

Deconstructing Europe: Postcolonial Perspectives

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179 pages, 2011, \$125 USD (hardcover)

London and New York, Routledge

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This exciting and creative collection of papers arising from the work of the Postcolonial Europe working group, which operates under the auspices of the European Advanced Thematic Network of Women's Studies, speaks to the 'leading edge' of debates in interdisciplinary feminist, postcolonial, and race theory and provides a valuable set of contributions to understanding the complexities, crossings, and convivialities at work in this region.

The inevitably troubling selective nature of edited collections raises many questions about the construction of the intellectual agenda of this volume and the choice of voices we hear. This material ranges across the more familiar territory of the UK, Italy, Spain, Denmark, and Austria, but unusually the book begins with an examination of racism, whiteness, and colonial identities in Iceland. Here, Kristin Loftsdottir effectively illustrates how, despite Iceland's lack of participation in colonialism, Icelandic identities were constructed through a close engagement with Europe's colonial project. This confirms, again, the ways in which racisms in one place are always connected to racisms elsewhere, and also that, as January-Bardill has observed, there is no region, no continent, and no ideology that has been insulated, separated, or immune to the power of global racialisation (22). The systematic geo-mapping of the racialisation of the planet has not been achieved although we do have increasing theory and evidence which leads us towards this goal. We have a patchy, uneven set of accounts across localities, nations, and regions which highlight both the interconnectedness and the variation in forms of racist discourse and in the logics of racial regimes. This collection helps to map some more of these processes and patterns and moves us forward towards a deeper and more coherent understanding of the complexity of global racisms.

In seeking to address the totality of postcolonial Europe, the exclusion of voices from post-communist contexts in Central and Eastern Europe and Russia in this collection is unfortunate as this has a range of fundamental implications for theory and action. Communist regimes were rooted in 'solid' modernity with grand narratives and a rational belief in progress through highly controlled use of technology, bureaucracy, and military power, and they too have their racialised hierarchies and racialised internal enemies and targets of hate, and are ordered and regulated by identifiable racial logics in state governance. The complacency, arrogance, and hypocrisy of these regimes declaring themselves immune to racism has for too long been hidden from scrutiny. The violence, atrocity, and human suffering brought about by

communism has been revealed as a death sentence on human freedom, yet the shift of these regimes into the 'liquid modernity' of new circuits of production, consumption, and communication is producing new exclusions, renewed racisms, expanding inequalities, and a political and social turn to racist explanations in a time of uncertainty and insecurity. Racism is a product of communist and post-communist regimes as well as capitalist and neoliberal structures.

The use of national frames to examine how memory, whiteness, and religion are articulated and represented in six of the nine substantive chapters may be valuable to specify and interrogate localised contexts, but relational analysis focussing on interconnections, linkages, and interactions across European national contexts can provide a more fruitful form of analysis in building understanding. Sandra Ponzanesi attempts this in her account of migrant cinema and what she sees as its contribution to the formation of a convivial culture which is at ease with its rich diversity. Although veering towards a euphoric position, she does demonstrate how these visual commentaries can move towards the redefinition of Europe.

Inspiring narratives of resistance, opposition, celebration, conviviality, and humanity continue to be found in a profusion of voices, social and political spaces, and locations in Europe. These themes are addressed carefully here in exploring migrant literature in Italy, the work of black African migrant writers resident in Spain, and migrant cinema, and in evaluation of the significance of a range of other artworks, novels, songs, and films. These accounts trace the many threads of ambiguous positioning, the politics of cohabitation in a postcolonial context, diasporic reconstructions of selfhood, and the politics of encounter and otherness. This stimulates the consideration of a wider set of conversations about contesting the power of the European post-racial contemporary which is assuming a hegemonic position as racism is consigned to the sidelines by political technologies of governance, and as internal processes of immiseration accompany a closing off, a defensiveness, a building of walls of many types in this region. Never closed, never shut off, and never completed, Europe remains open to intervention. This book provides many signposts to the ways in which these interventions work and the ways in which colonial legacies can be dismantled.

Works Cited

January-Bardill, Nozipho. "The International Legal Response to Racism." *Dimensions of Racism: Proceedings of a Workshop to Commemorate the End of the United Nations Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination, Paris, 19-20 February 2003*. New York: OHCHR/UNESCO. 2005. 21-37. Web. 10 January 2012.