

Book Review

El-Tayeb, Fatima. *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006. 253 pages. Paper, \$25.

The issue of race has stubbornly haunted postwar Europe, complicating Germany's transition from fascist dictatorship to democratic nation, France's legacy of brotherhood, and Holland and the UK's alleged histories of tolerance. In her recent analysis of the erasure of race in the dominant discourse on European identity, Fatima El-Tayeb points out that although the Holocaust has been instrumentalized by Europeans as a shared history that binds them together since "Hour Zero" and forces them to work toward a democratic, peaceful union, the deracialization of Holocaust victims in collective memory is one of many signs of the ongoing myth of colorblindness that is perpetuated throughout Europe.

In *European Others*, El-Tayeb challenges this myth of colorblindness by focusing on the experiences of second- and third-generation "migrants" who were born in France, Germany, and Holland, and yet are still viewed by the mainstream as alien. The queering of ethnicity in El-Tayeb's subtitle refers to the practice of "embodying an identity that is declared impossible even though lived by millions," such as being a European of color (167). Intent on expanding the archive and looking at "less well-defined, less respected fields of vernacular culture or public art in a variety of forms" (xxxviii), El-Tayeb investigates the queering of ethnicity among "multiethnic hip-hop crews, black and Muslim feminists, queer performers," and "urban guerilla video artists" (167). To resist Europe's refusal to recognize the legacy of invisible racialization, El-Tayeb connects postwar ethnicization in Europe with "precapitalist processes of racialization" (xiv). This move disturbs the exclusionary notion that each appearance of non-white presence is an anomaly—an act of amnesia that denies European minorities a past.

Rather than supporting binary thinking that might posit minorities as simply resisting the mainstream, El-Tayeb is interested in individuals who play off of mainstream culture and resist the myth of colorlessness in indirect ways. Her theoretical intervention seeks to mirror the movements she investigates by "creolizing" theory; she draws on women of color feminism, African diaspora studies and queer of color critique in order to explore the tensions between the global and the local and to allow for "intersectional, sometimes contradictory workings of power structures and subject positions shaped though not determined by them" (xviii).

In the first chapter, "Stranger in My Own Country," (a reference to German hip hop group Advanced Chemistry's single), El-Tayeb engages with French and German hip hop to explore a queering of identity that resists heteronormative white European masculinity. Mainstream media tends to depict (young) male minorities as particularly violent, misogynist, and outside of the democratic realm whether in the Parisian banlieues or the "soziale Brennpunkte" of Berlin. Lurking behind the argument that youth violence is a sign of individuals' failure to integrate is the assumption that, in contrast to Africa and the Middle East, which are allegedly "backwards" and "premodern," Europe is not only superior, but unique in its successful journey from modernity to a postmodern, secular society that has learned from the brutalities of its past. According to El-Tayeb, Eurocentric texts, such as Derrida and Habermas' response to anti-Iraq War protests and Baudrillard's response to the Parisian riots of 2005, show how European identity is linked to a fictional

collective past that argues for Europe's moral superiority and ability to lead the contemporary world, while conveniently refusing to engage in colonial history.

El-Tayeb suggests that second- and third-generation migrant youth use hip hop as a common language that allows them to challenge "their structural silencing in [such] mainstream debates" (7). The questions of who has the authority to speak about European history and how migrants use hip hop to exercise this authority are brilliantly tied together in her concluding discussion of Sarkozy's lawsuit against MC Hamé for allegedly slandering the national police forces with song lyrics that address the murder of Algerian protesters in 1961.

Chapter Two, "Dimensions of Diaspora," looks at an additional movement from the 1980s influenced by African American culture, namely the Afro German community-building that grew out of Afro German women's encounter with women of color activism and poetry from the US. According to El-Tayeb, both Afro German poetry and hip hop are united not only because they are vernacular practices often considered "low culture," but because they allow artists to unite personal feelings with political thoughts about larger national and diasporic communities. El-Tayeb's purpose in putting these movements in conversation is to achieve a concept of diaspora that can include individuals who may not have a "lost home," but have nonetheless been marginalized and excluded from many rights despite their status as citizens.

The texts at the focus of this chapter are *Showing Our Colors* and *Talking Home*, two volumes which demonstrate how the Afro German diaspora constructs a "memory discourse" that embraces plurality and fractures, as opposed to imposing a patriarchal narrative based on "roots and authentic origins" (43). Thus, the notion of diaspora proposed by the Afro German community helps move beyond the obsessions with "going home" and sharing one distinct homeland (43). Working off of Michelle Wright's proposal of dialogical Black subjectivities in *Becoming Black*, El-Tayeb stresses that in order to reject essentialism and avoid a definition of diaspora that reinforces a nationalist discourse we should embrace a dialectical model of diaspora. Both *Showing Our Colors* and *Talking Home* achieve this dialectical model of diaspora by presenting diverse narratives which do not put forth a normal or natural family model.

In "Secular Submissions," El-Tayeb looks at how the claim that Islam and Europe are incompatible depends on an exploitation of female Muslim bodies. The veiled woman is regularly utilized as a symbol for women's oppression in Islamic communities—a practice that ignores the fact that most Muslims emigrate from secular countries like Turkey. In the European discourse on Islam's integrability, the focus is placed on narratives of oppressed Muslim women who can only be liberated after reaching European soil, being freed from their religion and becoming "liberated consumer-citizens" (131). El-Tayeb supports this claim with analyses of the reception of works like Adelheid Roosen's *Veiled Monologues* and autobiographies by controversial figures like Necla Kelek and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. The voices challenging these stereotypes are queer and feminist Muslim activists who vigorously deconstruct Western universalist discourse. Connecting back to her argument in the first chapter, El-Tayeb asks whether Europe's myth of secularism depends on monoreligious and monoracial populations and the notion that the Other is presecular and prehumanist.

This discussion of the Western "coming-out" narrative, which is forced on both women and queer minorities, is what links Chapters Three and Four. El-Tayeb asserts that if queer minorities do not have a "coming out" or embody a particular white, homonormative queer identity, they're often seen as backwards and assumed to be

incapable of contributing to the queer community. The purpose of the “coming out” story is ultimately to make the queer minority into proper consuming and marketable democratic citizens, much like the women in the liberation narratives. Thus, queer minorities are faced with either accepting a homonormative discourse which relegates them to the margins as exotic objects to be consumed, or running the risk of being labeled deviant and dangerous.

In Chapter Four, “Because its Our Stepfatherland,” El-Tayeb discusses artists and activist collectives who reject this choice between assimilation and alienation by instead reclaiming “public spaces through visual and performative strategies” and creating “alternative archives that record silenced narratives of Europeanness” (127). Her case studies are Strange Fruit, a workgroup facilitating self-help for sex workers in Amsterdam; Salon Oriental, a Turkish German drag collective in Berlin-Kreuzberg; and Kanak Attak, a German group of second generation activists from various German cities. These three groups are differentiated not only by the type of intervention they make into the public, but also by their willingness, or lack thereof, to break with traditional leftist politics. Strange Fruit and Salon Oriental often have no connection to the traditional politics of the Left, because their politicization stems from occupying a precarious position in the queer community and their ethnic or religious communities. In contrast, Kanak Attak’s use of the camera to “expose hidden discursive hierarchies” and their desire to inscribe the traditions of resistance of the first-generation of migrants into postwar German history clearly draw on leftist traditions like Situationism and workerism. Finally, while Strange Fruit’s self-help model relies on a minoritarian positionality, the members of Kanak Attak refuse to consider how their positions as second- and third-generation “migrants” differ both from the first-generation and from political refugees who face very different challenges. As a result, El-Tayeb views Kanak Attak as being much more susceptible to hierarchizations and totalizing models of resistance.

El-Tayeb’s engagement with such different examples of “queering ethnicity” in this Fourth Chapter and her willingness to point out the shortcomings of some approaches are both strengths that enrich her overall analysis. Nevertheless, she does not seek to be comprehensive in her study, and instead limits her focus to continental Europe and, more specifically, France, Germany, and Holland. If the book had a few additional chapters, perhaps El-Tayeb could have expanded on why, as she mentions in her introduction, Great Britain might share similar situations, but nevertheless the British discuss race differently than those on the continent. Furthermore, the Western focus of the book also leaves one to wonder whether a similar legend of racelessness exists in Eastern Europe. If not, how does one contextualize rising violence and right wing extremism in countries like Poland and Ukraine—where Black soccer fans feared for their safety during the recent Euro Cup. If Eastern Europe *does* share the same notion of racelessness, how does one make sense of this in relation to Eastern Europe’s *lack* of a colonial past? And where would Russia fit into this picture?

Additionally there are several issues relating to her discussion of hip hop which El-Tayeb regrettably does not address in detail. The suggestion that European hip hop could be an example of a postethnic European of color identity warrants a more comprehensive discussion of how this might be complicated by hip hop’s roots in the US, its global character and the gender stereotypes within the scene. This is also a problem in Chapter Two, where El-Tayeb acknowledges that the sometimes patriarchal discourse found in hip hop poses a difficulty for viewing the Afro German hip hop and the Afro German feminist movements together, because it might suggest a regression from the feminist dialogical model. Despite her insistence that there has

nonetheless been a movement in the Afro German community from feminism to queer politics, the tension between female/male, poetry/hip hop still does not seem resolved. Finally, El-Tayeb does not acknowledge the role some governments have played in promoting hip hop. The state-funded hip hop projects one finds in a country like Germany raise the question of whether it is fair to blankly call hip hop produced by minorities subcultural—an argument raised in several of Ayşe Çağlar's essays. In fact, the mainstream/subculture binary is precisely the kind of thinking El-Tayeb wishes to challenge by queering ethnicity.

Like Heide Fehrenbach's *Race after Hitler*, Fehrenbach and Rita Chin's *After the Nazi Racial State* and Uli Linke's *German Bodies: Race and Representation after Hitler*, El-Tayeb's *European Others* is an important contribution to the discussion of race in postwar Europe. *European Others* also intervenes in the growing field of Whiteness Studies in the European context, preceded by texts like *Mythen, Masken, Subjekte*, edited by Maureen Maisha Eggers et al., and *Weiss—Weissein—Whiteness*, edited by Martina Tißberger et al.. Moreover, *European Others* adds to the queer of color critique pioneered in Roderick Ferguson's *Aberrations in Black* and José Esteban Muñoz's *Disidentifications*, by offering additional examples of productive strategies that can challenge exclusionary mainstream discourses while still engaging with the mainstream. Finally, El-Tayeb's unique approach of creolizing theory allows her to argue convincingly for the value of comparing different European countries in a non-universalizing approach that takes their differences into consideration—an especially difficult venture.

For those interested in multicultural Europe, history, gender, race, African Diaspora studies and Islamic studies, this book offers fascinating material and proposes unique approaches to the pressing issues in these disciplines.

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