

countability without Punishment?" "the power dynamics that create the conditions that fuel sexual violence go unaddressed and are even maintained by criminal legal proceedings." More than once, she reminds us that accountability cannot be forced upon those who cause harm to others and that our cycle of submitting people to the "physical, social, and civic death" of imprisonment only feeds our overcrowded prisons.

Kaba continuously reminds us that we can look beyond our "failure of imagination" where it is either "prison or nothing" when speaking to folks about abolition. However, none of this work can be done alone. This idea is at the heart of her abolitionist message, at the heart of redressing harm, at the heart of caring for victims, and at the heart of activism as a whole. And what makes these notions of community-centered activism so powerful is Kaba's ability to move easily between high-level histories to hands-on, feet-on-the-ground organizing, to personal reflections on her own role in the activist community and what she learns from being embedded in activist communities.

In Kaba's interview with Damon Williams and Daniel Kisslinger, she offers a beautiful moment of self-reflection. Kaba addresses her natural instinct to "always remind everybody of everything else and everybody else" and the moment of accountability it took for her to begin placing her name on the things she was creating. Collective action is the only way to change the structures of our society, and a part of collective work is acknowledging the work of others and the work you yourself have created. And not only to receive and share praise but—more importantly—to create transparent dialogue between organizers. These introspective moments Kaba brings to these essays and interviews ultimately make Kaba's book a deeply accessible and usable reference for years to come as we collectively imagine a transformed and more caring world.

The timeliness and timelessness of Kaba's subject fits the needs of librarians and other LIS practitioners and the positions we find ourselves in as stewards of information today. As library workers, we should absorb books like *We Do This 'Til We Free Us* not only because Mariame Kaba herself is pursuing a degree in Library and Information Science. The students, faculty, and multitude of patrons we serve are paying attention to these issues. These issues affect our patrons personally and materially; and, if there is anything we can learn from Kaba, it is that what affects one in a community touches us all. Collective community care work should be at the center of what LIS professionals do. As Kaba says in her writing, there is no single way to perform activist work. The role of those of us in the LIS profession has historically been in flux, but in principle, our work and our impact extend beyond the walls of our institutions. How we work toward freedom in our libraries follows our patrons as they embark into the world we share.—*Shawne West, University of California, Los Angeles*

Sara Ahmed. *Complaint!* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021. 376p. \$29.95 (ISBN 978-1-4780-1771-4).

Living, as we are, in this confluence of catastrophes including climate collapse, the global drug poisoning crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic, experience tells us that the trouble is not with evidence. The trouble is with power. As we hear more and more testimony and analyze increasing amounts of data about the impacts of racial capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy, and connected ideologies, I find the most urgent writing of our time to be the scholarship of power: how it operates, where it accumulates, and why it persists. In *Complaint!* Sara Ahmed offers what she calls a "phenomenology of the institution" (19) by interrogating complaint



structures and procedures in universities. While Ahmed's scope is limited to universities, the mechanisms she interrogates and her conclusions are broadly applicable to other institutions. Based on interviews conducted during a 20-month period "with forty students, academics, researchers, and administrators who had been involved in some way in a formal complaint process, including those who did not take their complaints forward, who started the process only to withdraw from it" (10), Ahmed presents a careful and sophisticated analysis of power and its abuses in universities.

Reading the participants' accounts of making complaints in universities is hard, heavy work. Whether it is personal hauntings and pangs of recognition, or empathy and solidarity with colleagues and friends who have experienced bullying, harassment, and other abuses of power, it is difficult to confront the grim realities of institutional mechanics. Still, understanding how universities work, whom they protect, and whom they aim to harm, can help us navigate and survive. This too, Ahmed argues, is "institutional wisdom" (275). Framing complaints as possible occasions of clarity is one of the many aspects of the book that make it necessary reading for academic workers. So much of what happens in situations of abuse is bound up in disorientation and gaslighting. When complainers are finally in a position where we are able to see the situation clearly enough to complain, how the complaint lands and where the complaint goes can help us get clarity, if not due process.

Complainers learn more about the institution and about those invested in the status quo, those who, as Ahmed writes, "benefit in some way from silence about violence" (217). As a library worker, I found Ahmed's discussion of abuses of power in environments that are often assumed to be progressive and feminist especially familiar and instructive. She writes about how those who reach out for support in confronting abuses of power can and do come up against "paper feminists—those who are feminists on paper but not in practice" (254). Those who understand that advancing their own careers and political agendas require them to keep their distance from complaints and complainers. Those who warn complainers about the dangers of exposing the institution to scrutiny and criticism: *Are you sure you want to do this? Have you thought about what this will do to our reputation?* Ahmed describes how abuses of power can be minimized or overlooked by those whose politics, on paper at least, would suggest an inclination beyond conventional damage control—they are invested in denying the problem: *That person isn't like that. This is a good place to work.* They pathologize the complainer: *She is not a good fit. She doesn't understand our culture.* They treat abuses of power as a difference in opinion: *I don't like to take sides. Why can't you just work it out?* They see the complainer as a destructive killjoy: *She's just being negative. No one else seems to have a problem working with that person.* Experience in academic libraries shows us that complainers—as opposed to bullies and abusers—are seen as unprofessional, uncivil, and noncollegial. As Ahmed has written previously: "When you expose a problem you pose a problem."¹

On the other hand, complaints can also help us find our people. While Ahmed describes experiences of complainers who are blocked and ignored, she is also clear in her message that complaint can offer "a fresh lens... on collectivity itself" (277). Whether a complaint is pursued or abandoned, becoming a complainer is lonely by design: "The atomization of complaint procedures can be how abuses of power remain unrecognized" (168). Even the spatiality of complaint is isolating. Ahmed describes how memories involving the built en-

vironment loomed large in the accounts shared by the interviewees. “Long corridors, locked doors, windows with blinds that come down” (41) are all used to create containment—an architecture of (institutional) power. Keeping the complainers and their complaints physically and bureaucratically separated from others allows the institution to block us from comparing notes and building solidarity while also controlling the extent of reputational damage. It is especially troubling when these techniques of separation and isolation are framed as something that those in power are doing exclusively for our own good (such as to protect our privacy).

As with academia itself, the culture in academic libraries is prone to ostracizing people who complain or speak up. The inclination to remain neutral, to not take sides, Ahmed tells us, is to side with bullies and abusers. We lose and find people when we make complaints; we gain clarity. We lose paper-feminists; we find co-complainers, collectives, feminist ears. Revisiting the concept of a feminist ear introduced in *Living a Feminist Life*, Ahmed talks about her methodology in *Complaint!* as listening with a feminist ear. Listening to what tends to be tuned out. Listening to what tends to be not heard, diminished, dismissed. Feminist ears remind us that we are not alone. Reading *Complaint!* Ahmed hopes, can also “be a reminder: we are not alone” (277). *Complaint!* recasts complaint as an instigator of camaraderie and also of possibility: “complaints in pointing back can also point forward, to those who come after; who can receive something from you because of what you tried to do, even though you did not get through, even though all you seemed to do was scratch the surface” (299–300).—Baharak Yousefi, *Simon Fraser University*

Note

1. Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 37.