

Miloš Debnár, *Migration, Whiteness, and Cosmopolitanism: Europeans in Japan*

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Over the past decade, scholars have dedicated increasing attention to the growing diversity of foreign communities in Japan. As Japan's demographics change due to an aging and shrinking population, foreigners are coming to comprise greater portions of Japanese society. One of the most interesting aspects of this change is the fact that the foreigners coming to Japan hail from very diverse backgrounds. This is producing a panoply of different foreign communities that call Japan home and leads to differential social positionalities that these communities maintain within Japan, as well as differential relationships they maintain with Japanese society. Miloš Debnár's analysis of Europeans in Japan further adds to this literature by providing an interesting qualitative account of the lives of Europeans, the issues they struggle with, and how they try to position themselves within Japanese society, among other important topics. In doing so, Debnár engages with several important conceptual topics relevant to migration studies, race and ethnicity, and contemporary Japan.

Debnár's work is based on fifty-seven interviews he conducted with Europeans living in the Kansai area from 2008–12. The book is divided into an introduction and three other parts: "Migration" (chapters 2–3), "Integration and Privilege" (chapters 4–5), and "Cosmopolitanism" (chapters 6–7). The book aims to accomplish several objectives: to destabilize existing concepts in migration studies and to challenge our understandings of racial categories, explain the increasing presence of Europeans living in Japan and better understand their experiences, and to situate these experiences within a wider framework of Japan's diversity.

Chapter 1, "Introduction," contextualizes the study within larger fields of literature and explains the theoretical and conceptual foundations of the study. Chapter 2, "European Migration to Japan: Historical Roots and Recent Development," provides an extensive historical overview of European migration to Japan, as well as a detailed statistical presentation of the European presence in Japan today. Chapter 3, "Between Entertainers and High-Skilled Elites: Skills, Study, and Marriage," examines the "diversification of motives for migration, and the consequent need for finding new explanatory factors" for understanding European migration to Japan (66). This chapter challenges theories of migration that seek to explain migration in simplistic terms that fail to capture the nuances of what many Europeans actually experience in Japan. Chapter 4, "Race and Privilege in Integration: Occupations, White Privilege and Gender," seeks to "depict the position of white European migrants in symbolic as well as more particular spheres of everyday life in Japan and the ways in which such positions are shaped by their race" (112). It is here where the concept of "white privilege"

is applied to the case of Europeans in Japan, and a racial lens is used to examine the experience of (middle-class European) whiteness in Japan. Chapter 5, “White Privilege Revised: White Man’s ‘Burden’ in Japan,” explains the limits of the concept of “white privilege” by showing how whiteness can be both a facilitator as well as a barrier for opportunities. Chapter 6, “Integration and Social Relations: Between Ethnicity and Cosmopolitanism,” argues that the migration patterns of Europeans to Japan “do not perfectly mirror the image of economic elites, highly-skilled professionals, or intrinsically privileged minorities” (180). This chapter adds emphasis to the argument that scholars need broader conceptual apparatuses for understanding and theorizing contemporary migration. The book thereafter ends with a concluding chapter summarizing the work’s key findings.

Debnár is well versed in his theory and spends much time explaining the theoretical fabric of his work. *Migration, Whiteness, and Cosmopolitanism* draws from an extensive and impressive body literature on migration, race, and globalization to make its arguments. Conceptually, Debnár aimed to challenge conventional ways of thinking about migration and whiteness, both of which are often oversimplified conceptually and lead to insufficient understandings of these phenomena that fail to capture their inherent complexities. This is premised on the fact that as migrations in the contemporary world unfold in a multitude of ways and take on diverse meanings, traditional ways of understanding these changing conditions often fail to capture the nuance of what is actually happening. The same is true of whiteness, in which conceptualizations of whiteness are often linked *a priori* with privilege, elitism, and cosmopolitanism, which overshadows any diversity that may exist within the category of “white.” In both of these areas, the book achieves its goals and Debnár makes a compelling argument for the need to more critically consider these concepts.

While Debnár provides an extensive array of conceptual and theoretical engagement, this comes somewhat at the expense of “thicker” ethnography, which would have added to the book considerably and would have helped readers learn more about what Europeans actually do in Japan. Also, Debnár explicitly states that the study is limited to “migrants of middle-class origin” (12–13). While he does this to rightfully problematize *a priori* associations of whiteness with elitism, by overlooking the lower-class end of the whiteness spectrum, we are left with an incomplete understanding of whiteness in Japan. This likely would have further supported his general argument on the pluralities of whiteness that exist in Japan, as well as provide for further interesting ethnography. One is left to wonder to what extent incorporation of these more marginal white voices would have challenged or buttressed the book’s findings. The same is true for the absence of upper-class white elites who work for multinational corporations in Japan, as their experiences, and perceptions thereof, are likely to differ importantly from both lower- and middle-class experiences. Also, one may critically question the extent to which “white privilege,” a concept that originated and developed within a particular sociocultural and political milieu of American society, is appropriate to examine interracial dynamics in the Japanese context, which has its own complex history of race thinking.

Shortcomings notwithstanding, Debnár’s work succeeds greatly in problematizing conventional conceptualizations of migration, whiteness, and the foreign experience in Japan. And it does so by providing interesting insights into the lives of Europeans themselves, which furthers our understanding of Japan’s ongoing diversification. The

book would be of most interest to scholars of Japan but also to scholars interested in race, migration, whiteness studies, or cosmopolitanism.

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