Shirley Anne Tate & Ian Law

Caribbean Racisms: Connections and Complexities in the Racialisation of the Caribbean Region. Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. vii + 204 pp. (Cloth US\$ 95.00)

Part of a series, “Mapping Global Racisms,” edited by Ian Law, this book sits alongside earlier volumes such as *Race and Racism in Russia* (by Nikolay Zakharov) and *Mediterranean Racisms* and *Red Racisms* (both by Ian Law). The series refreshingly goes beyond the standard geographical purview of studies of racism. Although Harry Hoetink’s *Slavery and Race Relations in the Americas* (1973) encompassed the British, Dutch, French, and Spanish Caribbean, such an inclusive approach has been unusual in recent decades. In practice *Caribbean Racisms* focuses on the Hispanophone and Anglophone islands, particularly Cuba, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago. This reflects the authors’ experience: Shirley Tate has done much of her first-hand research in the United Kingdom, although branching out into the Caribbean; Ian Law has focused his own work on Europe, but has made research visits to Cuba. The book itself involved a trip to Trinidad and Tobago to collect archival and other data. Both of them work in departments of sociology, but Tate is influenced by cultural studies and Law by mainstream political sociology. The chapters vary from easily accessible material, suitable for undergraduates, to more taxing excursions into cultural theory.

The broad net that Tate and Law cast allows them to explore what they term polyracial neoliberalism. They note the impact of neoliberalism—arguably particularly salient in the Caribbean—with its drive toward open markets, individual consumerism and responsibility, managerialist governance, securitization, and penalization of the poor. These varied processes, they argue, work with and rework existing racial divisions and meanings, creating some new variants; meanwhile racism is masked by a discourse of moral imperatives and meritocracy (hardly a new feature, one might say). The Caribbean region is an excellent vantage point from which to see the diverse ways in which neoliberal processes inflect racializations: from the reemergence in Cuba after the 1990s of a racism that had never really disappeared; through the resignifying (or “queering”) of practices of skin-bleaching as (literally) buying into a modern consumerist “browning” that does not necessarily involve a disavowal of blackness; and the lucrative market of brown-skinned sex workers for white North American and European tourists; to the increasing rates of poverty and drug-trade-fueled gang violence that undermine everyday conviviality between Trinbagonians of African and Indian descent.

The book starts with some background on colonial history, tracing the emergence of racialized hierarchies in the region linked to conquest and slavery, but

with deeper roots in European experiences (e.g., of the English with the Irish, and the Spanish with the Jews and Moors). Chapter 2 explores the postemancipation Caribbean, arguing first that old forms of slavery have been replaced by new forms, such as sex tourism (although I think this section ignores research showing that many sex workers are relatively independent—something that could be adduced for some urban slaves, who hired themselves out). The chapter then analyzes the intersection of nationalism and racialization in Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti, showing how these varied contexts all manifest continuing patterns of racism. Chapter 3 is an excellent treatment of *mestizaje*, *métissage*, and mixing, which recognizes that ideological projects seeking to overcome racialized divisions through mixture tend to reproduce the purities imagined to create the mixed product: “inbetweenness itself implicates essentialism” (p. 56). Yet the authors (here it is Tate speaking, I think) also suggest that hybridity can go beyond the model of “the roots, the two that make one” (p. 57). This overoptimistic view is tempered by the (slightly opaque) statement that difference and sameness are in an “impossible simultaneity” (p. 56). The chapter looks at Indian-black mixings in Trinidad and Tobago—pointing out that the denial of unions between Indian men and black women is not sustained by the historical record—before presenting an excellent analysis of skin-bleaching.

Chapter 4 is a detailed exploration of whiteness, focusing on the way Caribbean Whites are caught between not being brown—often the national norm—and always carrying with them the suggestion of mixedness. This chapter is actually as much about the aesthetics of brownness, which Tate deals with exclusively through the bodies of women; some reference to men would have been interesting. Chapter 5 traces the persistence of racializations through the postracial aspirations of the Trinbagonian nation after independence.

Overall, this is an impressive book, despite its unevenness. It has some truly excellent sections and the broad regional focus is most welcome.

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