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A recommendation for empirical studies in critical race and whiteness studies: Yasmin Gunaratnam's (2003) *Researching 'Race' and Ethnicity. Methods, Knowledge and Power*. London: Sage Publications, ISBN 0761972870

The book 'Researching 'Race' and Ethnicity' written by Yasmin Gunaratnam" (2003) proved, during the last decade, to be of great value and usefulness for empirical research in studying race and ethnicity. Gunaratnam addresses methodological issues that are still relevant in critically researching race and whiteness. These issues are; the framework of sameness production and othering processes; the attention given to the relations between researchers and research participants; and the importance of signifying silences. I therefore recommend this book and propose in this special issue a presentation that provides an insight into major methodological challenges which are crucial for critical race and whiteness studies.

Gunaratnam addresses in her book a crucial question for critical race and whiteness studies, namely; how can empirical research in social science challenge and transform, rather than reproduce, ethnic and racial thinking? In her book she encourages researchers to work both with and against racial and ethnic categorisations, following the argument of Stuart Hall, that 'race and ethnicity [...] do not constitute different systems of meanings', but rather 'racism's two registers' (Chapter 1, 32).

She puts forward that lived experiences regarding 'race' and 'ethnicity' are complex and ambivalent (chapters 2-4). The multiplicity of such experiences represents a major challenge for students and scholars in critical race and whiteness studies who are, on the one hand, caught by the theoretical recognition of 'race' and 'ethnicity' as social categories, overflowing with multiple meanings, and, on the other hand, by the fact that essentialised identities continue to bear deep significance within everyday life. Gunaratnam reframes

the multiple uses of 'race' and 'ethnicity' within the social production of sameness and otherness, showing how these systems constitute political processes, as they are used to classify populations into (deceptively homogeneous) clusters (29). She reminds us that 'race' and 'ethnicity' thus remain in a constant state of intersectional production and negotiation with other forms of difference such as class, sexuality, disability and age (32).

For scholars working on whiteness with quantitative data, I suggest they should pay particular attention to chapters 2 and 3. Here the scholars can find an important discussion of the methodological biases of the 'race-of-interviewer-effect' and 'matching methodologies' present in quantitative surveys. Resting on hidden assumptions about race as true and objective data, such surveys (re)produce the assumption that 'race' and 'ethnicity' constitute a 'fundamental, basic, absolutely necessary constitutive quality' of a person. This implies the essentialised idea that social groups share an a priori internalised sameness, as well as an 'external difference or otherness' (128). Regarding whiteness, this means that scholars should be aware about the danger of reproducing whiteness as a 'quality of a white person' instead as a system. She states that the production of sameness and otherness is a far more complicated process than presented by the

'convenient binary categorisation', may it be white/black; male/female; inside/outside...(147). She presents discursive opposition between racialised commonality and difference which enables researchers to engage with the multiple, entangled layers of 'race' and 'ethnicity' as lived experiences (Chapter 4). This complexity is strongly needed in studies on race and whiteness and Gunaratnam proposes a set of useful methods of data production and analyses through methodological puzzles inspired by (black) feminism, poststructuralism and postcolonial theories (chapters 5 to 8). The methodology she advocates takes into consideration stances such as relationality and reflexivity, as well as the tools of discourse analysis and multi-sites research.

Chapter 5 examines the ways in which 'race' and 'ethnicity' acquire meaning through different narrative themes in accounts of individual lives. Gunaratnam states that they work as meta-languages that 'can be both hyper-visible or invisible in [their] intersections with other social differences' (122). Taking this argumentation as a recommendation, researchers on race and whiteness have to be aware of the multiple relations which connect various systems of social differentiation. For this purpose she proposes to analyse the entanglement of 'race' and 'ethnicity' with other social categorisations through the concept of relationality.

This brings her to address the ambiguities and meanings generated in research encounters (Chapter 6). As particular ethical challenges, ambiguities of meaning are connected to other narrative themes; to biographical, subjective and social differences between researcher and research participant, and to the ways research is framed by and located within wider social discourses and socio-historical contexts (147). The tools of discourse analysis focus on the function of language rather than considering it as an unproblematic and transparent expression of 'experience' or 'truth'. This method of analysis, highly useful for race and whiteness studies, also puts embodied activities (verbal expression, silence, gesture, movement...) into the centre of analysis, weaving together the discursive, the material, the emotional and the interactional in the stories about individuals' lives (123). This is of importance since whiteness as a dominant category remains largely invisible in narratives, including in research narratives. Gunaratnam convincingly shows that embodied attitudes offer a way to reach beyond such silenced categories.

In her final chapter (8), Gunaratnam follows the path of multi-sited research as a way of connecting and juxtaposing personal experiences of various contexts. She rightly understands multi-site methodology not as doing research in many different sites, but as a methodological tool

that engages with the researcher's circulation and mobility. The different social contexts in which s/he lives should be an invitation to investigate connections between previously unconnected sites as for instance for critical whiteness studies... (183). Alongside other researchers she puts forward, the necessity for reflexivity thus becomes essential for arousing the awareness of our veiled assumptions, and for reflecting on our role in the co-construction of knowledge.

Here I will develop three specific elements of Gunaratnam's book which resonate acutely with methodological concerns of research about whiteness: the framework of sameness production and othering processes, the attention given to the relations between researchers and research participants and the importance of signifying silences. First, replacing the concern for 'race' and 'ethnicity' within the framework of sameness/otherness allows her to go beyond romanticised ideas of internal, a priori similarity within social groups – being 'race', 'ethnicity', 'woman-ness' or any other social category. She convincingly warns against romantic ideas of 'abolishing social distance between researchers and research participants', and invites scholars to find a way of 'inhabiting or occupying it' (195). Exploring the tension between the production of sameness and otherness is a powerful tool for investigating whiteness as part of

dynamic identity constructions, and of relational racialisation processes.

Secondly, paying attention to the relations between researchers and research participants brings her to emphasize the potentially unpleasant side of interview encounters. She very interestingly shows how uneasiness and feelings of awkwardness might draw attention to the researcher's own limits and biases. She convincingly argues that such moments play a central role in data production and the process of creative understanding. This concern stays in direct relation to the exploration of silences and the unspoken, mentioned in landmark studies such as Frankenberg's (1993) and Ware's (1996), as well as in more recent ones (Durie 2003). These researchers have pinpointed out the difficulty of addressing dominant narratives as they remain unspoken and unnamed – at least, 'for many who are white' (Durie 2003, 135). For Gunaratnam, also, the silences serve the purpose of producing an apparently de-racialised identity, enabling those categorised as white to ignore, deny, avoid or forget their racialised subjective and social positioning (114).

Gunaratnam raises important methodological questions that needed to be addressed by research on critical race and whiteness studies: How to figure out silences? Which blank spaces are allusions to whiteness, to 'race' and 'ethnicity'? When might they point to something else?

Such methodological puzzles are related to the methodological problem of naming, and to the shadows of over-interpretation (Olivier de Sardan 2008). Gunaratnam's book makes explicit the analysis of whiteness as produced within the framework of sameness and otherness. Drawing on concrete examples from her own and others' research, she guides us among the complex interweaving of these topics and how this messy entanglement cannot be tidied, as a vivid expression of the dynamic constructions of 'race' and 'ethnicity' as social categorisations. Therefore this book constitutes one methodological milestone for scholars studying critically race and whiteness.

References

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