

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

JEFFREY REITZ (Ed), *Host Societies and the Reception of Immigrants*. La Jolla, CA: Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, University of California, 550 p.

This tome is the result of a conference held at the Harvard University Weatherhead Center for International Affairs in 2001. The editor was the conference organizer and brought together scholars whose expertise focused on immigration adaptation and integration. Reitz begins his introduction by discussing how the “host society” paradigm has been rejected as attributes of the individual immigrant predominate in current research. He goes on to argue that social structure and processes have been omitted from the current research paradigm. He and his contributors attempt to bring back “sociological” components into research on immigration. The central argument of the book is that immigrant adaptation and integration have been studied without investigating the sociological and structural components of the host society, which he claims are equally as important as the human capital immigrants bring with them to the “host” society. He identifies four dimensions of the host society that have a major impact on immigrants entering the country. These dimensions provide the basis for integrating the various papers that were included in this tome.

The first section focuses on “Pre-existing Ethnic and Race Relations in Host Societies” and six papers are included in this section. Five of the six papers are written from the perspective of American ethnic relations that reflects the ideology embodied in a “melting pot” and “racially polarized” society. Only one of the papers is theoretical while the others provide empirical evidence to address the importance of pre-existing relations. These chapters illustrate that pre-existing ethnic/race relations vary in two important ways -- the cultural similarity between immigrants and host society and the level of resources of existing immigrant groups within the host society. While we would all acknowledge the importance of such structural factors, few empirical pieces have specifically looked at these factors and assessed their impact on immigrant adaptation and integration.

Section two looks at differences in “Labour Markets and Related Institutions.” This perspective argues that rather than focus on the individual attributes of immigrants, more concern should be given to the labour market structure, e.g., immigrant concentration in various segments of the labour force. This change in perspective also changes the focus from the individual to the structure of society. However, focusing on immigrant

participation in a single labour market limits any general assessments as to the prevalence of this form of concentration. Nor does it allow for an assessment of how the labour market interacts with other institutions in society. Fortunately, the comparative aspect of this book allows the reader to compare the impact of labour markets in other countries as well as to assess how other institutions in society interact with the labour market structure. This is just one aspect of the book that makes a substantive contribution to the discipline in that authors present data from a number of countries, e.g., Canada, U.S.A., Australia, France, Holland, U.K., and demonstrate that other factors such as labour market regulations and the extent of welfare structures, are important mediating factors that relate to the labour market participation by immigrants.

The third section of the book focuses on the impact of “Government Policies and Programs.” How immigrants adapt and integrate have traditionally focused on the attributes of the immigrants and their human capital. However, this section refocuses the interest on the impact of host society policies and programs with regard to immigrants. Beginning with immigration policy, host societies develop reception policies and programs as well as longer term policies, e.g., welfare programs, to enhance immigrant integration. However, interesting anomalies emerge in this argument. For example, while the U.S.A.’s immigration policy is less “skill selective” than in Canada, actual immigrants entering the U.S.A. are more highly skilled than in Canada. This clearly demonstrates that other forces are operating that blunt the intent of immigration policy. Nevertheless, the importance of this section goes beyond simple policy. The authors note that the historical context of these policies and the ethos of each country have an important impact on the current policy. Their work reveals that the “path dependency” of policies implemented play an important part in current policy and that changes to policy are difficult and expensive to implement.

Finally, the last section addresses the changing nature of “International Boundaries” and its impact on immigrant adaptation and integration. This section focuses on the “place” of each host society within the globalized world and how it impacts immigrants. This dimension focuses on the boundaries each society maintains with other societies and the constraints imposed with regard to the flow of people, ideas and goods entering and leaving, e.g., illegal immigration.

The material presented is predominantly from the U.S.A. (two thirds of the authors) with the remainder of the authors being equally split between Canada and the rest of the world. Not surprising, the book has a decidedly American perspective and embodies many of the assumptions and underlying conceptualizations of American immigration policy and views about assimilation. And, if the reader has a sense of “déjà vu” when reading some of the material, you will be correct. About one third of the papers have already been published in the *International Migration Review* journal (2002). While the inclusion of these published papers reflects their

importance, it might have been more fruitful for the editor to have included new scholarship on the topics.

Nevertheless, the intellectual contribution of the book is substantive. It arises from trying to get researchers to redirect their efforts from analyzing the social attributes (human capital) of immigrants to the structures of the host society. In this sense, the book tries to reintroduce social structure as an important sociological perspective that seems to have been increasingly lost in the current research on immigrants. A second contribution of this manuscript is the range of methodological strategies utilized by scholars to analyze secondary and primary data. Students interested in integration will learn from the varied techniques employed. Third, the comparative aspect of the material gives some insights into the complexity of immigrant adaptation and integration. The material in this book provides us with the understanding that the way we conceptualize how the world works is related to the concepts, methodology and perspectives we use in analyzing the data we collect. This tome provides a new perspective to interpret old concepts and encourages researchers to more fully understand the processes involved in immigrant adaptation and integration. In doing so, the authors provide a new perspective with regard to immigrant integration. Finally, I would like to recommend that this book be required reading for policy makers and government officials working in the area of immigration.

James S. Frideres, *University of Calgary*.

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