

New Racism

Norma Romm

New Racism

Revisiting Researcher Accountabilities

 Springer

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Preface

The idea for creating this book arose as I started reading various texts on racism – a topic that I had become increasingly interested in exploring over the last 6 years or so. While working with Carlis Douglas and Susan Weil on developing a book built around holding a (cross-racial) dialogue in which we probe together the multifaceted dynamics of everyday institutional racism, and upon reading relevant texts, I identified a lacuna. I realized that while there is a myriad of writings aimed at investigating racism and what is called “new racism” across the globe, there is *no text specifically comparing the styles of inquiry* used to proceed in the explorations. With “new racism” seen as operating in more or less covert ways in social life, and not easily visible, the question arises as to how the investigation hereof can properly proceed. How can we go about organizing social inquiries around that which is admitted to be not easily detectable (as well as being a shifting terrain)?

I decided to embark on the specific project of examining in depth the variety of ways in which social researchers/inquirers have tried to study this terrain – looking closely at how they have justified their approach (insofar as they offer epistemological and methodological justifications). As I delved into the various approaches – and looked at these with a view to pinpointing the explicit and implicit justifications for the manner of proceeding – I located possibilities for how they might be redesigned and/or further developed. I concentrated on rethinking the methodologies in line with my previous work on the accountabilities of social researchers. For example, in my book *Accountability in Social Research* (2001), I offer suggestions for how social inquirers can display their accountabilities by being mindful of the potential impact of their inquiries on the continuing unfolding of the social worlds of which they are part. This implies paying particular attention to possible hidden consequences of taken-for-granted views of “knowing” and “knowledge making.” This is not to say that none of those concerned with exploring (new) racism already do try to make provision for this. But it is to say that my attention in this book is directed toward considering more possibilities for creating such provision. I do this by drawing from some examples of research that I set out in the book, while expanding upon them, and also by offering some of my own examples.

The project of examining the range of literature in relation to inquiries around new racism and structuring all the arguments into a readable text, turned out to be a more complex process than I originally envisaged. I am hoping that the work that

I have put into detailing different approaches (exemplified with detailed reference to examples that I have chosen) and my proposals for extending them in specific ways will be helpful for inquirers – professional researchers and others – in their considerations for designing explorations around this area of concern.

As I explain in the book, I believe – with many others – that our ways of knowing are inextricably linked with our ways of living and being. Therefore, I believe that the suggestions that I advance for ways of exploring new racism are part of the process of our exploring options for revitalizing our humanity.

I would like to acknowledge that in writing this book I benefited immensely from input from the following people in particular, to whom I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude.

As regards my Chapter 1, which I found – as my starting chapter – almost the most difficult chapter to construct, many people helped me to define its development. Aleco Christakis, Sisinyane Makoena, Janet McIntyre-Mills, Tshimangodzo Mphilo, Phumla Nhlumayo, Abimbola Olateju, Elsa Onkenhout, Susan Schutte, and Susan Weil all read and offered commentary hereto. Susan Weil indicated to me (besides the additional commentary that she made suggesting points at which I should add clarifying material) that, in her words, “I so love how you ARE putting yourself more into your writing Norma ... I think we [Carlis and I] have had a big influence on you in this and in modeling different ways of doing this.” She added that this is especially important in a context where “implicit pressures and norms ... support tendencies to disappear ourselves in academic writing and research.” Tshimangodzo Mphilo pointed out to me the parts in the chapter that she found particularly meaningful and worth developing; and this also helped to give me direction.

As regards the rest of the book, in order not to ask too much of my friends, I asked different ones to offer feedback on different areas (although at times I gave the same sections of chapters to different ones hoping to receive a variety of perspectives). Aleco Christakis, Carlis Douglas, Veronica McKay, Phumla Nhlumayo, and Susan Weil all offered feedback that was invaluable both in helping me to see where the structure of chapters needed modification and where points that I had made needed development. Aleco’s comments on Chapters 3, 7, and 8 helped me to concretize many of my statements; Carlis’s comments in relation to Chapters 2, 7, and 9 helped me to see where I needed to extend the discussion; Veronica’s comments on Chapter 2 likewise were useful in this way; Phumla’s engagement with Chapters 5 and 6 opened up new insights for me; and Susan Weil’s engagement with Chapters 2, 7, 8, and 9 helped me to strengthen my “narrative” (as she calls it). Janet McIntyre-Mills kindly read almost the entire draft at its near-final stage – and I am grateful for her locating some places where I could clarify the text, but also for her summarizing for me how she was reading the book as a totality and how in her view I had proceeded to make a workable “flow” in the book. (I was also relieved to receive from all my commentators highly enthusiastic statements about the book, such as, for instance: that I had managed to weave together constructively threads from sociology, methodology, race, class, gender discussions, and so on – a job that “had to be done”; that the book was “very important toward the

development of our understanding of new racism”; that my inquiry approach in the book made a very important contribution to the field and that it would surely be “well received.”)

Meanwhile, discussions that I had with all these people (via face-to-face conversation, e-mail, and/or Skype) around the issues raised in the book also became useful material that became included in the text (and I have cited these conversations as “personal communications” therein). It is heartwarming to have received all the support offered to me – not only through people’s material contributions, but also through their “being there” for me. I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewers chosen by Springer to review my initial proposal, which helped me in the structuring of the chapters.

In conclusion, the fact that I come from South Africa, where national and international icon Nelson Mandela spent 27 years in prison for his convictions on a humane and inclusive society meant that I could not but be inspired by the magnanimity of his spirit of wholeness. I hope that this spirit is reflected in this book.

July 2009

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