

Review

Remi Joseph-Salisbury. *Black Mixed-Race Men: Transatlanticity, Hybridity, and 'Post-Racial' Resilience*. Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2018. 240 pages. \$99.99 cloth. ISBN: 978-178756-532-6. \$36.99 paper. ISBN: 978-178756-534-0. \$27.33 Epub. ISBN: 978-178756-533-3.

Black Mixed-Race Men: Transatlanticity, Hybridity, and 'Post-Racial' Resilience, by British sociologist Remi Joseph-Salisbury, crystallizes multiple turning points in the larger study of phenomena understood as “mixed race.” This publication signals a further institutionalization of a field that has expanded from the formation of an annual conference, an association, and this journal to Emerald Publishing’s new monograph series Critical Mixed Race Studies, which premiered with Joseph-Salisbury’s book in 2018. His contribution not only deepens critical mixed race studies as a transdisciplinary endeavor but also takes a transnational turn by bringing into conversation voices from both sides of the Atlantic. In an extraordinary fashion, Joseph-Salisbury’s theoretical apparatus thus draws on diverse modes of knowledge production—from Stuart Hall’s cultural theory to Claudia Rankine’s poetry volume *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014)—to provide a UK/US comparative sociological analysis, which is here “triangulated” in the form of a review by an Afro-German scholar in American studies. Moreover, Joseph-Salisbury sets out to implement the “critical” in critical mixed race studies by vehemently refusing to equate the visibility of some prominent mixed-race(d) subjects with a post-racial promise. He directs attention toward the relationship between ongoing structures of White supremacy and the situation of Black mixed-race men, subjects whom he situates not apart from Blackness but within its political and cultural formation. Most crucially, he zooms in on masculinity in a field that—as Habiba Ibrahim’s intervention *Troubling the Family: The Promise of Personhood and the Rise of Multiracialism* (2012) powerfully demonstrates—needs to take into full consideration the gender-specific conditions of multiracial discourse.

Yet this study is also shaped by central continuities in (critical) mixed race studies, especially with regard to a compensatory desire: Joseph-Salisbury strives to assemble an academic empowerment narrative as a corrective to pernicious imaginations of mixed-race experiences in figurations of tragedy, passivity, confusion, and isolation. In his analysis, Black mixed-race men are thus emphasized as “active and agentic,” as well integrated in Black and White contexts, and, most importantly for Joseph-Salisbury, as “woke.” Seeking “to understand what it means to be a Black mixed-race man in contemporary society,” he sits down for individual interviews with Black mixed-race men from the UK as well as from the US, where the ascent of people like Barack Obama and Meghan Markle as national figureheads have propelled speculations about an imminent post-racial era (185). Joseph-Salisbury discovers a lot of common ground with his interviewees and flags it as the “transatlanticity” of Black mixed-race men’s experiences. In particular, he is interested in carving out a shared “post-racial resilience,” or “PRR” (23). His concept is at least twofold. On the one hand, PRR describes the capacity to see through the “hegemonic” discourse of a post-racial era as a new effective guise of White supremacy (13). On the other hand, PRR stands for the

ability to either resist or recover from racist interpellations, aggressions, and threats whose very existence is denied or relativized by post-racial ideology.

The participants of this academic project are well aware of the ways they continue to be perceived through a gendered anti-Black lens as always potentially criminal, violent, uneducated, heterosexual, and hypersexual cis men. As Joseph-Salisbury interrogates how the Black mixed-race men of his study navigate their everyday lives under this ever-present “white gaze,” he examines a host of strategies: from the conscious use of racially coded practices of dress, speech, hair, and music to their engagement with White and Black peer groups (24). And importantly, Joseph-Salisbury provides the opportunity for a discussion of light skin privilege that is too often absent in scholarship dedicated to the recognition of mixed race. At times, he generalizes the interviewees’ PRR as representative of Black mixed-race men at large, but his particular sample of participants does overwhelmingly display everyday modes that produce a proud affiliation with Black community and a defiance toward anti-Black logics. Over the course of his “counter-narrative” Joseph-Salisbury especially values those modes that seem to defy dichotomous racial norms through a fluid adoption and adaptation of cultural practices (185). However, “regulatory ideals” and binaries of his own might emerge in the process (151). Most prominently, the recurrent notion that the affirmation and recognition of “hybridity” necessarily undermines White supremacy could have been complicated by drawing on such scholars as Jared Sexton (*Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism* [2008]), who have also examined the interplay of gender, multiraciality, and White supremacy.

After having read Joseph-Salisbury’s welcome contribution on the intersection of masculinity and mixed race, I was left with two questions. Firstly, I was wondering about the particularity of mixed race he sets out to uncover. Especially in his chapter on racist micro-aggressions, many experiences and strategies might equally apply to Black men who do not identify as mixed or who are not identified as mixed, as Joseph-Salisbury concedes himself. In his analysis, mixed-race specificity often seems not only to pertain to questions of racial self-identification but more importantly to the mis-recognition or non-recognition of White-Black interracial family affiliations, which could have been explored further alongside his insightful chapter on friendships. Secondly, I think that it would have been fascinating to examine more fully where national, cultural, and regional specificities matter and with what kind of consequences, including reflections on the dynamics between interviewer and interviewees. But admittedly, that may be beside the point in a study explicitly dedicated to identifying commonalities of mixed race across the Atlantic. Yet especially Joseph-Salisbury’s intriguing nods to his participants’ experiences within continuities of “the slave” or “lynching” made me wonder whether the “transatlanticity” he invokes primarily describes not a particularity of mixed race but a paradigm of Black abjection (70, 139).

Either way, Joseph-Salisbury’s study places us at an important threshold of critical mixed race studies in an era of Donald Trump and Black Lives Matter. At least in the US context, it would now be difficult to diagnose a mainstream discourse of post-racialism with regard to the renewed visibility of White supremacist ideology, on the right, and an almost ritualistic acknowledgment of structural racism, on the left. Where does critical mixed race studies go from here? What are the methodological and political approaches to the varied dynamics of “mixed race” in an age of transatlantic right-wing populist movements? *Time*’s notorious and inanimate “New Face of America” image from 1993, for instance, has

been awakened to life in Germany on the cover of the *GEO* magazine from 2015. Here, a light-flooded portrait of a disrobed, smiling, light-skinned woman of “German-Ghanaian-Togolese-Czech” descent against a light background is presented (to an implied “white gaze”?) as an unthreatening representative of Germany’s “remixed” future (24). Interestingly, the *GEO* issue is not situated in a German version of a multiracial or post-racial euphoria that could be observed in the US and the UK contexts over the past decades. Instead, the cover story can be read as a tacit response to the rise of neo-fascist movements, in which more recently the murder of a light-skinned Black mixed-race man was co-opted as a “fellow” German victim in a White supremacist cause against those constructed as African and Middle Eastern refugees. Joseph-Salisbury’s study should serve as an inspiration to join our various disciplines, methodologies, and archives to examine the myriad and contradictory ways “mixed race” is negotiated across the Black Atlantic and beyond.



Detail of *GEO* cover, “Deutschland Remixed: Die neuen Gesichter unserer Gesellschaft” (Germany remixed: The new faces of our society), text by Ines Possemeyer, photography by Martin Schoeller, September 2015. Reprinted by permission of *GEO* magazine.

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