

## **Book Reviews**

***Under The Gaze: Learning to Be Black in White Society.*** Jennifer Kelly. Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 1998; 133 pages, ISBN 1-895686-2-1; \$15.95.

This valuable book outlines the narratives of 26 Black females and 23 Black males aged 15 to 20 and drawn from grades 10, 11 and 12 at two Edmonton High Schools, on the issues of Black identity development.

### **Student Narratives**

In chapter three, "Locating Sources For Identity," the students note the imagery of Blacks promoted by the media and film industry in the US. These images are often urban, criminalized and negative. Sources of positive images include icons of Black resistance, such as Mandela and Malcolm X, as well as parents and Black community organizations. The students also identify the dearth of positive imagery and knowledge of Canadian Black history overall.

In "Peer and Gender Relations" (chapter four), students identify ways in which racial distinctiveness become social markers for taunts, racist comments, hostility and open conflict between fellow Blacks and non-Black students. As a result, peer relationships with non-Blacks are difficult to develop and to sustain. Conversely or in response to this phenomena, a redemptive Black identity is forged and contained to a large degree within racial and ethnic boundaries and reflected in institutions such as the Black church. Thus Black identity is cemented in the separateness or otherness of Blacks from non-Blacks.

Expectedly, the construction of Black sexual identity appears to be forged differently between Black female and Black males. For Black females, sexual identity is developed with a sense of responsibility toward self which was expressed as "going it alone" - that is, without dependence on a Black male partner. Black males appear to carve out their sexual identities through varying relationships with Black or non-Black females.

### **On Framework**

The author frames her study within the historic and contemporary processes of racialization in Canada. However, understanding Black identity development from the regional perspective of Western Canada is an important perspective and contribution of this study. Hence, a more focussed outline and analysis of the particulars and perspectives of racialization of that region of Canada would strengthen this text. Moreover, a focus on Western Canada and Edmonton would facilitate comparisons to be made between the racializing process, with its particular concomitant structural or systemic dimensions within Western Canada, and racialization which occurs in provinces and cities such as Ontario (Toronto) and Nova Scotia (Halifax).

### **Decentering Black Identities**

The author analyzes Black identity as not unified but decentred, with a plurality of interlocking centres (121). This issue of decentering or shifting from an identity rooted in nationality, for example Jamaican or Ghanaian, to an identity based on racial distinctiveness and the fluidity of that identity - for example, from Jamaican to Black or from Canadian to African-Canadian - needs further exploration. An important study such as this could be strengthened by examining the extent to which students are able to distinguish these shifting identities, their complexities and contradictions, and the extent to and situations in which these identities become fused.

Akua Benjamin  
Ryerson Polytechnic University

---

***Regulating Class Privilege: Immigrant Servants in Canada, 1940s-1990s.*** Patricia Daenzer. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1993; ISBN 1551308807; \$24.95.

***Not One of the Family: Foreign Domestic Workers in Canada.*** Abigail B. Bakan and Daiva Stasiulis, eds. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997; ISBN 0802075959; \$17.95.

In their qualitative critique of the Canadian state and its anti-immigration policies and practices, these two volumes successfully locate and expose the nation state's role in the systemic commodification and exploitation of the foreign domestic worker and woman of colour. Both volumes explore the interlink between the state and the nuclear family and address the numerous ways in which the lines between the public and the private spheres blur not only to regulate but to reinforce racialized, gendered discourses which work to keep the imperialist world order in place.

Daenzer offers an examination of five decades of challenging immigration policy documents regarding domestic workers. She provides an insightful and provocative analysis of the regressive nature of the system in her probing thesis which contends that "the exploitation of many immigrant labourers, carried out in homes by a privileged class is analogous to colonialization and is aided and abetted by the Canadian state" (144). Left unexamined, however, is how particular ideological power structures construct racist images. Because Daenzer does not study actual experiences of domestic workers, individual and unique voices get lost in a monolithic image of "the third world woman" where they tend to get defined in terms of their victim status alone.

Daenzer's first six chapters detail a regressive evolution and examine the contradictions in a system whose "inclusive" immigration policies become increasingly exclusionary only when the demand for foreign domestic workers exceeds the (white European) supply with the rise of bourgeois feminism. The policy revisions since the 1960s that offer admittance to domestic workers from the Caribbean and the Far East reflect racist undertones in which difficulties are constructed by the Canadian government which make applying for citizenship status virtually impossible for these women.

Daenzer leaves her most probingly substantial questions about the role of feminism to her final chapter, where there is little room for theorizing the implications of ideological state apparatuses and their link to feminism. She does posit that women employers, "in their drive to liberate themselves from oppressiveness of housework and its low-class attributes, become owners of domestic workers and part of the patriarchal system" (144), but she fails to address the complexities of this position. While interpretations are offered, what is not theorized in any detail is the white bourgeois feminist complicity in a system which perpetuates racism. The question left both unasked and unexamined is, how are privileged white feminists who claim to speak for all women able to be accountable for their own racism when they are practising, not to mention reflecting, the phallogocentric order they are purportedly rebelling against?

While both volumes in review point to evident gaps between Canadian policy and practise, Bakan and Stasiulis' anthology of essays is more compelling in that it includes the stories of domestic workers Miriam Elvir and Pura Velasco, giving credence to the voices lost in the impersonalized details of statistical information and policy legalese. The four chapters that lead towards the Elvir and Velasco narratives create a plateau-like effect in a collective thesis whose underlying theme links the various ways in which the "Canadian regulatory regime for migrant domestics violates international labour and human rights standards by institutionalizing unequal treatment between citizens and non-citizen/migrant workers, working and living conditions and access to rights" (8). The first chapter by Bakan and Stasiulis provide an insightful analysis of the Canadian hierarchy of citizenship rights in the context of global inequality. The second chapter by Sedef Arat-Koc presents an historical overview of the racist treatment of different foreign domestics by the Canadian State. Daenzer's essay (chapter three) is especially intriguing as it examines the intricacies of Canadian "gatekeeping" and nation-to-nation negotiations that grease the wheels of the capitalist machine which in turn keep in place the oppressive forces imposed

upon domestic workers from the Philippines and the Caribbean. In chapter four, Judy Fudge demonstrates how organized resistance in Ontario resulted in securing collective bargaining rights for domestic workers in 1993, only to be reversed by the provincial conservative government in 1996. Chapters five by Elvir and chapter six by Velasco document the experiences of two domestic activists, recounting their encounters with wealthy employers and intimidating immigration bureaucrats.

The anthology spans the systematically (and racially) stratified admission of domestic servants into Canada since the nineteenth century, with each essay uniquely exposing oppressively racist, sexist and classist characteristics of the capitalist society. In Velasco's chapter, one brief but compelling paragraph speaks volumes about the institution that prides itself on its democratic platform: "Canada is not the compassionate country it portrays to be internationally. Domestic workers are not here for humanitarian reasons. It's not from the bottom of their hearts that the government wants to help us. This is posturing. It is difficult sometimes for many domestic workers to recognize that we are here because they need us. There is a need to be met" (163). While these particular words are directed at the state, the subtextual message goes out to the female employers of domestic workers. As bell hooks says: "the contemporary feminist call for sisterhood, the radical white woman's appeal to black women and all women of colour to join the feminist movement, is seen by many black women as yet another expression of white female denial of the reality of racist domination, of their complicity in the exploitation of black women and black people" (1994, 102). With that in mind, what both these volumes implicitly ask, but fail to pursue in the end is, "what are we going to do about it?"

#### REFERENCE

hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Rina Cohen  
York University

---

### **In Search of Foremothers: Herstory or the Perpetuation of Myths**

*Mary Ann Shadd Cary: The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century*. Jane Rhodes. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998; photographs; ix+284 pp; ISBN 0253334462; \$39.95 US.

Black women's history in North America has been recently enhanced by the publication of a number of biographies of "Black women who made a difference." Jane Rhodes' book on Mary Ann Shadd Cary aims to restore an important foremother to the forefront of popular and academic consciousness. Mary Ann Shadd Cary, journalist, schoolteacher, abolitionist, suffragist and lawyer emerges as one of the nineteenth century Black women who fulfilled the requirements for Black foremother and hero. Perhaps more than any Black woman who lived in nineteenth century Canada, she has left behind many written records of her life.

Rhodes looks at Shadd's life and various careers in both the United States and Canada, and in so doing advances our knowledge of the life of this important pioneer, especially during her American years, before and after the Civil War. Two of Rhodes' more important contributions to our knowledge are her discussion of the ways that Shadd fought racism and sexism, and the important awareness Shadd had that Black women's gender was racially constructed. Her explorations of Shadd's involvement in the suffragist movement is also groundbreaking. But while trying to restore Shadd to her "rightful place," Rhodes has either ignored (or suppressed) significant information that would reveal the complexity of Shadd's life and actions. Foremothers, when they are found, sometimes appear with embarrassing flaws. Historians, at times, disconcerted by the fact that their subjects are really quite human, consciously or unconsciously pay little or no attention to evidence that reveals the unsavoury aspects of their subject's character. Rhodes is guilty of this. She has written a "great woman" biography and by using such methodology naturally valorizes Shadd and her life.