

Surviving Nordic Supremacy

Suvi Keskinen:

Mobilising the Racialised ‘Others’ – Postethnic Activism, Neoliberalisation and Racial Politics

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Mobilizing the Racialised ‘Others’ illustrates the efforts of activists racialized as non-white to combat the violent nature of Nordic (white) superiority. These efforts range widely from addressing media (mis)representations, housing conditions, border/migration policies, crime bills, etc., which all negatively target non-white people residing in the Nordic region.

Much of the work in the field of race and racialization has amongst other things focused on media discourse (Danbolt & Myong 2019), and on the intersection between psychology and philosophy (McEachrane 2014). Suvi Keskinen is a white professor of Ethnic Relations at the University of Helsinki, Finland. With this contribution, she joins Julia Suárez-Krabbe, Annika Lindberg & José Arce (2018), in taking a more grounded approach that follows the intimate lives of activists racialized as non-white, as they attempt to untangle negative media discourses and oppressive policies targeting them. Through a wide spanning qualitative study that includes interviews and extensive field work, this book investigates the conditions, forms,

and visions that shape activism and solidarity, brought about by activists in Denmark, Sweden and Finland.

Keskinen coins two terms in her book that help identify the types of racism and activism present in this geographical region. The first one being ‘racial nordicisation’, which sets the context for the second term, known as ‘postethnic activism’ (p. 24). Racial nordicisation is a variation of ‘European racialisation’ and refers to three ways in which ‘Nordic superiority’ is constructed, in relation to both non-white Others and the rest of Europe. These include: 1) Rejecting current “forms of racism and racial thinking” (p. 24) and at the same time relegating ongoing racial oppression and colonial activities (both domestically and overseas) to the past. 2) Positing the welfare state as egalitarian and innocent of exclusion, thus concealing historical, ongoing exclusions and harm toward minorities like sterilization, assimilatory practices, dehumanizing attitudes towards migrants, indigenous people and people with disabilities, etc. (p. 20). Lastly, 3) weaponizing gender equality in

"constructing national identities and hierarchies in relation to migrants and racialised minorities" (p. 24).

'Postethnic activism' is then the multi-faceted effort that aims to challenge the various aspects that shape racial nordicisation. In the book, Keskinen describes various forms of postethnic activism and their intended focuses. What characterizes these activists is their common interest, which builds upon understandings of their societal positionings in the countries in which they are situated. The activists "identify the reasons for their organizing in the impact of racism on social structures and individual lives" (p. 36). Drawing on Frantz Fanon, Keskinen connects "the violence of global raciality, the outcome of centuries-long histories of colonialism and racism (...) with individual experiences of unsafety and marginalization by those racialised as 'Others'". So postethnic activists are posed with the task of "organizing to create futures beyond such hierarchies" (p. 36). Of course, this work involves continuous analyses of social structures and practices to be able to understand the broader contexts of both collective and individual experiences.

Keskinen's account of racialization in the Nordic region sufficiently grounds the social context of the racialized 'Others'. In doing so, she also argues that there is good reason to believe in the radical potential of postethnic activism. Founded upon politics of social justice, politics of survival, and politics of love, postethnic activism will not miss to address commonalities and center intersections of social violence at its core moving forward. Hence, we might call it an upgrade in terms of conducting activism in the Nordic region. With this perspective as the standard for approaching social activism, we can surely wave goodbye to single-issue policy activism.

The book elucidates the labor prior to 2020's Black Lives Matter demonstrations and a dialogue with old and new academic work in this field. More specifically, chapter four implicitly opens possibilities for further conversations regarding antiBlackness within activist spaces. Known for its gratuitous nature, antiBlackness refers to the "human race's necessity for violence against Black people" (Marronage & DCN 2020, 47; see also Hunter 2023, chapter 3).

The absence of a grounded acknowledgement of antiBlackness and how antiBlackness shapes social positions indicates the limitations of both the book's analytical framework as well as postethnic activism's understanding of the racial hierarchy. Keskinen does not fully describe these hierarchies in the book, even though she continuously states the existence of said racial hierarchies and acknowledgement of differences. Furthermore, chapter five sets the scene for a white vs. non-white binary racial categorization. Despite the acknowledgement of present hierarchies amongst non-whites, these hierarchies are not fully described in their nature, which I assume is a shortcoming of her desire to focus on the common. Absence of deeper engagements with antiBlackness will only bring about solutions that promote comfortable serfdom for non-Blacks and increasing passivity towards oppressive structures, regardless of difference.

However, Keskinen successfully connects the oppressive patterns operating across the Nordic countries. I agree with the author that the book is widely accessible for, particularly "scholars and students in sociology, ethnic and racial studies, cultural studies, feminist studies and urban studies" (np), but it is also of great utility to newcomers in these fields.

References

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