

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

NEIL CHAKRABORTI and JON GARLAND (Eds.) *Rural Racism*. Portland, OR: Willan Publishing, 2004, xiv + 203 p. Index.

From a policy perspective, rural racism in the UK remains less recognized than its urban complement because rural incidences of racism are often obscured through a focus on numbers, rather than on needs, of “minority ethnics.” Service provision in rural areas is complicated by geographical distance and the direct and indirect networks of community members. The contributors to this book, who represent academic and policy backgrounds, respond not only to this gap in policy initiatives, but also to the lack of focus on rural areas in the British academic literature on racism. Drawing heavily from government policy and data (e.g., censuses), the authors highlight the differences between rural and urban settings in terms of manifestations of racism and service provision to those who experience racism.

In rural settings, racism may be exacerbated through the hypervisibility and increased surveillance of racialized Others, but as Garland and Chakraborti observe this policing may be renarrated through euphemistic claims of protecting unique local ways of life. Although residents may allude to the uniqueness of their communities, Pugh, Cloke, and Garland and Chakraborti consider the ways a singular, idealized countryside figures largely into the project of nation-building. Cloke also notes, albeit briefly, the broader context of English imperialism when he speaks to the erasure of people of colour in historical narratives.

While this book’s focus on rural racism brings to light a significant silence in the work on British racism, the broader context in which this racism takes place is almost entirely absent from the book. There are no connections drawn to Britain’s international relations, both historically and in the present, as they have contributed to diaspora and its perceived interruption of the rural idyllic. Cloke’s mention is the only reference in the book that hints of the legacy of colonialism in which contemporary rural racism in Britain plays out. Context is also absent at a smaller scale. Iganski and Levin’s chapter aside, there is little connection between rural racism and urban racism. While there are clearly particularities of the rural experience that warrant the analyses put forth in this collection, in attempting to carve out a unique racism for the countryside, the book misses important connections and tensions with the ways in which racism operates in urban settings. Moreover, while there is some attention to the

role of the rural as an idealization of Britain, there is limited attention to the ways that rural racism contributes to this larger nation-building project.

A further absence from this text is empirical research about or theoretical deconstruction of the whites who are largely considered to be normative. Although Robinson and Gardner survey whites, Cloke questions the assumed whiteness of the rural, and de Lima calls for further analysis of whiteness, the articles in this collection do not begin the project of deconstructing whiteness. Because of this lack of critical attention to those in privilege positions, the book takes up racism as manifested either through exclusionary or insufficient structures (i.e., the absence of appropriate services) or irrational individuals or groups (such as the far-right British National Party). It does not call attention to the rational exercise of racism that persists under less conservative governments, such as the current Labour regime or that is undertaken consciously or otherwise by “non-pathological” citizens.

Given its focus on the British context, this book provides an interesting comparison and contrast to the Canadian context. Both locations are marked by disproportionately low numbers of racialized Others in rural communities, as well as the difficulties of providing services across large distances, a problem exaggerated in Canada. While in Britain Others are expected to assimilate into rural communities (Garland and Chakraborti), in Canada the “cultural diversity” of these Others is extolled and they are objectified at times and in ways that buttress Canada’s multicultural and tolerant national identity. Moreover, “the rural” is imagined as idyllic in Britain, while in Canada it has more feral resonances. However, the book’s tight focus on specific locales in Britain necessitates an accompanying text for comparison.

Rural Racism takes up theory and policy analysis of race and racism in a context that has yet to be adequately explored. Its focus on the rural is an important angle on race-related research as it speaks to an absence in the literature and emphasizes the contingent nature of racism. However, the narrow focus on rural racism leads the authors to pay minimal attention to parallels of race and racism in different locales (e.g., urban settings) and at different levels (e.g., nation-building) and limits the contribution the book makes to the broader body of literature in this area. The lack of context and engagement with broader works on racialization are significant detriments to the book.

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