

Jemima Pierre. *The Predicament of Blackness: Postcolonial Ghana and the Politics of Race*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press), 2013. pp. 288.

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Jemima Pierre's *The Predicament of Blackness* is an ethnography of racialization that interrogates historical processes of racial constructions and the dislocation between disciplines of African diaspora studies. Positioning Ghana as an example, the overarching thesis of this book postulates postcolonial African societies as formed under structures of global White Supremacy. *The Predicament of Blackness* culminates Pierre's five collective years of research and nearly two decades of time in Ghana. It looks to provide a theoretical reconfiguration of race relations in contemporary African space and its relationship with the diaspora. And provide it does: It is innovative in establishing the occurrence of racialization in contemporary Africa as a fact. Its theorization will help to lead a more accurate and forthright discussion among the disciplines of focus.

The Theoretical objective of this book is to contextualize contemporary racial formations in Africa by interweaving historical background with case studies. Ghana's particular role in this analysis is justified by its central role in Pan-African politics and culture that "resonate across the various fields of African diasporic culture."¹ Pierre's extensive travel to Ghana, particularly her stays in Accra and Cape Coast add inimitable richness in narrative, but also heavily supplements the clarity of Ghanaian identity formation around diaspora politics. Pierre's use of the terms "Racecraft" and "racial projects" establish a point of departure in looking at the racialization process; "Racecraft" and its projects capture "the building blocks of racialization processes (racial formation)" by giving meaning to racial formation.² Ghanaian linguistic utilizations of "obruni" also help to structure a linguistic and ideological meaning of race as colloquial understanding of class and culture.

Chapters one, two, six and seven are theoretical and historical chapters that engage the academic disciplines of the African diaspora. Particularly framed in the first and last chapter is the isolation between these disciplines in order to "challenge the systematic isolation of slavery and colonialism. It efforts to

demonstrate that racialization is part of a larger historical act that continues to shape identity and communities on both sides of the Atlantic.”³ Chapter one departs from the discussion of colonial ruling and the effects of indirect rule in its establishment of generic and naturalized practice of apartheid. Chapters two and six then frame this historical implication into a modern, postcolonial and highly politicized Ghana. This attempt to dismantle the colonial “racial project” clashes with agendas of independence and further racializes all societal aspects of Ghanaian imagination. To Pierre’s attesting point, these racial constructions are again facilitated by hegemonic powers of White Supremacy, informing mutual and often times inaccurate identifications among and between global black populations.⁴

Chapters three, four and five “focus on particular racial projects and on distinct sites of Ghanaian racial formation.”⁵ Each chapter provides salient examples further demonstrating continued pervasiveness of race in Africa. Chapter three offers countless examples of “white merit” (and therefore power) that remain in Ghanaian society, with no interrogation for justification.⁶ The positioning of Whiteness in Ghana and its historical-structural links to privilege highlights Ghanaian societal contradiction. This quest for identity in a highly touted, proud, nationalist country is captured in chapter four’s discussion of skin bleaching. Chapter four further highlights the country’s historically complex relation of race by relevantly connecting the relationship of race explicitly to color; this color association is framed in connection to the greater diasporic community. Pierre then examines the Ghanaian state and its political interaction with the diaspora through a contentious scheme of tourism. Again, “Racecraft” is used here to analyze the state’s complex political dynamics. One may be skeptical at Pierre’s decision to focus the political integrity of Ghana through an analysis of two contrasting celebratory events (PANAFEST and Emancipation Day), but again, such examples provide a distinctive analysis of a unique structuring of racial formations in this area.

Pierre’s intricate knowledge of a racialized Ghanaian space and its unyielding connection to diasporic studies provides a necessary and enriching analysis of racial formations. Each chapter in *The Predicament of Blackness* fulfills its objectives clearly and is sprinkled with (at times) humorous, yet relatable experiences of

standard tropes, in a neglected space of dialogue. Perhaps some readers may find Pierre's seemingly loose form of methodology remiss, but there can be no question to the desperately needed contribution of a theoretical departure point for studies of race in contemporary African societies.

Notes

- ¹ Ibid., 6.
- ² Ibid., 5.
- ³ Ibid., 215.
- ⁴ Ibid., 176.
- ⁵ Ibid., 8.
- ⁶ Ibid., 84, 85.

