



Book Review of Loftsdóttir,
Kristín, Hipfl, Brigitte and
Ponzanesi, Sandra (eds.)
2024. *Creating Europe from
the Margins: Mobilities
and Racism in Postcolonial
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BOOK REVIEW

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Speaking of a contemporary crisis in Europe, as many have done, almost feels disingenuous. Has not the idea of Europe always been fraught with crisis? The wars of early modern Europe, the colonial conquests, inter-imperial wars, and incessant economic crises of the early industrial era, the Cold Wars, oil crises, and terrorist waves of the post-war era, the ‘chick doctrines’ and inter-ethnic conflicts of the early 1990s, the discontent with the European Union’s structural adjustment programs and austerity regimes after the 2008 financial crisis, the resurgence of right-wing nationalism and fascism in the 2010s, the xenophobic hysteria during the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ in 2015, and the consequences of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022, seem to collectively conjure an image of persistent crisis and instability within the geographic, discursive, and political spaces that mark and are marked by Europe. In its definition as a self-identical political, economic, and cultural space, Europe has continually sought to incorporate or expel its Others and to permanentize various phases of hegemony in which the interests of European ‘core’ powers become articulated as definitional and dominating for a projected European space. As this necessarily breeds conflict, struggle, and violence, Europe has always been a problematic and crisis-ridden space.

Editors Kristín Loftsdóttir, Brigitte Hipfl, and Sandra Ponzanesi highlight these conflicts, crises, and unfinished negotiations at the heart of the European project in their recent anthology, *Creating Europe from the Margins: Mobilities and Racism in Postcolonial Europe* (2024), through a series of chapters that focus on those various spaces, subjects, or political conflicts that sit at the *margins* of the European project—variously defined as Europe’s excluded and racialized Others, its gendered and racialized labor reserves, its internal subalterns, or its Eastern or Southern borderlands. With concepts from post- and decolonial thought, this focus is conceptualized in the introductory chapter as an epistemic and theoretical standpoint opposed to dominant views of Europe as a clearly delineated territory with certain ‘civilizational’ virtues. Instead of this essentializing view, a view from the margins highlights those contingent processes of governance, violence, exploitation, and negotiation that define Europe’s shape and

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reach and view the migrations, mobilities, and resistances that arise as responses to such processes as '[sources] of creativity and critical thinking' (p. 6). Collectively, this illuminates the non-fixity and conflictuality that characterize Europe's 'boundaries, borders and hierarchies' (p. 9), thereby '[generating] a deeper understanding of "Europe" as a discursive and affective space, while emphasizing Europe as being always ambivalent as a project and idea' (p. 2). With this, the book establishes an important intervention into debates on European politics and identity from a critical and subaltern perspective.

Here, the book links together several theoretical strands that, in different ways, de-center the hegemonic powers of Europeanness, but might not always have been in close dialogue. It is inspired by decolonial thought's centralization of the colonized Other in the analysis of European modernity (Mignolo 2011; Tlostanova et al. 2016); it builds from postcolonialism's attention to processes of hybridization, subalternization, translation, and mobility in colonial and postcolonial encounters (Bhambra 2009; Hall 2002); it draws from the work of Mezzadra and Neilson (2013), Balibar (2009), and other neo-Marxist theorists of globalization, nationhood, and borders, by insisting on the border as a multifaceted, ambivalent space which does not only demarcate territorial boundaries but also *proliferates within* such territories; additionally, it relates to critical border and migration studies insofar as the multifaceted and resistant statuses of migration and refugeedom become articulated as emblematic for the notion(s) of marginality that the book seeks to center (Chambers 2008; Römhild 2017).

By placing these theoretical strands in relation to each other and focusing on borders, margins, and Others *within* Europe itself—rather than on the Global South or Europe's constitutive relations with the South—the book makes a novel contribution and illuminates common concerns among a multiplicity of critical research fields and theoretical formations. As such, the book could be of good use to researchers and students who want to apply the conceptual apparatuses of decoloniality, postcolonialism, or critical border studies to European contexts. It can also be a valuable resource for strengthening dialogue and cooperation across theoretical divides among critical scholars and activists, insofar as it finds and illuminates political issues and theoretical concerns that should be of interest to decolonialists, anti-racists, Marxists, feminists, and anarchists alike.

However, these theoretical connections are mostly explored in the book's introductory section, where the book's strongest contribution resides. The other chapters of the book are mostly concerned with applying some of these overarching concerns to a wide breadth of specific empirical case studies, focused on, for example, LGBTQ-free zones in Poland, Sicily's status as a 'Euro-Mediterranean borderland,' health-related mobilities between French Guiana and Northern Brazil, and documentary portrayals of Turkey's borders. Of the chapters, I find the three most interesting and valuable contributions to be the following:

- (1) Chapter 4, by Milica Trakilović, utilizes two autobiographical vignettes to dissect the role of (ex-)Yugoslavia and the (ex-)Yugoslav refugee in European imaginaries, illuminating how these function as 'object' and 'border figurations' (p. 72) that 'puncture a unitary idea of Europe and European belonging' (p. 63).
- (2) Chapter 9, by Kristín Loftsdóttir, conceptualizes Iceland as a marginal location of Europe and narrates Iceland's reinvention as a tourist economy after the 2008 financial crisis, highlighting in particular how this reinvention

plays on Iceland's paradoxical and marginal position vis-à-vis Europe: on the one hand, it commodifies an image of Iceland's supposed marginality and exoticness, on the other, it still envisions Iceland as an essentially European destination (safe, white, nearby, perhaps even an image of 'original' European culture).

- (3) Chapter 10, by Ignacio Fradejas-García, José Luis Molina, and Miranda J. Lubbers, utilizes a case study of two 'demographic enclaves of Romanians in Spain' to explore how 'the characteristics of these enclaves and the transnational relations that their residents maintain across Europe are relevant because they have economic, social and cultural consequences that make Europe in unexpected ways' (p. 158), simultaneously examining how such consequences are framed by intra-European economic inequalities and racialized mobility regimes.

While this variety of case studies opens a range of possibilities for decentering dominant views of Europe, it also constitutes the book's main weakness. While the editors do a good job of conjoining the book's batch of chapters in the introduction, by viewing them through the lens of their theoretical program, the texts themselves seem somewhat locked to their individual cases and the specific theoretical and disciplinary issues they seek to address. While there is some topical coherence around the theme of Europe and its margins, the chapters articulate this theme in relation to largely divergent research fields. As few of the chapters strive to make any major interventions into the theoretical concerns addressed in the introduction, but rather demonstrate their relevance in empirical research, this disciplinary breadth results in a lack of coherence, dialogue, and synergy. There are some exceptions to this, however, mainly in Trakilović's chapter, which showcases the potential of autobiography to '[foreground] displacement and peripherality as epistemological phenomena that might complicate static accounts of Europe' (p. 63). If every chapter would have included such larger theoretical gestures tied to the book's overarching topics and reference points, dialogues and synergies between the chapters could have been strengthened.

In conclusion, this book contains a variety of important contributions that could be of interest to scholars of various disciplinary and theoretical inclinations. However, its primary novelty and theoretical edge result from the way the editors frame and interpret the book's individual contributions into an overarching theoretical discussion. Furthering this discussion in future projects could prove fruitful for establishing a common research agenda that links aspects of decolonial thought, postcolonial studies, globalization theory, post- and neo-Marxism, as well as critical migration, border, and mobility studies.

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