

GENDER, RACE, AND NATION: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Vanaja Dhruvarajan and Jill Vickers, Eds.
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002

REVIEWED BY SIMONE BROWNE

Questions of “belonging,” difference and the nation-state have long been the subject of much feminist research and discussion. The contributors of *Gender, Race and Nation: A Global Perspective* provide contemporary and historical understandings of the politics of inclusion and exclusion in the Canadian nation-state, and on the global stage. Organized into two parts, the first section reviews key terms and introduces the editors’ one-world feminist analytical methodology as a tool for thinking through differences. This one-world framework, which reads like a best practices guide from scholars and activists including Philomena Essed’s understanding of gendered racisms and Maria Mies’ methodological postulates to guide action research and knowledge making, could also be termed a transnational feminist analysis. The second part of the book functions as a collection of nine essays that attempt to apply the one-world methodology to the study of various topics, including Vanaja Dhruvarajan’s chapter on reproductive technologies, Amanda Goldrick-Jones’ discussion of pro-feminist men’s organizations, and Pavin Ghorayshi’s study of women’s paid and unpaid labour. Here, Ghorayashi reveals how national economic policies are heavily invested in gendered racisms.

In addressing how economies of the body circulate on the national stage, the chapter ‘Between Body and Culture: Beauty, Ability, and

Growing Up Female’ asks, “Do body image issues differ among diverse groups of women?” and explores the various ways in which women negotiate dominant ideals of beauty. Using a diverse group of participants, in terms of physical abilities, race and gender identity, Carla Rice conducted interviews to chart and understand these women’s “bodily histories.” Rice analyzes technologies of social control, public scrutiny, and the body as currency, and in doing so, carves space for understanding how the participants narrate the self to create resistance strategies.

One of the most important contributions to the book is Jill Vickers’ chapter, “Thinking about Violence.” Vickers considers the numerous ways in which violence is understood in current feminist theorizing, including the violences that colonialism, globalization, and some nationalisms and state practices entail. This chapter adheres to the one-world framework by attending to the differences in how violence is understood and addressed by differently located women. Interestingly, Vickers offers a brief comparison of the contents of two issues of *Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme*, one from 1983 and the other from 1991, to reveal how understandings of violence in academic writings have developed into the more nuanced conception of a “continuum of violence.”

Some of the chapters of *Gender, Race and Nation* serve as literature surveys of the field and would benefit from more inclusion of women’s voices and experiences, or a “view from below” as Mies suggests with her postulates for activist research.

In doing so, the reader could more fittingly see the application and benefits of this one-world framework. For example, the chapter “Women of Colour in Canada,” although highly informative, uses secondary sources to present a cursory history of Canada’s immigration and multiculturalism policies, and some women’s experiences regarding them. As such, the opportunity to hear

women’s voices is missed. As well, such terms as “people of colour,” “non-white,” and “Canadian,” as in “Canadians perceive their country as one of white settlers,” would benefit from further qualification, perhaps through a discussion of the processes of racialization, as their use risks reifying whiteness as norm and that which constitutes a “real Canadian.” However, this chapter does offer a good description of how the Women’s Press and NAC have changed in structure due to the efforts of “woman-of-colour activism.”

The contributors to this collection succeed in offering several theoretical perspectives on their particular topic of inquiry. Key concepts are explained in an accessible manner, while the lengthy bibliography provides for an excellent resource. Given this, *Gender, Race and Nation* is a useful introduction to thinking through and theorizing differences, at both the local and global level.

ON THE EDGE OF EMPIRE: GENDER, RACE, AND THE MAKING OF BRITISH COLUMBIA, 1849-1871

Adele Perry
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001

REVIEWED BY KRISTIN BURNETT

On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871 by Adele Perry examines British Columbia after it became a British colony in 1849 and before it joined confederation in 1871. As Perry shows, when British Columbia became a formal colony, it was anything but orderly, respectable,

and white. British Columbia “hovered dangerously at the precipice of Victorian social norms and ideals.” Demographically, First Nations people outnumbered white people and within white communities men far outnumbered women. As well, these white communities did not conform to nineteenth-century Victorian ideals of “sober, hard-working men, virtuous women, and respectable families.” Instead white men, drawn from around the globe to the gold rush in British Columbia, produced a homosocial culture where they drank, worked, and lived with other men or pursued mixed race relationships. All of this challenged prevailing notions of race and gender.

In response, according to Perry, disparate groups within British Columbia sought to create the ideal settler colony; one that was “anchored in respectable gender and racial behaviours and identities.” Reformers attempted to channel colonial masculinity towards acceptable sites of heterosociability, even going so far as to import white women and regulate mixed-race relationships through marriage or by discouraging them altogether. White women, as in other colonial contexts, were regarded as the panacea that would solve the problems presented by the rough plural culture that existed in British Columbia. Ultimately, the efforts of reformers during this period failed and British Columbia remained ‘on the edge of empire’.

Placing her work within the broader international scholarship that deals with colonialism, Perry criticizes Canadian history because it has failed to analyze settlement as part of an internal colonial project. Perry effectively argues that colonialism involved a myriad of processes, not just the physical displacement of Indigenous peoples and the settlement of Euro-Canadians. As Perry aptly writes “notions and practices of manhood and womanhood were central to the twinned business of marginalizing Aboriginal people and designing and building a white soci-

ety.” Representations of white and Aboriginal women were used to delineate and solidify boundaries between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal society, thus, making categories of femininity and masculinity central to reformers’ efforts to create a white settler colony.

Moreover, Perry’s work joins the growing body of literature that interrogates the category of white as ‘normal’, recognizing that whiteness is a race like any other. The identity of Euro-Canadian settlers in British Columbia was produced through notions of whiteness. And the actions of reformers and legislators in British Columbia were intended to confirm and bolster the status and power that whiteness conferred. Although British Columbia had failed during this period to become the ideal white settler colony, this success came two decades later when non-Aboriginal settlers began to outnumber Aboriginal people and numbers of white women and men approached parity.

It is only in the last two chapters that Perry investigates the experiences of women who were forced to survive in an environment which presented few job opportunities and guaranteed financial dependence. Readers, particularly those interested in learning more about women’s history, may find it unsettling that women seemed to play such a marginal role. Partly this is because Perry makes little claim to knowing the experience of Aboriginal women through racist white male sources, but also because understanding the context in which white women came to the colony and the role they played in establishing a ‘white man’s province’ is essential to investigating claims white women made to public space at the turn of the century, particularly as such claims were made on highly racialized terrain.

FLINT AND FEATHER: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF E. PAULINE JOHNSON, TEKAHIONWAKE

Charlotte Gray
Toronto: Harper Flamingo, 2002

REVIEWED BY CLARA THOMAS

Pauline Johnson’s life was both tragedy and triumph: triumph in her indomitable pursuit of a career that was glowingly successful for many years, tragedy in the stumbling blocks that her dual inheritance inevitably put before her. On the one hand she was a proud Mohawk woman, the daughter of George Johnson, a leader among the chiefs of the Six Nations tract along the Grand River; on the other, Emily Howells Johnson, her mother, had so instilled the lessons that a Victorian lady must learn that Pauline was forever caught in the uneasy, often warring, tensions between two cultures. In this meticulously researched biography, Charlotte Gray has shown us a gifted, complex woman who might possibly have lived comfortably today but could never have been completely at home in her own time.

In 1861 when Pauline was born, Chiefswood, the home that her father had built only six years earlier, was a social centre for the Six Nations Reserve and a symbol of the easy relationship that then existed between the reserve families and the wider Canadian community. Pauline, her sister and two brothers, were, she wrote, “reared on the strictest lines of both Indian and English principles. They were taught the legends, the traditions, the culture and the etiquette of both races to which they belonged.” Strangely, in view of his pride in his heritage, George Johnson did not teach his children his native language. Inevitably theirs was a partial education in both cultures. The easy harmony of their