016; Spillers 2003; Weheliye 2014; Wynter 2003). We trace the formation of white agricultural masculinities, represented as central to US national identity, alongside the disproportionate toxic burden borne by communities of
colour to argue that relationships between the environment, race and gender can be product- 
ively understood through attention to intimate experiences and representations. The discourse 
of the timeless ‘family farm’, at the heart of US national imaginaries, centres a patriarchal 
and hetero-normative family structure anchored in nationalism and settler colonialism. An 
alternate discourse of the US as emblematic of industrial modernity is undergirded by envir-
onmental racism, where Black bodies and geographies are exposed to toxic waste. Here, we 
bring together these twinned embodied manifestations to push for a feminist and intimate 
geopolitical approach to understanding the (mis)management and representation of life in the 
contemporary US.

In what follows, we provide a brief overview of geopolitics as a subdiscipline of geography, 
then turn to recent developments in feminist geopolitics. After this review of the literature, we 
will engage with brief case studies based on research in Iowa and North Carolina to flesh out 
the ways that an embodied and intimate understanding of the geopolitical can enable us to see 
things that we might otherwise miss.

From geopolitics to critical geopolitics

Geopolitics, as a field of study and as a particular practice, is closely aligned with the broader 
study of geography and geographic thought, though the term itself has long been contested, 
reimagined and reworked to examine the operation of state power on populations and territories 
from different theoretical engagements. The earliest geopolitical thinkers in the late-nineteenth 
and early-twentieth centuries could also be easily identified as geographers. Geographic thought 
at the time was steeped in environmental determinism – the theory that the physical geography 
of a given place defines the biological profile of the people who live there. Deterministic thought 
was heavily influenced by Social Darwinism, an application of emergent Eurocentric ‘objective’ 
empirical approaches to social analysis that sought to uncover the ‘natural laws’ defining the 
 essence of human societies, legitimizing racial categories for the benefit of imperial capitalist 
agendas (Peet 1985). An overly simplistic adaptation of Darwin’s evolutionary theories by early 
geographers like Ellen Churchill Semple shrouded environmental determinism in a cloak of 
scientific objectivity and was used to justify a range of state-sanctioned oppressive acts. Semple 
herself was a student of Friedrich Ratzel, who is perhaps most closely associated with bringing 
Social Darwinism and determinism together in an imperial, territorializing strategy that became 
‘geopolitics’. Ratzel theorized nation states as living organisms, competing for survival, and jus-
tified imperial expansion rooted in each organism’s need for Lebensraum (living space).

Inextricably linked with imperial practices of statecraft, the work of early geopolitical 
thinkers such as Ratzel in Germany, Mackinder in the UK, and Mahan in the US conceptualized 
the world as driven by inevitable conflict among global imperial powers (Kearns 2011) and 
developed geopolitics as a science of understanding how states could maximize their geo-
graphic resources to consolidate power, further their interests, and protect themselves. Ratzel’s 
thinking, in particular, profoundly influenced Nazi-era Germany, which often justified atrocities 
as the necessary consequence of the expansion of German geopolitical power over territories 
inhabited by people whom they considered genetically inferior. While geographers eventu-
ally moved away from the more obviously racist elements of environmental determinism, the 
theory’s influence on geopolitics was notable and came to define global interstate relations in the 
postwar era.

Isaiah Bowman, as the first director of the American Geographical Society and later 
President of Johns Hopkins University, exemplified the thinking and practice of geographers 
at the time. While Bowman worked to distance geography from the deterministic ideas that
came to define Nazi geopolitics, a ‘hidden determinist agenda’ remained central to his thinking (Livingstone 1992; Peet 1985, 328). Bowman worked closely with the US State Department and influenced policymakers in the US such as Kissinger and Brzezinski, who also frequently cited Mackinder positively, ensuring that the geopolitics of the state actors in the Cold War era was indelibly linked to an imperialist agenda (Kearns 2011). The publication of Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilizations* (1993) continued this trend of consolidating differences between peoples and states to create ill-defined ‘civilizations’, which were hierarchically ranked by arbitrary and uncritical categories like ‘freedom’. While not without its critics, Huntington’s work remains widely influential among geopolitical strategists in international relations, particularly in the US. However, criticism of geopolitics as a field within geography began to gain attention, and the publication of *Critical Geopolitics* (Toal 1996) exposed the deep links between geopolitics and imperialism. Engaging with poststructuralist thinkers such as Foucault and Derrida, Toal demonstrated how geopolitical theory, rather than objectively describing the existing order of the world, actively intervenes to shape the world through political practices that emerge from geopolitical discourse. The field of ‘critical geopolitics’ that emerged focused on demonstrating how space functions as an important tool of imperial and state power, through which conventional geopolitics prescribes strategies and trains subjects to carry them out (Hyndman 2004).

Concurrently, feminist geographers, increasingly influenced by Haraway’s (1988) call for ‘situated knowledge’ and criticism of the ‘God trick’, began intervening in the conversation opened by critical geopolitics. The earliest feminist critiques demanded that critical geopolitics account for the continuation of a detached ‘view from nowhere’, which maintains that statecraft is a practice of all-seeing intellectuals or statesmen and thus inaccessible to ordinary people, who apparently await ‘their regular injection of [geopolitical] ideas’ (Sharp 2000, 362). Often, these early critiques questioned the position of those geographers in articulating a critical geopolitics, arguing that their unexamined gender analysis maintained the masculinist orientation of geopolitics and served to keep women hidden from geopolitical work. Even in critical geopolitics, feminist geographers argued, women’s bodies were acted upon by states, yet were never recognized as actors in geopolitical discourse (Dowler and Sharp 2001; Staeheli 2001).

**Feminist interventions**

Feminist geographers embarked on an ambitious project to do more than rewrite women into geopolitical histories; they sought to articulate a perspective through which ‘the everyday experiences of the disenfranchised can be made more visible’ (Dowler and Sharp 2001, 169). These geographers demanded an acknowledgement that geopolitical discourses are not simply written onto bodies but produce active geopolitical subjects. Thus, early feminist geopolitical interventions highlighted how geopolitics functions at scales other than the nation state (Massaro and Williams 2013).

This work questioned how scale was deployed in geopolitical theory. While traditional and critical geopolitics emphasizes an analysis on ‘public displays of power’, with the state assumed to be the ‘basic unit of analysis’ (Staeheli 2001, 185), feminist geopolitics demonstrates that the global and local are not unilaterally ordered in a spatial hierarchy. Instead, these scales are intertwined and diffuse, ‘scaffolded’ and interpenetrating (Marston 2000). This shift in perspective makes alternative visions of the world possible. ‘Counter-topographies’, for instance, demonstrate how distinct places are analytically connected to other sites through material and social relationships (Katz 2001). Secor (2001) proposes ‘counter-geopolitics’ as a way to demonstrate the multiple scalar categories that ‘ultimately blur, overlap and collapse into one another in the
making of a political life’ (201). Similarly, ‘alter-geopolitics’ questions the function of states as ‘immutable forces’, and instead offers that everyday moments ‘speak back’ and change these forces (Koopman 2011, 276). In each of these interventions, it becomes possible to see how geopolitical discourses about states emerge through intimate relationships, how state power focuses attention on the body, and how emotions run through the flows of power and knowledge.

As both the subfields of critical geopolitics and feminist geopolitics have developed in the last 20 years, scholars continue to work in tandem, but feminist geopolitics specifically has come to focus attention on key themes: intimacy; the body; and emotion. Examining intimacy and intimate relationships with regard to geopolitical power focuses attention on the ‘lived materiality’ of the bodies of geopolitical subjects (Pratt and Rosner 2012). Such work aligns with feminist interventions that have long demonstrated that supposedly ‘private’ realms are, in fact, intertwined with global circuits of power, and intimate geopolitics shows us how our political worlds are built around personal attachments with other bodies, materials or objects that are touched by such power. Importantly, this is not to suggest that the intimate is simply ‘dripped down upon’ by geopolitics but rather that, in taking the intimate as a starting point for geopolitical analysis, it becomes possible to see how the home is a site of state security and violence, as well as resistance to that violence (Fluri 2011; Pain 2015, 64–65). By focusing on intimate space, we can see that there are other forces beyond states and statesmen working to produce geopolitical realities, and that there is no neat ‘spatial hierarchy’ that demarcates everyday intimate spaces from global, geopolitical ones (Pain and Staeheli 2014).

Within the intimate realm, where struggles over population and territory are materially realized, feminist geopolitical scholars have focused attention on how ‘the body itself becomes a geopolitical site’ (Smith 2011, 456). By examining the role of the body and questioning whose bodies are able to move through space, feminist geographers have demonstrated that state borders are negotiated in bodily space (Mountz and Hyndman 2006). From the perspective of the state, the body is a key target of various security strategies, with securitization functioning to either ‘protect’ certain bodies or to mark them as ‘a potential agent of “insecurity”’ (Fluri 2014, 797). With regard to violence, Pain (2015) shows how violence is committed against bodies not just by geopolitical actors; it is already present in intimate relationships, which ‘soak up and are shaped by these wider forces’ (66). Thus, in contrast to classical or even critical geopolitics, feminist geopolitics shows how the unevenly articulated borders of the state permeate the most intimate spaces of everyday life, even as states continue to disregard the full impact of such embodied power. Indeed, these borders are manifest within the body, as evidenced by recent work on stem cells (Dixon 2014) and foetuses (Wang 2017). In essence, by seeing bodies both as the site of geopolitical strategy and as active, mobile and resisting agents themselves, it is possible to understand how borders and territory are created not by distant and disembodied figures of statecraft but in the relationships between people in the intimate realm, which makes them geopolitical actors (Smith, Swanson and Gökarıksel 2016, 260).

Intimate relationships, of course, are formed through emotional attachments and commitments that, from a feminist geopolitical perspective, must also be understood within this context of discourses about nationhood and the state (Smith 2012). Love, desire, fear, hope and anxiety – these and other emotions can be found in everyday moments that pin intimate interactions and relationships to geopolitical struggles for territory and the future of nations. Management of fear in the face of sexual violence, for instance, contributes to a ‘banal nationalism’ through which people experience the state in the intimate realm (Christian et al. 2016). Research on the politics of love during wartime destabilizes masculinist narratives about war while simultaneously demonstrating that the lived dimensions of war are complicated – about pain and death as much as about love and life (Tyner and Henkin 2015). Thus, in contrast to geopolitics from
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the perspective of the state, feminist geopolitics demonstrates how we experience the state as a complicated tangle of emotions, intimate moments and embodied interactions, rather than as neat borders negotiated in distant conference rooms.

Masculinity, agriculture and the good life: farmers and others in Iowa

In 2016, standing in front of a crowd of Iowans honouring bikers, veterans and farmers, Donald Trump – who made his fortune building skyscrapers and casinos – forcefully pledged to solve the problems of a rural population that feels increasingly disenfranchised in American politics. With rows of Iowa corn swaying in the summer sun behind him, Trump declared: ‘Family farms are the backbone of this country. Remember that. And I know what’s happening to you.’

The crowd’s cheers were deafening; the people had waited a long time to hear this promise. Trump launched into a long litany of ‘happenings’ faced by the rural Iowan farmer: job-killing regulations; the Environmental Protection Agency’s intrusions into farmers’ homes; unfair trade deals; and illegal immigration. Trump told the crowd, ‘We are going to end this war on the American farmer’.

To anyone unfamiliar with life in the rural regions of the US today, such a proclamation must seem particularly strange. What is this war, exactly? How can an economic sector that receives billions in federal subsidies each year still be disenfranchised? How can residents in a state that becomes the focal point of American presidential politics every four years feel ignored? Answering these questions requires a feminist geopolitical approach to rural America, to the right and to the rise of Trumpism, which jettisons popular media discourses about a white working-class voting against its own interests. On paper, at least, the agricultural economy of rural Iowa is doing quite well – unemployment rates are low; commodity prices are modest compared to earlier booms yet nowhere near the 1980s farm-crisis levels; and land prices have been at record highs for several years.

The ‘war’ that Trump speaks of, then, is about something deeper than simple economic anxiety. It is, as this section contends, about a perceived loss of respect for the American farmer, about a betrayal of rural values, and a desire for a return to better times. Whiteness and masculinity are central to the respect and values that make up the rural agrarian nostalgia that is thought of as lost. When Trump tells his rapt audience, ‘I know what’s happening to you’, the unspoken happening is the perceived breakdown of the cultural borders that have protected whiteness and manhood for generations in these rural spaces. In this sense, contrary to the conventional post-election analyses in 2016, people are not voting against a narrow understanding of their own economic interests – they are, instead, supporting the first candidate in a generation who appears to share their specific sociocultural worldview.

Political consciousness in the rural US has come to be defined by a sense of resentment against cities and a belief that these cities are imposing regulations and supporting their own decadence through the stolen labour of rural white Americans (Cramer 2016). The political discourse about government regulation has ‘historically been made by equating deservingness with whiteness’, and conversations about whom government policies should support ‘are about race even when race is not mentioned’ (Cramer 2016, 86). Even as agriculture in the US remains heavily subsidized, a racist discourse about regulation ensures that white farmers do not see themselves as the recipients of government aid. To be effective, however, such a spatial hierarchy of race must appear democratic and ‘immediately intelligible to the masses’, thus racist codes must not appear racist but should instead act as an ‘interpretive key’ or a shared secret knowledge of how individuals should be rightly placed in the social world (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991). Thus, when Trump states to rural Iowans, ‘I know what’s happening to you’, he never
needs to explicitly say what it is that is going on yet the vociferous audience is clearly receiving the message. ‘What’s going on’ can therefore be understood as a penetration of pure white space by a Brown threat, originating in the cities, and these discourses do the work of securitizing nationalist space by identifying for their audience the various ‘outliers who actively work against core American beliefs’ (Silva 2016, 29). Indeed, these are not merely electoral debates for hearts, minds and votes: they are embodied struggles for territory – ‘geopolitical power struggles … firmly tethered to brown bodies’ (Silva 2016, 6). The rise of the right in rural America in the last two decades can be connected to this power struggle. Right-wing movements that either implicitly or explicitly acknowledge the racialization of these spatial contestations offer a sense of optimism and hope that they can restore ‘the good life’ to white, rural America. This explains why Trump rallies, with their dark, threatening messages, are quite often jubilant affairs. There is a palpable hope that, in exchange for this faith in optimism, the individual will finally be recognized by the state as a deserving subject, even if that recognition is little more than a ‘misrecognition you can bear, a transaction that affirms you without, again, necessarily feeling good or being accurate’ (Berlant 2011, 43).

The influence of whiteness on the rural Iowa landscape cannot be separated from its intricate connections to masculinity. If rural communities must be protected from the Brown threats encroaching from the cities, then it is rural white men who must do the protecting. The history of perceived threats to rural space can be read as threats to the role of men as protectors and providers. Still, despite its profound influence, ‘masculinity goes through great pains to hide itself and cloak its influences … it never has to acknowledge its role in organizing social, economic, and cultural life’ (Shabazz 2015, 9). The fear of lost masculinity is a formative and powerful discourse crafting space in rural landscapes.

Kimmel (2015) writes that the farm crisis of the 1980s, followed by continued economic shocks, globalization and corporatization, left rural white men with the sense that ‘the very people who had built America were the ones who were being pushed aside’ (13). This sense of entitlement is infused into the discourse about modern farming, where the independent ‘family farm’ – led by a strong male head – is continually positioned as the cornerstone of agriculture. A 2013 Super Bowl advertisement for Dodge Ram vehicles perfectly summarizes this discourse. Images of men baling hay, caring for livestock, praying, waving flags, wearing dirty cowboy hats and jeans and (of course) driving Dodge Ram trucks are shown, while radio personality Paul Harvey recites a famous 1978 speech to the Future Farmers of America:

God said, ‘I need somebody … who’d bale a family together with the soft strong bonds of sharing, who would laugh and then sigh, and then reply, with smiling eyes, when his son says he wants to spend his life doing what dad does.’ So God made a farmer.

The production of this particular kind of masculinity, which is indelibly linked to farming, emerged as part of a historical process of state-sponsored projects, like Future Farmers of America and 4-H, where citizenship programmes produced wholesome white youths performing ‘gender-appropriate’ labour on the family farm. These projects merged this ‘vision of rural normalcy with American nationalism and the language of civic obligation, casting white, commercial family farmers as the backbone of the nation’ (Rosenberg 2015, 8). This rhetoric persists in contemporary discourse, as exemplified by Trump’s Des Moines speech. It is powerful because of its effective emotional resonance – being described as ‘the backbone of the nation’ links the body of the white man with the body of the nation. As Smith (2012) writes,
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this complex interplay between embodiment and emotion – material movement and practices, as well as love, fear, and pain – are ‘not the side effects of geopolitical practice but its principal manifestation’ (1524). In essence, from their perspective, white rural Iowan men are the body and soul of America – they, alone, truly belong. And when they see themselves reflected in the voice and body of Donald Trump, they envision themselves taking their rightful place at the head of the nation.

Intimate entanglements of geopolitical care: Race and waste in Badin, NC

In community meetings held in church basements, the residents of West Badin, North Carolina, lament the state of disrepair and decline that their community faces. West Badin was a residential settlement established in 1917 for Black workers at the Alcoa (formerly the Aluminum Company of America) Badin Works, an aluminium smelting plant, and their families. Since the closure of the plant in 2007, small grants from Alcoa have supported beautification efforts, a museum and historical markers in the predominantly white East Badin and attempts to rebrand the company town as a quaint tourist destination. On the other side of the plant, in West Badin, the broken-down roads and homes abandoned by residents without any economic prospects reflect a general sense of hopelessness. Those who remain are caught between nostalgic remembrances of a once-thriving Black community and contentious politics regarding ongoing contamination from nearly a century of industrial toxicity. Racism has defined the occupational, political and social history of Badin. Black workers were hired for the most physically demanding and dangerous jobs in the aluminium plant. Black residents were exposed most directly to the toxic chemicals from the plant’s smokestacks and from the unlined industrial landfill, located adjacent to their residences. When Alcoa was required by environmental regulators to account for and manage the contaminated areas, the Black residents were excluded by the town council, company and state agencies.

It would be easy to see Badin as an isolated instance whose conditions are specific to a town in the twentieth-century US South. However, the disproportionate combined burden of toxicity and racialized political exclusion reflects a pattern of ‘environmental racism’ (Pulido 2016), which refers to the unhealthy living and working environments that result from racially driven unequal development. Sites like Badin are racialized ‘sacrifice zones’ (Lerner 2012) to capitalist development, where the collusion of corporate harm and state neglect creates territorial zones whose residents are excluded from state welfare and representation, despite their nominal citizenship. Badin’s history is replete with the racialized sacrifice of Black workers and residents in the cause of national security, a story of twentieth-century US geopolitics driven by the profitability and promises of war.

Badin Works was one of the earliest aluminium smelting plants in the US. Described as ‘the material of modernity’ (Sheller 2014), aluminium was vital to the emergence of the US state as a global powerhouse in the mid–twentieth century, from kettles and cookware to portable construction equipment, to the wings and fuselages of aircraft. The materials of warfare for World Wars I and II were manufactured with this new ‘light metal’ that promised a more efficient, mobile, sleek and altogether modernized American military. As the sole aluminium producer for the US military in the interwar period, Alcoa consolidated power and geopolitical influence. Alcoa’s vertical integration of smelting and commodity production operations and full control over government-funded materials research ensured that Alcoa held a monopoly on aluminium production through the war years. Their executives and investors gained key posts in the federal government while the company expanded its holdings across a vast geography, acquiring bauxite mines, factories, and dams, becoming one of the world’s first multinational corporations.
(Sheller 2014, 62). The intimate entanglements of corporate power, technological expertise, and government funding that enveloped Alcoa probably inspired President Dwight Eisenhower’s cautionary note in his 1961 farewell address against the ‘unwarranted influence’ of government by the ‘military-industrial complex’.

In January 1943, the Badin Works aluminium smelting plant in Badin, North Carolina, was honoured with the Army Navy E-Award for ‘Excellence in Wartime Production’. Received by only 5 per cent of all US military producers and contractors, the award recognized the ‘high and practical patriotism’ of the factory’s workers, in the words of Under Secretary of War Robert Patterson. The programme brochure quotes President Roosevelt’s 1942 State of the Union address: ‘Modern methods of warfare make it a task not only for shooting and fighting but an even more urgent one of working and producing.’ The production of materials for modern warfare in Badin is quite revealing of the production of modernity itself. Looking back on the experiences of Badin’s Black workers and residents, we start to see a different picture of the sacrifices demanded for US military might.

Badin was a real-world test lab, where Alcoa was able to perfect methods for producing aluminium cheaply and efficiently, while conveniently exploiting Black bodies as receptacles for lethal industrial waste. As such, these bodies become intertwined with geopolitical strategies of war (Pain 2015) that, for residents of Badin, produce a complex mess of feelings, including nostalgia for the times when the plant was open and a sense of betrayal at its closure, along with a sense of complicity in the violence enacted on their own families. Often, residents brought toxins home on their clothes and bodies, connecting the intimate space of the home and the intimate ecologies of the body (Vasudevan 2019) to global processes of security and violence through these very finely grained expressions of industrial–military power (Fluri 2011).

Yet the residents of Badin also show how geopolitical efforts to transform our homes and bodies into sites of territorial struggle are resisted. In a context where company loyalty was instilled from childhood as a patriotic duty, Black workers and residents have struggled for generations to challenge Alcoa’s portrayal of itself as a caring and responsible company through creative strategies that maintain a communal history erased in the formal archives. An older generation of women who could not openly voice dissent has compiled in homemade scrapbooks the obituaries of workers who died prematurely from illnesses due to toxic exposure. The scrapbooks, a form of ‘wake work’ (Sharpe 2016), document the tremendous burden of caring for dying workers that was borne by the women of the community. This gives meaning in death to those who were not valued in life. We may not recognize social reproductive practices such as these as geopolitics, yet they enable both the survival and the possibility of future politics for those racialized communities who are subject to ongoing state violence through neglect and abandonment (Gilmore 2008; Pulido 2016). Today, as West Badin residents seek to hold Alcoa responsible for poisoning them, artifacts like the scrapbooks are a reminder of the generational inheritance of both oppression and resistance in their intimate lives.

Conclusions

In Iowa, rural voters who feel neglected by the state invest their hopes in a presidential candidate who promises them safety, security and a return to the good days; while in Badin, North Carolina, Black workers and their families do the work of justice and survival that is necessary for them to exist at the intersections of geopolitics and racial capitalism. In both these cases, to omit either the geopolitical framing of the case or the intimate and entangled ways that questions of geopolitics come to rest within homes and bodies would be to miss a significant
component of the story at play. For white Iowans, the embodied politics of Trump speaks to the fears and concerns that blur the geopolitical (unprotected borders, trade wars) with the insecurity of family economics and a future that looks increasingly uncertain. These are felt and embodied, and find resonance in Trump’s outsized performances.

In the moment of affective connection between a politician at a rally and the global imaginary of a country under threat, these fears shift electoral possibilities and manifest the revanchist white masculinity in the White House, sending ripples of geopolitical anxiety across the world (even as we know that this is not a new era but an intensification or retrenchment of older eras). Likewise, in Badin, North Carolina, we find a reconfiguration of older iterations of racial capitalism: one in which the imperial drives for modernity and military might that are manifest in aluminium production now continue the devaluation of Black bodies, yet in forms that have shifted from those in earlier eras. Here, in addition to the intimately felt geopolitics that work through family histories of illness, the residents of Badin also work to destabilize these geopolitical regimes of erasure and devaluation when they mark, remember and seek justice for the lives cut short.

Both these cases resonate with an intimate geopolitics of the good life deferred, in which visions of happy family and community life in the future lead the residents of Badin and Iowa to participate in geopolitical work. In creating a good life for their families, the Black workers at the plant found themselves complicit in the company’s dumping of waste in the community yet were told by their elders not to speak up, lest they should lose their economic stability. In Iowa, attachment to a particular dream of the good life, offered but never attained through neoliberalism, sets residents toward an exclusionary masculinist and nationalist politics that disallows the formation of different forms of community in a changing rural space.

**Key readings**


**References**


