



Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Crises of Multiculturalism: Racism in a Neoliberal Age* by Alana Lentini and Gavan Titley

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social theory, research, and analysis. The history of qualitative sociology includes several projects with similar goals, whereby scholars present alternatives to mainstream ways of conducting social analysis. These include Harold Garfinkel's ethnomethodology, Dorothy Smith's work on feminist standpoint theory, Glaser and Strauss' grounded theory, and Michael Burawoy's extended case method. However, in each of the latter cases, the authors exemplified the application and utility of their paradigms with comprehensive elaborations of their approach, ones now regarded as archetypes of well-crafted social analysis.

In contrast, because this book is more intellectually wedded to philosophical analysis (teaching by telling) and less immersed in field research (teaching by showing), its presentation is less capable of convincing confused or skeptical readers of CR's value and aesthetic appeal. Consequently, the description of the CR approach and its application to social research generally and migration studies more specifically remains abstract, stressing general principles for conducting research and analysis rather than demonstrating concrete techniques that researchers can readily apply in topics of their own choosing.

While the author courageously criticizes many of the most influential social theorists associated with qualitative methods, including Foucault, Blumer, and Goffman, his reliance on secondary sources rather than original texts as the basis of his critiques tends to undermine his arguments. Moreover, the book's key points are often expressed in lengthy quotes from the writings of other CR scholars rather than in the author's own words. This makes the discussion less direct and less powerful than it might have been otherwise. Finally, the quality of the book's copy editing is sloppy, revealing frequent misspellings and making portions of the text incomprehensible. Many works cited in the text do not appear in the bibliography.

In sum, *Qualitative Methods in Migration Studies: A Critical Realist Perspective* introduces readers to a new approach to social research and immigration studies. Its high level of abstraction, lack of in-depth applications, and dearth of specific techniques that can be readily applied to on-going projects

means that readers may encounter challenges as they attempt to apply the book's lessons to their own research.

The Crises of Multiculturalism: Racism in a Neoliberal Age, by **Alana Lentin** and **Gavan Titley**. London, UK: Zed Books, 2011. 285pp. \$27.95 paper. ISBN: 9781848135819.

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If you think, like I do, that multiculturalism is an even more complicated and contentious topic than most scholars and lay people realize, then you will probably appreciate the scale, attention to detail, and thoroughly critical thrust of this new volume from Zed Books.

The authors Alana Lentin and Gavan Titley previously edited a volume on the politics of diversity in Europe. In this book, they elaborate their own critique of multiculturalism. Defying the usual mainstream political binaries, Lentin and Titley argue that the erstwhile progressive movement has "become a central site for coded debates about belonging, race, legitimacy, and social futures in a globalized, neoliberal era" (p. 12). If you think of Malcolm X's famous line about racism (that it is like a Cadillac—they make a new one every year), then you have a pretty good sense of what to expect.

The range and tenacity of the critique is impressive. Chapter Two, for example, explains how, in an ostensibly post-racial, colorblind era, much public talk about multiculturalism reduces problems of race and racism to questions of "culture"—a frame that both minimizes the gravity of the challenges of multiculturalism and reduces them to the agency and choice of otherwise marginalized, dis-empowered groups. Chapter Three reverses the political polarities to criticize the conventional liberal attack on multiculturalism for its supposed misplaced emphasis on tolerance and excessive catering to group separatism (which, among other things, misses the problems of social inequality that should accompany concerns about solidarity). Chapter Four situates

multiculturalism in the context of media coverage of transnationalism, suggesting that coverage of immigration and integration debates gets caught up in other political issues and agendas. Chapter Five suggests that neoliberal distinctions between “good diversity” and “bad diversity” actually serve to produce and reinforce subtler, new commonsense racial distinctions and hierarchies. And the final chapter contends that the now common mainstream critique of various “integrationist policies” depends on an exaggerated, stylized, and fundamentally inaccurate vision of multiculturalism’s orientation to racial identities and affiliations.

The Crisis of Multiculturalism will not be an easy read for American social scientists accustomed to literal prose and dispassionate analysis. The writing is deliberately argumentative and often ironic. For instance, the first lines of the introduction read: “Multiculturalism, whatever it was, has failed. Multiculturalism, wherever it was, has imploded. Multiculturalism, whenever it was, has gifted us the pathologies that gird our new certainties” (p. 11). In terms of methodology, the project does not employ any formal case selection, data collection, or analytic technique but rather is driven by interpretive claims which are often a dense mix of high theory and lower brow, popular cultural references. (“Mirrors are not innocent metaphors,” as Lentin and Titley write in one representative discussion of veils (p. 93), “as both Lacan and Snow White would advise.”) And the vast majority of the empirical material that constitutes the objects of analysis and evidence of claims comes from Europe, and is focused far more on cultural politics—head scarves, minarets, cartoons, and campaign speeches—than actual laws, social programs, or public policies.

None of this is necessarily a criticism. As someone who only dabbles in European politics and culture, I found many of these examples and extended discussions edifying on their own terms. And every page has analogues, overlaps, and implications for multiculturalism more generally, both in the United States and elsewhere. But I also found myself wondering if I was always drawing the appropriate conclusions and correct generalizations, especially given some of the

particularities of the European conception and experience of multiculturalism.

One of the most distinctive features of multiculturalism in Europe, or at least as it is portrayed in this volume, is that it is taken to refer mostly, if not exclusively to, race and racism. (The subtitle is, in this sense, quite literal and precise.) Missing here are referents to other forms of social difference, exclusion, and marginalization that multiculturalism can and often does refer to in the United States: sexuality and gender, for example, or ethnicity, ability, or even class. Religion should probably be mentioned as well; although religious communities and practices—especially Islamic—are very much a focus of the book, these discussions are usually folded into categories and conceptions of race as opposed to being seen as having unique cultural bases and dynamics of their own.

Perhaps if I were a more confident cross-cultural scholar and if we had a book review format that allowed for more extended treatment, such contrasts would lead me into a more thorough comparative discussion: speculating about how racial, ethnic, and other heretofore outsiders who have benefited from various multicultural programs and reforms in recent years might have a different view of much of this. But this being the format that we have and the scholar that I am, I will have to let other readers and reviewers develop such points. And I certainly hope that they will because I am convinced that the argument Alana Lentin and Gavan Titley make—that multiculturalism, that once progressive movement, has come to reinforce the very racial stereotypes and inequalities it was originally intended to contest—will be a challenging and useful starting point for all future conversations about multiculturalism in the contemporary, global world.