

**Martina Tißberger, Gabriele Dietze, Daniela Hrzán, and Jana Husmann-Kastein, eds.: *Weiß - Weißsein – Whiteness: Kritische Studien zu Gender und Rassismus: Critical Studies on Gender and Racism*. Berlin: Peter Lang, 2006**

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1 This much-needed collection of German- and English-language essays on Critical Whiteness Studies combines different disciplinary and thematic approaches to the topic and explores this relatively new field in German academia. The articles - all of them well-structured and of readable length - interrogate a number of important (political) questions: What are the blind spots of German feminism when confronted with its own hegemonic position? Can Critical Whiteness Studies serve as a tool to approach the structural racisms that so are so easily neglected when racism is time and again only equated with right wing extremism and Neo-Nazi brutality? And how can we clarify the fact that race is not something that applies only to racially and ethnically marked people, but has a lot to do with Whiteness and Occidentalism?

2 Martina Tißberger's two essays try to shed some light on the psychological effects of Whiteness or, to be more specific, the absence of an informed White perspective in dominant German psychological discourses. In her first German-language essay, "Die Psyche der Macht, der Rassismus der Psychologie und die Psychologie des Rassismus," Tißberger explores the history of her discipline and its entanglement with racist practices such as intelligence tests. On a smaller scale, she also records the defense mechanisms of White German psychotherapists she interviewed on their understanding of race and racism in her second, English-language contribution, "The Project(ion) of 'Civilization' and the Counter-Transferences of Whiteness." Tißberger demonstrates how resistant (German) psychology still is to a critical understanding of Whiteness as a privileged subject position.

3 Nado Aveling in "More than Just Skin Color: Reading Whiteness across Different Locations" explores notions of Whiteness across age and place. Collecting data from conversations she conducted with White university-educated Australian women in their mid-thirties, White Australian school children (both male and female) aged 12 to 17 and White German university students in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties on White subjectivity and racial privilege, she was continually being confronted with the groups' power-evasiveness, colour-blindness, and the general difficulty of speaking about Whiteness. Especially the group

of German students repeatedly attributed their paralysation in the face of race, racism and Whiteness to the history of Nazi ideology and German post-war education on it.

4 Jana Husmann-Kastein's article on "Schwarz-Weiß. Farb- und Geschlechtersymbolik in den Anfängen der Rassenkonstruktionen" examines the European tradition of black and white imagery and deconstructs it as a gendered system of thought and representation that is fundamentally linked to a specifically occidental dualism. Those symbolic traditions are at work in European racist discourses, which construct the colors black and white as anthropological categories. Focusing on the 16th up to the 18th century Husmann-Kastein explores the implications of these color symbolics for a gender-specific racism.

5 In her text "Weiße Körper als Fetisch: Konsequenzen aus der Ausblendung des deutschen Kolonialismus," Isabell Lorey focuses on the problem that gender still largely constitutes the primary category in much of German feminist research. The failure to properly address Germany's colonial past has also helped to conceal White women's status as accomplices. Feminist research has centered so exclusively on the "fetish" of the devalued White female body that it has neglected to understand its hegemonic position in terms of race. Drawing on Foucault's theory of *gouvernementality*, Lorey seeks to develop a feminist perspective that does not mourn the purported devaluation of the body but that accounts for the different functions of its valorization.

6 Sabine Broeck's remarks on "The Subject of Enlightenment: Notations Towards an Epistemology of Slavery, Gender and Modernity" delineate some of her theoretical assumptions as part of an extended research project to deal with slavery, gender and modernity. Broeck criticizes the implications of White Western gender theory in the self-articulations of transatlantic (post)modernity. Moreover, she demands a self-critical reflection of the epistemological premises of White feminist and gender theory, which in her view uncritically employ a concept of the modern enlightened subject that is deeply entangled in colonialism, slavery and racism.

7 Daniela Hrzán's essay on "Re(Discovering) FGC: Anthropology, Whiteness, Feminism" analyzes discourses on Female Genital Cutting in US-American cultural anthropology concentrating on their relevance for the genealogy of debates around this issue. Also, she investigates the roles of categories such as Whiteness and gender in the production of knowledge on FGC.

8 In her reading "Rassendiskurse in den Nachkriegszeit: Winnetou in Bad Segeberg" of the immensely popular theatrical representation of the *Winnetou* novels by the German author Karl May, Kathrin Sieg demonstrates how the "Bad Segeberg Festspiele" helped to re-

establish a German national identity in post-WWII Germany. Sieg focuses on how a German White male identity was purged from the collective guilt by being portrayed as the brother and defender of North-American Native Americans. She also discusses the "heterosexualization of the 'Wild West'" that is required to successfully establish this idealized brotherhood between the races. By importing an American model of heroic masculinity German masculinity could thus be re-centered.

9 Michaela Wünsch examines the *Halloween* horror movie series. Her text "The Horror of Invisibility in the Stalker Film," explores how the usually Black encoded horror villain (such as the monster or vampire) is replaced by a new White protagonist. The stalker horror genre has brought forward an explicitly White protagonist: Michael Myers, the killer whose face is hidden behind a white mask and around whose gruesome resurrection the series is constructed. In this context, Whiteness becomes a powerful "empty signifier" (172). Wünsch explores filmic techniques such as the subjective camera, the cutting and slicing of the image as a means to depict this specific "horror of whiteness."

10 Vron Ware's "Mothers of Invention: Good Hearst, Intelligent Minds and Subversive Acts" combines a reading of Lillian Smith and Malcom X's autobiography with Spike Lee's movie *Malcom X* and the positions put forward by the editors and contributors of *Race Traitor* for inquiring into the possibility of practices abolishing Whiteness as a system of dominance. Ware demands that theoretical insights gained by Critical Whiteness Studies must have the potential for transformative and interventionist social practices and should speak to and from a specific history of "political responses to race-thinking by those categorized as white" (182).

11 Nanna Heidenreich's "Von Bio- und anderen Deutschen" starts with a reading of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Angst essen Seele auf* (*Ali: Fear eats the Soul*). She is concerned with the visibility of *Ausländer* (foreigners) in German cultural discourse. In this context, Heidenreich speaks of a "deutschen Ausländerdiskurs" (203). Germanness and being White are equated time and again, thereby producing fatal blind spots.

12 Finally, Gabriel Dietze reconstructs the history of Critical Whiteness Studies and proposes her model of Critical Occidentalism as a mode of hegemonic self-reflection that might be more applicable to a deconstructive analysis of European and especially German practices of racist Othering.

13 All in all, *Weiß - Weißsein - Whiteness* is a recommendable and significant contribution to the relatively young field of German Critical Whiteness Studies. In a short time span a number of important books, such as this collection (but also the 2006 collection

*Mythen, Masken und Subjekte. Kritische Weißseinsforschung in Deutschland.* Maureen Maisha Eggers, Grada Kilomba, Peggy Piesche, and Susan Arndt, eds. Münster: Unrast, 2006) prove that Critical Whiteness Studies are an expanding field of research. The price of 42 Euros might not make the book easily attainable for some, but it is definitely a must read for (German) scholars focusing on Whiteness, racism and gender theory as well as on reflections of scientific knowledge practices and academic genealogies. Especially its critical focus on the intersections of race and gender make this book interesting both from a gender perspective as well as from a Critical Whiteness perspective.