



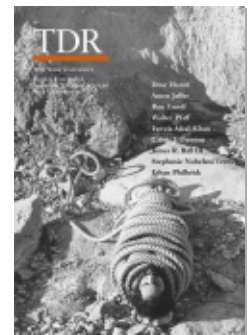
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Performing Whiteness in the Postcolony: Afrikaners in South African Theatrical and Public Life by Megan Lewis (review)

Christopher Martin

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constructions—glamour-boy and glamour-girl—directly confront the camera; in his three faux wedding pictures he plays the beautiful bride. Curtis died of AIDS soon after the last bride shot. These striking visuals capture what the sharpest bits of Palladini’s descriptions and theoretical reflections of the 1960s do for readers: illuminate under-valued labor, re-view vibrant art-work, and productively unpack queer community connections. Indeed, the labor of love is often revealed in this book, a labor that is reflected in the author’s scholarly investment in her subjects.

—Cindy Rosenthal

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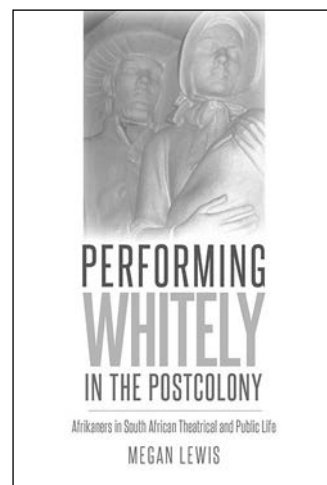
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Cindy Rosenthal is Professor of Drama and Codirector of Women’s Studies at Hofstra University. Her books include Ellen Stewart Presents: Fifty Years of La MaMa Experimental Theatre (University of Michigan, 2017); The Sixties, Center Stage (Michigan, 2017, coedited with James Harding); and Modern American Drama: Playwriting 2000–2009, coedited with Julia Listengarten (Bloomsbury/Methuen, 2018). She is a director and a founding member of the Bread Loaf Acting Ensemble in Vermont. Cindy.D.Rosenthal@hofstra.edu

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Performing Whiteness in the Postcolony: Afrikaners in South African Theatrical and Public Life. By Megan Lewis. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2016; 272 pp.; illustrations. \$55.00 paper, e-book available.

Megan Lewis’s *Performing Whiteness in the Postcolony: Afrikaners in South African Theatrical and Public Life* is an urgent and overdue analysis of 20th- and 21st-century performances that are strategically tethered to ideologies of whiteness. Lewis examines South African performance tactics and media, staged performances, playwrights, and performance artists in order to mark and make visible how Afrikaner whiteness protects itself. Methodologically, her intent is to examine performances created by white artists in ways that do not patriotically defy nor glibly demonize them (5). Lewis interrogates how South African performances have reified and critiqued shifting manifestations of whiteness from the nation’s inception to the contemporary moment.



Lewis frames her scholarship around the term “whitely,” which serves to focus the reader’s attention on her subject’s “doing of actions” or the “performing of self” (10). She defines whiteness as a fictitious concept, but one that believes itself to be infallible. Whiteness demarcates boundaries and separates “those who benefit from its privilege and those who are excluded from it” (46–47). The starkest example of the performance of whiteness is found in the study’s use of the word “laager,” or circle of wagons. This represents the literal fortress early Dutch and French Huguenot settlers used to protect themselves from “wild animals, enemy forces, [and] black Africa” in order to establish insiders and outsiders (28). Metaphorically, it represents the invisible border of whiteness designed to keep out the unwanted, which is in fact vulnerable to being penetrated as both literal and ideological borders are both porous and not sealed. This “laager mentality” continues to shape Western media’s narratives of Afrikaners and serves as a unifying concept for understanding the white subjects of this study (3).

Lewis follows a lineage of intersectional feminist scholars who have attempted to unsettle universal narratives and assumptions of objectivity by making their own voices heard. She identifies her own position as a white, naturalized US citizen with an English father, Afrikaner mother, and with Afrikaner roots concealed by her Anglicized name (4). She foregrounds this “insider-outsider” construction as a strategy to unmask and understand the book’s subjects. For instance, in reaction to escalating crime, Bok van Blerk wrote the controversial war song “De La Rey” in 2006, a summoning of the 19th-century Boer war hero General Koos de la Rey. The song was seen by many as a call for “insider” Afrikaners to circle the wagons and perform their *volk* identity in order to find protection from the “outsider” black government (59). The Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria, a monument that commemorates the Afrikaner nation, similarly presents the insider-outsider narrative with its construction comprising 64 wagons (43–44).

Broadly, the book examines how whiteness is constructed and protected, as well as how notions of traditional, binary, and the well-defined continue to be embraced, challenged, and interrogated through performance. Lewis tracks white anxiety from the white settlers who defined themselves in opposition to others, to contemporary artists working to queer and parody historical whiteness and the contemporary anxiety it produces. In chapter three, Lewis shows the ways in which the plays of Dean Opperman use “nostalgia, memory, and minority status” to garner sympathy for the Afrikaner position. In his work, Opperman investigates white anxiety, and asks his audiences to remember the world whiteness created, and to envision a future South Africa (68–69). In another case study, Lewis examines the work of Afrikaner cross-dressing satirist and performance artist Pieter-Dirk Uys, whose character Evita Bezuidenhout is strategically covered with diamonds—a jab at the mining industry that fueled the apartheid economy (103). Uys uses satire, alternative masculinity, and drag to trouble binaries and categorization and to resist whiteness and traditional gender constructions. One of the most provocative subjects Lewis examines is Anglo-Afrikaner Peter Van Heerden who comments on how whiteness and Afrikanerness are tangled by ritually sacrificing his own body (137). For instance, in his piece *So is ’n os gemaak* (*Thus Is an Ox Made*) (2004), he sketches across his naked body words such as “volk” (people), “skyt” (shit), and “bitch.” While suspended upside down from an ox yoke, he violently moves his head through the earth underneath. He explains that his white masculinity must be ritually sacrificed in order to “enable the formulation of a new non-racialised practice” (137). By examining his own white body, he does not intend to recenter power to whiteness, but to ask South Africans to examine themselves and the culture they created in order to bring forth change.

Lewis is diligent to create a monograph for the transnational reader. As many will not be familiar with her subjects, she is careful to include a representative sample of images and more thoroughly explain Afrikaner-specific terminology and concepts in the endnotes. This book urges white practitioners and scholars to remain vigilant so as to prevent their privileged positions from recentering the focus onto their white bodies, thereby undermining their original

pursuit to disavow white privilege. In the wake of the Brexit referendum and the election of Donald Trump to the US presidency in 2016, whiteness continues to protect and consolidate its power as right-wing nationalism becomes more visible across the globe. Lewis presents a study that can be used as a strategy for marking these developments in order to “resist, challenge, abject, queer, and refashion whiteness” (191). Although Lewis agrees that this study presents more questions than answers and expresses her doubts that irony alone is capable of helping whiteness escape its hegemonic past, this book is a welcome contribution to the growing body of transnational whiteness scholarship, which includes Mary Brewer’s *Staging Whiteness* (2005) and Wendy Sutherland’s *Staging Blackness and Performing Whiteness in Eighteenth Century German Drama* (2016). This scholarship works to reverse the gaze in order to discover the paradoxes, loss, and imagined suffering created as a result of an ideology of whiteness (61).

— Christopher Martin

Christopher Martin is a PhD candidate and playwright in the Department of Theatre at the University of Kansas. His research interests include critical race theory, whiteness studies, transnational performance, and revisionist theatre history. His dissertation, “Stages of Whiteness: Marking Power and Privilege in US and German Popular Performance,” explores the strategic protection of whiteness in contemporary theatre and television performance. chris.martin@ku.edu

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Rewriting Narratives in Egyptian Theatre: Translation, Performance, Politics. Edited by Sirkku Aaltonen and Areeg Ibrahim. London: Routledge, 2016, 288 pp.; illustrations. \$150.00 cloth, \$52.16 paper, e-book available.

Tabrir Tales: Plays from the Egyptian Revolution. Edited by Mohammed Albakry and Rebekah Maggor. Kolkata: Seagull Books, 2016; 346 pp. \$45.00 paper.

In 2016, Routledge and Seagull Books each released titles addressing Egyptian theatre and drama in translation. *Rewriting Narratives in Egyptian Theatre: Translation, Performance, Politics* gathers a formidable cast of scholars and practitioners working both on and in the Egyptian theatre and attempts to assemble them as a cohesive volume that addresses aspects of Egyptian theatrical translation from the 19th century up to the present day. *Tabrir Tales: Plays from the Egyptian Revolution* collates 10 original translations of contemporary Egyptian plays. The publication of both volumes is proof of the considerable development of Arabic theatre studies in English. This is important as scholars within this specialization often articulate anxiety about the invisibility of Arabic theatre in international theatre and performance scholarship. The two texts offer divergent experiences for the reader and different directions for the subfield of Arabic theatre studies.

Aaltonen and Ibrahim’s volume consists of 13 chapters divided into 4 sections. In addition to an introductory preface from the editors, each section contains two or three scholarly pieces and one practitioner’s “testimonial”—written by an Egyptian playwright-actor-director (Dalia Basiouny), translator (Mohamed Enani), theatre critic (Nehad Selaiha), or documentary

