Book Review/ Compte rendu

Frances Henry, Enakshi Dua, Carl E. James, Audrey Kobayashi, Peter Li, Howard Ramos, and Malinda Smith. *The Equity Myth: Racialization and Indigeneity at Canadian Universities.* Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017, 316 pp., $34.95, paper (9780774834896)

This book captures the experiential side of the university environment as told by racialized and Indigenized sector scholars. It exposes a better understanding of the equity regimes that exists which have varying support in making the ideological claims of promoting equality. In addition, it provides a review of the various models developed to provide equity protection to staff. Given the wide scope of data collected: from employment length, to length of time to reach full professorship, wages, equity offices and policies reviews, this text provides much needed exposure of the surrounding contexts in which equity issues arise or rest, and the processes that are put into place to address the issues. The assemblage of these knowledge pieces collectively shapes and defines the landscape that surrounds those of us with Indigenous and racialized backgrounds, and helps to portray the realities we maneuver through what are obviously systemically and intellectually controlled spaces in the edifices of higher education in Canada. This is a much-needed book that discloses glaring gaps in equity policy and procedures that almost seem to be designed to fail at meeting their objective of meaningful equity. As the book demonstrates, our existing equity policies are cumbersome, ineffective and often superficial structures. This information is important to my colleagues in understanding how the deceptively loose construction of policies impacts and reinforces the conditions we work in, while disclosing the flimsy and /or nonexistent institutional protection against racism and inequality in Canadian universities.

The introductory chapter frames the larger contexts in the chapters that follow. I was immediately impressed with how the writers managed the language difficulties—in particular the references to terms for 'racialized minorities' and "Aboriginal' peoples—given the myriad of conflicting terms used by government, found in policy, and/or woven into data. These decisions were explained in a respectful, thoughtful manner, which as a starting point, encouraged me of the authors' ability

to capture perspectives such as mine, and which drew me in further. I am a Blackfoot woman from the Siksika Nation.

After carefully reading each chapter and seriously reflecting on the content, I believe the overall message of the book is certainly well captured in the title—the equity *myth*. The book provides ample comparative data on how Canada sits internationally, reviewing statistics on visible minority and Indigenous populations in the academies of the United Kingdom, United States and Australia (Henry, Kobayasi and Choi, 2017: 24-45). The text notes in several parts of the investigation, the lack of uniform data collection as a significant problem causing disaggregation issues in compiling the data and is further noted as an ongoing and universal problem. An oversight, I would suggest that helps to obscure the facts. One is reminded, by the authors - who benefits from the lack of data collected? Without the data collected, experiences remain individualized or simply seen as evidence of a person not 'fitting in' (300-305) or as subjective interpretations that float disconnected without background data to attached them to known realities.

Ramos and Li report earnings and employment inequities that visible minorities face and also report earnings disparities between ethnic groups. The writers also note that visible minorities are underrepresented in the universities they studied across Canada, which supports research reviewing inequities in the UK, USA and Australian universities, and suggests an underlying problem of unequal treatment and lack of protection, which results in systematic pay inequities. Interestingly, these inequalities show remarkable resilience. The book is excellent at bringing the reader on this journey of discovery past the policy language into the realities of the minorities and Indigenous faculty in Canadian universities and abroad.

The differences in how work is carried out by racialized and Indigenous faculty is highlighted, and refreshingly I found the writers in several of the chapters captured some of the rationale for why the differences we experience as racialized or Indigenous faculty emerge. The differences in work, they correctly report, materialize in how we maintain relationships with students who are also often racialized or Indigenous, with whom we must also spend more time. Also, the authors note the differences in our community expectations. The differences in the expectations that as Indigenous or racialized scholars, we are the cultural experts expected to sit on committees or do the cultural work in our departments. And yet, the book reminds us that 'soft metrics' used to measure 'service,' do not understand or take into consideration the extra nature of mentoring students and support roles required of Indigenous faculty and racialized faculty. 'Hard metrics' or the number of papers presented, research dollars,

books published are noted in the book as being impacted by the additional 'soft metric' variables, which cannot be taken into consideration under that heading nor can they be taken into consideration as an aspect of the work-world of Indigenous or racialized faculty. The enforcement of 'hard metrics' is another version of colonization that Indigenous staff perceive as oppressive and non-reflective of the difference in cultural values taught in university courses. Yet that knowledge does not transfer to recognition within the institution, and is not adopted or adapted in practice. I found James' reference to 'race tax' an accurate descriptor for the additional work we do in our institutions, that does not neatly fit into the categories of teaching, research or service. These factors are extremely important for all levels of academia to understand, if we are hoping for tangible changes to be made in our institutions.

James and Chapman-Nyaho's chapter "'Would Never Be Hired These Days': The Precarious Work Situation of Racialized Staff and Indigenous Faculty Members" brought forward the dilemma of tokenism. I would suggest that with the TRC report there is a surge of interest in all factions of the universities for all professors to become "experts" on Indigenous knowledge and these dynamics will make Indigenous employment even more difficult. James and Chapmen-Nyaho's work is critical, as it portrays the stark realities faced by racialized and Indigenous faculty, and this chapter echoes the desire to have inclusion and acceptance of different worldviews within the academy.

What the narrative in this book describes is an environment that has constructed a false security. The presence of policies also contributes to community complacency. Many racialized and Indigenous staff directly experience systemic, explicit, and/or structural racism. Equity offices will appreciate the research of this text to critically review their own effectiveness. The book argues that the work of racialized and Indigenous staff is poorly valued and, according to the book, this is reflected in the standard measures of salary levels, promotion and tenure, as well as in the ability to engage in research, curriculum development, and mentoring of the future generations. I wish the text could have explored the experiences of those who have quit working in the university environment (perhaps because of these reasons), as well as collected data on how important an equitable environment and minority or Indigenous professor representation in the faculty body is to students (both Indigenous/racialized, or not) when deciding where they might study.

The research methodology for the book included an extensive review of existing data. Due to the difficulty and fragmentation in the data, the book recommends better and more specific data collection processes so we can unmask the full impact of inequality. Experiences of those who

have not faired well in universities remain untold—stories that could also shed light on the circumstances and experiences faced by minorities and Indigenous faculty members in Canadian universities.

After reading the text, I cannot help but reflect on my experience of being told by an acting chair of an institution I was in at the time, to keep my culture out of the university. I did not report the instance; there was no one to report it to. In hindsight, I think I did the right thing. With little or no protection in the university system, complaints backfire and we get labelled and/or alienated.

I found the chapter titled; Challenging The Myth, particularly important, the authors argue that part of the resistance to working toward true equity is due to the rise of the neoliberalist agenda. This is discussed in Chapter five, "the neoliberal agenda has set the stage for the shift of discourses and practices away from achieving equity and from the demands of equity-seeking groups to those that reinforce the structures of power" (299). The book discloses an array of equity models, but through the smoke and mirrors, the writers show us how these are arranged to subliminally inflect a feeling of equity. This book is important to diverse faculties and to university administrators, critical for lawyers who take up the discrimination cases, and to government entities who urge universities to diversify their university staff. This book will also be of interest to the racialized and Indigenous parents of children, students, grad students, and Indigenous and racialized community members who work or study in universities. A particularly strong component of the book is the list of institutions that take equity seriously, and those who do not.

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References

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