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Rapatzikou, Tatiani G., and Ludmila Martanovschi, editors. *Ethnicity and Gender Debates: Cross-Readings of American Literature and Culture in the New Millennium*. Peter Lang, 2020. Pp. 297. ISBN 978-3-631-79223-0 (hardback).

In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, a plethora of studies have looked at how gender, race, and ethnicity/immigration intersect in different areas of American culture. Numerous monographs, such as *Gender and U.S. Immigration: Contemporary Trends* (Hondangneu-Sotelo, 2003), *Identities: Race, Class, Gender, and Nationality* (Alcoff and Mendieta, 2003), *Beyond Black and White: Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in the U.S. South and Southwest* (Cole and Parker, 2004), *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (Alcoff, 2006), *American Multicultural Studies: Diversity of Race, Ethnicity, Gender and Sexuality* (Pinder, 2013), *US Immigration in the 21st Century: Making Americans, Remaking America* (DeSipio and de la Garza, 2015), *The Cultural Politics of US Immigration: Gender, Race, and Media* (Perry, 2016), have examined these intersections in a variety of fields, such as psychology, social sciences, education, health care, law, politics, and culture, with a view to offering a more in-depth understanding of the intricate contemporary American social, political, and cultural landscape.

Ethnicity and Gender Debates: Cross-Readings of American Literature and Culture in the New Millennium is a welcome addition to the scholarly conversation on these topics. Divided into three main parts, preceded by a foreword and an introduction, the volume revolves around cultural, social, and literary *debates* on race, gender, and immigration issues from a contemporary perspective. The foreword points to the critical interconnectedness of gender, race, and ethnicity during the 2016 presidential elections in the United States as a way of underscoring the necessity and importance of scholarly debates on the "contested space" of

diversity in American society (8). In the introduction, editors Tatiani G. Rapatzikou and Ludmila Martanovschi offer a brief literature review of the contemporary scholarly tendencies that promote multidisciplinary and intersectional approaches in order "to highlight the multiple shifts and processes American literary and cultural production constantly undergoes" (16), as well as an outline of each section. The goal of this volume is, as the editors point out, "to contribute to the dialog and research already taking place within American Studies, while opening up the texts to be discussed to further literary and cultural evaluations and interpretations" (17).

The first section, "Race Matters: Past and Present Challenges," brings together five chapters that discuss the connections between past and present racial issues in American literature and society. The first two chapters look at the imbrication of race and medicine from two perspectives, of the members of the medical profession and of the recipients of medical services. Carmen Birkle's essay, titled "'The Taint of Blood': Miscegenation and the Medical Discourse in Frances E.W. Harper's *Iola Leroy* (1982)," interrogates the concept of "tainted blood" in the discourse on miscegenation and the one related to the medical profession in the past, as well as the importance of racial uplift during the fraught period after the Civil War, as represented in Harper's novel. Lea Stephan's chapter "Half a Century of Health Care in the U.S.: Ongoing Racial Inequalities in Medicaid" is a well-documented examination of the inequalities, specifically the political consequences at racial level, which still persist in the Medicare-Medicaid health care program in the United States today. Based on a cinesemiotic approach, which combines Roland Barthes' five semiotic codes (five systems of meaning) with Christian Metz's eight syntagmatic types, Ileana Jitaru's essay "A Cinesemiotic Investigation of Race in *Twelve Years a Slave* (Solomon Northup, 1853) and *12 Years a Slave* (Steve McQueen, 2013)" offers a detailed analysis of how the racial issues in Northup's slave narrative have been transposed cinematically in the 2013 adaptation directed by Steve McQueen, "an act of reparatory justice" (91), as Jitaru concludes. Raluca Andreescu's study, "'That Which Is Unspeakable by the White Enemy Is Speakable by Us': Examining Racial Tensions and the Failures of Law Enforcement in Joyce Carol Oates's *The Sacrifice*," analyzes how race, gender, and social class intersect in Oates's novel, based on a thirty-year-old controversial rape

case, exposing contemporary issues of racial stereotyping and profiling, sexual violence, and police brutality in American society, as well as the media sensationalism engendered by the case. The first part of the volume ends with Aitor Ibarrola-Armendariz's chapter, titled "Why Are Young Adult Readers So Momentous? Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* as a Case Study." Ibarrola-Armendariz aptly analyzes the debates among scholars and educators in terms of its effects on young readers because of Alexie's "explicit representation of rather prickly topics" such as "bullying, alcoholism among Indians, sex at an early age," and even violent death (112), underscoring the significance of the novel, even for younger readers, because it raises awareness of the situation of Native-American teenagers.

The second part, "Immigration Revisited," includes chapters that explore multifaceted aspects of collective and individual ethnic identity in the context of contemporary transnational immigration as reflected in American film and innovative literary works. Noelia Gregorio-Fernández's essay "Robert Rodriguez's Hyperreal Aesthetic of Violence: A Transnational Approach to the US.-Mexican Border in *Machete*" offers a detailed analysis of the visual and aesthetic dimensions of violence in the border area, demonstrating how, by repositioning graphic violence "in a transnational trend" and employing it in a "politicized" manner, Rodriguez "creates a work highly critical of the current policies of the U.S.-Mexican border" (138). In her study "The 'Outlandish Stranger': Immigrant Identities, Photo-Textual Narratives and Ethnicity in Crisis in Aleksandar Hemon's *The Lazarus Project*," Angeliki Tseti discusses Bosnian-American writer A. Hemon's 2008 novel, which combines "verbal and visual terms," specifically photography, and, through its multiple points of view and past and present voices, addresses "perceptions of ethnicity through time" and, implicitly, of the immigrant *other* (143), thereby redefining the concept of American identity in post-9/11 United States, still "a fissured space occupied by a nation in crisis" (156), as Tseti concludes. Pi-hua Ni's chapter "Taiwanese Diaspora and Taiwanese American Identity: Julie Wu's *Third Son* as a Cornerstone of Taiwanese American Literature" is a detailed examination of the ways in which Wu "offers a 'counterhistory' against the historical grand narrative" about Taiwan and its dark past in this novel, considered a landmark in Asian-American literature, emphasizing Wu's significance as a literary

pathbreaker in Taiwanese-American literature who "gives voice to the suppressed and the unspeakable," thus redressing "the lacunae in the historiography about Taiwan" (162). In his essay "'Fish Skull? No Way!' Food and Chinese American Masculinity in Gish Jen's *Typical American*," Jiachen Zhang looks at various food tropes, arguing that "Jen's gendered presentation of food consumption and preparation" highlights issues of gender performativity, assimilation, and racialization and draws attention to "the remasculinization of the Chinese American male immigrants" in an attempt to "dismantle the stereotypes originally used in order to subordinate them" (188). Similar to the previous two articles in this section, Iuliana Vizan's chapter "Culture, Power and Society: A New Historicist Reading of *I Hotel* by Karen Tei Yamashita" analyzes the ten novellas that make up this innovative contemporary Asian-American novel through the critical lens of new historicism, with a view to contextualizing the story of the International Hotel in San Francisco in its "historical and political background" as "the center of the Asian American civil rights movement in the 1960s" (191), as well as examining "the multicultural interpretations triggered by the tenants' everyday life issues ranging from gender to race and from class to politics," thus revealing the "interconnected relation between society, politics, history, culture, and power" (207) in the fight for the hotel in the late 1960s.

While the first and second sections revolve primarily around debates on race and immigration in literary works, the chapters in the third part, "Gender Focus: New Perspectives," expand the range of genres even more to examine gender issues in various areas of American culture. Thus, in her essay "Ladders for Ladies: American Women Muralists Working in the Midwest," Marianne B. Woods looks at the work of various American women muralists across the United States in the first half of the twentieth century, and the ways in which they transgressed gender limitations through their creative endeavors, an activity that brought them "recognition and notoriety," especially because "mural painting was considered 'a manly venture' and women's foray into this genre was indeed exceptional " (227). In turn, Barbara A. Nelson's chapter "Expanding the Transnational Mapping of the Modern Girl to Eastern Europe" discusses the same time period, with a view to offering a contemporary examination of how changes in female representation are

reflected in Ioana (Zizi) Lambrino's lesser-known autobiography, *Mon Mari, Le Roi Carol* (*My Husband, King Carol*) (1950), as well as how the transnationalization of mass media impacted those changes. Analyzing the text as a "site of talk" at diegetic and extra-diegetic levels, Nelson argues that it also "pushes the boundaries of the socio-psychological melodrama to include political issues" (234). In the same vein of contemporary debates on gender issues, Elisabeth Boulot's study "Fighting for Gender Equality in the 21st Century and Passing the Torch to the Younger Generation" focuses on the significance of gender equality in the twenty-first century, highlighting, on the one hand, the measures taken by the Obama administration "to close the pay gap" (251), and, on the other hand, emphasizing the necessity to raise awareness on various social media platforms and promote the active involvement of the younger generation of women in the process of achieving equality. Finally, Constantine Chatzipapatheodoridis's essay "'Elvis Is My Daddy, Marilyn's My Mother:' Lana Del Rey's Camp Melodrama and the Mythopoeia of Hollywood Sadcore" examines the constant refashioning of Del Rey's music persona, exemplifying her penchant for "the camp culture of diva worship" (274) and the sadcore genre in her audiovisual productions, thereby suggesting that "she re-envisions an alternative vision of history" (277). Despite her inspiration from the American past, though, Chatzipapatheodoridis concludes that Del Rey's "oeuvre is a kitsch canvas of stars and stripes that gaudily exhibits how malleable, performable, and, ultimately, marketable cultural images can be" (283).

One of the merits of this volume is that the perception of the United States "as part of a fluctuating as well as geographically and culturally expansive reality" ("Introduction," 17) is reflected both in the range of topics examined and in the diversity of the contributors themselves, scholars from Europe, Asia, and the United States. It is also worth noting that in each section, the main thematic threads – race, immigration, and gender – are interwoven in implicit or explicit ways, revealing the subtle connections between the three socio-cultural elements. Moreover, by highlighting the intersections of these elements in literature, film, art, and music and approaching them through a multitude of contemporary critical lenses, the chapters in the present volume expand the multilayered landscape of current debates in American literature and culture. On a temporal axis, the topics debated invite readers to reflect on the literary

and artistic analogies and connections between the past and the present, on the ways in which present perspectives on gender, race, and immigration can shed light on past concerns, and, conversely, on how present issues related to these socio-cultural aspects are rooted in the past. Therefore, the volume represents a valuable research source for contemporary scholars in various academic disciplines and an important contribution to the ongoing scholarly debates in American Studies.

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