REPRODUCING RACE: THE PARADOX OF GENERATION MIX

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networks among asylum seekers. The author offers a brief conclusion and comments on the direction of current asylum policy.

The strength of the book is chapter 4, which shows that the areas where asylum seekers were dispersed to on a ‘no choice basis’ were socially deprived areas chosen on the basis of available, unpopular and vacant housing. The author argues that by dumping asylum seekers into such areas they were ‘excluded’ from essential services, including the absence of immigration lawyers, schools, appropriate health care, and community support, etc. However, it is not clear whether services in all the dispersal areas were uniformly absent or whether this varied, and whether the agencies contracted to implement the policy were able to help asylum seekers overcome problems.

The author struggles to understand and develop key concepts – deprivation, strategies of invisibility, liminality, social networks – employed in the book and often fails to provide adequate evidence to support her arguments. This is a pity because there are important lessons which need to be learned regarding the conception, planning and implementation of this policy. Key lessons include (1) the apparent refusal of the Government to learn from earlier efforts at dispersing asylum seekers/refugees, (2) the failure to realize that unduly harsh legislation contributed to a climate of public hostility towards asylum seekers, (3) the dispersal of individuals to a relatively small number of socially deprived areas that prevented individuals from accessing key services and seems to have contributed to social unrest and (4) that a separate system of support for asylum seekers was unnecessarily complex, extremely bureaucratic and unresponsive to the genuine needs of individuals. The lack of humanity with which asylum seekers were treated and their understandable problems in comprehending and coping with complex regulations and unresponsive agencies is a key issue which emerges from the book. Unfortunately, these conclusions are buried in unreadable prose.

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From the outset, Reproducing Race promised to be a controversial read. The repeated use of the term ‘mulatto’ (not confined to historical discussions, as is conventional) stood out and created a sense of anticipation at the arguments to follow. This book centres on the significance of Generation Mix, defined as ‘people (typically, but not necessarily, young people) who consider themselves to be the immediately mixed or first generation offspring of parents who are members of different biological racial groups’ (p. 2). Young people who have parents from different racial backgrounds have been celebrated in the media and within much sociological literature as representing a more tolerant and potentially post-racial future. This book offers a critique of celebratory accounts of multi-racialism in the USA and the ideas underpinning the American Multiracial Identity Movement. Rainier Spencer argues that ‘racial ambiguity, in and of itself, is no guarantee of political progressiveness, racial destabilisation, or, indeed, of anything in particular’ (p. 3). Furthermore, Generation Mix does not radically change the racial order; it simply adds another category because whiteness is still at the top of the racial hierarchy while African-Americans remain at the bottom.

The book is divided into three parts representing different temporal spaces. In part one, ‘The Mulatto Past’, Spencer considers historical portrayals of mulattoes in the USA from the late nineteenth century, drawing on novels, plays, films and academic literature. Chapter 4 is
an absorbing discussion of literature by mulatto writers about marginality and racial passing. Such accounts are used to critique the adoption of the marginal man thesis by sociologists, such as Park, Reuter and Stonequist.

The second part, ‘The Mulatto Present’, introduces more contentious arguments about the current racial landscape. Spencer contends that Generation Mix is not new and is in fact indistinguishable from mulattoes, although the American Multiracial Identity Movement attempts to deny ‘mulattleness’. Furthermore, despite celebratory media and academic accounts, members of Generation Mix are not special because African-Americans are also mulattoes, and there is no real difference between those who are recently and historically mixed. However, the utility of reviving the term ‘mulatto’ and applying it to African-Americans has not been made entirely clear, as it appears to go against the book’s stated aims by relying upon the notion of biological race and leaving whiteness untouched. Spencer further argues that members of Generation Mix are attempting to navigate away from blackness and towards whiteness, often under the direction of their white mothers.

In the final section titled ‘The Mulatto Future’, Spencer advocates rejecting ideas of biological race and hypodescent by eliminating whiteness and giving up political blackness. Some interesting proposals are made regarding changing the wording of the federal race categories in the census (which Spencer argues that they are still needed despite their invocation of biological race). It is argued that instead of being asked how they see themselves, people should be asked to indicate what race they are perceived to be by those who do not know them, as this would provide a more accurate picture of discrimination.

While in general this is a well-crafted and tightly written text, in my opinion a key weakness is the portrayal of the white mothers who often run the multi-racial advocacy groups that this book is critical of. Whereas other recipients of the book’s attention (such as the mulatto characters portrayed in films and novels) receive a multi-dimensional, nuanced and empathetic portrayal, here Spencer relies upon emotive language such as ‘the shrill voices of white mother-indoctrinators’ (p. 218) who are seen as ‘pleading hysterically for a multiracial category’ (p. 252). White mothers are depicted as a monolithic group, who are self-serving and constantly trying to distance their children from blackness. Spencer fails to engage with their views in a meaningful way or provide a sense that this is a group consisting of individuals with differing views and experiences.

Notwithstanding the caricature of white mothers, this is a challenging and thought-provoking book, presenting a number of intellectually stimulating and sometimes unusual arguments. In teaching the sociology of race and ethnicity, such a text is likely to act as a useful stimulus. It has the potential to encourage critical engagement with competing perspectives on the significance of racial categories and racial mixing in the past, present and future contexts.

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Thomas Faist, Margit Fauser and Peter Kivisto (eds), THE MIGRATION-DEVELOPMENT NEXUS: A TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, xiv + 228 pp., £55.00 (hard)

A third wave of research on the nexus between migration and development has gained momentum. The two main characteristics of this third phase are its focus on the transnational ties that migrants maintain and the aspect of co-development through NGOs – in contrast to earlier emphasis on remittances and return (1950s–1960s) and