

Stephen Trinder

(The Higher Colleges of Technology, Abu Dhabi)

Joseph Raab (ed.) (2014): *New World Colors: Ethnicity, Belonging, and Difference in the Americas*. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag / Bilingual Press, 405 pages.

"Everything that divides men, everything that specifies, separates or corners it is a sin against humanity". This quote from José Martí's *Mi Raza* (trans. My Race; 1893) opens Josef Raab's wide ranging volume on identity and race in the Americas. The quote typifies the work's attention towards locating, critiquing, and then deconstructing the postmodern sociological markers that serve to articulate difference. This comprehensive 405-page collection of essays is the outcome of a 2008 conference held in Bielefeld, Germany on the topic of 'Ethnic Identities in Processes of Transnational Integration in the Americas', and features contributions from twenty scholars on a broad variety of topics, exploring varying perspectives on white, black, Asian, and Latino notions of identity. In editor Raab's own words, the work seeks to examine "multiple contestations that have been under way in processes of self-positioning and othering, in defining or defending a certain notion of self, collective, or nation" (2).

Benedict Anderson's thesis on the nation and nationalism largely underpins this book, which positions itself at the centre of contemporary Cultural Studies discussions on the shift from nation-centered approaches toward deterritorialized and transnational concepts of identity. *New World Colors* continues editor Raab's academic interest in exploring themes of identity and belonging within the framework of the Americas, with this volume enhancing arguments in 2008's *Hybrid Americas: Contacts, Contrasts, and Confluences in New World Literatures and Cultures* and 2012 essay *Multiculturalism and Beyond: The New Dynamics of Identity Politics in the Americas*. The volume is divided into five main chapters, with Raab himself setting the scene in the introductory essay 'Contested Americas', which engages Bruce Norris's Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Clybourne Park* (2010) to contextualize the shifting nature of race relations in the US since the 1960s. Heavily underpinned by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's work, it compares the differing strategies of political representation *vis-à-vis* race employed by US president Barack Obama and Bolivian leader Evo Morales upon their election to office in 2008 and 2006 respectively.

Chapter one 'Ethnic Typologies' explores self-defined difference and otherness, including essays on the mass immigrant marches in the US in 2006 and a lengthy piece from Raab on the genealogical representation of Latino(a)s on US television. Largely US-centric, the essays here bring attention to the increased presence of minority groups in national political and

[152]

mediascapes. Chapter two 'Questions of Belonging' focuses principally upon commonality. It features contributions from scholars on Asian-American perspectives of belonging in the US by analyzing popular migrant literary works *Native Speaker* (1995) by Chang-Rae Lee and 'Chang' (1989) by Sigrid Nunez. It also includes sociological critiques of Ecuador's bilingual education program and ongoing conflicts between Nicaragua's government and its indigenous Miskitu people. Generally this section highlights the traumatic nature of the processes that both the individual and the collective encounter in their pursuit for acceptance and belonging within the nationalist milieu.

The next chapter tackles issues of inter-ethnic conflict through the disparate frames of the Native American Indian genocide, the portrayal of US youth sports teams in film, and issues of ethnicity in Bolivian indigenous groups. It chiefly interrogates the violent elements that reside at the heart of struggles between indigenous and non-indigenous groups, chiefly with regard to the imposition of - and resistance to - state homogenization. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's essay 'Paradoxes of Ethnicity in Contemporary Bolivia' in particular explains this concisely.

Chapter four moves onto queries of nationhood. Here, Canada's national history is interrogated within the postcolonial milieu of the Spanish Conquest before belonging and citizenship are scrutinized in literary award-winning Chilean-American writer Isabel Allende's memoirs *My Invented Country* (2003) and *The Sum of Our Days* (2008). Continuing the focus on questions of indigenous identity, this section also includes an essay on the campaign for greater recognition of rights and territory of the Mapuche people in Chile and Argentina in the context of identity politics and postmodern deconstruction. This sets the scene for the theme of chapter five, which examines identity within a contemporary political framework: featuring attempts to theoretically conceptualize the question of identity politics through Pierre Bourdieu's model of the political field, proposing adaptations to develop its appropriateness to contemporary notions of identity as fluid phenomenon. The section's opening essay from Rudiger Heinze also debates second generation immigrant self-positioning in the United States, querying the effectiveness of terms like 'second generation' and 'migrant literature' in the epoch of identity politics.

New World Colors remains pertinent in its contribution to contemporary debates on identity in the Americas, particularly with regard to ongoing Hispanic immigration to the US (which as of 2016 had reached almost 44 million¹) and the influence of what is now the country's most significant minority on popular culture, media, and politics. The rise of Trumpism and a continued return to the promotion of monocultural identity constructs, which seeks to

¹ See Zong et al. (2018); most recent figures available.

marginalize immigrants and indigenous populations across the Americas, also draws attention to the relevancy of many of the issues discussed in this volume. While extremely wide-ranging in its subject matter, the book perhaps suffers from a lack of focus overall because of this. Structurally too, *New World Colors* is slightly inconsistent in its chapter formation and essay length: for example chapter one opens with an informative 13-page piece on spectacles of citizenship before editor Raab's extensive 58-page essay highlighting the representation of Latino(a)s on US television. Such disparities can surprise the reader and, in places, take attention away from the message that the book seeks to convey. Despite this *New World Colors* remains a useful work for students and academics of Inter-American Studies, highlighting relevant critical approaches to the subject of identity, belonging and transnationalism. Most importantly it provides a platform for those looking to advance the perspectives put forward in the context of recent political and social events across the continent as a whole.

References

RAAB, Josef. / Martin Butler (eds.) (2008): *Hybrid Americas: Contacts, Contrasts, and Confluences in New World Literatures and Cultures*. Münster / Tempe: Bilingual Press / LIT Verlag.

RAAB, Josef / Olaf Kaltmeier / Sebastian Thies (2012): 'Multiculturalism and Beyond: The New Dynamics of Identity Politics in the Americas'. In: *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 7.2, 103-114.

ZONG, Jie / Jeanne Batalova / Jeffrey Hallock (2018): 'Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States'. In: *migrationpolicy.org*, 8th of February. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states>. [27.06.2018].