

European Whiteness?¹

A Critical Approach

AF BOLETTE B. BLAAGAARD

If to be European means to be white as colonial and postcolonial writings suggest, then what does 'white Europeanness' mean and how may we think of 'critical whiteness studies' in a European context?

This article attempts to flesh out a study of whiteness in a European context. With examples from U.S. and European discussions I intend to show ways in which critical studies of whiteness have intersected with gender studies and thus problematised the axis of gender and race. The U.S. theories serve as backdrop to an exploration of European critical studies of whiteness, but I argue that Danish and European gender studies scholars need to draw on specific European (power)relations between race, ethnicity, religion, culture and gender in order to make apparent the concept as it plays out in Danish and European contexts. Firstly, because within critical U.S. debates on whiteness the terms 'Euro-American' and 'European American' have mostly been used to designate whiteness or 'white people'. This is done to assign specificity rather than normativity to whiteness (Frankenberg 1993). However, the term also "deracializes" and thus falsely equalizes communities who are, in terms of

current reality, unequally positioned in the racial order” (Frankenberg 1997: 632). That is, it allows whiteness to be just another racial signifier among many others and thus strips the concept of the economical, political and cultural power, which it entails in the U.S. society. The term is of course also highly problematic when transported into a critical European context as it suggests that all Europeans are white and belong to a certain ‘civilisation’ (Lewis 2006). It seems that the insistence on the term Euro- or European American feeds into a black-white binary. Moreover, the terminology fixates Europe in a political space and social reality which is merely a symbolic and negative power position disregarding the multi-layeredness of its geography, cultures, religions, histories, ethnicities etc. Thus, secondly, we need a flexible epistemological and theoretical approach to the field of critical whiteness studies in which both the synergy between the U.S. and European geographical and theoretical contexts are recognised and differences are respected and made apparent. If the particularities of European history, society and culture are not considered the field of critical whiteness studies in a European context runs the risk of displacing whiteness and with it also racial oppression and discrimination, to the U.S. alone.

It is not, then, a shifting of political and historical grounds alone that I am proposing; it is moreover an epistemological shift as well as a new way of understanding whiteness as an inter- and intra-mingling of power relations, structures and subjectivities. It is a shift away from a binary and oppositional understanding of difference to a multi-layered exploration of ethnic, religious, gendered, sexual, social, cultural and political dimensions of subjectivities. As a way of challenging our thinking on European whiteness I conclude this article by presenting a manifesto against totalitarianism introduced in the debate following the Danish cartoon controversy in 2005.

This case study will illuminate the multi-layeredness of European whiteness.

THE BLACK-WHITE DICHOTOMY AND BEYOND

The particularities of critical scholarship on whiteness emerging from the U.S. are based on a threefold otherness connected to Native Americans, slavery, and recent immigration from South America and Asia. Most prominently features scholarship on African American experience, which emerged through the political movement for in particular African American civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s and through a critique of white feminism in the 1970s. Although studies and politics of African American culture have been around as long as gender studies,² it is not until the 1980s and early 1990s black feminism and a critique of white feminism emanated as a distinct field of its own. The prominent African American scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1995) developed the concept of *intersectionality* in order to analyse several layers of female and racial experience and their intersections. This approach looks at the levels of experience of gender, race, class as well as their convergences and intersections.³ ‘Black feminism’, or ‘womanism’, is seen to have developed in relation to African Americanist criticism and Anglo-American or European American feminist criticism (Andemahr, Lowell, Wolkowitz 1997), so the field has been intersectional from the word go. But ‘Black feminism’ or ‘womanism’ is also founded on the opposition to white hegemony and power of definition, i.e. encompassing ‘white feminism’. It is a form of resistance to hegemonic white, masculine (way of) thinking: a way of putting the African American person in the *personal* when speaking about the personal as the political in feminist tradition.

Whiteness as an ideology, politics and culture has deep roots in the American identity. “[being] American means [being]

white” (Morrison 1993: 47) and this pervasive but unacknowledged and therefore structurally invisible racialisation may be something the American self-image cannot do without, suggests Nobel Prize winning author Toni Morrison (1993). That is, American whiteness is constructed upon and simultaneously denies its ‘other’ in order to sustain a cultural, political and economical power structure privileging white skin and culture. Moreover, as an American phenomenon, whiteness is founded on the historical subjugation of black people, which lays the groundwork for a continued social, political and economical inequality between white and black. Whiteness is as such a power tool to work on – originally – African slaves in order to establish and stay in power. The power is sustained through cultural and political products and discourses in for instance literature, Morrison asserts. The historical connection and reproduction of racist structures of slavery and segregation means that whiteness in black imaginary is connected to “the mysterious, the strange and the terrible” (hooks 1998: 39) and whiteness and white cultural domination have left a notion of whiteness as terror in all black people. bell hooks (1998) recaptures the look of African American onto the European (or Anglo) American, and uses memory to name whiteness in the black imagination. It is a representation of terror, and white people are terrorists, killers, rapists, ghosts, and death. Exploring this representation hooks argues that the socially and politically enforced white projection of the image of the terrorist ‘other’ onto black people makes an awareness of the representation of white as terror impossible to whites. However, it is this representation that all black people in the U.S. experience indifferently of their status, class and other background, hooks asserts, and as such it functions as a collective memory. In order for white people to take part in a deconstruction of whiteness as terror, white people have to

shift positions, raise their levels of consciousness and develop the skills needed to be able to see themselves and their culture as terrorising.

To Toni Morrison and bell hooks white women play an equal part in this subjugation and continue to do so through cultural reproductions (hooks 1998) and through their literary work (Morrison 1993). When the representation of whiteness intersects with the representation of gender, Morrison’s analyses of literary representations focus mainly on the white masculinity embedded in the metaphors and narrative structures of classic novels. Morrison lets the gendered female experience fall in the background when the issue of race enters the stage. hooks, on the other hand, finds that race trumps gender when it comes to white female icon, Madonna, who is constructed as a ‘bad girl’ because of her affiliation with blackness and thereby her rejection of white men and the reproduction of sameness. Whereas Madonna’s gender situates her in a particular hierarchical relation to (black) men, it is primarily her whiteness that gives her agency over black men – as well as women. Madonna is merely reproducing and playing with the old stereotype and power structure of respectively white men and white women placed above black men and black women in the racist/sexist power hierarchy.

THE POSTCOLONIAL INTERVENTION

In an attempt to reverse the negative hierarchy and representation of blackness a particular black feminist standpoint (Collins 1990) is supported by lived experiences particular to black women. The grounding of this theory in the body of black women makes clear the value of self-definition and identity-politics. Patricia Hill Collins (1990) tries to break down the hierarchy by ‘simply’ ignoring it or positioning black women outside the hierarchical categories. Black women should not be de-

fined through or as opposed to white women or black and white men, because black female experience and black feminist thought and knowledge production is different from the mainstream white feminism, Collins argues. However, Collins' strategy is to position black intellectuals in opposition to other groups of intellectuals. Because of the internalised 'black, female' experiences particular to – as well as limited to – black women, Collins is feeding into a black/white symbolism – a 'them' and 'us' dichotomy, which constructs undiversified and stereotyped groups. Collins' approach is a constructed essentialism structurally comparable to the discursive construction of 'third world women' by 'Western' feminist academics. Postcolonial theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991) critiques this 'third world women'-construction by arguing that it is achieved by reducing power relations to one patriarchal power, which suppresses all women in all countries. White feminists hereby force women from so-called third world countries into the hegemonic monolithic and homogenising discourse, which furthermore produces a static image of the 'the third world woman'. In this way the category 'woman' is always already placed as one fixed and uniform group upholding the simplistic opposition of men and women. This 'third world woman' exists within a stereotype, which clarifies the 'Western' woman's perception of herself as being modern, liberated etc., Mohanty argues. In the case of Collins' African American female experience and knowledge production, the stereotype is taken up and developed in an African American scope, which appreciates black female experience in a kind of 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak 1993). However, the structuralistic approach which produces a binary position of black versus white (Collins 1990) remains unchanged and the statically reproduced category of black women is moreover isolated from power relations of whatever cul-

ture, politics and history which may surround them.

Obviously, neither of the theorists above chooses arbitrarily the opposition of black and white. It is a longstanding 'Western', white and to some extent masculine tradition to define oneself in opposition to the Other, the 'blackened' and the 'backwards'. The definition of race as biologically determined and visually identifiable was popular among scientists in the 19. century. Scientists in the field of eugenics conflated physical appearance with personality traits and specific racial qualities (Gilman 1985, Gould 1993, Sturken and Cartwright 2001). What was visible on the body was thought to mirror the mind and character of people and what seemed like arbitrary characteristics were linked to black or white skin, big or small noses, brown or blue eyes etc. This gave rise to a number of 'scientific' studies within the discipline of phrenology that measured craniums in order to assess and rank the races (Gould 1993). The scientific and representational discourse is exemplified by the many autopsies of African women, whose genitalia were shown as proof of the different human species (Gilman 1985, Schiebinger 2004: 168-72). A polygeistic argument of different racial geneses was thereby sustained through metonymic representation of the African female. Though scientists performed their examinations concerning sexuality on African women, research intended to cast light on the science of race was conducted on male Africans (Schiebinger 2004). This distinction in the scientific approach mirrors other research (at the time) and its dichotomous mental habits as well; the (white and black) male was considered the true representative of the species, whereas the female was representing the site of reproduction and sexuality. Moreover a link was forged between the African person and the (white) prostitute also using physical characteristics. Physical features such as facial asymmetry and the shape of the labia

were seen as proof of the prostitute's affinity to 'blackness' and to immorality, which in turn was linked to sexuality and reproduction. The ambiguity of white female sexuality and reproductive potentiality left her in a peculiar category; white females were perceived as (physical and symbolic) bearers of whiteness. However, she is always capable of potential racial and moral demise through her reproductive and sexual powers. White women's potential ability to give birth to a black child constructs her as a site of terror, because "she stands as a white blackness, as a living contradiction of white supremacy" (Gordon 1998:305).

It is, then, a well-established dichotomy, which Collins plays on in reverse when she argues that uncontrollability and blackness connotes *good*, and control and whiteness connotes *bad* in epistemological as well as moral terms. But the colour-line discourse is sometimes blurred and does not necessarily have to end up in antagonistic positions and hierarchies (Davis 1984). However, in what ways the position of the white woman is theorised within the dichotomy between hierarchically positioned categories of gender versus race has called white feminist Catherine MacKinnon (1997) to argue that positioning white and black women in opposite categories is to buy into the white male stereotype constructed around white femininity – as being innocent and available to men at all times. Whiteness as a power structure should not imply white women, because such an argument neglects to acknowledge the oppression of white women. MacKinnon believes that feminism in general – and here she encompasses African American feminists engagement in the feminist movement – is based on diversity between and within women and female experiences. MacKinnon thus privileges anti-sexism in contrast to anti-racism. The intervention calls for a questioning of MacKinnon's brand of feminism and its ability to critique own ranks and the aforementioned critique of white

feminism (Mohanty 1991) seems apt once again.

Another way to approach the issue is to look at the structural similarities between white patriarchy dealt with in white feminist theories and black experience within the white hegemony in U.S. Peggy McIntosh (1997) lists fifty points of white privilege modelled on her feminist work and her knowledge of masculine privilege to see the parallels in the kinds of oppression. McIntosh is very explicit about the structural similarities between 'white feminism's' critique of patriarchy and critique of racism. She also underlines, though, that the privileges of white people, men, able-bodied people, young people etc. are not similar but interlocking. Thus, McIntosh tries to avoid the hierarchical categorising trap. In contrast to hooks' collective memory of African Americans, McIntosh's list is a collective *non*-memory of white people; an invisible weightless knapsacks of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks (McIntosh 1997), which through awareness can be re-valued and re-distributed amongst all citizens of the U.S. (i.e. the privileging content of the knapsack needs to be re-distributed among black as well as white). Not all of McIntosh's fifty privileges are privileges in the sense of advantages, but norms that misinform white people and make them believe that they live in a meritocracy, where everybody has the same opportunities in life based on their individual abilities etc. Though McIntosh's list addresses the heteronormativity of whiteness and white privilege none of the privileges on the list address the intersection of her female experience with that of white experience. McIntosh believes that to gain awareness you need to give up the 'myth of meritocracy' and furthermore you have to exert a will to change. It is a re-evaluation of white identity through changing experiences, knowledge and lived reality she calls for. However, the assumption that white people are

able to change their experience of the world by for instance moving to a less white neighbourhood is based on a white middle-class premise. I.e. the choice of life style involved assumes certain affluence and thereby social options of moving to predominantly 'black' neighbourhoods etc. This premise needs to be questioned and the issue of class needs to be introduced in order for McIntosh's analysis to gain depth.

The briefly sketched attempts at analysing race, whiteness and gender show it remains a challenge. The kind of intersectional methodology engaged by many theorists assumes somewhat stable categories of class, race and gender which are able to intersect without giving priority to one over the other. If this approach is difficult to sustain in a U.S. context it is even more complex in a differently diverse and diversified European realm.

EUROPE'S CULTUR(ALISM)

The two tensions originating from the U.S. theories: the black-white binary leaving European experience in a white, immobile space and the either-or relation between race and gender aspects are readily recognisable in a contemporary European context as well. However, as the U.S. race theories are marked by centuries of fighting and imprisoning Native Americans, slavery and South American migration, European history adds two mutually sustaining historical elements of racial oppression and subjugation: colonialism and fascism, which moreover base racial oppression on the science of eugenics. The debates on eugenics and its enforcement in the colonies enable a categorisation of inclusions and exclusions based on pseudo-science and the atrocious whims of national leaders. Therefore these ideologies of discrimination and subjugation (extermination) are pivotal to an understanding of the meaning of 'white' Europeanness.

In this light the female body is seen to

reproduce not only human beings but whole nations, which positions reproduction at the centre of the debate when it comes to establishing collectiveness and belongingness as race or nation (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1996: 113-4). The notion of the (white) Family of Man has been evoked by several feminists (Firestone 1981, McClintock 1995, Haraway 1991) and pertains to the patriarchal structure of sexist oppression and the cloning of the Same (Essed and Goldberg 2002). Moreover religious movements and national identity and feelings of belonging play their part in the conceptualisation of white Europeanness. What is at play in racialisation and exclusion in the European context is manifold: The visible 'others' are interpellated into the racist structure of the colour-line. Moreover, the conflation of ethnicity, culture and national identity (Braidotti and Griffin 2002) makes it possible to construe the national collective and its 'others' in broader terms, for instance encompassing sufficient mastering of national languages (Linke 2003). One can be othered in terms of language as well as in terms of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and religion, but not everyone can be 'white' and thereby hold a dominant position. That is, the dominant subject-position or ethnic group holding cultural, political and economical power is identified with whiteness. Nonetheless, theories of whiteness cannot be reduced to theories of the 'dominant ethnicity' as suggested in the scholarship (Kaufmann 2006), because this limits whiteness to a question of ethnicity and race. In contrast Braidotti and Griffin (2002) call for revisiting politics of difference instead of identity politics, which often, they argue, drives research and political efforts in Europe. Identity politics keep ethnic and cultural identities fixed and put forth a claim that "the needs of a particular minority group have to be recognized and dealt with" (Braidotti and Griffin 2002: 230). Rather Braidotti and Griffin seek to under-

stand “intra-group differences [and] ... that identifying with one colour does not automatically and on its own determine your socio-cultural position” (Braidotti and Griffin 2002: 231). This point brings into question on what grounds distinctions of inclusion and exclusion are made.

Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1996) make a distinction between racist and ethnic categorisation. Racism or racist categorisation relate to a wish to subordinate a certain group of people whereas ethnic categorisation is relating to fixation of a community (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1996:112). However, in European societies where discourses about progress through education and science are favoured the line between subordination of a community and fixation of a community is profoundly blurred. That is, a community that is perceived as caught up in ideologies of the past is also readily subordinated to the ‘Western’ world’s perception of own teleological progress and superiority. This is one of the legacies of the European Enlightenment. David T. Goldberg (1993) coins the term ‘ethno-race’ to describe the blending into each other of the categories. Goldberg questions the merely biological and subjugating use of the term ‘race’ by suggesting that the term has more in common with the definition of ‘ethnicity’ than usually predicted. ‘Ethnicity’ is perceived as a benign conceptualisation of cultural and social otherness, but as instances of ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and Sudan have shown it is not as innocent as it may appear (Goldberg 1993: 75). The idea of ethnicity “turn primarily on the boundary construction and on the internalization and naturalization of identity by social subjects” by invoking invented and perceived pre-determined differences of mental, social and cultural capacities, aesthetics, kinship and linguistic connections etc. (Goldberg 1993: 75-6). In comparison the idea of race is additionally based on biological notions of descent. However, Goldberg insists, these

biologically determined differences are culturally and socially chosen and adhered to through rhetoric internalisation and naturalisation.

Goldberg’s discussion of the terms can also be reversed so as to argue for a racialisation of the term ‘ethnicity’. In the European context it has not always proven necessary to mention race in order to racially discriminate, subjugate and exclude. This means that race and by extension racism is understood only in terms of biology and so is kept in 19. century discourse as a historical curiosity or as a U.S. phenomenon. In order to avoid supporting the definition of ‘ethnic’ as a cultural benign conceptualisation of otherness, I think it important to recognise the connection to U.S. racial and racist structures of ethnic differentiation in European discourse as discussed above. However, the term ‘ethno-race’ does not answer the question of religion, which has become so dominant in European debates about ‘our’ national ‘identity’ and belonging.

THE MOSLEM OTHER

As discussed above the racialisation of the ‘other’ – the one who differs from a ‘white’ and culturally ‘right’ ‘us’ – is based on a teleologically sustained hierarchy. It is based on the idea that human beings inevitably progress towards an (biological and/or cultural) evolutionary peak. In this context religion emerges as a site of dispute which runs parallel to the ‘ethno-racial’ discussions. Though the end of the Second World War put a lid on the popularity of eugenics, the divisions between them-us persist in altered and in less outspoken forms. Ideas of ethnic differentiations are still prevalent and recently the importance of religion – and in particular Islam – has re-entered the European stage. In these discussions European whiteness is readily equated with secularity or secularism.

The connections between gender studies

and debates focusing on Islam as the ‘other’ of Europeanness and thus of whiteness find expression on the site of women’s bodies. The visual sign of otherness in terms of culture and religion is on the bodies of women in the form of the Islamic head-wear; the *burka*, the *hijab* or the *niqab* or as it is otherwise and reductively known in ‘Western’ discourse; the *veil*. Postcolonial theory is insightful in this field as it recognises the situation of ‘Western’ feminists as double and problematic. ‘Western’, white feminists are both a part of an orientalising West that produces the ‘Orient’ and Islam as Europe’s other and part of a subjugated ‘identity’ in relation to ‘Western’ men. An answer to this double bind is a call for a deconstruction followed by a displacement of the (‘Western’) subject (Yegenoglu 1998). This approach constructs two different kinds of subjectivity: the first is of the ‘Western’, dominating and possessive kind; and the second “is active in the sense of receptivity and openness to others and otherness” (Yegenoglu 1998: 9). hooks’ assertion that white people need to shift positions (from white to black) in order to achieve an anti-racist view-point is adopted in this critique of the attitudes of ‘white Europeans’ toward Moslem women. However, the account seems to place oppression entirely outside the ‘Oriental’ subject. The fact that structures of interpellation can be more complex as (for instance) in the case of Indian myths (Shome 1999) in which local custom as well as British colonising educational systems made a discourse of the superiority of whiteness possible in colonised India is neglected in this work on the *veil*. The universalising effect of ‘Western’ secular thinking is moreover challenged in research establishing female Moslem piety as a site of agency (Mahmood 2005). In contrast to the previous approach this sort of analysis recognises the agency (and I would add interdependence) of the oppressed and calls for a tentative approach from gender scholars when deal-

ing with religion versus democracy and secularism. Saba Mahmood suggests that secularism may not necessarily equate equality of women’s rights in all cultures (Mahmood 2005). This stance takes Moslem women’s agency to mean that they have freedom to subjugate themselves in order to realise Moslem faith more fully. It thereby seeks to go beyond the binary of resistance-hegemony so prevalent in feminist theory and revived in debates about female Moslems.

I find, however, that discussions about the Moslem *veil* (the *burka*, *hijab*, *niqab*) show a tendency to return to theories of binary black and white constructions and the idea that colour coded ‘identities’ constitute and construct each other simultaneously. Though at times converging, these ‘identities’ are still marked with a stable character and thus posit people in order of colour or culture. In a European context (and probably also in a U.S. context) this approach is unhelpful as a model for analysing gender and race because it leaves the binary ‘them’ and ‘us’ unchanged and unchallenged.

WESTERN VALUES AND RELIGIOUS OBSCURITY

The binary ‘them’ and ‘us’ allows dichotomous debates about the religious ‘other’ and the progressive and liberated ‘West’ to dominate as it happened in the course of the so-called Danish cartoon controversy in 2005-6. By introducing this case study I want to bring attention to the complexity of politico-cultural, religious and gendered multi-layeredness of the European context and to a liberal-democratic turn in the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ -argument. In relation to the controversy a number of European intellectuals authored and published a manifesto against totalitarianism, which read:⁴

Like all totalitarianisms, Islamism is nurtured by fears and frustrations. The hate preachers

bet on these feelings in order to form battalions destined to impose a liberticidal and unegalitarian world. But we clearly and firmly state: nothing, not even despair, justifies the choice of obscurantism, totalitarianism and hatred. Islamism is a reactionary ideology which kills equality, freedom and secularism wherever it is present. Its success can only lead to a world of domination: man's domination of woman, the Islamists' domination of all the others. To counter this, we must assure universal rights to oppressed or discriminated people.

Clearly the manifesto draws on a strong Enlightenment rhetoric invoking the concepts of freedom, equality and secularism while neglecting to mention the ideas of the white man's self-understanding of superiority and consequent 'burden'. It also draws on liberal feminism, paralleling men's subjugation of women to a theological subjugation of both men and women by Islam. This correlation between men-Islam and women-the West is at first glance perhaps oddly chosen. Firstly, because of the traditional conception and orientalising of Islam, which render Moslems feminised, as the 'other' (Gilman 1985, Stoler 2002, Yegenoglu 1998) whereas whiteness is often corresponding to masculinity. In the manifesto it is the 'West', which is put in the feminine position of being in danger of oppression. Secondly, the analogy seems odd because surely there are other political analogies to be drawn and women's rights are often seen as a 'women's issue' rather than a societal issue. But there are – at least – two reasons for this juxtaposition: Firstly, the feminisation of the 'West' is underscored by the 'fear' of Islamic dominance and hegemony. Fear of over-powering patriarchal dominance (Islam) places the 'despairing' 'West' in the position of the under-dog that has to fight for its freedom from domination. It is a position which the 'West' shares with white women under patriarchy and black people under white

hegemony and it erases the violence of the 'West'. Secondly, it aligns the 'West' with values of gender equality and freedom. Placing women's liberation at the forefront of this alleged 'clash of civilisations' is symptomatic for the way in which women's bodies are the site on which these cultural battles are fought (Ware 2006, Yegenoglu 1998, Braidotti and Griffin 2002). Additionally, it is worth noticing the use of 'man' and 'woman' as generic forms in contrast to the terms 'men' and 'women'. The categories are universal and do not distinguish between different cultural, religious and political stances within the groups of men and women. The original African American critique of white feminism's universalisation of the category of 'woman' is readily applicable. The manifesto assumes a 'woman' who is secular, equal to men and free. What is at stake here is an identification of the gender dynamic that emerges incontestable but which originates from a 'Western', white worldview and history. The West and the 'Moslems' are established as fixed cultural and 'racial' identities emphasised by using gender coded comparisons which in turn constructs 'us' as Western, secular, gender equal and white and 'them' as 'backwards', religious, irrational, and oppressive (Mohanty 1991).

The twist is that the manifesto was written and signed by migrant intellectuals – former and current Moslems and new European citizens. Thus, in this case it is not people who are visually ethnically or racially identifiable, but the cultural, political and secular values and ideas, which are argued as being constitutive of 'us' and whiteness in opposition to the 'other'. The 'other' is not evoking the spectre of colonialism and oppression but makes a claim to 'white Europeaness' by erasing European historical and contemporary violence and through adopting a particular political ideology constructed through effectually rewriting European history and geography. European critical whiteness studies, therefore, cannot

be defined by a colour-coded binary inherited from traditional U.S. theories, but needs to re-define that relation. Though whiteness is certainly about – political as well as cultural – power it is always more than that. That is, European critical whiteness studies should not reduce whiteness to identity but must always understand the concept in terms of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, race, age, nationality, culture, politics, science, history, religion, class. Moreover it must always be seen in relation to the geographical, historical, socio-political, economical and cultural context in which it is analysed. This approach reintroduces the aspect of liberal-democratic whiteness into the traditional ‘identity’ based and the multi-layered analysis of difference. An analysis which starts from here may also allow for a collaborative anti-racist and feminist critical theory of whiteness in a European context.

NOTES

1. The concepts of whiteness and race are sometimes referred to in brackets as ‘whiteness’ and ‘race’. This practice serves to bring attention to the arbitrariness with which these signifiers are politically and culturally constructed. I have chosen not to use brackets, although I understand these racial categories as discursively constructed. Let me emphasise that tentativeness is required when thinking about racial categories and their implications. The same applies for the concept of the west. The west is a misleading concept in at least two ways: geographically, it alerts us to the Eurocentric way of viewing the world as a map centring on Europe. Everything to the left of Europe is the west and everything to the right is the east. This is of course a reduction. Historically, the west is the west in opposition to the east. During the Cold War the east was synonymous with the Soviet block etc. As the world changes around and within Europe the tendency is to define this change by renaming the opposition. Thus, the east block is now the former Eastern Europe for example. But what does that make the west? The former west? A critical approach to whiteness – that is, to the construction of a European ‘us’ in terms of a set of

particular racialised, cultural and political markers – stays vigilant towards the tendency to construct ‘ourselves’ as simultaneously everything and nothing (Dyer 1997).

2. Both the struggle for racial equal rights and women’s rights started in the U.S. with the abolitionist struggle – what came first is hard to determine, though, and also slightly irrelevant in this context.

3. It is not my intention to narrate the developments and particularities concerning U.S. and/or European intersectionality debates. For debates about this see *Kvinnovetenskaplig Tidskrift* (2-3, 2005), *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning* (2-3, 2006), and *European Journal of Women’s Studies* (13:3, 2006). I use the term intersectionality to mean a predominantly structuralist methodology of dealing with ‘identity’ based diversity in categories of difference which has traditionally been popular within U.S. race theories. The journals mentioned above challenge and develop this methodology while keeping the concept.

4. I am quoting from

<http://www.petitionspot.com/petitions/manifesto> but the manifesto can be found on several sites on the internet.

LITERATURE

- Andemahr, S., T. Lowell, C. Wolkowitz (eds.) (1997): *A Concise Glossary to Feminist Theory*. Arnold Publishers, London.
- Anthias, Floya and Yuval-Davis, Nira (1996): *Racialized Boundaries*. Routledge, London and N.Y.
- Braidotti, Rosi and Griffin, Gabriele (2002): Whiteness and European Situatedness, in Griffin, Gabriele and Braidotti, Rosi (eds.): *Thinking Differently. A Reader in European Women’s Studies*. Zed Books, London and New York.
- Collins, Patricia Hill (1990): *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Unwin Hyman, Boston.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé (1995): The Intersection of Race and Gender, in Crenshaw, Kimberlé (ed.): *Critical Race Theory. The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*. The New Press, New York.
- Davis, Angela Y. (1984): *Women, Culture and Politics*. The Women’s Press Ltd., London.
- Dyer, Richard (1997): *White*. Routledge, London and New York.
- Essed, Philomena and Goldberg, David T. (2002): Cloning Cultures: The Social Injustices of

- Sameness, in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* vol. 25, no. 6, pp. 1066-1082. Routledge, London and New York.
- Firestone, Shulamith (1981): *The Dialectic of Sex*. Bantam Books, Toronto, London, New York.
 - Frankenberg, Ruth (1993): *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.
 - Gilman, Sander L. (1985): *Difference and Pathology. Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca.
 - Goldberg, David Theo (1993): *Racist Culture. Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*. Blackwell Publishing, Malden, Oxford, Carlton.
 - Goldberg, David Theo (2006): Racial Europeanization, in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2 March 2006, pp. 331-364. Routledge, London and New York.
 - Gordon, Lewis (1998): Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism, in Roediger, David (ed.): *Black on White*. Schocken Books, New York.
 - Gould, Stephen Jay (1993): American Polygeny and Craniometry before Darwin: Blacks and Indians as Separate, Inferior Species, in Harding, Sandra (ed.): *The "Racial" Economy of Science. Towards a Democratic Future*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis.
 - Haraway, Donna (1991): *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*. Free Associated Books, London.
 - hooks, bell (1998): Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination, in Roediger, David (ed.): *Black on White*. Schocken Books, New York.
 - Kaufmann, Eric (2006): The Dominant Ethnic Moment, in *Ethnicities*, vol. 6, no. 2. Sage Publications, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi.
 - Lewis, Gail (2006): Imaginaries of Europe. Technologies of Gender, Economics of Power, in *European Journal of Women's Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2. Sage Publications, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi.
 - Linke, Uli (2003): "There is a Land Where Everything is Pure": Linguistic Nationalism and Identity Politics in Germany, in More, Kosel, and Pandian (eds.): *Race, Nature, and the Politics of Difference*. Duke University Press, Durham and London.
 - MacKinnon, Catherine (1997): From Practice to Theory, or What Is a White Woman Anyway?, in Delgado, Richard and Stefancic, Jean: *Critical White Studies*. Temple University Press, Philadelphia.
 - Mahmood, Saba (2005): *Politics of Piety. The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford.
 - McClintock, Anne (1995): *Imperial Leather. Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. Routledge, London and New York.
 - McIntosh, Peggy (1997): Unpacking the Knapsack, in Delgado, Richard and Stefancic, Jean (eds.): *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*. Temple University Press, Philadelphia.
 - Mohanty, Chandra Talpade (1991): Under "Western" Eyes. Feminist Scholarships and Colonial Discourses, in Mohanty, Chandra T.; Russo, Ann; and Torres, Lourdes (eds.): *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington.
 - Morrison, Toni (1993): *Playing in the Dark. Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Vintage Books, New York.
 - Schiebinger, Londa (2004): *Nature's Body. Gender in the making of modern science*. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick.
 - Shome, Raka (1999): Whiteness and the politics of location: Postcolonial reflections, in Nakayama, T.K. & Martin, J. (eds.): *Whiteness and the Communication of Social Identity*. Sage Publications, Oakland, CA.
 - Spivak, Gayatri (1988): Can the Subaltern Speak?, in Grossberg and Nelson (eds.) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. The board of trustees of the University of Illinois.
 - Spivak, Gayatri (1993): *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. Routledge, London and New York.
 - Stepan, Nancy Leys and Gilman, Sander L. (1993): Appropriating the Idioms of Science: The Rejection of Scientific Racism, in Harding, Sandra (ed.): *The "Racial" Economy of Science. Towards a Democratic Future*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis.
 - Stoler, Ann Laura (2002): *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
 - Sturken, Marita and Cartwright, Lisa (2001): *Practices of Looking. An Introduction to Visual Culture*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
 - Ware, Vron (2006): Info-war and the politics of feminist curiosity, in *Cultural Studies*, vol. 20. no. 6. Routledge, London and New York.
 - Yegenoglu, Meyda (1998): *Colonial Fantasies. Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

SUMMARY

Born out of the United States' (U.S.) history of slavery and segregation and intertwined

with gender studies and feminism, the field of critical whiteness studies does not fit easily into a European setting and the particular historical context that entails. In order for a field of European critical whiteness studies to emerge, its relation to the U.S. theoretical framework, as well as the particularities of the European context need to be taken into

account. The article makes a call for a multi-layered approach to take over from the identity politics so often employed in the fields of U.S. gender, race, and whiteness studies.

Bolette B. Blaagaard, PhD candidate
Utrecht University
Department of Media and Culture Studies