Book Review: Postcolonial Media Culture in Britain by Rosalind Brunt and Rinella Cere

Apr 8 2012

***Postcolonial Media Culture in Britain** is a refreshing and interesting text that introduces readers to postcolonial theory using the context of British media culture in ethnic minority communities to explain key ideas and debates. Asiya Islam is concerned that the book lacks a detailed exploration of gender-specific issues, but applauds it for taking on important under-discussed topics.*

Postcolonial Media Culture in Britain. Rosalind Brunt and Rinella Cere. Palgrave Macmillan. 192 pages. December 2010.

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David Cameron's infamous "Multiculturalism has failed" speech, given at a security conference in Munich in February 2011, marked an important point in the history of race and ethnic consciousness in Britain. Not only did it imply a resistance to future immigration, but also seemed to admit to making an error in allowing Britain to become a melting pot of cultures. Expressions of similar sentiments by other world leaders, including Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel, have further contributed to this opinion, positing multiculturalism as a global failure.

The questions of what role ethnic minorities play in society, where they stand and whether they have equality of opportunity are all significant questions, and are tied up with Britain's media machine in two ways. Firstly, the media reflects and creates spaces for ethnic minorities through 'representation' in its pages. Many will be familiar with, and much academic work has been written on, the negative stereotypes of cultural minorities. Such literature has emerged from various academic disciplines, including gender studies, race studies, media studies, anthropology and sociology. Though these discussions on media and race are very significant, they do not necessarily suggest alternatives. Secondly, the policy stance on multiculturalism influences media policies and governance. Britain exemplifies this phenomenon very well. With changing governments and policy stances on 'integration', air time *given* to ethnic minorities has seen fluctuations.

Postcolonial Media Culture in Britain is refreshing in that it studies mostly non-mainstream media produced by ethnic minorities. By doing so, it brings out detailed nuances of the relationship between postcolonialism and the expression of the 'self'. Edited by Rosalind Brunt (Visiting Research Fellow in Media Studies at Sheffield Hallam University) and Rinella Cere (Senior Lecturer in Communication and Media at Sheffield Hallam University), the book contains a set of highly interesting essays that exemplify how postcolonial theory can be applied to analysis of concrete media forms by exploring the creation of art, music and film by black and minority ethnic (BME) groups.

Essays examining case studies are flanked by others discussing the importance and use of postcolonial theory in the study of the media in Britain. Rinella Cere starts by setting out a cognitive
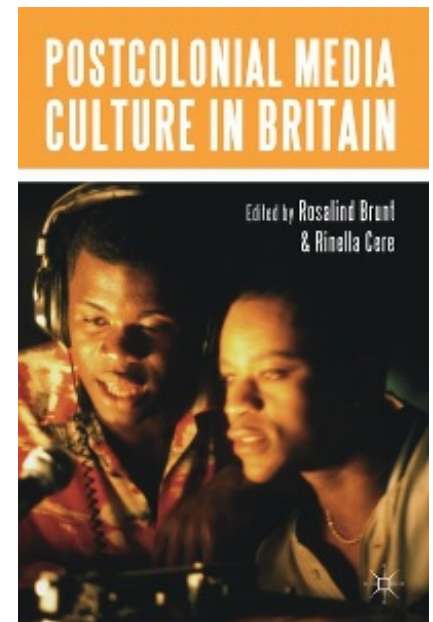
map of postcolonial theory and the media which those unfamiliar with the works of Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak and Stuart Hall will find quite handy as a preface. It is also useful as an introduction to the theme of the book, especially the idea that media not only 'represents' in the traditional sense of the word but also *creates*. Readers interested in the theoretical aspects of the debate will also find the last essay in the book of particular interest as it explores contemporary postcolonial theory with a critical mind. Christopher Pawling argues that the postcolonial global disorder can be challenged and transformed only with a scientific and rational critique.

Many essays in the book tend to focus on issues relating to Muslims in Britain. This is understandable since the contemporary backlash against multiculturalism has been, to a certain extent, an extension of the growing trend of 'Islamophobia'. These essays are instrumental in presenting the diversity of Muslims in Britain. While popular or dominant media often portrays *all* Muslims as a homogeneous group to be seen with suspicion and distrust, these essays expound the heterogeneous identity formation of Muslims, including Black and Asian Muslims, the multiple ways in which the internet has been put to use by the British Muslim community and organisations, and the role of mainstream news in Islamophobic opinion formation.

Some extremely interesting ideas emerge from these essays. One particularly important issue is that of the formulation of 'communities' in the age of new media. Is 'British Muslims' a real or an imagined community? Gary Bunt notes that the idea of *'ummah',* or a global Islamic community, has been one of the motivations behind developing online Islamic forums. But these forums have been used in as many ways as possible – for developing collaboration beyond national/regional boundaries, for furthering dissent between different sects of Islam and for ending animosities between different Islamic schools of thought.

While the main theme of the book is self-expression of BME voices through the media, it does not shy away from confronting racist legacy in dominant media in Britain. It challenges the culture of stereotyping and presents alternatives, such as more positive and varied representations of people from BME groups on radio. Such alternatives also raise questions over government policy on media and race, the changing political atmosphere in Britain, and the avenues available to black and minority ethnic groups in British society.

Though overall the essays explore various types of media, including radio, music, online networks and channels, and apply postcolonial theory for analysis, they could have done with exploring other more nuanced themes within that analysis. For example, the book lacks a detailed exploration of gender-specific media and issues, which cannot be isolated from the discussion on postcolonialism nor can the discussion on postcolonialism turn a blind eye to them. However, as mentioned earlier, the essays do present a refreshing perspective by taking up an interdisciplinary approach to the creation of media by black and minority ethnic groups.

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Asiya Islam graduated in Gender, Media and Culture from the LSE Gender Institute in 2010 and has since been working in Equality and Diversity at LSE. Asiya is interested in studying intersections of race and gender in the media and popular culture. She blogs about feminism and feminist analysis of various issues on www.whyamiafeminist.blogspot.com. She also contributes to the Guardian and Women's Views on News. She tweets at @asiyaislam. Read more reviews by Asiya.

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