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BOOK REVIEW

Lars Jensen, Julia Suárez-Krabbe, Christian Groes, Zoran Lee Pecic (eds.), *Postcolonial Europe: Comparative Reflections after the Empires*, ISBN 978-1-78660-304-3 (hb), 978-1-78660-305-0 (pb), London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018, 268 pages

Postcolonial Europe is a volume of 13 chapters, consisting of a series of case studies of how postcolonial legacies and dynamics play out in contemporary times. Different chapters focus on: racialization in Italy, in view also of the North-South divide; on the notion of *el moro* in Spanish and Catalan society; on the disempowerment of Roma people in Europe; on the contemporary effects of Dutch coloniality; on how the work of the Santomean poet Conceição Lima raises critical questions on Portugal's colonial past; on the relation between 'geo-linguistics' and colonialism with regard to the idea of a 'Lusophone community'; on critical questions raised by translations of Fanon's texts and their role in Anglophone postcolonial studies; on contemporary relations between France and African nations, particularly the 2013 French military operation in Mali and its aftermath; on the question of Greenland's relation to Denmark; on Belgium's colonial past in Congo and its contemporary legacy; on the postcolonial backlash in Poland's contemporary conservative politicians; and on the relation between China and a postcolonial Europe.

As can be attested by this list of topics, this volume is eclectic (in the best of senses), making use of a wide-range of analytical approaches, methodologies and disciplines.

In fact, as the editors indicate in their contextualizing introduction, the book originated from an interdisciplinary conference which invited scholars to "rethink European colonialism in light of the vanishing historical horizon of the European empires and the rise of new forms of power formations" (p. 4). Such a wide-ranging task necessitated a plurality of approaches that include critical race studies, post- and de-colonial studies, gender studies, anthropology, media theory, security studies and international relations. We see these approaches playing out in the different chapters that tackle the idea of postcolonial Europe through analyses of film, poetry, discourse, translation, policy and political developments. In this regard, this volume constitutes a series of very rich and meticulous studies that bear witness to true inter-disciplinarity.

Chapter 1, by Gaia Giuliani, focuses on images of blackness and whiteness in contemporary Italy, examining how sexuality and colour are expressed in public discourse in examples from 2010-2012. Her analysis demonstrates that such public discourse recreates racial stereotypes and white heteronormativity. Giuliani's analysis shows how whiteness remains unmarked, as opposed to the hyper-signification of the black male body, which she analyses through case studies on migrant field workers in southern Italy and the abuse directed towards footballer Mario Balotelli. Giuliani also considers the orientalization and sexualization of the Southerner and the non-European brown Mediterranean women. This colonial tradition is analyzed and demonstrated through a study of Berlusconi's 'go-go girls'. Giuliani also studies the criminalization of brown heterosexual men in view of the targeting of such men in a police investigation of the murder of a 13-year old white Italian girl.

Chapter 2, by Carmine Conelli, takes its cue from how the neoliberal EU discourse placed responsibility for the eurozone economic crisis on the so-called 'PIGS' nations, distinguishing between a supposedly responsible north and PIGS nations with 'bad habits' of corruption and wasteful spending. Conelli compares this logic to the colonial 'civilizing' discourse, demonstrating how northern countries are constituted as rational and civic-minded while the southern region is portrayed as irrational and irresponsible. Conelli shows how this logic played out in the Italian context, with the former Prime Minister Mario Monti (born in northern Italy) accusing the 'Mezzogiorno' (i.e. the southern regions) for not complying with 'European standards'. The author makes interesting use of postcolonial theories and Gramsci's work on 'the southern question' to analyze the history of the Mezzogiorno as deeply entwined with colonization, with the southerners being portrayed as requiring saving from the Piedmontese civilization. The thrust of Conelli's argument is the idea that the construction of the Italian nation state "has overall been an elite achievement" (p. 32) and has happened through an exclusion of the contribution of the south from national discourse. This gesture is read alongside Edward Said's suggestion that western dominance aimed at the denigration of the east. The author notes how there were attempts to legitimize this domestic colonization within Italy through 'scientific' theories of racialization whereby biological differences between Italians were theorized. Interestingly, the unification of Italy across such north-south divides coincided with the first Italian attempts to create an overseas colonial empire, whereby the problem of southern rural overpopulation was 'solved' by settling southern Italian peasants in Eritrean lands. The author concludes by arguing that while anti-south racism is today more latent than manifest, recent waves of migration have now provided new targets of racialization.

Chapter 3, by Martin Lundsteen, presents an ethnography done in a small town in the northern region of Catalonia, which has a significant population of African immigrants, mostly Moroccans who are often labelled *moros*. The author discusses Spanish identity as an imagined national community, whereby "the hegemonic idea of Spain (and Spanishness) is built on the historic negation of Muslim and Jewish identity" (p. 43). The rich ethnography presented in this chapter demonstrates that, rather than 'culturalist' readings that regard culture as the main cause of social conflict, we should instead look at the political-economic structuring of such social realities. In this chapter, the use of the term *moros* is traced back to the *Reconquista*, which after pogroms, massacres and expulsions of Jews and Muslims, led to a series of forced conversions, with the converted Muslims being referred to as *moriscos* or *moros*. Lundsteen notes how what followed this time was an external expansive colonization projects in the Americas and Africa, with the category of *moro* developing further into eighteenth century Spanish colonization projects. Lundsteen notes how, in contemporary times, the label of *moro* is predominantly used by working-class people who themselves would have migrated to Catalonia from other parts of Spain, thus establishing a divide between new and old migrants. The author notes that during the 1960s and 1970s, there was an internal influx of migrants into Catalonia, resulting in the new category of *el xarnego*, i.e. a derogatory term used to designate descendants of mixed marriages between Catalans and Spaniards. When, later, socioeconomic changes in the 1990s led to an influx of migrants from old colonies, including Morocco, attitudes towards Moroccan immigration started to shift. This led to a differentiation between *xarnego* and *moro*, with the former enjoying a more privileged position. The author concludes that right-wing media and politicians in contemporary Spain fuel discourses of 'invasions' and

moral panic that lead to a criminalization and marginalization of *moros*, who is placed in opposition to Spanish society and identity.

Chapter 4, by Sabrina Marks and Miye Nadya Tom, focuses on past and present situations of Roma populations in Europe, arguing that the case of Roma populations challenges the modern idea of Europe as homogenous. The authors adopt a postcolonial lens to problematize centuries of state-sanctioned efforts to dominate and eradicate the 'Otherness' of Roma people. The authors claim that "the situation of the Roma is an outstanding example of how coloniality has shaped the idea of not only 'what' Europe is but also 'who' belongs there" (p. 72). The authors note that the Roma are one of the most disadvantaged and marginalized populations, facing dehumanizing stereotypes and severe attempts to control their movement. The authors also point towards the failure of several postcolonial scholars to include Roma histories in their analyses of what Chakrabarty calls 'asymmetrical ignorances'. The authors note how even the label of 'Gypsy' is a false characterization of Roma people, since this is a misnomer based on the idea that they originated from Egypt, whereas linguistic studies yield evidence that they began to migrate from northern India. In being constituted as primitive, resisting modernity and non-settlers, the Roma people are excluded from the construction of 'Europe'. The following captures some of the various efforts in recent history to oppress Roma people that the authors mention: "ethnic profiling in Italy; segregation, discrimination and bullying in schools throughout Europe; mass evictions from their homes in Spain; the expulsion of Roma refugees in France and Germany and forced sterilizations throughout CEE" (p. 70). Moreover, asylum regimes operating under a racist colonial logic are treating Roma people as 'bogus asylum seekers'.

Chapter 5, by Patricia Schor and Egbert Alejandro Martina, problematize an award-winning student anti-polarization campaign in the Netherlands, titled "Dare to be Grey". The authors note how, despite its good intentions, the campaign actually rests on problematic assumptions and discourses. The campaign promotes an anti-extremist attitude through which a spirit of 'togetherness' can be achieved by abandoning the 'black or white' extremes. The authors rightly pick up on the racialized distinction implied by this discourse; for them, the campaign's reference to 'greyness' does not present a non-aligned alternative to black/white thinking, but "actually reinforces the colonial logics of whiteness and anti-Blackness" (p. 76). Moreover, the chapter shows that, by suggesting a kind of 'bothsidesism', the campaign normalizes racial violence by promoting a politics of constraint, which amounts to a post-political (or depoliticized) notion of polarization. According to the authors, beneath the campaign's rootedness in a tradition of 'respectful dialogue' and the Dutch ideology of the *Polder model* (a political metaphor for consensus) lies a disqualification of racialized subjects, which can be seen through racialized subjects suffering racial profiling by police, unjust treatment by public servants, and also in the debate surrounding Zwarte Piet (a Dutch folklore character usually portrayed in blackface and red lipstick). Thus, the authors contend that the campaign's discrediting of anger in the face of racial inequalities prevents the formation of radical black subjectivity. The dominant discourse of such campaigns uses anti-polarization as an attempt to, wittingly or not, curtail anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-capitalist critique. The authors conclude that the campaign's intention to go from black and white to grey actually functions to reproduce white as legitimate and in place, and black as excessive and out of place. This gesture ultimately serves to reinforce a resilient Dutch coloniality.

Chapter 6, by Inês Nascimento Rodrigues, reads the poems of Conceição Lima through the idiom of haunting, ghosts and specters in order to show how they "help to unveil histories, voices and a profoundly shattered Santomean society that remains haunted by the consequences of colonialism" (p. 91). Interestingly, the author indicates that Jacques Derrida's conception of the spectral – itself the basis of an influential analytical perspectives – actually rests on Eurocentric and ahistorical biases. Instead, the author turns to other ways of reading the concept of haunting (such as Esther Peeren's and Achille Mbembe's) so as to challenge homogenizing narratives of the postcolonial nation, in this case the Santomean struggle against the Portuguese. The focus of this chapter is the 1953 Batepá massacre of the *forros*, the Santomean dominant ethno-cultural group. The author notes that the *forros* considered themselves as 'authentic' Santomean, distancing themselves from contract workers who came from other Portuguese colonies to work in the plantations. The involvement of the contract workers in the massacre, and their collaboration with the colonial power, was concealed over time, not least by Santomean nationalists who feared that this information would weaken their struggle against the Portuguese. Lima's poetry often refers to the contract workers in an attempt to narrate nationhood otherwise. The chapter reads the figure of the contract worker as the living dead in Lima's poetry, haunting the nation. The author also draws on Boaventura de Sousa Santos' sociology of absences and emergences, insofar as Lima's poetry gives voice, recognition and agency to these people rendered invisible by hegemonic discourses and narratives of the nation.

Chapter 7, by Elena Brugioni, adopts a postcolonial approach to consider the ambiguities surrounding geo-linguistics, namely, the use of language in constructing a

community, with particular reference to the notion of a Lusophone linguistic community. Brugioni raises critical questions on how the category of 'Lusophone' functions, for example, when university courses classify literature from, say, Angola or Cape Verde as a single literary system of 'Lusophone African literature'. Or when discourses connoting 'possession' or 'betrayal' were invoked as a reaction to Mozambique's admittance to the Commonwealth. This chapter reminds us that the institutional dimension of language foregrounds the colonized/colonizer relationship, and the homogenization and essentialization demanded by the supposed community of the colonized. The chapter closes with an interesting discussion of the notion of community, drawing on the work of Giorgio Agamben and Jean-Luc Nancy, particularly their respective notions of 'the coming community' and 'inoperative community'. Such notions can reanimate our thinking of "a far more decolonized 'postcolonial conviviality'" (p. 110).

Chapter 8, by Sarah Scales, presents an interesting discussion concerning translations of Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs* (*Black Skin, White Masks*), highlighting the important divergences in translation between Charles Lam Markmann's first translation and Richard Philcox's more recent one. Scales demonstrates how such differences in translations matter, particularly from a postcolonial perspective, especially in view of the central role that Fanon's text came to have in Anglophone postcolonial studies. The author indicates instances where Markmann's translation amounts to an assimilationist domestication of the text, where the original text is rendered more readily understandable at the expense of important meanings being lost in the process. For example, Scales notes how Markmann's translation displaces Fanon's emphasis on the lived experience of the black man, does not foreground the

French Caribbean context of Fanon's writing, and repositions Fanon's text in an attempt to show how this text can be applied in the American context of the civil rights movement. This can also be seen in the way that Markmann translates some of Fanon's dialogue in a kind of American South register. Such translation choices can have a questionable effect on the work, "turning it into a text that people *want* to see, rather than the text it is" (p. 121). Towards the end of the chapter, Scales turns to Edward Said's travelling theory, suggesting that understood in this light, the adapted translation can also be seen to have the positive effect of increasing the appeal of Fanon's text in its literary afterlife as it travels to a new American readership. Scales' important conclusion proposes that scholars of postcolonial studies must "reconsider the reliance on English translations of key texts, or at the very least, treat them in a more circumspect and considered manner" (p. 126) in order to appreciate the multilingual nature of postcolonial studies.

Chapter 9, by Alice Brown, examines the postcolonial discourses employed in the reporting of the 2013 French military operation in Mali and its aftermath, namely the hostage crisis in the Algerian town of In Amenas. Brown demonstrates how themes from African colonial history are still recurrent in the contemporary postcolonial world, and that France's foothold in Africa still colours the current situation. This chapter critiques the "false bravado of politicians" (p. 135), as witnessed in the French military operation, which results in a series of further conflicts and crises. The author notes how the media plays a role in this, particularly with its use of 'liberator's discourse' to justify its military actions. Brown argues that the French strategy was that of "a publicity campaign to clear out certain areas, quickly declare victory over the Islamist militants, before moving on and leaving the Malian army with the arduous task of re-establishing order and control" (pp.

137-8). This chapter concludes by suggesting that between the imperialist exceptionalism shown by the French postcolonial foreign policy and the new form of domestic colonization brought about by African despots, "the unfortunate result is an every-deteriorating socioeconomic plight for the masses, who have seen little change in the past thirty years" (p. 142).

Chapter 10, by Lars Jensen, analyses the Danish entry for a 2012 architecture biennale, titled 'Possible Greenland'. Jensen contextualizes the Greenland question by highlighting that despite being politically autonomous, Greenland is still financially dependent on the Danish state. Jensen's chapter proceeds by highlighting the internal contradictions and ambiguities implied in the 'Possible Greenland' project – including in the discourse of the project's curator Minik Rosing, a popular Greenlandic geologist – between messages of modernization against preservation, or sustainability against neoliberal dictates. Jensen points towards three crucial challenges that Greenland faces, which the Danish pavilion identifies. These are climate change issues, evidenced by the retreat of the glacier; local demographic challenges whereby inhabitants of small settlements struggle to attract inhabitants in order to be eligible for funding; and the resource boom predicament. Jensen's chapter concludes how pointing out that, despite its attempts, 'Possible Greenland' did not manage to adequately face the inherently contradictory aspects of neoliberal modernity faced by Greenland, and that the curatorial language surrounding the exhibition still reflects the Danish modernization project.

Chapter 11, by Sarah Arens, presents a postcolonial reading of Belgium, particularly as some of its municipalities, such as Molenbeek, have drawn a lot of attention in view of the 2016 bombings. Arens discusses how contemporary Belgium is still full of icons and

monuments that reflect its colonial past, such as monuments celebrating colonialism. This chapter consider a 2015 film (Bilall Falah's *Black*) and a 2011 novel (Patrick François' *La dernière larme du lac Kivu* [*The Last Tear of the Kivu Lake*]). What Arens highlights through these artistic productions is how young male bodies of colour, in this case Belgian-born and of Moroccan heritage, experience mobility in complex postcolonial Belgian spaces. The author maintains that, in the case of *Black*, "the film's representation of black male characters and its problematic gender politics tap into long-established and mediatized stereotypes thereof," (p. 169) with the film's one-dimensional portrayal of certain characters reinforcing "a racist discourse of atavistic violence reverberating with the rhetoric of savagery and barbarism" (p. 171). With regard to François' novel, the author argues that it offers a bleak picture by "presenting the only mobility of black male bodies that state power allows as them being driven around in a police van" (p. 174). Ultimately, Arens concludes that the mediatized discourses contribute to constructing some bodies as belonging to certain neighborhoods while being prevented from other spaces.

Chapter 12, by Dorota Kołodziejczyk, discusses what she calls the "postcolonial backlash" (p. 177) in populist right-wing discourses in Poland. This chapter conducts an interesting analysis of how the right took over certain postcolonial terms and notions, such as 'decolonization', 'self-colonization' and 'hegemon' in order to reinforce their right-wing politics and attempts at nation-building. In the right-wing discourse and rhetoric, the 'self-colonizing subject' comes to stand for that who is open to European liberal projects and ideologies, while the 'true national subject' is the one who constructs their identity in opposition to liberal concepts of civil rights or personal choices. In this way, a politics of *ressentiment* is "used to

legitimate radical nationalism as a postcolonial reclamation of the self and (denied) authenticity" (p. 179). Such right-wing media also promote the idea of the EU as a 'colonizer', thus tapping into desires for unbounded sovereignty. Kołodziejczyk concludes the chapter by turning to the work of Laclau and Mouffe to show how contemporary right-wing Polish politicians are making use of powerful 'empty signifiers' that ultimately have an exclusionary function. Interestingly, the chapter closes with a reference to an observation by George Lakoff that "the 'conservatives' have a much more effective communication policy than the 'progressives'" (p. 189), particularly with regard to how "the 'conservatives' are more assertive about resorting to the higher grounds of (their) value system than 'progressives' who tend to downplay their participation in the 'progressive' value system" (p. 190). This is an interesting insight which, as Kołodziejczyk argues, should invite a European re-animation of the ethical dimension of a 'common dream', if only as a counter-discourse geared towards radical democracy and the ethics of sharing.

Chapter 13, by Zoran Lee Pecic, is an interesting addition in a collection about postcolonial Europe in that it takes China as its case study, which Pecic studies through an analysis of the portrayal of queerness in the 1996 film by Zhang Yuan, *East Palace, West Palace*. Specifically, Pecic also adopts the theoretical notion of 'thirdspace' from Edward Soja in order to describe the portrayal of queerness in this film as a "space caught in-between two views of non-normative sexuality in China: the 'progressive' global and the 'authentic' local" (p. 193). Pecic's chapter demonstrates how this Chinese film challenges and problematizes Euro-American notions of queerness and 'coming out' narratives'. In doing so, the film is presented by Pecic as destabilizing notions of a liberated modern West as opposed to a local and

oppressed 'tradition'. Thus, the film is read as an opportunity "for investigating Chinese queerness without adhering to polarizing discourses of the West and the East" (p. 212).

The volume closes with a brief but highly incisive afterword by Gurminder K. Bhambra, in which she offers her take on the notion of postcolonial Europe. Bhambra points out some of the grievous malaises that haunt contemporary Europe, from crises of austerity, to refugee 'crises', exacerbated far-right politics, suspicion about multiculturalism, and rising levels of inequality. In view of this, a postcolonial Europe "is the Europe that disappears from view in the standard narratives that present either cosmopolitan accounts of Europe or nationalist ones" (pg. 216). Bhambra importantly highlights the colonialism at the heart of the construction of Europe, pointing out that "countries that came to constitute the European Economic Community (EEC) and then eventually the EU were not, for the most part, nations, but rather empires with not only colonial histories but also colonial presents at the moment of European integration" (p. 217). For this reason, Bhambra argues that it is untenable to speak of the European project without foregrounding this, not least because the unification of Europe went hand in hand with a joint colonization of Africa, such that "the European project cannot be understood outside of its own colonial ambitions and intent" (p. 218). Bhambra concludes by critiquing the EU's construction of the influx of refugees as a 'crisis', suggesting that "if we do not wish refugees at our borders, then one thing that could be done is to lobby our governments to end their complicity in producing the situations that create refugees" (p. 219).

Despite my attempt at providing some engagement with all chapters in this volume, it is hard to capture the full richness of these chapters which, in their diversity, offer ample insights on the historical circumstances that

go some way to explaining the contemporary postcolonial European situation. Readers of this volume will be benefiting from detailed and nuanced studies of highly pertinent matters structuring contemporary political life. The chapters in this volume remind us of the perils of forgetting not just European colonial pasts but present imperial hang-ups. *Postcolonial Europe* makes for an edifying experience to newcomers to the field as well as more specialist readers.

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