

Despite its undoubted importance, *The Annoying Difference* does pose a significant difficulty (apart from its price) for the non-academic, non-media specialist reader, which arises, ironically, from its strengths. The fact that *The Annoying Difference* is based on the findings of three large-scale qualitative research projects carried out over a thirteen-year period gives Hervik's analysis depth. But the presentation within the book of the methodology and findings of these projects, which not only involved close reading of texts, but focus groups and attitude surveys, to establish how the media was shaping opinions and prejudices, means that this is really not one book, but two. And the two books do not always sit easily together. The first book, which comes replete with tables and discussion of concepts, is more academic and concerned with methodology, concepts and findings, while the second, which discusses neo-racism and neo-nationalism within the context of the professionalisation of news management and the emergence of spin, is investigative and analytical. It is really in the first 100 pages, which move in fits and starts between the two approaches, that the greatest difficulties arise. But those readers who persevere will find in this book much that is informative and new and will be heartened that the attributes of the bright, tenacious and unstoppable TV detective Sarah Lund can also be found within the Danish academy.

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*The Crises of Multiculturalism: racism in a neoliberal age*

By ALANA LENTIN and GAVAN TITLEY (London, Zed Books, 2011), 286 pp. Hardback £15.99.

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois asked, 'How does it feel to be a problem?' Alana Lentin and Gavan Titley do not set out to offer an updated European answer to this question, but provide the most effective critical study yet of what they call the 'crisis of multiculturalism' discourse, the primary means by which 'minorities' today are cast as 'problems' of cultural integration, and their lives homogenised and reified in order to provide so much evidence of the failure of a supposed multicultural experiment. Addressing this discourse's European hotspots in Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland, while also analysing the ways in which it has resonated in less obvious locations (Ireland and Finland), and with occasional forays outside of Europe to the US and Australia, the authors show how the narrative of a failed multiculturalism has been the primary means by which racism has been recoded in an ostensibly post-racial era.

The death of multiculturalism narrative will be painfully familiar to *Race & Class* readers.<sup>1</sup> It begins with the idea that, in a fit of benevolence and naivety,

European governments encouraged postwar immigrants to preserve their own cultural values, promoting an 'apologetic relativism at the expense of shared values and a commitment to liberty of expression, women's rights and sexual freedom'. This over-emphasis on cultural difference resulted in the unintended consequences of social segregation, urban unrest, religious extremism and communal patriarchy. But now the lesson must be learned: 'Like disappointed parents, or worldly social workers, or rueful older lovers, European nation-states promise themselves never to make the same, innocent mistakes again.' Respect for 'our values' must be cultivated and coerced, backed up with a reinvigorated confidence in European identity, without apology. With this new mood, complaints of racism are heard as echoes of yesteryear, unhelpful distractions from the necessary work of 'integration'. It is not we who need to change, but them.

In the shadow of this discourse, most scholarship has sought to advance one or other model of how governments should deal with the 'problem of diversity' or has aimed at empirical investigation of the problems that multiculturalism is thought to have introduced. Lentin and Titley usefully sidestep these frameworks. Instead, their object of study is the narrative of a crisis of multiculturalism itself, the mechanics by which this narrative is circulated and its role in sustaining racism in a neoliberal age.

They begin by pointing out that, 'multiculturalism has rarely amounted to more than a patchwork of initiatives, rhetoric and aspirations' and that there is an obvious gap between the empirical realities of multicultural societies and their representations in media and political discourse. But, they argue, the narrative's distance from reality is, while important to recognise, ultimately beside the point. Angela Merkel and David Cameron's recent attacks on an imagined multicultural orthodoxy were not rendered ineffective by the absence of any such orthodoxy. Virtually the same speech had been delivered by various Labour government ministers over the previous nine years, yet the rhetorical strategy of courageously breaking the politically correct taboos of a fantasy multicultural establishment did not seem to wear thin over time. For the standard story of multicultural tolerance is a fiction that 'allows anxieties concerning migration, globalization and the socio-political transformations wrought by neoliberal governance to be ordered and explained'. This multicultural 'backlash without a lash' was never about correcting the excesses of a failed experiment; rather, it provided an alibi for the reshaping and relegitimation of racism.

If the 'crisis of multiculturalism' speeches of Cameron and Merkel had any actual existing policy target, it was the managerial forms of multicultural policy that sprang up in some European city councils in the 1980s and 1990s, always highly contested and limited in their impact. Ironically, as Lentin and Titley point out, those attacking these policies (and hugely inflating their significance) share with their multiculturalist opponents an entirely culturalist way of looking at society. According to this culturalism, some of us live hermetically sealed within our cultures, ethnicities or religions, our lives entirely determined by them,

whereas others exist outside of any specific culture in the neutral space of universality, able to consume culture, but not be consumed by it. Using the language of culture in this way (for example, to define a 'Muslim problem') can produce the same outcomes that the more obviously racial language of anti-Semitism once achieved. Cultural tropes, such as wearing a hijab, 'can just as easily serve as racial signifiers as skin colour'.

In a useful discussion of how this discourse is mediated, Lentin and Titley argue that events such as the Danish *Jyllands-Posten* cartoon crisis and the Swiss minarets ban serve as signposts pointing to particular culturalist interpretations of 'diversity'. Today's media economy, with its need for instant response and commentary, lack of specialisation and a decline in the production of original material, is ideally suited to the circulation of culturalist modes of explanation, which provide easily adaptable and transferable frameworks for making sense of events, whether they involve those labelled Muslims, asylum seekers, immigrants, Roma or blacks. When groups are defined by their culture, it becomes easy to slot new events into pre-existing scripts. The latest news simply reconfirms what we already knew – that Muslims oppose freedom of speech, oppress women, and so on. And this occurs across space as well as time: a culturalist framework established in the Netherlands can be reapplied in Spain, irrespective of local circumstances, because Muslims are ostensibly the same everywhere. Thus, the freedom of speech issue in Denmark was 'easily grafted on to a "clash of civilizations" framework of understanding', circulated around the world and reappropriated in different local contexts. And if a country has not yet experienced this kind of event, it is just a matter of time before Muslim culture works its way towards the inevitable outcome, what Lentin and Titley call the 'ticking culture scenario'. What is left out of these accounts is precisely the politics behind these events. Thus, for example, the cartoons crisis was the result of a rightwing newspaper attempting to escalate its 'values-based campaigning' in order to push Denmark in a more Islamophobic direction.

Under neoliberalism, Lentin and Titley note, it is through the notion of culture that politics is evacuated of any real content. Culture provides a means of explaining away the existence of neoliberalism's often racialised 'disposable' populations, those for whom the state no longer needs to maintain the rhetoric of protection and instead seeks simply to manage and control. For those deemed to be enclosed in their culture, politics can only ever amount to communal backwardness; only those who have freed themselves from cultural determinism are able to produce liberal civilisation. Politics can therefore be reduced to a conflict between 'their' regressive cultural identities and 'our' liberal values. The only acceptable agency for 'them' is the rejection of their cultural practices in order to become 'free like us'. Lentin and Titley point out that this assumes that liberal values, such as gender equality, are 'a property of a "community" of white European secularism; that those in but not of Europe are always already excluded from this state of being, and lack the capacities to define and organize their own

liberations'. Moreover, it allows for a division between 'good diversity' and 'bad diversity', the former the result of 'pre-moderns' integrating themselves into the European 'way of doing things', the latter a product of 'anti-moderns', who are unable or unwilling to follow this path.

The problem is that seeking to adopt the prescribed national way of life is a fragile basis for equality. It depends, Lentin and Titley argue, on granting others the privilege of deciding whether or not one has truly integrated, a recognition that can always be removed if one oversteps the unwritten limits of tolerance. The Muslim who sells kebabs contributes to 'good diversity' until he criticises foreign policy, when he becomes not an engaged citizen, but a failure of integration, culpable for Europe's lack of social cohesion. One might also add that this is how it feels to be a problem.

With a wealth of important new insights into the ideological underpinnings of today's racisms, Lentin and Titley's *The Crises of Multiculturalism* will be indispensable for anyone wishing to mount an effective riposte to David Cameron, Angela Merkel and their academic fellow travellers.

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## Reference

- 1 See, for example, Liz Fekete, 'Anti-Muslim racism and the European security state', *Race & Class* (Vol. 46, no. 1, 2004), pp. 3-29; Arun Kundnani, 'The death of multiculturalism', *Race & Class* (Vol. 43, no. 4, 2002), pp. 67-72; A. Sivanandan, 'Race, terror and civil society', *Race & Class* (Vol. 47, no. 3, 2006), pp. 1-8.

*School Wars: the battle for Britain's education*

By MELISSA BENN (London, Verso, 2011), 256 pp. £10.99.

Not for nearly fifty years has the school system in England been so fractured and unequal or the vaunting enemies of comprehensive and equitable schools for all English children been so rampant and self-confident as those so powerfully placed in government through the Con-Dem coalition.

This grim schoolscape can very soon be gauged from a reading of Melissa Benn's lucid, strongly committed, but very worrisome book, simply, but truthfully, called *School Wars*. Benn is the daughter of a remarkable, brave and brilliant mother, Caroline, who, notwithstanding that she was American by both birth and education, spent her life in England explaining, championing and defending, as well as analysing, comprehensive schools, also ensuring that, unlike many a New Labour demagogue, her own children received their full benefits. But Melissa has her own very singular and eloquent way of describing, in her concluding chapter, what she wants for all British children: 'A service based on neighbourhood