



## ***Danishness, Nordic Amnesia and Immigrant Museums***

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**Abstract:** Museums' images and narratives play an active role in the construction of collective memories. Since collective memories are integral to the politics of social and group identity, most of the controversy surrounding museums' representational practices depart from the question of who "owns" memory and what form of remembrance ought to be presented (Prosis 2003). Through an exploration of the Danish Immigration Museum's website, in this article the author discusses the dynamics existent between DIM's representational practices and its politics of exhibiting other cultures. In order to render intelligible such dynamics, the politics of remembrance (of particular cultural elements) and oblivion (of other elements) within the museum's system of representation are scrutinized. Methodologically this means that questions concerning the "semiotics" of meaning production—how the museum classifies, categorizes, and represents other cultures—are not dissociated from the "politics" of meaning production—how the museum constructs, through the objects it chooses to display and the narratives it chooses to tell, master narratives about itself. Accordingly, the representations of other cultures invariably involve the presentation of self-portraits, in that those who are observed are possibly eclipsed by the observer. The article's goal is to address how colonial legacies—with their epistemic and ontological violence—continue to inform, implicitly, current dynamics of representations in Danish museums.

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

It has hitherto been the nation-state task to maintain the geographic territory as a regulatory element for the maintenance of its imagined community. History has been constructed from the idea of the national as organizing principle, and thus from a fixed location. It is this entrenched Western (read Euro-American) view of the world as

organized in nations that territorial mobility is envisioned as abnormal, and the "postcolonial" immigrant as a "threat."

The immigrant subject has from this optic occupied a deviant position—neither completely inside nor completely outside the nation-state, constituting, within the nation state's own views, peripheral post-colonial narrations without historical impact to its memory.

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The appearance of a museal culture devoted to symbolically and materially represent the history of immigrant cultures, contributes in many stances, I argue, to the multiple and subtle mechanisms of minimizing the historical importance of the nomadic, the “strange” and the (“ethnic”) “other” within the nation-state’s history.

The Danish Immigration Museum (DIM) in Denmark is not an exception. What we observe today represented in the museum’s web documentation is a narrative of forgetfulness as a political feature of Danish national and public memory.

Despite vigorous institutional argumentation for immigration museums as sites of memory, the praxis shows us that such sites have often yielded paradoxically forgetful results. In this respect, the Danish Immigration Museum discloses a complicated national relationship to immigration and immigration politics: namely the question of colonial memory (Blaagaard 2010). A closer look at the museum’s photo archives shows us an absence of any historical record related to the Danish former colonies<sup>1</sup> and their presence in the Danish territory.

Nordic history seems to show us that there is a collective purpose behind the suppression of memory. The intentional banalization of colonialism serves not only as a form of selective forgetting, but also as an ethical issue concerning the political relationship between Denmark and its former colonies.

The negation of intense participation in the European colonial administration has enabled and still enables the Nordic countries to carry on its fictitious humanitarianism. The silenced archives of the DIM

<sup>1</sup> I am referring to Saint Thomas, St. John and St. Croix in the Caribbean, Ghana in Africa, Faroe Island and Greenland (Faroe Island is a former Danish colony and now self-governing part of the “Kingdom” of Denmark; immigrants from both Greenland and Faroe Island are not represented in the museum due to their Danish “citizenship”).

contribute to this non-history of colonialism.

Furthermore, as part of a vehicle for integration policies, the museum fails to address historically important immigrant groups whose presence in the country today do not necessarily result from colonial history, but constitutes part of the Danish history, most notably, the Tamil immigrants from Sri Lanka.

A report published by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (2002), reveals that of all the Scandinavian countries, Denmark is the least interested in its minorities at the parliamentary level (Blaagaard 2010:107). Resonating with most European discourses on migrancy, the Danish discourse on immigrants is highly xenophobic and exclusionary in character. Descendants of immigrants are officially called new-Danes; however, the reality is that once an immigrant you’ll stay an immigrant forever: “You’re a first generation immigrant, a second generation immigrant, a third generation immigrant, a fourth generation immigrant—you’re always an immigrant” (Gilroy 2006).

As I will argue throughout the article, the Danish hegemonic discourse on migration materializes itself in the overall structure of its one and only Immigrant Museum. In spite of its function as a memory site, the museum is oddly overdetermined by national blind spots, thus highlighting how colonial legacies and historical “forgetfulness” continue to inform current dynamics of cultural representations in Danish museums in general and in DIM, in particular. Paradoxically, the immigrant museum then becomes part of a master narrative that the Danish nation articulates about what it means to be “Danish” (and modern).

Accordingly, departing from the analysis of the DIM’s website, the following article argues that there are two cultural constructions at work at the website, firstly,

the hidden construction of Danishness through the selective choice of exhibitions and topics related to migrancy, and, secondly, the “invisibilization” of some historical factors associated to immigration in Denmark including potential cultural memories.

In the first part of the article, I will be concentrating on the forms of knowledge constructed by the website. By highlighting how the site is given its meaning by the institution that creates it, I will discuss how representation connects meaning and language to culture (here expressed metonymically as “Danishness”). In this section, I will be also focusing on the museum’s cultural narratives. That is, the stories that are reinforced through the function of the site. The article’s last part intends to briefly examine the absence of the Danish colonial past in the museum’s website. By examining why this past has been “forgotten” and how such forgetfulness continues to reproduce itself as discourses on Danishness, I will touch upon the the troublesome issue of race in immigration.

## II. THE MUSEUM

I find the Danish Immigrant Museum’s website to be interesting because its embodiment in electronic media brings to the forefront a multitude of issues that are informed by recent challenges to the definition of museums as memory sites. The museum has existed since 1987 and the website was constructed in July 2009. It is also important to note that, at the moment (June 2010), the museum’s physical space is under construction, which makes its website the only means of public access.

The museum’s goal to configure as a site of memory is evident in the structure of their exhibitions and the organization of their data; however, the site delivers basic information without really looking broadly at who might consume the information in

the viewing public. That is particularly clear in the textual compositions of the website. Many of the links from the menu in the front page leads us to monological theoretical discussions of issues concerned with migration, without even presenting any artifacts or historical data on the issue being debated (see <http://www.immigrantmuseet.dk/>). It is evident that the site has a clear rhetorical preoccupation in engaging with the public debates related to migration in Danish media. This rhetorical urge seems to reflect the ideological interests of the museum staff more than it accommodates the needs of the audience.

In the following sections I will present a few selected links from the museum’s website from which my discussions will depart.

## III. THE MONOLINGUAL MUSEUM

*“Language communicates attitudes, reflects traditions and conveys human relationships. On the one hand, language is an important part of an individual identity. On the other hand language marks affiliation to a group. Therefore language is often highlighted as an important element of integration.”* (DIM, June 2010 <http://www.danishimmigrationmuseum.com/index.php?page=sprog>)

The quote above is an example of one of the many discourses constructed by the museum. Language is the thematic subject under discussion in this link. I find the quote worthy of note because it reveals the twofold purpose of the text; the desire to articulate the use of mother tongues with identity politics, and the concealed message about the importance for immigrants to learn the host *country’s language* for their successful integration. My argument in what follows is that the

text above is inserted within the usual questions of politics of representation, placing, in this way, the juridical framework of identity politics—who has the right to speak? And who has the right to represent others?—right at the heart of the museum’s signifying practice.

In order to contextualize the discussion, I can inform the reader that foreigners seeking residency through family reunification or political exile in Denmark are required to pay DKK 1406.00 for a Danish language test (Studieprøven). In addition to testing Danish language skills, the exam also requires a residency applicant to know general facts about Danish culture and society.

The test is composed of 200 questions in 11 areas ranging from the Danish royalty, local geography and the economy. Applicants have 60 minutes to answer 35 of the standard questions as well as five problems dealing with current events.

Applicants must correctly answer 28 questions to pass the test. And while they can re-take the test as many times as they wish, this particular test costs EUR 189.00 to take.

Reactions to the citizenship test have been mixed. A number of left-wing politicians and education experts have suggested it concentrates too much on obscure historical and political details that even Danes might have difficulty answering correctly. According to an article in *Information*, a Danish newspaper, several Danish university students struggled to pass the test. One student, Patrick, only managed to answer 29 questions correctly and admitted he found the test difficult: “I learned about a lot of the things it asks in school, but I’ve forgotten them again,” he said. Another student, Natalia, felt that “the test concentrated too much on history” (*Information* 2006, June 28<sup>th</sup>).

I am arguing here that the website is a medium through which the museum’s (and “Danish”) thoughts, meanings and values

are disseminated. The production of meaning in the text above seems to be telling us more about what the museum (and Denmark) consider important in terms of the relationship between language and integration, than the contribution of different mother tongues to Danish identity politics through the history of immigration in Denmark. Topics like the influence of foreign languages on the Danish language or the dialects and slangs spoken by the Arabic speaking urban youth are completely dismissed. Besides, the website does not give one single example of the multiple immigrant languages spoken in Denmark today (see <http://www.danishimmigrationmuseum.com/index.php?page=sprog>).

The politics of language, like religion, is highly ideologically charged—not least as a result of the national language ideology (as represented in the text above). The overall stance taken by Danish migratory policies is to discourage the toleration and promotion of immigrant languages due to the danger of ghettoification which, according to their rethoric, bears the risk of political fragmentation and community unrest. Such policies neither intend to promote the language rights of immigrant individuals, nor work to find a balance between the claims of individual language rights and the interests of the nation-state.

In the following I will tentatively discuss the mechanisms by which the museum constructs the “idea” of Danishness through the exhibition of objects brought by immigrants.

#### **IV. REPRESENTING THE SELF THROUGH OTHERS**

Looking at the museum’s collection, we find a curious interest in gathering traditional Christmas objects from Christmas around the world. This link is only found in the Danish version of the website

(see <http://www.immigrantmuseet.dk/index.php?page=alias-22>). The most noteworthy about the link is its emphasis on the meaning of Christmas objects *for* Denmark.

In the translated Danish text below, we are informed about the history of the first Christmas tree brought by German immigrants to Denmark. The text's first paragraph bears quoting:

“The Christmas tree is a European custom which came to Denmark from Germany. The first Christmas tree in Denmark was lit in 1808 at the Holsteinsborg property in Sealand (Sjælland in Danish). In Copenhagen, the first Christmas tree stood by the Lehmann family at New Kongensgade in 1811” (See <http://www.immigrantmuseet.dk/index.php?page=juletr-et>).

Christmas traditions are a very important element in the discourse on Danishness, and the “Christmas tree” can be considered to be the Nordic ethnographic object per excellence. The only problem, in the context of our discussion, is that discourses on the meaning of Christmas objects brought by immigrants for *Danes* tend to minimize the role material objects play for (non-Christians) immigrants to surmount the complex situations and emotional instability associated with the process of migration. The immigrant's material culture, their objects, plays a significant role in achieving self-remembering, self-representation and home (re)making.

This does not mean that I am arguing for the exhibition of immigrant's material culture as the only factuality of their socio-cultural complexity. Rather what I am suggesting is that the over-representation of Christmas objects in the museum's collection tells us a lot about the manner in

which the museum make certain objects meaningful, and how it constructs discourses through these objects display.

The website's emphasis on Christmas traditions speaks for itself bearing in mind that Islam is the largest minority religion in Denmark (statistics from august 2009: Blaagaard 2010). Nordic public and political debates often conflate the notion of “migrant” with the notion of “Muslim” (Jensen:2006). Norway's Constitution, for instance, requires that over half of the government cabinet are members of the state church (Human Rights Report 2008). In Denmark, a newly implemented migration law has created a quota that allows 500 refugees with a Christian religious background to access the country every year (ENAR Shadow Report 2004). Such political practices suggest that the Nordic nation-state's idea of integration/assimilation is powerfully informed by Lutheran-Protestant Christian classifications. As argued here, these (Islamophobic) practices point to the omission of other potential narratives, and omission of subjectivities that might generate cracks in the discourse about Nordic secular history and culture (Gullestad 2005).

It is uncontested that migration is not just about citizens crossing borders from homeland to host-countries; it also incorporates global movements of material and immaterial things. As I attempted to argue above, the museum's priority to select objects which seem the very epitome of the notion of mono-culturality (like the Christmas tree) and its concern in maintaining the idea of a “national language” are part of a textual complicity which reveals a certain urge in communicating values concerned with the preservation of “Danishness.” The multilingual, the pluri-religious and the intercultural society are still marginalized values in the museum's discursive practices.

My main goal in this first part of the article has been to discuss what scholar

Jeanne Canizzo calls “museum as cultural text” (1998). Jeanne Canizzo sees the museum as a cultural text “that may be read to understand the underlying cultural and underlying assumptions that have informed its creation, selection and display” (Canizzo 1998:151). Resonating Canizzo’s views, I have explored how implicit discourses of Danishness shape the museum’s website textual content and the museums choice of exhibited artefacts.

In the following section the focus will be on the “silenced” archives of DIM. The general idea in this last section is to understand how the choice to “forget” or “look away” can function both on an historical level and on the level of representational practices.

## V. THE “FORGOTTEN” IMMIGRATION: THE SILENCED IMMIGRANT GROUPS

By January 2009, the immigrant population in Denmark (though literally defined, referring to immigrants, refugees and descendants from all countries) made up 500,036, or 8.3% of the total Danish population of 5,400,640 people (Danish statistics 2009). The term “immigrant population” includes in a statistical and formal manner people of both “Western” (29.2%) and “non-western” (70.8%) origins (Denmark statistics 2009). Immigrants with origin in Somalia, Lebanon, Afghanistan and Iraq have the lowest attachment to the labour market. The so-called original/working-immigrants; Turks, Pakistanis and Yugoslavs, are still among the largest immigrant groups in Denmark (Goli 2007:60).

The term ‘immigrants’ includes both foreigners and naturalized citizens. However, in the real world the term only refers to immigrant and descendants of non-western origin. The label ‘descendants’ means children born in Denmark, where at least one of the parents is foreign

citizen born abroad—children born in other countries would be immigrants themselves.

40.4% or 178,491 of the total immigrant (including descendants) population in Denmark are Danish citizens of a different ethnic/national background (Goli 2007:61) who paradoxically are counted among immigrants, making the picture tremendously blurred. The complete survey of all immigrant groups existent in Denmark today would exceed the limits of this essay, suffice it to say for now that not all immigrants living in Denmark today are portrayed in the museum’s website (<http://www.danishimmigrationmuseum.com/index.php?page=grupper>).

There is no apparent explanation for which criteria were used to choose these groups, other than other immigrant groups. Perhaps a look into the historical past may be helpful in order to understand why some stories are told over and over again and others are “forgotten.” Among the immigrant groups represented in the website we find descriptions of what the museum calls the “potato Germans,” the “Moravian,” the “Somalis,” the “Romani people,” the “forgotten” Swedish workers, the “German-, Palestinian-, Russian and Hungarian refugees,” and the “Turks” (Ibid.).

In his work “Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History” (1995), the Haitian historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot uses the concept “silencing the past” to show how unimaginable or undesirable events are systematically written out of history—he highlights how “unthinkable” the history of the Haitian revolution was and still is. This forgetfulness can be seen, he argues, as an *activity* (Trouillot 1995) and not how we generally perceive it: as absence and motionlessness: a non-activity.

The case of the Danish Immigrant Museum is particularly illuminating. As an example of the “activity” of forgetfulness towards immigrants who generated cracks

in the discourse about Danish self-perception, I will briefly introduce, in the following, one group of immigrants whose existence is not registered in the website, but whose presence provoked a heavy political havoc in Denmark: the group of immigrants and refugees from Sri Lanka.

## VI. NORDIC AMNESIA I—THE TAMIL CASE

According to official statistics 7,147 people of the origin of the island of Sri Lanka (Immigration Service 2009) live in Denmark today. The Sri Lanka Tamils came to Denmark in the eighties as refugees from the civil war. In 1987, the justice minister Erik Ninn-Hansen decided to decrease by law the number of Tamil family reunifications, which was justified by the improvement of the civil war situation in Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, the law clearly ensured the Tamil refugees the right to family reunification rendering Hansen's order, known as the Tamil case, illegal (Henrichsen 1993:10). When the case appeared in the media, several political parties opposed to the re-election of Erik Ninn-Hansen and others demanded an in-depth investigation, ultimately leading to the resignation of Erik Ninn-Hansen as justice minister in 1989 (Henrichsen 1993:10).

Four civil servants in the Department of Justice were charged and the justice minister was put before the court of impeachment, which led to the fall of the Poul Schlüter Conservative government in 1993. In 1995 Erik Ninn-Hansen was found guilty of three cases of power abuse and received a suspended sentence of 4 months of prison (Henrichsen 1993:11). The official report on the "Tamil case"—a great work of 2218 pages (in addition, lawsuit 2782 pages and annexes 634 pages)—had a huge media repercussion during the 90s.

My point in bringing the "Tamil case" into light is that the Danish Immigration Museum's narratives does not emerge in a political vacuum, but rather reflects national blind spots. The Tamil case is one of the events that are well-known yet systematically and actively forgotten, considered unworthy of contemplation or unimportant in a museal context, even when it concerns an immigration museum.

## VII. NORDIC AMNESIA II—COLONIAL HISTORY

When it comes to the history as well as the non-history or silence of Nordic colonialism, indifference occurs simultaneously with forgetfulness.

As seen in the previous discussion, there are groups who are remembered and those who are selectively forgotten. It is not common knowledge that Denmark was the seventh largest slave-trading nation during colonial times—the US being the sixth (Gøbel 1996). Information on colonial history is available in history books in Denmark but is not considered worthy or important for the country's understanding of their present (Blaagaard 2010).

In the following I will briefly present a list of the Danish former colonies (Gøbel 2002, Oommen 2005):

### *Europe*

- Faeroe (1380/1536/1814 to present, although it exercises a large degree of autonomy from Denmark.)
- Iceland (1380/1536/1814 to 1918, after that fully sovereign state united with Denmark under a common king and since 1944 an independent parliamentary democratic republic.)
- Danish Estonia (1206-1645)
- Shetland Islands (1380-1469)
- Orkney Islands (1380-1469)

*Arctic*

- Greenland (1814 to 1979, since then largely autonomous)

*America*

- Danish West Indies (1666 to 1917)
- St. Thomas (1672)
- St. John (1683)
- St. Croix (former French West Indies Company) (1733)

*Asia*

- Danish East India
- Nicobar Islands (*Ny Danmark - Neu-Dänemark* 1756-1848/1868)
- Serampore (also *Frederiksnagore* in Bengal, 1755-1845)
- Tranquebar (Danish: *Trankebar*; sea port in India, 1620-1845)

*Africa*

- Ghana Denmark established several short term bases and fortresses at the Gold Coast in West Africa, today the coast of Ghana, in the 17th and 18th centuries.
- Ningo: Fort Fredensborg (1734-March 1850)
- Accra/Osu: Fort Christiansborg (1658-April 1659, 1661-Dec 1680, February 1683-1693, 1694-1850)
- Tshe: Fort Augustaborg (1787-March 1850)
- Keta: Fort Prinsenstein (1780-12 March 1850)
- Ada: Fort Kongensten (1784-March 1850)
- Amanful/ Amanfro: Fort Frederiksborg (1659-16 April 1685)
- Anomabu: Fort William (1657)

Despite the fact that there is no overarching master narrative in understanding the history of Danish colonialism, the list of Danish former colonies above certifies that

the Danish kingdom had substantial colonial possessions.

Denmark has through its journalistic practices and educational and cultural institutions, privileged and prolonged a cultural amnesia through a silencing of colonial historical events.

This suspension of discourse kept Danes crimeless and irreproachable despite their continuous encounter with colonial subjects. Greenlanders are, for instance, an embodied presence of the colonial subject up to date in the country.

For the sake of our discussion on museums and their relation to migration we might ask: What are the political implications of the decision to perform historical events in the way it is done by eclipsing their existence as we see in the website of the museum? In short, who got to speak, who was heard and who was silenced? And, in what ways do colonial legacies continue to inform patterns of immigration policies, historical memory and museal representations?

## VIII. CONCLUDING: THE PRESENCE IN ABSENCE

I believe that the concept of “coloniality” as formulated by the Peruvian scholar Anibal Quijano (2000) may be a helpful analytic tool for understanding the modern/colonial Denmark and the questions posted above.

In my reading, coloniality shows us that modernity is not teleologically ordered; on the contrary, it carries the concept of coloniality within itself. If it has been the Western world’s task to define modernity as living a present time continuous with the past, coloniality is a helpful concept because it cuts across the linearity of time, showing us another historical temporal logic. We find out that power relations in the present are not fundamentally different from power relations in the past. It



is within this grammar, that *Quijano* uses the concept of *coloniality of power* to show the colonial elements in the model of *power* that today is globally hegemonic.

Two historical processes associated with the constitution of coloniality of power are important to mention: the social classification of the world's population around the idea of "race" (Quijano 2000), and the constitution of a new structure of control of labor which was also based on the ideology of racial classification. Coloniality of labor control determined the social geography of capitalism to be in the West (Quijano 2000:538).

Europeans in general, and Danes in particular, have astutely denied consciousness of those others who helped to accumulate the wealth through coloniality (wealth that, for instance, allowed Denmark to construct their modern welfare state). On the other hand, "coloniality of power" does not stand alone, besides coloniality of power there are "coloniality of being" and "coloniality of knowledge" (Maldonado-Torres 2007).

The basic assumptions behind "coloniality of being" and "coloniality of knowledge" is that the historical negation of the cognitive faculties of racialized others has provided the basis for their ontological negation (Maldonado-Torres 2007).

If we assume that European modernity or classical epistemology is built upon an anthropological colonial difference (as Maldonado-Torres argues) and that anthropological colonial difference is based on race, we are getting close to understanding racism as structural to the modern nation-state.

The irrational myth of modernity (de-linked from coloniality) (Mignolo 2000), and its epistemic and ontological violence, is the root, I argue, of the Danish social imaginary and its amnesia. These imaginary constructs "distorted ideas of common sense; an obscure *taken-for-grantedness*, which limits self-criticism by mysti-

fying issues" (Blaagaard 2010:104). This is present in the public sphere; that is, social structures of representation such as libraries, architecture, museums, the press and publishing houses, public and government institutions.

Paul Gilroy uses the concept of agnology in order to describe the patterned forms of ignorance present in the Nordic countries. Agno-politics is a form of structural blindness that produces a "new racism" (rather than a more easily condemnable overt racism) (Gilroy 2006).

The problem with concepts seeking to understand "new" forms of racism, as "recent" types of racism, is that they do not seem to assume racism to be structural to the concept of modernity. I do not believe in new forms of racism, particularly because lately the concept of new-racism emerged rhetorically in Scandinavia as if racism was a new phenomenon, as something that did not exist for a moment, and returns unexpectedly from an unknown past. The Nordic history shows us that the phenomenology of racism has always been racist, independently of its discursive morphology.

Lewis Gordon argues in "Bad Faith and Antiracist Racism" (1995) that everyone can succumb to ethnic hatred. In fact, this is predominantly what the concept of racism as bad faith communicate—"that racism should be understood as a permanent possibility (or even a permanent temptation) that is interwoven with the dynamics of human existence itself" (van Leeuwen 2008).

According to Gordon, the racist perceives himself as "presence," while the racial other is construed as "absence" or "emptiness" (Gordon 1995:35).

As I have argued throughout this article, the forms of knowledge constructed in the museum's website, the texts and artefacts it chooses to exhibit, discloses the strategies of a host country representing immigrants through a narrative of its own

history and values as a norm. The history of migration that the Danish Immigration Museum presents to us is part of a master narrative of Danish modernity, wherein modernity is delinked from its colonial history. This is a statement that requires some unpacking.

Collecting Christmas objects from immigrants around the world, when the majority of immigrants in Denmark have a Muslim religious background, is a construction of an absence. In this way the website is also constructing a history of the good and the visible immigrant who brings the good objects, like Christmas trees, to Denmark. Through the lenses of Gordon's theories, I propose that Danishness is reified as presence in the website through the rhetoric of the "modern/colonial" world (Mignolo 2000); it is the racism inherent to this rhetoric that makes invisible the "bad" immigrant "other." The dynamics of presence/absence with regards to one's own location (ethnic, cultural and economic) are very complex in the context of DIM. As I have argued, the museum is not only representing the material and symbolic culture of immigrants; discourses on immigrant culture occur simultaneously with constructions of Danishness. Danishness, on the other hand, has also a racial dimension understood as the embodiment of universality and normativity. "Whiteness," in the context of the website, becomes the "axiom" as well as something invisible—"everything and nothing" (Dyer 1997).

This fictitious transcendental position is maintained, as I have argued, through the three colonialities: of power, of being and of knowledge; that is to say, the negation of the history and presence/existence of the colonial and immigrant "other."

The irrational myth of modernity is kept through master narratives told in various institutions, by different agents with multiple purposes, one of them, as we have seen above, been told through the invisibilization of potential cultural and historical

memories while making national values and icons hyper-visible.

Resonating with Lewis Gordon's theory on racism, the racial other—in this case the "ethnic" immigrant—in the racist's universe is perceived as a lack of being (Gordon 1995:132), often in combination with the claim that the racist perceives him- or herself as universal presence of being.

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