Recent Books on Human Rights and Groups

Book Review

E.J. Ruiz-Vieytez


This book forms part of a series encouraging interdisciplinary approaches to the study of diversity, in particular the accommodation and management of diversity linked to “nations without states”.1 Although the author’s particular concern with “nations without states” is evident in a number of the examples provided throughout the book, it is interesting that chapter one starts with a discussion of immigration and diversity policies. The justification for this is that this is the “phenomenon which we instinctively use to link the concepts of diversity, multiculturalism and interculturalism”.2 These are concepts discussed at length in the book, particularly in chapter two, which considers current responses to diversity and discusses both the crisis of multiculturalism and the increasing popularity of the idea of interculturalism. This book is an unusual one for an academic to review, as there are few in-text references. It is clear, however, that the works of Will Kymlicka and Charles Taylor continue to be extremely influential in these debates.3 The author’s own position is that

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2 Ibid., p. 13.
interculturalism should be regarded as a reformulation of multiculturalism, with added nuances focused on intergroup relationships, and interactions between different cultures and identities. The book rightly identifies that cultural accommodation has been a neglected area in the immigration debate, although the author makes it clear very early on that the focus of the book is on the public management of cultural diversity more generally rather than specifically on immigration.

According to the author, the book was “designed to encourage reflection”, and argues that a new approach to politics and to democracy is needed which is more responsive to the “demands of cultural and identitarian diversity”. The book is certainly written in a very accessible way, with anecdotes used to keep the reader engaged and in reflective mode. There are two particularly notable examples of this. Both come towards the end of chapter one, which aims to describe and illustrate the importance of cultural diversity and collective identities, particularly in relation to the political organisation of society.

The first comes in relation to a discussion of “mobile phone citizenship”, where the example is given of the system of “text voting” in the Eurovision Song Contest. This enabled those with mobile phones registered in a particular country to participate in the voting of that country, with immigrants and national minorities appearing to play a key role in the outcome of these votes (his focus is on 2008). In the second anecdote the author reproduces an extract from the travel chronicles of his friend from Bilbao, and includes his reflections on his dislike of the ‘Where are you from?’ question. As someone from the city now commonly referred to as Derry/Londonderry, I found this a particularly interesting account. His friend admitted that “he does not want others to see him through the filter of a particular identity, because that would automatically bring certain clichés into play, certain norms that make him feel as though he is being categorised and which he has to defeat if he wishes to be recognised in another way”.

The point that the author seems to want to draw from both examples is that identities are “an essential point of reference for human beings”, that multiculturalism is a reality and that we

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4 Ruiz-Vieytez, supra note 1, pp. 73–74.
5 Ibid., p. 15.
6 Ibid., p. 17.
7 Ibid., p. 9.
8 Ibid., p. 11.
9 Ibid., pp. 40–44.
10 Ibid., p. 47.