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CHAPTER 34

COLONIALITY AND EUROPE AT THE MARGINS

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Introduction

The roles played by colonialism and imperialism in the shaping of European identities have been well documented (Dirks 1992; Stoler 2002). Recently, scholars have focused on the colonial engagements of European countries with no formal colonial possessions, as well as those that perceive their national history as falling outside of colonial histories. Barbara Lüthi, Francesca Falk and Patricia Purtschert (2016) speak of such countries as 'blank spaces in colonial history' (p. 1). This draws attention to the need for a more extensive analysis of the intersection between contemporary racism and the denial of colonial history.

   This chapter focuses on racism in these 'blank spaces' in colonial history, paying special attention to European countries that perceive themselves – in one way or another – as on the margins of Europe. Recognising that the 'margins' are constantly 'dislodged and recreated' (Fur 2006), the chapter emphasises how decolonial perspectives can illuminate hidden colonial engagements, focusing especially on the utility of the concept of 'coloniality', as theorised by Aníbal Quijano (2000). Decolonial scholars have drawn attention to the intrinsic embeddedness of colonialism within modernity, and the lingering effects of coloniality, which have extended far beyond the end of formal colonial administration (Escobar 2007; Grosfoguel 2011; Mignolo 2011). In various parts of Europe, claims of colonial innocence – or claims that the colonial past is non-existent or irrelevant – work towards refuting the existence of racism (Keskinen et al. 2009; Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012a). In the Nordic region, complicity in overseas colonial enterprises (Keskinen et al. 2009) and histories of colonial violence inflicted upon Indigenous people in the region (Fur 2006) have been largely ignored. However, persistent claims of innocence from colonial histories are not unique to the Nordic context, but are also documented in Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland (Andreassen 2014; Loftsdóttir 2019b; Lundström 2014; Lüthi, Falk and Purtschert 2016; Wekker 2016), where such claims of innocence are often extended into claims of innocence from racism. Simultaneously, some European countries have attempted to insert themselves within colonial narratives in an attempt to achieve greater 'Europeanness' (Dzenovska 2013; Loftsdóttir 2019a; Peralta and Frangella 2012). This indicates the close relationship between being a 'proper European nation' and having a history as a colonial ruler.

The chapter explores the ways in which racism is articulated in countries that perceive themselves as outside of colonial histories and/or on the margins of Europe. It asks how racism is justified or rendered meaningful in such contexts, in what ways the plurality of Europe should be recognised in discussions of racism as well as emphasising the relevance of lens of decolonial theory for an analysis of Europe at the margins.

Decoloniality and racism

In the twenty-first century, racism has become more openly expressed, while also continuing to be entangled with candid references to culture and religion. The optimistic, post-war idea that racism can be 'taught' away – that is, eliminated through education – is long gone. To complicate research on racism, it is difficult to precisely delimit what racism is. This is reflected, for instance, in debates over when racism emerged historically (Wade 2015, pp. 3–4). Some U.S. scholars have criticised their European peers for not taking racism seriously enough (e.g. Parvulescu 2016). In contrast, many European scholars have questioned whether U.S. definitions and understandings of race can be adopted wholesale to the European context (Balkenhol and Schramm 2019; Ponzanesi and Blaagaard 2011), as well as stressing a more nuanced analyses of how people make sense of race in different localities within the United States (Hartigan 1999, p. 4).

In the following section, I will briefly explain some of the main components of decolonial theory and utility for understanding racism and the unevenness that is intrinsic to racism, as well as to draw attention to the wider global and structural dimensions of racism. As shown in the next section, these components of decolonial theory help us to tease out the racism present in 'irregular' colonial situations, such as the situations of European states that lacked formal overseas colonial possessions and were, in some instances, themselves under the rule of other European states. Such situations do not fit easily into the boxes of coloniser–colonised (Stoler 1989), and they have been undertheorised until recently (Loftsdóttir 2019b; Lüthi, Falk and Purtschert 2016). Decolonial theory emphasises global historical inequalities that continue to be reproduced in the present (Harrison 2002). Some of these inequalities are entangled with knowledge production – that is, how certain knowledge comes to be seen as better or more universal (Restrepo and Escobar 2005). To produce alternate knowledge or to decolonise hegemonic knowledge, dos Santos Soares (2019, p. 3) argues, one must be 'critical of the regimes of authority and regulation that determine […] the hegemonic places of its production – Europe and the U.S. – as they determine the conditions of its production in the Global South'. Decolonial theory both draws on and supplements other critical theoretical frameworks, such as post-colonial, feminist and critical race studies (Allen and Jobson 2016; Harrison 2016). It also intersects with the critical theory of memory and history (Trouillot 1995).

In addressing racism through the lens of decolonial theory, which I see as particularly relevant for an analysis of Europe at the margins, I draw on the work of Aníbal Quijano (2000, 2007), who has inspired many other decolonial scholars. Quijano emphasises the need to understand racism in a broad historical perspective, in order to contextualise modern understandings of racism within the massive transformations that took place in the aftermath of the European colonialisation of the 'New World', interlinked with notions of modernity and the formation of capitalist systems. At that time, a new world order was imposed and global resources were brought under the control of a small European elite (Quijano 2007). Extensive wealth through the appropriation of land and resources became constitutive of capitalism as we know it (Mignolo 2010, p. 331).

As described above, a key question for Quijano and other decolonial writers is how the particular cultural knowledge of colonisers became the only significant knowledge (i.e. universal knowledge and 'right' way of knowing) (see Mignolo 2007). Quijano (2007, pp. 169–170) notes that this cultural coloniality assumed different forms, in different places and times. In some places, such as Latin America, it took the form of genocide, resulting in a near-complete destruction of native societies and the mass slaughter of native populations. In other places, like Asia, societies and their forms of knowledge production were more often placed in a subordinate position. The general subordination of so-called non-Western knowledge went, furthermore, hand in hand with the utilisation of this same knowledge to facilitate the resource extraction from the native people (2007). In all contexts, the process led to massive social transformations. As stated by Quijano (2007, p. 169):

> Cultural Europeanisation was transformed into an aspiration. It was a way of participating and later to reach the same material benefits and the same power as the Europeans: viz, to conquer nature – in short for "development". European culture became a universal cultural model.

As European elites gained domination over various parts of the world, ideas of modernity and rationality took shape in European thought. Ideas of modernity are critical components of the coloniality of power (Quijano 2007, p. 171). Thus, Quijano (2007, p. 169) argues, while direct political colonialism ended in many places after World War II, the relationship between Europe (or the Global North) and the rest of the world continues to be one of colonial domination, in terms of ways of knowing and understanding the world.

The social classification of people around the idea of race became fundamental to this new model of power (Quijano 2000, p. 533). As described by Quijano (2000, p. 535), 'race became the fundamental criterion for the distribution of the world population into ranks, places, and roles in the new society's structure of power'. The idea of race was a part of an axis to this new model of power, alongside new methods for controlling labour and resources (Quijano 2000, p. 534). Intermixed with these new 'modernising' technologies to exploit labour, labour became associated with race, whereby particular racially-defined groups were assigned different placements within global structures of labour (Quijano 2000, p. 537). In European colonies, wage labour was reserved for those seen as white (p. 538).

Similar to many other decolonial writers, Quijano (2007) understands ideas of modernity to have consolidated alongside colonial domination (see also Escobar 2007), furthermore as being associated with Europe and European bodies. Racialised understandings continue to be embedded in modern social and global structures and worldviews, reflecting how coloniality persists with continued salience (see Escobar 2010; Grosfoguel 2011). Furthermore, racist classifications have become globalised, as 'the entire globe is responding in one way or another to Western racial classification' (Mignolo 2010, p. 334). When discussing globalisation today, Quijano (2000) argues, we must understand it as a culmination of processes that started with the colonialisation of the Americas.

This means that decolonial perspectives draw attention to racism as a historically constituted phenomenon integrated with the rise of modernity and the reshaping of the world in accordance with modernising theories, which devalued certain knowledge while celebrating Eurocentric ways of knowing. The framework is useful for analysing and understanding racism as a system that is flexible and mutating, while simultaneously grounded in history that is both particular and shared. This makes it possible to capture the ways in which racism

is made meaningful in local circumstances (as I will return to later), while also recognising that no local perspectives exist in isolation.

Faye Harrison (2016), who has written on decolonisation, emphasises such a flexible approach to racism, which highlights an analysis of how racism becomes meaningful, while understanding different racist regimes. Working from decolonial perspectives, Ramon Grosfoguel, Laura Oso and Anastasia Christou (2015, p. 636) similarly provide an analytical frame for research on racism, which they describe as a 'global hierarchy of human superiority and inferiority' that is made and recreated politically, culturally and economically. This definition is fairly elastic and emphasises, as Grosfoguel, Oso and Christou (2015) note, a key dualistic separation between those who are seen as superior and those who are seen as inferior (p. 636). Grosfoguel, Oso and Christou (2015) emphasise that we can see these distinctions as two zones of being (i.e. being and non-being), where the intersections between different identifications are articulated in diverse ways, creating further stratifications based on racism.

Coloniality and the margins

An in-depth understanding of racism in Europe can benefit from two aspects, inspired by the critical decolonial perspective: First the concept of coloniality and secondly the rejection of the idea of a single universal narrative, in embrace of a greater acknowledgement of different localities and histories. The concept of coloniality draws attention to that we are not only talking about the formal administration of states but also particular ways of thinking and acting. The analytical use of the concept coloniality allows, furthermore, for broader temporality i.e. the continued practices and ways of conceptualising the world after the era of formal European colonialism. Additionally, using coloniality allows for the involvement of those who were not key players such as in terms of formal administration and conquest, or were 'complicit' (to use a phrase from Suvi Keskinen et al. 2009), in colonialism. Recapturing colonial and imperial histories through the use of the concept coloniality is particularly important, as these histories – or their denial – represent the foundation of some European countries' claims of innocence, which filters into their rejection of racism in the present.

Turning to the second aspect, the recognizion of different imperial and colonial histories draw attention to the fragility of Europe as a coherent space, as Europe is characterised by different geopolitical dimensions, and histories of subjectification and inequalities (see, e.g., Loftsdóttir 2019b; Ponzanesi and Blaagaard 2011). Notably, due to that Europe is constantly in flux and renegotiated (Ponzanesi and Blaagaard 2011), we must recognise Europe's margins as in no way stable or fixed (Fur 2006). Here, margins constitute historically dynamic boundaries, rather than lines in space (Salazar 2018, p. 2). Decolonial theory's emphasis on local histories and rejection of the United States and Europe as universal histories can be used to draw attention to the mutability of racism as a system, highlighting the ways in which, across Europe, racism has engaged with different localised histories and positions. In addition, various populations within Europe have been historically racialised in different ways, and this racialisation should be understood in conjunction with the racialisation of populations that have historically been associated with spaces outside of Europe. Thus, as I will show in this chapter, the racialisation of different populations within Europe should not be seen as separate forms of racialisation, but as phenomena that engage with and draw on ideas of modernity and coloniality.

Coloniality and racial innocence

As indicated above, engagement in colonial history is important for understanding the contemporary discussions about racism, as it is the basis upon which some European countries disassociate themselves from racism (Bangstad 2015, 2016; Loftsdóttir 2019b; Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012b; Naum and Nordin 2013). While twenty-first-century claims that 'we' are living in a world of post-racism have echoed widely across Europe, rendering critical perspectives on racism irrelevant (Lentin and Titley 2011), some European countries have constructed their national narratives and images as if they were never a part of this history. The Nordic countries, in particular, have successfully emphasised their colonial exceptionalism; but so have several other European countries. While some of these countries can be said to have an irregular colonial history, in the sense that they never held colonial possessions, this is certainly not the case for all countries that have tried to separate themselves from histories of colonialism. Denmark, for example, was an imperial power prior to the twentieth century, holding various colonial possessions (Jensen 2015); and Belgium had formal involvement in colonial rule, as the Belgian state took over King Leopold's colony in the Congo in 1908 (Buettner 2016). The Netherlands was an imperial power in the East Indies (Schär 2019) and the Caribbean, and it still has colonies in this region (see Tate 2019, p. 17). Thus, a lack of formal engagement with colonialism and imperialism whereby the main actor is the state, is in no way a prerequisite for claims of innocence. As Catherine Baker (2018) stresses, we must view these racial exceptionalisms in conjunction; when we recognise race as 'a systematically global structure', it becomes clear that these refusals of racism are not parallel developments, but connected (Baker 2018, pp. 11–12).

Here it is important to avoid assumptions of methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002), as the direct actions or effects of colonialism and imperialism outside of Europe did not always revolve around particular nationalities (Horning 2013; Schär 2019). Individual subjects and enterprises participated in colonial and imperialist endeavours in multiple ways, such as through settler colonialism in the Americas and the Caribbean (as was important in most of the Nordic countries; see, e.g., Eyþórsdóttir and Loftsdóttir 2016). Claims of a non-colonial history have muddled or overlooked different strands of this larger history. Bernhard C. Schär's (2019) discussion of the Dutch East Indies draws attention to the fluidity of people across different national boundaries, as approximately 40 per cent of the soldiers in the Dutch colonies were from other European countries (p. 9). Similarly, Erlend Edsvik (2012) has shown that Norwegian entrepreneurs were major players in international shipping, related to imperialism and colonialism, and in fact benefitted from their marginalised position as state actors in the process.

The key issue here is not only the amnesia in terms of involvement, but coloniality in a much broader sense, wherein European subjects were educated and brought under the logic of coloniality as a way of understanding the world and its diversity. This was conducted through textual means, direct actions and various performances, both abroad and at 'home'. While Iceland was, for example, under Danish rule prior to 1944 (when it received full independence), its discourse was shaped by coloniality, both through the reproduction of racist materials and through a deep aspiration to be recognised as an important and *non*-colonial subject in Europe. While Icelanders were at times subjugated by European imaginations of them as exotic and primitive, Icelandic aspirations to transcend these imaginations were deeply engaged in coloniality (Loftsdóttir 2019a).

Thinking in the terms of coloniality, rather than simply colonialism, is also useful for the analysis of countries that were previously ruled by neighbouring states e.g. Eastern European and Balkan states. In the Soviet Union, modernisation was introduced under the label 'socialism', but socialism based on a similar sense of coloniality as modernisation that effectively worked towards erasing the memories and histories of those inside its realm (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2009, p. 137).

Attention to local experiences

European states' differing historical engagements with colonialism and the ruling of other European countries reflect Europe as a hierarchical space. Accordingly, there are various power dynamics at play, some of which intersect with racialisation. The division of Europe according to the axes of south, north, east and west is particularly relevant. For example, with the enlargement of the EU in the 2000s, many people from Eastern European countries experienced intense racialisation (Fox, Moraşanu and Szilassy 2012) based on their historical relationship on the axes east and west (Buchowski 2006). In the aftermath of the economic crisis in 2008, depictions of populations in Greece and other southern European countries as lazy, greedy and unreliable surfaced (Bickes, Otten and Weymann 2014; Chalániová 2014; Frois 2012) – images that can be linked with longstanding racialised depictions of southern Europeans as 'darker' and more African than northern Europeans (Muehlebach 2018, p. 139; Persánch 2018). In the intra-Nordic context, some Nordic countries have been marginalised due to having been ruled by neighbouring countries during a period of their history (Keskinen 2019; Loftsdóttir 2019b; Vuorela 2009). Furthermore, Maisa Martin (2012) observes how an emphasis on *skandinaviska* (Scandinavian languages) in Nordic collaboration has effectively marginalised Nordic populations who do not speak Norwegian, Swedish or Danish.

To capture these different positionalities, Manuela Boatcă (2013) suggests three main areas of Europe with 'different and unequal roles in shaping the hegemonic definitions of modernity and in ensuring its propagation'. Boatcă provides prototypes for these multiple 'Europes', exemplifying how each translates into coloniality: semi-peripheries (Spain and Portugal) had a founding role in coloniality, but their investment today is shaped by nostalgia; core countries (e.g. France and England) are hegemonic and had a central role in coloniality; and finally other semi-peripheral countries (e.g. Balkan countries) had aspirations towards coloniality. Boatcă (2013) stresses that while this classification is incomplete, it helps to understand Europe's differing levels of national involvement in coloniality. Furthermore, it makes the attempts of marginal countries to insert themselves into colonial histories more understandable within the wider logic of coloniality, which treats a country's history as a colonial empire as an indicator of its 'Europeanness'. This is supported by Dace Dzenovska's (2013) discussion of Latvia. Similarly, in Iceland, economic growth in the early 2000s was often spoken about favourably as a form of colonisation (Loftsdóttir 2016).

This complicated history means that the national identities of, for example, some Nordic and Eastern European countries have been shaped by coloniality in multiple senses – through both a desire to claim Europeanness and a sense that they must 'prove themselves' as European subjects (Baker 2018, p. 15; Loftsdóttir 2019b). What is important here is that a refusal to acknowledge complicity in Europe's colonial past, as well as a sense of victimhood due to a history of subjection under foreign rule, work jointly to refute racism in both the past and the present. This point is especially drawn out by Catherine Baker (2018) in her analysis of the former Yugoslavia, in which she notes how, in the Eastern context, post-colonialism is

often used to stress dynamics of power, while racism is ignored or rendered irrelevant. Here, again, it is significant that Quijano's term 'coloniality' avoids reducing imperialism and colonialism to only state-executed control, and has to do with practices and particular ways of understanding the world and acting in it. Furthermore, decolonial theory makes it easier to analyse the hierarchal relationships between different areas of the world, including the relationship between the Global South and Global North, and relationships within Europe.

This, however, draws attention to the importance of recognising the ways in which racism has manifested in different contexts, by engaging with localised meanings and histories (sometimes national, but other times not) that are still a part of global geopolitics. Insights from decolonial theorists on the power disparities in academic knowledge production along the Global South/Global North axis (Mignolo 2011; see also Harrison 2016) can be applied within Europe, where certain areas (e.g. the Nordic region, Central Europe and Eastern Europe), are more often positioned as case examples or particularities. Other parts of Europe (e.g. the United Kingdom and France) are, however, more likely to represent a more universal 'European' history. Applied to racism, this means that we cannot take histories of racism in countries like the United Kingdom and United States as universal models, in spite of their hegemonic power to become part of a wider global discourse of/on race (Loftsdóttir 2019b; Nowicka 2017). While racism is not a 'national phenomenon', in the sense that it is contained within the borders of a nation (Nowicka 2017), a decolonial approach can provide stronger acknowledgement of the 'specificity of each particular historical experience' (Kalnačs 2016, p. 19).

There are, however, several potential pitfalls to this approach. First, it is important to avoid the reproduction of methodological nationalism. While recognising the fluidity of Europe's borders and people, we must simultaneously take into account the state's role in reproducing particular national narratives that delimit the nation and the histories of particular localities. Second, we must consider how to account for the power dynamics within European *without* reproducing persistent narratives of racist exceptionalism – that is, without diminishing various historical engagements, as well as the fluidity that always characterises borders and identity markers. As stated above, it is important to bear in mind how claims of racial innocence often revolve around things that are simply different 'here'.

Europe and the shifting margins

While the Nordic countries are often positioned as isolated and outside the history of colonialism, an emphasis on coloniality, rather than colonialism, makes the transnationalism of the Nordic countries prior to modern times evident (Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012b; Naum and Nordin 2013). Similar to other European countries, Nordic countries were not shaped in isolation, but within the complex dynamics of Europe, which extended beyond the North Atlantic to the wider world. The term 'coloniality' is useful for capturing the multiple engagements of different Nordic countries and their investment in particular understandings of the world and their role within it. Racialisation can be better understood in Iceland if we recognise Iceland's self-understanding as marginal within the European context. Through this lens, racism in early nineteenth century Iceland clearly demonstrated anxieties around belonging in the European context, which have become reanimated in the present (Loftsdóttir 2020). This echoes Boatcă's (2013) discussion of 'aspiration' as important to understanding Eastern European engagement with Europe and coloniality. In the early twentieth century, racism was often expressed through attempts to disassociate Iceland from other subjugated countries. Also in the early twenty-first century, racism manifested in attempts

to insert Iceland within narratives of exploration and imperialism (Loftsdóttir 2019a). While these shifting and continuing streams of racism and racialisation in Iceland are relevant, they are always embedded in a globalised discourse of race.

Scholars focusing on the Nordic countries have explored the meaning of whiteness in localised context, while not losing sight of its global dimensions (e.g. Andreassen 2014; Hübinette and Lundström 2014; Keskinen 2014). Steve Garner (2014), in his review article on whiteness studies, notes that, since 2008, there has been increased interest in the ways in which whiteness 'functions in different national contexts'. He identifies this as part of a third wave of whiteness studies, and stresses that we should develop a more nuanced view of the normalisation of whiteness and the maintenance of white supremacy (Garner 2014). The goal of these studies is not to dismiss that these countries are a part of globalised racism, but to capture the ways in which racism has taken on different meanings in different contexts e.g. the United States versus Europe, within Europe and within the Nordic countries. We see, for example, that the association between Nordic areas and whiteness has not always been self-evident, and it is not always analytically useful to think about the Nordic countries as one whole. With the strengthening of ideas of race as biology, the association between 'whiteness' and 'Nordic' became stronger, even as it played out differently in different Nordic contexts (Lundström and Teitelbaum 2017). For example, in the early twentieth century, Swedish people were considered the 'whitest of all whites' (Lundström and Teitelbaum 2017, p. 153), while other subjects in Sweden (e.g. the Sami and Finns) were racialised as inferior (see Keskinen 2019).

In recent nation branding and the branding of the idea of the Nordic, this association with whiteness has been reanimated – particularly with respect to the association between whiteness and images of Nordic 'purity' and 'safety' which in some cases centre on the idea of the 'Nordic' and in other cases centre around narrations of particular Nordic nations (Loftsdóttir 2019a; Pitcher 2014). In Iceland, a massive branding exercise after the 2008 economic crash by the Icelandic government and stakeholders in tourism positioned Iceland within an image of the 'white' North, while also seeking to demonstrate Iceland's exotic nature and people (Loftsdóttir 2015).

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the utility of decolonial theory in analysing the racism that is manifested in 'marginal' European countries. Such analysis serves to improve our understanding of how racism 'endures' in the present, to use Amin's phrasing (Amin 2010, p. 4). Here, I have focused on two key aspects that I see as useful in this regard, i.e. the concept of coloniality how decolonial theory helps to recognize racism as both historical and fluid, as a phenomenon that we have to theorize as global, while recognizing that racism intersects with local dynamics and histories. Importantly, we must understand not *only* hegemonic (or universal) forms of racism, but also the ways in which racism, as a globalised system of classification and entitlements, is made meaningful in different contexts and historical conditions, which are structurally connected in various ways. Analysis of the localised meanings of racism and the power dynamics within Europe must always rest upon the assertion that racism *does* exist and *has existed* in all European countries (Loftsdóttir 2019b). We are thus not endorsing racist exceptionalism or claims to innocence, but rather emphasising the ways in which actions, systems of thought and structures of racism are rendered meaningful within different contexts.

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