

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

VANAJA DHRUVARAJAN and JILL VICKERS, eds., *Gender, Race, and Nation: A Global Perspective*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002, x + 316 p., Index, \$65 hardcover, \$29.95 paper.

The editors of this anthology argue that thinking through the differences among women is necessary to understand and explain the life experiences of all women (indeed all people) worldwide. The 11 chapters, eight of them by one or both of the editors, deal with feminist theories, feminist research perspectives, women of colour in Canada, women workers in Canada, bodies, beauty and growing up female, men and feminism, reproductive technology issues, violence, nationalism, religion and spirituality; and social transformation. The work adds to our knowledge of women's experiences in Canada and is an example of the growing international literature on gendered aspects of racism and nationalism and the diversity of women's experiences.

The editors favour an approach which combines women's knowledge of their common and different experiences with analyses of how systems of power based on differences work. They approve of Essed's comparative 1991 study of Black women's experiences of racism in the United States and Holland, noting that gendered racism and sexism affect power relations of women and men in various contexts. The editors invite occupants of privileged positions to consider how they replicate systems of power: e.g., many white women who are anti-racist continue to benefit from their privileged position. They maintain that difference can be used creatively when it is combined with a sense of commonality and used as a political resource to deepen democracy globally. For example, women in non-Western societies may choose motherhood, marriage and domesticity as strategies to avoid poverty and save their children from oppression. Many marginalized women in the West choose to identify racism, colonialism, heterosexism and ableism as major oppressions which intersect with that of gender and mainstream Western feminists often silence Palestinian and Arab women.

Vickers suggests research on women may use positivist, standpoint, or postmodern approaches, but sees active involvement in women's movements as important for effective feminist scholarship. Dhruvarajan maintains that women of colour have a long way to go before becoming fully accepted members of Canadian society but notes that funds have been made available to assist their struggles and educational institutions have become more inclusive. Ghorayshi provides evidence that women of colour

with university degrees are under-represented in professional or management positions and over-represented in the clerical field. She concludes that progress toward gender and ethnic equality in the workplace has been slow.

In the chapter on women's bodies Rice uses interview data to describe various strategies women use to resist certain ideals and to define themselves. She advocates appreciation of and assistance for women as they work through the political, ethical and health-related dilemmas of bodily practice, claiming that alternative images of beauty and a broader range of options for all women are needed.

Amoral and unethical practices by biomedical and pharmaceutical companies undermine women's health worldwide and Dhruvarajan sees the resulting problems as systemic, contending that feminists should be engaged at all levels of decision making to ensure woman-friendly policies. But, as Vickers argues in relation to violence, problems arise when mainstream Western women call for state protection from violence whereas women in other cultures prefer community-level approaches and collective security practices which build women's solidarity. Experiences of productive versus repressive nationalism raise similar complex issues.

Dhruvarajan rejects socialist feminist arguments that action should concentrate on economic and political concerns rather than in the religious sphere because there is a reciprocal relation between material circumstances and value systems. Religion often provides a value framework for economic decisions such as the appropriateness of certain kinds of women's work and its degree of segregation from men. Moreover, struggles between liberal and fundamentalist versions of religion have very different implications for women and that interfaith dialogue is a condition for promoting postpatriarchal religions.

Dhruvarajan concludes that the building of coalitions between women of colour and mainstream women is hindered by the benefits which white middle-class women continue to enjoy, and by the construction of women of colour as "other" and prejudices among women of colour toward each other. Development of a sense of community among feminists is vital and there is great potential in the United Nations' conferences and their efforts against poverty and violence. The goal is a caring and compassionate world where equality and justice prevail for all people. Few would disagree.

The editors acknowledge that their discussion is limited to English texts. But their argument is inconsistent on two fronts: the chapter on men and feminism, in which Goldrick-Jones demonstrates how men can make positive contributions to feminist work, is not integrated with the others, particularly the key introductory and concluding chapters; and, despite calling for the recognition of differences, the editors make a number of generalizations about "two-third world" women, making class and other differences among women in developing countries invisible.

Nevertheless, this is a useful volume which can be used effectively for teaching purposes at the senior undergraduate level and above and as a source of insight for research projects in this field.

Rennie Warburton *University of Victoria*

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