Narratives of Geeks, Terrorists and Thugs – How Do ‘Other’ British Masculinities Compare?

In my paper I will problematise analytical tools of comparison in masculinity studies. While as a result of the political interventions of women of color and/or queer women feminist theory has arrived at increasingly intersectional modes of addressing gender, the centrality of gender as a category of analysis in masculinity studies has not been challenged in comparative ways. Raewyn Connell’s differentiation of hegemonic and subordinated masculinities remains the most comprehensive and helpful approach in this respect. But despite such theoretical inroads into increasingly more complex and global framings of different masculinites in masculinity studies, two dilemmas remain: overall, there is still a tendency to prioritise gender as a maker of difference and consequently often re-centre hegemonic expressions of masculinity. How does the framework of masculinity studies change if the central category of masculinity itself (or gender in general) is addressed more consistently in relation to the interdependent processes of social stratification with respect to race, class and religion, for example? Looking at the ways in which contemporary ethnicised masculinities in Britain adhere to or undermine monolithic ideas of what a British man looks like and who belongs to Britain today, I will focus on three figurations of masculinities in contemporary British film and TV, namely on the ‘geek’ in The IT Crowd (2006-2013), the ‘terrorist’ in Four Lions (2010) and the ‘thug’ in Attack the Block (2011), in my talk. These are two ‘(stereo-)types’ of men who – often spectacularly – fail to embody hegemonic British masculinity. The analysis of such ‘deviant’ scripts of masculinities is meant as a way to frame masculinity as always already informed by ‘Other’ markers of difference – a perspective which equally challenges more normative expressions of masculinity and Britishness.

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