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Review

**Heidi S. Mirza and Cynthia Joseph, editors,
*Black and Postcolonial Feminisms in New Times:
Researching Educational Inequalities*
(New York: Routledge, 2010)**

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In the edited volume *Black and Postcolonial Feminisms in New Times*, scholars from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean living in Britain, America, Canada, and Australia committed to intersectional analysis and complex theorizing of power structures focus on particular issues

within educational research. Published as a special issue of the journal *Race, Ethnicity and Education* (volume 12, issue 1), the individual contributors employ the understanding of systematic power relations and othering of black women of black feminist thought and the (re) production of knowledge, difference, and power of postcolonial feminisms. To claim that black and postcolonial feminisms are able to make meaningful political coalitions in the struggle against racism, sexism and imperialism, editor Mirza contends that it is imperative to employ strategic multiplicity and polyvocality as female scholars of color while investigating the reproductions of raced, classed and gendered boundaries and inequalities in the particularities of black and ethnicised women's lives (2-3).

The contributions in this book take up the task by exploring a diversity of educational contexts – higher education, multiculturalism in schools, representations of education, race and gender in the media – while using the variety of tools and methodologies available to black and postcolonial feminist scholars, for example ethnographies, embodied autobiography, the storytelling of critical race theory or critical embodied theorizing. Doing so, the authors provide new insights and perspectives on the impact of intersections of power, ideology and identity in the lives of black and ethnicised women from different globalised locations and in different educational settings, and introduce new complexities into questions of identity, experience and resistance.

The more multifaceted a particular context is the stronger is the need for a complex intersectional analysis of power and difference in ethnographic work. Cynthia Joseph demonstrates this in her chapter on identity practices of young Malaysian women who identify as Malay-Muslim, Chinese, and Indian. Their identity negotiations in cultural and educational spaces are marked by strategic positioning as well as neo-colonial economic restrictions. The

complex articulations of religious, cultural and classed identities within affirmative action educational and economical policies of Malaysia point towards the need of analyzing particularities of agency and success. This is echoed by Njoke Wane, who explores notions of success in the experiences of black Canadian women of African descent in higher education. Wane points out the intersection between black feminist theory and postcolonial theory which allows for a heterogeneous particularity that fosters articulation of black indigenous epistemologies and definitions of success.

Kalwant Bopal provides an analysis of fluid identity constructions and negotiations of groups and belongings in the investigation of dowry practices among a variety of female Asian students in the UK. She finds that dynamic and complex identity processes manifest in constant negotiations and exclusions and multiple group identifications. Bopal also emphasizes the value of insider-outsider perspectives of the researcher, in which a black feminist perspective enables a standpoint that allows for knowledge production as well as empowerment of marginalized persons (37). An illuminating analysis of the representation and regulation of the black female body is found in Uvanney Maylor's chapter investigating the experiences of being a black female researcher. Mis/recognition shapes the identification and positionality of black female experience, and resilience and resistance are possible by tapping into and claiming personal embodied experiences.

A compelling and sharp example of embodied theorizing is found in Sara Ahmed's chapter, in which she investigates the problems and paradoxes of being and doing diversity in organizations, particularly higher education settings. Difference and desire are played out on racialized bodies, as they are sought to portray certain images of a post-racist embrace of

difference. Yet for the person embodying this politicized image, it comes with the double-bind of being the token to change the public image of the institutions brand and being silenced when exposing racism in organizational structures. Theorizing through embodied experience, diversity is exposed as a trope for racism and institutional violence. Critically analyzing diversity, Ahmed names it a “technology of happiness” (46) and a “technology for not hearing” (47). Diversity as a technology serves the image management of an institution that thus can represent itself as committed to equality while at the same time ignoring and/or concealing racist practices and embedded structures of white privilege. Asserting that the ongoing nature of racism is obscured by the demand for positive stories of inclusivity and diversity, Ahmed theorizes anger and the so-called angry black feminist as a method that exposes violence, racism, and the violence in racism. As black bodies serve as signifiers in social relationships, black women can find in their embodied experience the tools for powerful analysis of and resistance to racism and sexism when anger is constructed as agency, creative imagination, epistemic mode, and resource for survival.

Some essays serve more explicitly in defense of the value of black and postcolonial feminisms, for example Suki Ali’s chapter that investigates black feminist pedagogies in British higher education through postcolonial paradigms. She argues for robust and contingent responses to racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, ableism and religiophobia, and sees in a postcolonial black feminist perspective a way to incorporate critical and reflexive analysis that enables political action (84).

For the religious scholar, the important implications are within the aim of the book: to provide research of educational settings as an important site of investigations of into the power dynamics of marginalization and identity constructions of disenfranchised communities,

particularly women. Convincingly, black and postcolonial feminisms are presented as diverse toolkits for the exploration of marginal identity and embodied experiences of difference. Intersectional analysis provides alternative epistemologies that contribute to producing genealogical accounts of racialized female experience. Some chapters (i.e. Oesterreich's case study of black female youth identity construction) might provide stepping points for the religious scholar to think about agency and social justice struggles if one is attentive to the ways in which religious/spiritual issues are also (indirectly) highlighted in discussions of culture and neo-colonial educational power dynamics.

Overall, this book is a useful compilation demonstrating the possibilities of analyzing particular contexts intersectionally to contribute to global coalition building in social justice struggles via alternative knowledge production. This volume provides the interested scholar with methodologies and research findings that on the one hand points (with a few exceptions) to a noted absence of religious dimensions or a folding of religion into culture in many educational research designs. On the other hand, it gives religious scholars powerful examples of intersectional analysis that aid in concerning and constructing engaged praxis and reflexive theorizing. It is noteworthy that the essays drawing more strongly from black feminist perspectives (i.e., Wane) seem to be able to include issues of religion and spirituality more easily into their discussion than others. This is not so much a criticism of the particular contributions in this volume as an observed general need for the sector of religion and spirituality to be incorporated more explicitly to make investigations of anti-colonial struggles and resistance more complex.