

**Book Review****Title:** *Accessible Citizenships: Disability, Nation, and the Cultural Politics of Greater Mexico***Author:** Julie Averil Minich**Publication Data:** Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2014**Softcover:** ISBN: 978-1-4399-1070-2; also available as an e-book**Cost:** \$26.95, 240 pages**Reviewer:** Donna McDonald, PhD

*An (un)holy trinity: Chicana/o cultural representations of the politics of disability images*

The title of Minich's book—*Accessible Citizenships: Disability, Nation, and the Cultural Politics of Greater Mexico*—led me to believe that it would take up the challenge of the late Chis Bell's lament that disability studies fails to engage with issues of race and ethnicity (2006). As a lecturer of disability studies in Australia, I was keen to be illuminated about the indigenization of disability in Greater Mexico, with a view to extrapolating the themes of this book to other cultures. Unfortunately, while Minich's book responds to Bell's challenge, I was disappointed.

Minich's ambitions for her book—"My focus on disability and Chicanismo as sources of important insights about nationalism and citizenship stems from a belief in the political value of subaltern or minoritized identities" (p. 5)—are wide-reaching, but teasingly obscure to apprehend. Her analysis of representations of disability in contemporary Chicana/o literature and film as a way of understanding political engagement requires a deeply shared commitment by the reader to her task for two important reasons. First, Minich's selection of Chicana/o novels and films to illustrate her arguments assumes that both the Chicana/o and non-Chicana/o readers will be familiar with those cultural texts. This hurdle could be reasonably accommodated but for the second (and more fatal) obstacle: Minich's opening essay—"Accessibility and Nationalism: An Introduction" (pp. 2-27)—plunges the reader immediately into her complex, layered, and circumlocutory theoretical propositions, instead of providing a clear, concise description of the role and purpose of each of the following chapters. Without such a map, the two hurdles combined to make this particular reader anxious about how to make sense of the entire book. It also left me none the wiser about the day-to-day realities of contemporary disability politics in Greater Mexico.

Given that Minich makes much of her "scholarship" in her "Acknowledgements"—she notes that "no scholarship is the work of one person alone" (p. ix), that this is her "first scholarly book" (p. ix), and she thanks "scholarly organizations" (p. xi) for their support—it appears that Minich considers other scholars to be her target readers. Indeed, Minich stakes out her narrow readership territory on page 2: "disability scholars ... [scholars of] political belonging including Chicana/o studies, border studies, and queer studies". However, this select readership for Minich's indisputably solid piece of research will need significant prior knowledge of the cultural and literary texts which Minich explores to support her thesis. Alternatively, they need to be prepared to Google-search them during the course of their reading. Certainly, few readers outside Greater Mexico are likely to be at home with the works of "gay Chicano writer . . . with disabilities" Arturo Islas Jr. (p. 32), "feminist playwright, poet, and queer theorist Cherrie L Moraga" (p. 57),

“the younger Chicana queer writer Felicia Luna Lemus” (p. 57), “Alex Espinoza—a gay, disabled writer who identifies as both Mexican and Chicano (p. 95), Oscar Casares, Chicano writer and filmmaker (p. 124), and Chicana novelists Ana Castillo and Cecile Pineda (p. 156). (Tommy Lee Jones is a rare familiar celebrity name in Minich’s exposition. He gets a fleeting mention as a “white, Anglo actor-director” (p. 124) who collaborated on Casares’s film “The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada”).

Further, the strenuousness of Minich’s thesis—that Chicana/o literary culture conceptualizes the political community through images of disability—is hard to shake off. While sincerely argued, her expository style occasionally feels contrived, convoluted and jargon-heavy. Examples can be found in any chapter, for example:

“*The Rain God* and *Migrant Souls* counter normative narratives of Chicana/o family; instead of positing the patriarchal family as an idealized representation of the nation, they reveal the violence and trauma that must be edited out of the family history in order for the patriarchal family to present itself as a whole and unified representation of the whole and unified nation” (p. 55).

This could be distilled to, “Contrary to idealized images of Chicana/o patriarchal families (symbolic representatives of a whole and unified nation), *The Rain God* and *Migrant Souls* reveal the hidden violence and trauma in Chicana/o families.” Another example the reader has to step her way through:

“I have scrutinized the liberatory potential (and shortcomings) of queer cultural nationalisms. These next two chapters, on the other hand, are concerned with dominant, state-supported nationalism—and more specifically, with the ways in which US nativism reinforces an exclusionary construction of the US national body that is mobilized to justify brutal immigration restrictions” (p. 95).

So much is contained in these 53 words. It is too much to absorb in a single reading, and requires the reader to slow down and parse each phrase before moving to the next phrase.

Having said this, Minich undeniably makes a unique and substantial contribution to our knowledge. Indeed, it is the hallmark of a fine scholar to make known what has been unknown, unfamiliar and formerly unreachable. This is how our understanding of humanity expands. Minich’s commitment to this challenge can be seen in her every attentively crafted sentence, every conceptualized paragraph, and every narratively shaped chapter. For this reason alone, Minich’s book is of substantial benefit to disabilities studies.

Minich states that her book “began with my dissertation research at Stanford University” (p. ix). This goes some way to explaining the complexity and density of her writing: the power of her ideas is often overwhelmed by the weight of her concepts. It would take a determined scholar to read her book from “go-to-whoa”. However, that determination would reap rich rewards for a disability studies or political studies scholar. A reasonably priced book, it would also be a good addition to the “required reading list” for a graduate class on disability studies, political studies or the humanities, providing a suitably provocative counter-weight to the usual suspects of white disability studies texts.

## Reference

Bell, Chris. (2006). Introducing white disability studies: A modest proposal. In L. Davis. *Disability Studies Reader*. New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 275-282.

**Dr. Donna McDonald** is Senior Lecturer in policy and disability studies at Griffith University, Australia. She is a published writer with two books, several book chapters, journal articles and essays. Her latest book, *The Art of Being Deaf: A Memoir*, was published by Gallaudet University Press in March 2014. She may be contacted at: [donna.mcdonald@griffith.edu.au](mailto:donna.mcdonald@griffith.edu.au)

Julie Avril Minich's *Accessible Citizenships: Disability, Nation, and the Cultural Politics of Greater Mexico* is a necessary and refreshing intervention into disability studies and critical race and ethnicity studies. These representations of disability within political community formations (rather than outside of or in opposition to them), Minich contends, "have the potential to reconfigure how we perceive the body politic and to transform what we imagine when we (to repurpose Benedict Anderson's canonized phrase) imagine community" (3). From the start of the book, Minich makes clear that she is not interested in reifying the boundaries of the nation or in promoting the inherent value of citizenship. *Accessible Citizenships: Disability, Nation, and the Cultural Politics of Greater Mexico* Paperback " December 20, 2013. by Julie Avril Minich (Author). Visit Amazon's Julie Avril Minich Page. Find all the books, read about the author, and more. See search results for this author. Are you an author? Julie Avril Minich is Assistant Professor of English, with concurrent appointments in the Center for Mexican American Studies and the Center for Women and Gender Studies, at the University of Texas at Austin. Product details. *Accessible Citizenships* examines Chicana/o cultural representations that conceptualize political community through images of disability. Working against the assumption that disability is a metaphor for social decay or political crisis, Julie Avril Minich analyzes literature, film, and visual art post-1980 in which representations of non-normative bodies work to expand our understanding of what it means to belong to a political community. Minich shows how queer writers like Arturo Islas and Cherr e Moraga have reconceptualized Chicano nationalism through disability images. She further addresses

Her *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* helped to inaugurate the shift from a medical view of disability to a social/cultural perspective. In her study, Garland Thomson coins the term "the normate," a highly influential neologism that has informed Disability Studies, transforming the discipline. 2014. *Accessible Citizenship: Disability, Nation, and the Cultural Politics of Greater Mexico*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Disability in Spanish-speaking and U.S. Chicano Contexts. In *Accessible Citizenship: Disability, Nation, and the Cultural Politics of Greater Mexico*, Julie Avril Minich asks how disability has been used to build, reconfigure, and dismantle real and imagined political communities in the context more. In *Accessible Citizenship: Disability, Nation, and the Cultural Politics of Greater Mexico*, Julie Avril Minich asks how disability has been used to build, reconfigure, and dismantle real and imagined political communities in the context of an evolving Chicana/o cultural nationalist movement. She is the author of *Accessible Citizenship: Disability, Nation, and the Cultural Politics of Greater Mexico* (Temple University Press, 2014), winner of the 2013-2014 MLA Prize in United States Latina and Latina and Chicana and Chicano Literary and Cultural Studies. Drawing from Chicana/o studies and disability studies, this book works against the common assumption that disability serves primarily as a metaphor for social decay or political crisis, engaging with literary and filmic texts from both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border in which disability functions to extend knowledge of what it mean

The first is citizenship as legal status, defined by civil, political and social rights. Here, the citizen is the legal person free to act according to the law and having the right to claim the law's protection. Feminists have criticized this rigid division as mythical since both the separation itself and the radically unequal conception of the household that it presupposed were clearly the outcome of political decisions made in the public sphere (Okin 1992, 60). By giving greater emphasis to the importance of regional developments, Chinese archaeologists are able to legitimize a much larger part of the country as ancestral to the cultural mainstream, thus encouraging the integration of people throughout China. This growing regionalism is supported by administrative reorganizations and new infrastructural bases of support, such as provincial museums. She is the author of *Accessible Citizenships: Disability, Nation, and the Cultural Politics of Greater Mexico* (Temple University Press, 2014), winner of the 2013-2014 MLA Prize in United States Latina and Latina and Chicana and Chicano Literary and Cultural Studies. Drawing from Chicana/o studies and disability studies, this book works against the common assumption that disability serves primarily as a metaphor for social decay or political crisis, engaging with literary and filmic texts from both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border in which disability functions to extend knowledge of what it means "Disability studies does not treat disease or disability, hoping to cure or avoid them; it studies the social meanings, symbols, and stigmas attached to disability identity and asks how they related to enforced systems of exclusion and oppression, attacking the widespread belief that having an able body and mind determines whether one is a quality human being." -- p. Minich, Julie A. *Accessible Citizenships: Disability, Nation, and the Cultural Politics of Greater Mexico*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014. *Second World First World French Revolution Constitution World War Two Textbook The Twenties Insight Two By Two*. Book Information. *Accessible Citizenships: Disability, Nation, and the Cultural Politics of Greater Mexico*. By Julie Avril Minich. Ratings Accessible Citizenships examines Chicana/o cultural representations that conceptualize political community through images of disability. Working against the assumption that disability is a metaphor for social decay or political crisis, Julie Avril Minich analyzes literature, film, and visual art post-1980 in which representations of non-normative bodies work to expand our understanding of what it means to belong to a political community. Minich shows how queer writers like Arturo Islas and Cherríe Moraga have reconceptualized Chicano nationalism through disability images.