

H-France Review Vol. 18 (June 2018), No. 121

Katelyn E. Knox, *Race on Display in 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-Century France*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016. ix + 229 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, and index. £85.00 (hb). ISBN 978-1-78138-309-4.

Review by Gillian Glaes, University of Montana-Missoula.

One of the important recent turns in scholarly assessments of colonialism and its legacy is the interrogation of how the colonial world shaped and continues to shape the post-colonial context. No longer can we assume that colonial ideas and mentalities ceased to exist when colonial empires throughout the world collapsed. Katelyn E. Knox's book *Race on Display* underscores this point through an innovative exploration of the legacy of what are referred to as "human zoos" and the practice of putting colonized people on display. She argues quite convincingly that displaying humans in France and elsewhere contributed to contemporary constructions of race, national identity, and racism in important yet troubling ways. "Institutionalized spectacularism," then, becomes a key focus of the book (p. 18). As Knox explains, the display of humans during the colonial era and the continued use of their bodies in museums such as the *Musée de l'Homme* well into the post-colonial period influence notions of race in profoundly problematic and negative ways. Knox's analysis also takes the conversation in a new direction by incorporating whiteness studies into her discussion of race in France. She looks at how it is that whiteness has shaped ideas of race and the social and political constructions of minority groups in France. One of the key objectives of the book, then, is to explore "how racial and ethnic minorities in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century France problematize racially based notions of national identity through literature, music, fashion, and dance" (p. 23). The three tracks of her argument—the legacy of display, the responses of minorities, and the role of whiteness in the construction of race and identity in France—are intertwined in various and compelling ways, making this a unique and critical contribution to the literature on race in France. The case studies used here are both historical and contemporary and draw on a wide range of sources.

Chapter one, entitled "Civilized into the Civilizing Mission," explores children's comics at the *Exposition Coloniale* of 1931. Knox examines "how France's children were socialized into the imperial gaze at the time of the Exposition coloniale internationale" (p. 23). To investigate this, she looks at what she terms "colonial children's comics" to understand how they shaped the understanding of the "other" for a generation of writers and politicians who have wielded tremendous influence over conceptions and constructions of race in France (p. 23). While many of the comics she discusses here reinforced racial and ethnic stereotypes, the comics themselves became an important point of resistance. Knox reveals how some of the characters within them challenged their objectified status. And yet, as Knox argues, "the comics not only invite the reader to gaze upon the racialized object, but also suggest that to fail to do so is dangerous both for France and for the colonized subject" (p. 41).

Chapter two, entitled "Self-Spectacularization and Looking Back on French History," explores several literary contributions, termed *migritude* works, including the musical piece "Nou Pas Bouger." Their collective and individual goals are to "give voice to one of France's most vulnerable populations: immigrants" (p. 68). In doing so, Knox demonstrates not only how they reframed national and global

histories of France but also how they challenged the much-debated idea of memory within French history and society. As one of the leaders of the *sans-papiers* movement, Ababacar Diop, maintained, it was France's colonial history that shaped post-colonial immigration. He underscored a connection that must be understood to comprehend the complex dynamics shaping contemporary immigration and the debates that surround it. Knox's analysis here also reveals how French society moved from the amnesia around immigration identified by Gérard Noiriel in *The French Melting Pot* to one focusing on capturing and exploring the memory of immigration to France. She explains that, "these literary and musical works pluralize notions of national history and memory in late twentieth-century France" (p. 69).

Chapter three, titled "Writing, Literary *Sape*, and Reading in Mabanckou's *Black Bazar*," explores the novel *Black Bazar* from several different perspectives. Knox looks at the various ways that the book "writes to right" images of Black France (p. 73), as many of the works under analysis throughout Knox's book do. One issue that several of the contributions under investigation seek to address is "the implicit and automatic association between racial and ethnic minorities in France, immigration (likely clandestine), marginalization, and criminality" (p. 73). Beyond this assessment of "writing to right" understandings of race and ethnicity, this chapter makes an important contribution in taking a critical look at the concept of the gaze itself. Knox explores the way that the novel's gaze operates on many different levels while also pointing out that these gazes, as conveyed through novels and other mediums, impact how ethnic groups see themselves and others.

Chapter four, "Looking Back on Afropea's Origins," opens with a powerful statement on what Knox terms the "gaze...associated with power and privilege" (p. 93). This theme runs throughout her work. In this case, she explains how Léonora Miano's *Blues pour Élise* "probes the relationship between minorities' literal (in)visibility within predominantly whitewashed mediascapes...and their figurative reception" (p. 94). There's also an interesting overlap here between literature and television, as *Blues pour Élise* was originally intended for that medium. While it has not yet made it there, the novel encourages readers to reflect on whom they see on the small screen and why. In telling a story involving Afropeans in France, *Blues pour Élise* both exoticizes and normalizes its black characters. As Knox explains, "ultimately, then, *Blues* grapples with the way the cultural marketplace sells blackness as a commodity for consumption, all the while weaving its response directly into its intermedial form" (p. 118). The novel acquiesces to the very stereotypes it seeks to challenge.

The book's final chapter, "Anti-White Racism without Races: French Rap, Whiteness, and Disciplinary Institutionalized Spectacularism," takes on an important topic by exploring whiteness, national identity, and the relationship between the two in France. In this chapter, Knox addresses a paradox that has become increasingly common in France and elsewhere, namely that "to fight against discrimination in France is itself increasingly labeled as 'discriminatory'" (p. 120). She begins and ends the analysis in this chapter with the story of the collaboration between French sociologist Saïd Bouamama and the rapper Saïdou. Their project raised the ire of l'AGRIF (General Alliance against Racism and for the Respect of French, Christian Identity or *l'Alliance Générale contre le racism et pour le respect de l'identité française et chrétienne*), a conservative group, resulting in a legal battle that saw Bouamama and Saïd brought up on charges. The two were eventually acquitted of hate speech. In reviewing this and other examples, Knox explores the relationship between "whiteness and Frenchness," a relationship that is not often enough analyzed in scholarly works or popular culture (p. 121). While scholars continue to analyze minorities in France from multiple, and as Knox argues, sometimes problematic perspectives, she maintains that whiteness itself is not looked at objectively or analytically. Going forward, Knox argues, we as scholars must be much more cognizant of the concept of whiteness and the power it wields in France historically and from the contemporary perspective.

Knox's book makes several important contributions to a range of fields, from history to literary and cultural studies. Her insights on the politics of race, ethnicity, and identity refracted through a cultural lens push scholars in a variety of areas to think about important issues such as reception, resistance, display, and the power of the gaze in the process of othering. In reflecting critically on her multifaceted

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and complex analysis, two points stand out, one local and one global. The title reminded me of Dana S. Hale's *Races on Display*, which might cause a bit of confusion. More broadly and more importantly, though, I wondered whether her conclusions could apply to other contexts across Europe and around the world. Europe has for the past several years dealt with its largest refugee crisis since World War II, which has brought significant changes to several countries quite rapidly. I wonder how Knox's analysis might apply to Scandinavian countries who are becoming host countries, to Britain as a fellow former colonizer, or to, Germany, with its own complicated relationship with identity, race, and immigration. If it is specific only to France, what are the implications of that specificity? These points, though, do not detract from Knox's considerable accomplishment. This book's contributions stand on their own and will shape discussions and debates about race and identity in France and beyond for quite some time.

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ISSN 1553-9172