

Book Review

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Joe Turner

Bordering Intimacy: Postcolonial Governance and the Policing of Family

Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020, £80.00 hbk (ISBN: 9781526146960), 312 pp.

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The shift towards a (supposedly) post-colonial Britain required crucial moves away from geographically fixed notions of racial belonging and towards malleable technologies of citizenship that could be wielded in more or less authoritarian ways. *Bordering Intimacy* draws our attention to the fundamental role of family in these shifts, which translated and submerged the control of imperial movement into contemporary bordering practices (p. 68). As Turner argues, the privileging of white mobility and the containment of Britain's 'internal others' was 'managed through binding heterosexual family further into the codes of citizenship' (p. 94).

Focusing on the confluence of family, race and nation, which underpin the 'domesticating state' (p. 35), Turner argues that family operates as both object and instrument of policing. Both ideological tool and series of materially embedded practices, family is central to the reproduction of property, heteronormativity and immigration and citizenship law (p. 10). Importantly, Turner is interested in bordering practices far beyond the operations of the nation state, immigration law and detention systems. Bordering operates not only through exclusion and enclosure, but also to 'facilitate moving bodies' (p. 57).

Turner situates both family and bordering as fundamental to the machinery of empire. As sites of normative intimacy, family has been used as a measure of civility and progress while also organising 'who can feel at home' (p. 16). Interweaving the work of postcolonial, decolonial and black feminists, domestication is related to Lockean models of expropriation as development; reproductive sex to racial purity; European models of the family to mechanisms of racial hierarchy and control. For instance, black slaves were denied rights to family law across British empire. Not legally parents, slave status was inherited through the mother, and 'slavery functioned as an inherited commercial blood-line' (p. 70).

Positioned within these unfinished histories, the patrilineal whiteness instituted under the 1981 British Nationality Act is directly related to how racialised personhood is 'gained or eviscerated through a patriarchal connection to whiteness' (p. 71). This has been written into widespread explanations for failures of success and the criminalisation of black and Muslim families in Britain in terms of family structure, parenting style and household organisation. The impossibility of legal black motherhood across Britain's plantations is here recoded within discourses of failing 'black motherhood' (p. 95).

It is not simply a *lack* of patriarchy that is targeted in this discourse, but also forms of masculinity seen as inadequately domesticated by the white father and so formatted as hypersexualised and hyperpatriarchal (p. 103). Forming a supposed threat of ‘violence done to whiteness’ (p. 149), they sit at the core of an imbroglio of: the migrant woman as the ‘reproducer of unBritishness’ (p. 105); perceived failures to ‘integrate’; terrorist ‘breeding grounds’; ‘grooming gangs’; the arranged marriage; and patriarchal violences projected on to Muslim communities. Turner demonstrates how these issues justify visa and immigration frameworks, which use ‘good character’ requirements and tests for ‘genuine’ intimacy. It is here that ideologies of femonationalism are seen to be already embedded in the inner-workings of the nation-state. A supposed concern for (Muslim) women in fact operates to characterise communities as pathologically irredeemable and so forever presenting a threat to the liberal values of white Britons.

Importantly, Turner’s analysis and discussion actively confounds the periodisation of the title throughout, tracing what ‘family does to make empire in our contemporary moment’ (p. 241), and arguing that ‘decolonisation is not “over” and so nor is coloniality’ (p. 229). But perhaps more clearly centring the enduring colonial tensions that arise from our intimacy with and dependence on those whose lives and labour continue to be expropriated would also bolster Turner’s account of both family and bordering not in terms of exclusion from humanity but as violent and disjunctive inclusion. In particular, it would be useful to further contextualise the discussion in terms of racial capitalism and neo-imperialism. Bordering forms part of the massive machinery through which disparities in living standards are preserved by vast transfers of value from periphery to the core, with differential production costs and local workers’ rights in the global South essential to the accumulation of capital in the North. This imperialist context would bolster interconnections such as those made with the ‘armed social work’ of counterinsurgency, and illuminate how and why it is that ‘Eurocentric humanism needs blackness as a prop in order to erect whiteness’, as Jackson (2020: 4) writes.

Bordering Intimacy is an exceptional and timely analysis that does not just intervene in debates regarding immigration and citizenship, but sets an agenda for centring the family within these and much broader sociopolitical discussions of race, Britishness and liberal humanism. It is a vital contribution to academic discourse, but should also be read as part of an emerging body of work that situates contemporary Britain *within* the temporalities of colonialism. Perhaps most importantly, Turner provides powerful support to the argument that borders cannot be decolonised, and their abolition requires us to work much more broadly against what Sharpe (2016) terms ‘white kinship’.

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