



Sabine Broeck, Carsten Junker (eds.)

**POSTCOLONIALITY –
DECOLONIALITY –
BLACK CRITIQUE**

Joints and Fissures

campus

Postcoloniality—Decoloniality—Black Critique

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Postcoloniality—Decoloniality—Black Critique: Preface

Sabine Broeck, Carsten Junker

In recent years, monographs and anthologies have presented rather focused interventions of postcolonial or decolonial critique into the landscape of European and transatlantic humanities and social sciences, mainly in the United States and Britain, and we can also register a growing number of publications interested in revitalizing post-Fanonian Black Critique. This collection presents a different approach. Rather than mapping the respective fields and emphasizing the fissures between them,¹ we propose to work through and make visible the possible points of dialogue and mutual recognition, that is, the joints between those fields.

Accordingly, we do not structure the volume along the lines of any of these recognizable approaches. There is neither a chronological nor a spatial order inherent to them. Since these approaches have always overlapped, we have organized the book along the lines of topical foci:

Epistemic Repercussions
Ethical Reassessments
Disciplinary Reconfigurations
Cultural Revisions.

The select articles do not claim to be representative of their fields; they are presented here because they share a sense of putting an epistemic critique of coloniality and *enslavism* respectively at the center of their analyses.² This does not go to say that the authors and editors do not see possible controversies between these contributions. However, we want to vitalize the

1 In the German-speaking context, see in particular Castro Varela and Dhawan (2005); Ha et al. (2007); Kilomba (2008); Reuter and Villa (2009); Boatcă and Spohn (2010); Ha (2010); Conrad and Randeria (2012); Kerner (2012); Mignolo (2012); Reuter and Karentzos (2012); Steyerl and Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2012).

2 For the term “enslavism,” see Broeck in this volume.

productive lines of tension between them and thus rather foreground possible mutually beneficial readings across seemingly clear-cut borders.

Accordingly, this transversal impetus is put to work here so that the articles signify within and *beyond* their own respective (sub)disciplines, as they are in no particular order: Sociology, Literature, Cultural Studies, Political Science, Philosophy, Gender Studies, and History. In the same spirit, this collection assembles perspectives that would traditionally be contained within particular area-studies paradigms such as Asian Studies, American Studies, or European Studies, even though they certainly partake in the debates of those configurations. Thereby we suggest a critique of modernity from a range of perspectives, to avoid exclusionary logics that might constrict the fields and would thus create obstacles to encompassing modes of analysis and critique.

Our goal is to tease out the epistemic implications of postcolonial, decolonial, and Black critical lines of investigation. This allows for possibilities of broadening the analytical horizon for a critique of the sociopolitical, cultural, and philosophical legacies of humanism and modernity in our current moment. Contrary to much postmodern intellectual debate that keeps reinstating the teleological, universalist logic of Enlightenment, even when calling critically for a more radical realization of its ideals,³ the contributions in this collection share the assumption that Enlightenment modernity cannot be thought without its “darker side[s]” (Mignolo 2011), that is coloniality and enslavism. In brief: it is white humanism that is the antagonist.

The sources of this epistemic endeavor are manifold. As our articles make manifest, they range from a mediation of *indigenous* knowledges, subaltern studies, third-world liberation movements, and Black struggles. While the interventions in this collection are situated in the wake of the generative paradigm of writing back to Empire from within and beyond metropolitan centers, they acknowledge and warn of the risk of appropriating non-hegemonic positions for postmodern white introspection.

The history of the Institute for Postcolonial and Transcultural Studies (INPUTS) has been the history of critiquing humanism and modernity along those very lines. INPUTS, founded as a cross-disciplinary venture at the Faculty of Linguistics and Literary Studies at the University of Bremen

³ The debate between Jacques Derrida and Jürgen Habermas is a case in point, with the former consistently critiquing reason and the latter arguing in defense of reason, modernity, and the legacy of European Enlightenment. See Thomassen (2006).

in 2000, has made its name with an epistemic practice that emphasizes necessary and urgent disciplinary and conceptual crossovers. The book is thus a mirror product of more than ten years of conferences, workshops, and individual scholarship, and—by putting the manifold perspectives that crossed at INPUTS into one collection—it confirms and enriches the prerogatives of the institute.

Based on the respective authors' own summaries of their contributions, what follows is a condensed synopsis of the book's content.

Epistemic Repercussions

Walter Dignolo's chapter "Further Thoughts on (De)Coloniality" places Decoloniality (decolonial thinking, decolonial options) vis-à-vis Postcoloniality and Black Critique, not with the intention to evaluate which one is preferable (for whom?) but in order to identify differences as well as commonalities in orientation. As Dignolo claims, the three projects walk in the same direction, but through different paths nourished by the differential memories of colonial wounds (racism and genderism—the social classification of sexuality) and, in consequence, different and complementary ways of decolonial healings.

In his contribution titled "Location and Social Thought in the Black: A Testimony to Africana Intellectual Tradition," Kwame Nimako describes and evaluates the distinctive Africana intellectual tradition that flows across Africa and the African diaspora. He argues that the context of this intellectual tradition is corrective and prescriptive; the content, however, is historical, structural, and developmental. This tradition flows from what Nimako refer to as parallel lives and intertwined belongings, which highlights how people who share the same space have different experiences and memories. The common threads that run through this intellectual and political tradition are 'race,' humiliation, slavery, colonialism, and memory.

Robert Stam and Ella Shohat's essay "Race in Translation: The Red, Black, and White Atlantics" draws from the work for their recently published *Race in Translation: Culture Wars around the Postcolonial Atlantic*, where the authors argue that the transnational movement of ideas is multidirectional, asymmetrical, and uneven. The authors offer two examples of this movement of ideas, first in terms of the Red Atlantic as referring to the

pervasive presence of the figure of the Indian as exemplar of freedom for French and American revolutionaries and for Brazilian modernists; secondly, in terms of the travelling debates around multiculturalism, particularly in France and the U.S. The authors note a certain right-left convergence in the dismissal of identity politics first by the French and American right, but also by the left as represented by intellectuals like Pierre Bourdieu and Slavoj Žižek. The essay argues that this convergence arises from a certain blindness to the links between colonialism and racism. Throughout, Shohat and Stam delineate the red-black-white triad forged by colonialism and slavery in order to cast a prismatic light on a shared history both of colonial exploitation and of cultural achievement in the Red, Black, and White Atlantic.

This section closes with a contribution by Rinaldo Walcott. Titled “The Problem of the Human: Black Ontologies and ‘the Coloniality of Our Being,’” the essay addresses the ways in which anti-blackness continually produces Black peoples as out of place and the consequences that result from such out of place-ness. But this essay is also about the ways in which what Walcott has come to call a *pure decolonial project* remains an impossible project if the deathly production of anti-blackness is not central to future and more hopeful political desires.

Ethical Reassessments

In “Legacies of Enslavism and White Abjection,” Sabine Broeck addresses the humiliate-ability, the enslave-ability, the rape-ability, the abuse-ability, and the ship-ability of Black people in the discourses and practices that shape European white collective memory as well as the contemporary repertoire of thinking Blackness in the white European mind. These discourses and practices add up to a *longue durée* of white abjection and un-humanization of Black being dating from the early modern period, through Enlightenment modernity into the postmodern moment. The ‘slave’s’ assumed ‘slavishness,’ that enduring topos in which Blackness has been contained in white philosophy from Hegel to de Beauvoir has blatantly disregarded the histories of Haiti, and other locally and globally important acts, practices, and Black discourses of Black rebellion, and of Black freedom narratives, and has kept negating all forms of Black life. As

Broeck argues, it persists in contemporary modes of un-humanization of Black being which—like the un-mournability of lost African lives in the Mediterranean—need to be analytically connected to early modern transatlantic trajectories of enslavement.

In her text “Europe’s Colonialism, Deolonality, and Racism,” Marina Gržinić puts forward an analysis of Europe, its colonialism, and present coloniality with reference to Achille Mbembe, a philosopher and public intellectual, who published a provocative book titled *Critique de la raison nègre* (Critique of Negro Reason) in 2013. Mbembe, one of the key figures of critical Black thought, refers directly to Europe in this book. As formulated by Mbembe, “Europe is no longer the center of gravity of the world” (2013, 9, trans. M. G.). Gržinić argues that this downgrade opens new possibilities—but also carries dangers—for critical thinking.

As Ina Kerner notes in her contribution “Countering the Legacies of Colonial Racism: Delinking and the Renewal of Humanism,” legacies of colonial racism and strategies of resisting and possibly overcoming these legacies are a prevalent topic within the traditions of postcolonial, decolonial, as well as of black thought. Kerner’s chapter focuses on three select authors—Walter Dignolo, Achille Mbembe, and Paul Gilroy—whose work is of particular importance in this regard. It addresses the ways in which each of them draws on the work of Frantz Fanon and discusses the authors’ respective take on how current, persisting or re-actualized forms of colonial racism might best be countered—by modes of colonial delinking in the case of Walter Dignolo, and by constructing new forms of humanism in the cases of Achille Mbembe and Paul Gilroy.

Madina Tlostanova’s article “Why the Postsocialist Cannot Speak: On Caucasian Blacks, Imperial Difference, and Decolonial Horizons” maps thematic, theoretical, and methodological intersections between what she terms the decolonial option, postcolonial theory, and Black critique. These discourses are regarded through the lens of the emerging postsocialist discourse which adapts them to its own local history. The paper focuses on decolonial categories relevant for the conceptualization of the ex-second world in the global geopolitical architecture. Tlostanova demonstrates that the postcolonial critical apparatus is deflected when mechanically applied to the post-Soviet material. Focusing on post-Soviet racial discourses, she examines in detail the exemplary case of the Caucasians—the symbolic Blacks of the Russian/Soviet empire and today’s Russia.

As Frank B. Wilderson III claims in his chapter titled “The Black Liberation Army and the Paradox of Political Engagement,” Assata Shakur’s 1973 prison communiqué is exemplary of the paradox immanent in any recourse to the analogical terrain of the Symbolic for the articulation of a Black political position. The violence constitutive of the Black-qua-Slave voids access to ‘transindividual objects’ of prior spatial (e.g. ‘land’) or temporal (e.g. ‘heritage’) plenitude—real or imaginable—that both triangulate intra-Human (non-Black) conflict and *fortify* their relationality or common subjectivity. Since the narrative structure of political discourse cannot translate gratuitous violence (Real) from ‘violated’ flesh (Imaginary) to its authorized touchstones (Symbolic), it, like the Marxists and postcolonialists who deploy its grammar, is inherently anti-Black.

Disciplinary Reconfigurations

Manuela Boatcă opens this section with a chapter titled “Inequalities Unbound: Transregional Entanglements and the Creolization of Europe,” arguing that inequalities have been the result of transnational processes and transregional entanglements between shifting metropolitan and peripheral areas. To this end, it focuses on the historical continuities between “creolization” as a term coined to describe processes specific to the Caribbean and what is being analyzed today under the label of the “transnationalization” of (Western) Europe. In showing how the transregional flows of people, goods, and capital established transnational links between inequality patterns between Europe and the Caribbean as early as the sixteenth century, the paper subsequently posits the linking of colonialism to (post)coloniality as an essential element in of the endeavor of creolizing Europe.

Challenging a broadly accepted thesis, according to which Sociology and Postcolonial Studies are separated and irreconcilable fields of study, Sérgio Costa’s contribution “Social Sciences and North-South-Asymmetries: Towards a Global Sociology” discusses how Postcolonial Studies can promote a renewal of sociological knowledge production. This argument is developed in three steps: first, the paper presents some difficulties Sociology has recently faced in order to develop categories to analyze social processes beyond national borders. The second section discusses three differ-