

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

VIJAY AGNEW (Ed.) *Interrogating Race and Racism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007, ix + 412 p.

Interrogating Race and Racism is a collection of highly engaging chapters which collectively focus on the insidious existence of racism, primarily in the Canadian context. Race is defined in the introduction and is demonstrated in the chapters to be a historically specific categorization constructed in the context of power relations. Accordingly, racism is also particular to a historical context of power relations. "Racism is not, however, merely a set of attitudes, but finds expression in the practices, institutions, and structures that a sense of deep difference justifies and validates" (13).

Racialization is the process by which race is constructed. While whiteness is a socially constructed race (17), it is also recognized in the chapters to be "an organizing principle of social relations that refers to its structural position of power and privilege historically, socially, politically, and culturally" (17). How whiteness can be an organizing principle of social relations in Canada is illustrated by Peter S. Li in "Contradictions of Racial Discourse." Racial discourse involves the usage of coded concepts to allude to race; while liberal democracy is based on equality, the usage of coded concepts makes it possible to refer to race. Similarly, the use of constructed syntax validates such references. Because of the manner in which race is expressed, it is possible for whiteness to be upheld in conjunction with the principles of liberal democracy despite what should be a fundamental incongruity.

The contradiction between purported Canadian egalitarian ideals and lived reality is exposed throughout the book. But in the chapters "From Slavery to Expulsion" (by Sharryn J. Aiken) and "Citizenship, Illegality, and Sanctuary" (by Jean McDonald) the systematic mechanisms which prevent racialized individuals from accessing Canadian citizenship are documented. Aiken describes the current legal processes and practices which serve to perpetuate historical acts of racism and exploitation. These procedures facilitate the exclusion of racialized individuals and lead to the physical expulsion of these "Others" from Canada. In "Citizenship, Illegality, and Sanctuary" McDonald illustrates how the designation "illegal" enables the exclusion, exploitation, detention, and deportation of racialized Others in and from Canada. McDonald argues that formal citizenship is a requisite for substantive citizenship despite present counter-arguments; Aiken demonstrates the difficulty in relying on progressive legal changes to disrupt and dismantle the institutional structures which uphold racist practices.

Although the first part of *Interrogating Race and Racism* focuses on the more insidious aspects of racism in Canada, such as coded language, discord between

purported ideals and lived reality, and labelling practices which facilitate inclusion and exclusion, the second part of the book focuses on more blatant aspects of racism. For instance, discrimination in the workplace is well known for being manifest in lower incomes, barriers to promotions, and workplace harassment for racialized individuals. Krishna Pendakur and Ravi Pendakur provide an incredibly thorough examination of earnings differentials from 1971 to 1996 in “Colour My World: Have Earnings Gaps for Canadian-Born Ethnic Minorities Changed over Time?” Shuguang Wang and Lucia Lo in “What Does It Take to Achieve Full Integration?” examine the earnings of male and female Chinese immigrants in Canada with particular interest in recognizing location of origin and differential human capital. Broadly, Pendakur and Pendakur as well as Wang and Lo draw the same conclusions; namely, that systemic racism in the labour market exists despite employment-equity and immigration settlement services. Complementing the discussions of systemic earnings differentials, the social and psychological effects of racism in the workforce are emphasized in the last chapter in part two. Rebecca Hagey, Jane Turriffin, and Tania Das Gupta use the testimony of nurses to demonstrate their experiences of racism in the workplace, as well as the strategies they use to confront racism such as using their social power. The discord between official policy and lived experiences is highly apparent in both parts one and two.

The historical context of racialization is the focus in part three. In “Borders and Exclusions: Racial Profiling in the New World Order” Charles C. Smith documents the magnitude of difference in the treatment of racialized people by Euro-Canadians. In conjunction with anti-terror legislation in Canada the use of racial profiling has increased; consequently, the marginalization of racialized people has intensified. Such marginalization can occur under nationalism, as demonstrated by Ezra Yoo-Hyeok Lee. “Nationalism as a discourse of exclusion is another form of non-recognition or misrecognition of others” (Lee 2007: 289). Lee exposes the links between nationalism and cultural racism by juxtaposing the experiences of Arab Americans post 2001, and Japanese Americans during World War II. But as historical contexts change, new opportunities for social justice emerge. Struggles of recognizing a historical past while creating a space of dialogue, cooperation, and commitment to equity are shown in the chapter “From Displaying ‘Jewish Art’ to (Re)Building German-Jewish History: The Jewish Museum Berlin” by Robin Ostow.

Building on previously presented themes, part four explores the boundaries which exist for racialized individuals in Canada. What Canadian citizenship entails, the exclusionary practices which exist under the guise of inclusion, and the challenges dichotomous and static identity constructions impart are described. Questions of how to recognize historical discrimination, different experiences and impacts, and how to move forward are raised by Vijay Agnew in the chapter, “The Conundrum of Inclusion: Racialized Women in Public Policy Reports.” Structures of oppression including gender, race, class, ability, and sexuality have differential effects on identities and experiences. Policy which does not critically investigate these differential experiences and which does not collaboratively use the expertise of people for whom the policy is addressed does not promote equity. But being included is not a passive process, as illustrated both by Vijay Agnew and by Gillian Creese. Creese specifically illustrates the importance of the creation of a pan-African community in Vancouver as a means to negotiate

inclusion and belonging. Additionally, the barriers that African immigrants face in Vancouver are detailed in the chapter “From Africa to Canada: Bordered Spaces, Border Crossings, and Imagined Communities.” The difficulty in defying barriers is acknowledged in Agnew’s interview with Frances Henry, who acknowledges that: “...Racism exists. Things are changing, albeit slowly” (411).

Something that really distinguishes *Interrogating Race and Racism* is that chapters in the collection emphasize the potential for the reduction and eradication of racism. The veracity of racism is unflinchingly presented, as are mechanisms for activists, scholars, and other engaged individuals to demand and achieve greater equity for all. For instance, Hagey, Turriffin, and Das Gupta conclude part two with strategies for confronting racism using cultural/relational theory. McDonald describes sanctuary cities as promising sites to implement active citizenship strategies. Agnew discusses the difficulties in creating policy, but suggests mechanisms for improvement. The strategies offered by the authors are not superficial attempts to conclude chapters, but are tools for people to engage in challenging racism.

Agnew wrote, “...who we imagine ourselves to be, how we act, and the stories we choose to tell can construct a nation that accepts the past while struggling and resisting racism” (239). This well-written multidisciplinary collection of research collectively describes the complexity of racism and encourages readers to question and challenge practices which privilege and exclude. The commitment of all of the authors to the subject matter and the thoroughness of each individual investigation are exceptional.

Kristie O’Neill, University of Toronto.

© Canadian Sociological Association / La Société canadienne de sociologie