

**Sharmilla Beezmohun, ed.** *Continental Shifts, Shifts in Perception*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016. ix + 180 pp. \$71.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4438-8824-0.

**Reviewed by** Priscilla Layne (University of North Carolina)

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*Continental Shifts* is one of four collections of essays that have been published based on five international conferences by the AfroEurope@ns: Culturas e Identidades Negras en Europa research team. This volume is specifically based on the conference that took place in London in 2013. As such, unfortunately some of the essays still reflect the informality of a conference paper. The volume covers an impressive range, with essays on a number of countries including Ireland, Portugal, and Sweden; however, the focus is primarily on western Europe and there are no essays that address eastern European countries. Nevertheless, there are several countries represented about which we hear relatively little regarding AfroEuropeans. Therefore, the volume is best suited for those with preexisting knowledge of AfroEuropean history, as it provides interesting snapshots of local AfroEuropean populations for those who would like to expand their knowledge beyond better-known examples like England or France.

Some of the essays even expand their framework beyond Europe, taking the United States as a place of comparison and proving that America still holds a significant importance for a large portion of the African diaspora. Carlos Rabassó, Francisco Javier Rabassó, and Mariam Bagayako consider the experience of racialized subjects in France, namely Africans and West Indians, and

compare theirs to the situation of African Americans and Puerto Ricans in the US. They point out the paradoxical problem that because the French Constitution states that “all citizens are equal regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, or gender” (p. 118), the country sees no need for keeping statistics on citizens based on race or ethnicity, and therefore even though anti-Black racism is clearly a problem, there are no statistics about how many French citizens of African or West Indian descent ever reach positions of power in public and private sectors. This problem will likely be familiar to scholars working on European countries with similar understandings of citizenship and race, like Germany. By questioning how and why the situation of African Americans and Puerto Ricans in the United States has improved, but also acknowledging continuing problems there, Rabassó et al. consider what measures can be taken in order to promote diversity and raise awareness about discrimination in France. Meanwhile Donald M. Morales’s essay, “American ‘Migritidue’” looks at why Black British artists seem to be emigrating to the United States. Morales claims that rather than permanent emigration, this is a temporary move often motivated by the larger number of roles open to Black actors in the US and the actors’ desire to find legitimacy acting in America that might open doors back in the UK.

In addition to these sociological issues, several essays examine representations of AfroEuropeans' experience, either in literature or film. As Leonardo De Franceschi argues in his essay on the French actor of Senegalese-Mauritanian descent, Omar Sy, for those minority groups who feel powerless in western Europe due to a lack of resources, capital, or political representation, there can be a lot at stake when it comes to artistic representation. De Franceschi chooses Sy as his case study because of Sy's success in France as a comedian, in particular with the film *Intouchables* (2011) for which Sy won a French Oscar in 2012. Franceschi makes a strong case for why, despite the film's problems, it offered a landmark moment for Black actors in France, showing how Sy could present a model of Black stardom that might help create more opportunities for Black actors, screenwriters, and directors in the future.

Another important thread running through the volume is how AfroEuropeans challenge a commonsense understanding of national identity that hinges on homogeneity and whiteness. In her essay, Anne Heith, analyzes the work of two Afro-Swedish authors, Johannes Anyuru and Sami Said. Heith acknowledges that Sweden is commonly thought of as a country where questions of race and ethnicity have little importance, because the national community and the outside world understand the country to be homogenous and white. However, not only have there been ethnic minorities in Sweden for centuries, including Sami, Roma, and Jews, but also the now growing Afro-Swedish population, in their writing, challenges the "notion of a homogenous national culture as a basis for the shaping of national identities" (p. 52). According to Heith, the "literary representations of cultural encounters ... transform traditional Swedish narratives of the nation by deconstructing borders between the white Swedish nation, on the one hand, and 'Africanness' or blackness on the other" (p. 51).

Several chapters look at the important role football plays in Europe in shaping a national identity that can either be exclusive or inclusive. Alfred Markey's chapter on Irish soccer fans' greeting of Nelson Mandela in Dublin in 1990 provides a welcomed inclusion of critical whiteness studies that is missing from other contributions. Despite Markey's centering of Mandela's visit and the acceptance of Black soccer players on the Irish national team, Markey's article is really more concerned with the construction of Irish white masculinity. Markey argues that a common hatred of the English as colonizers and oppressors allowed white Irishmen to embrace ethnically diverse fans and players to be assimilated into an imagined Irish national community that no longer depended on whiteness. In his essay, Maurice O'Connor takes up the important issue of how young, talented West African football players are often exploited by talent scouts and companies who promise to bring them to Europe to get them a contract with a professional team, but then leave them to fend for themselves, which often leads to a precarious existence living on the streets. Alternatively, O'Connor suggests it would be best for FIFA and European clubs to invest in national African teams and invest in the players' well-being and education, in exchange for the "muscle drain" they have created in West Africa.

What was missing from some contributions was more reflection on the role of whiteness in both subjects and their objects of study. One example is Joana Passos's essay, which looks at an interesting phenomenon of texts written by white Portuguese citizens who were born in and grew up in African colonies in the 1960s and 1970s and upon immigrating to Portugal following decolonization and independence, offered a critical look on colonialism that does not fit the stereotype of the *retornado* (returnee). According to Passos, using the term *retornado* to describe this group assumes that they feel a sense of national and cultural belonging in Portugal, which is often not the case since they have spent their entire lives in Africa

and often identify with African cultures. The two texts she discusses are Teolinda Gersão's *Â Ávore das Palavras* (1997) and Isabela de Figueiredo's *Caderno de Memórias Colonias* (2009). While Passos makes a strong case for taking a more nuanced approach to analyzing these texts, what is missing from her analysis is reflection on critical whiteness studies. She does not acknowledge that though Gersão and Figueiredo may indeed identify with Mozambiquan culture and be critical of colonialism and Portuguese culture, they still existed in a space of privilege while living in Mozambique. Even as they actively rejected Portuguese culture, they were always benefiting from white privilege. Thus, although Passos does address the role of gender, it would have made her argument even stronger to consider these authors' solidarity with Mozambicans vis-à-vis their privilege as white women, which is an important topic discussed in Critical Race circles right now.

A few of the contributions also raised some red flags concerning how scholars who identify themselves as white Europeans position themselves concerning the topic of AfroEuropeans. In the foreword, Marta Sofia López addressed the question of "legitimacy": who can and should speak on behalf of AfroEuropeans. López writes that "legitimacy" has been a particular problem for the "white members of the group.... On several occasions we have been interpellated by black individuals on account of our 'suspicious' interest in 'ethnic minorities,' as if we had some hidden agenda" (p. vii). There are several troubling issues with this statement. First of all, López clearly creates a binary of we (whites) and them (Blacks), which would lead one to believe that this volume is solely a collection of white scholars writing *about* Black people, which is certainly not the case, since there are in fact several AfroEuropean scholars present in the volume. Such a binary reinforces the exclusion of Black people from the activity of creating knowledge and makes them eternally objects of study. Secondly, the question of what motivates white scholars to research ethnic minorities is a le-

gitimate question that links to postcolonial and decolonial discussions about who creates knowledge, for what purpose, and about whom. The fact that López would take such a defensive stance with regard to this critique is troubling and suggests that, if she does in fact view herself as a white scholar, she does not recognize what privilege she has compared to Black academics conducting research and Black non-academics who become the objects of their research. López's claim that AfroEurope@ns is "non-essentialist in its philosophy" (p. viii) recalls Katrin Sieg's critique in *Ethnic Drag* of well-meaning white scholars who do not acknowledge their privilege.

This misguidedness is also reflected in Nat Illumine's afterword, where she suggests that as a white, Jewish woman born and raised in London, she might be allowed to claim an AfroEuropean identity because she is "married to a second-generation Ghanaian, [has] mixed race children" and hip hop has played and continues to play a large part in her personal and professional life (p. 174). While good-intentioned, such an attempt to adopt an AfroEuropean positionality, on the part of a white woman, is troubling and reflects current ongoing discussions in critical race theory about the position and privilege of white allies. And Illumine's concluding remarks that "identity confusion" is "part of the human condition" and "a part of postmodernity" (pp. 174-75) flatten the experience of people of African descent, ignoring the prevailing problem of anti-Blackness and the real threat of anti-Black violence. Despite the unfortunate framing of the volume by a rather controversial foreword and afterword, *Continental Shifts* contributes valuable knowledge to the growing field of AfroEuropean studies and offers important insights into a diverse range of topics and local examples.

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