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**Arcia Tecun, Lana Lopesi, and Anisha Sankar (Editors), *Towards a Grammar of Race in Aotearoa New Zealand***

**Jatinder Mann**

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Arcia Tecun, Lana Lopesi, and Anisha Sankar (Editors), *Towards a Grammar of Race in Aotearoa New Zealand* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2022), 256pp. Paperback. NZ\$39.99. ISBN: 978-1-9900-4663-6.

This fascinating and significant edited collection is probably one of the most unique out of all the numerous edited books that I have reviewed throughout my career. This is mainly due to its subject matter, which is extremely diverse, and it is also approached from several different perspectives. Furthermore, some of the approaches adopted in specific chapters are also very distinctive. Tecun, Lopesi, and Sankar, in their introductory chapter, provide a very useful discussion of the term 'race', its relationship to the terms 'culture' and 'ethnicity', and the way grammar connects to all of these. The editors make the very important point that 'perspectives that minimize the importance of race end up exacerbating racism instead.' (p. 19) Due to limitations of space, I will focus on several chapters which I believe provide a good cross-section of the diverse themes explored in the book.

Garrick Cooper in his chapter, 'Hidden Beneath Tiriti Justice,' maintains that 'Until more recently, as a country we have largely avoided discussing the ways in which race and racism operate in Aotearoa.' (p. 38). He explores the role of Treaty of Waitangi settlements in addressing injustices experienced by Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand (it should be noted that the book only refers to the country with the first word, not the subsequent two). Although the impact of the Treaty settlements is undeniable, especially economically to iwi across the country, Cooper does highlight the position of 'disconnected Maori', those that are treated with some suspicion by both the New Zealand state and iwi leadership, as not being able to benefit from this and therefore continue to experience racism in all respects.

'Tenants in Our Own Land? Racism, Settler Colonialism and Maori Home Ownership' by Pounamu Jade William Emery Aikman argues that the disproportionate level of home ownership by Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand (less than half compared to about two-thirds for other New Zealanders) reflects racism against Māori which has its origins in their dispossession from their ancestral lands through settler colonialism. Aikman's argument is a very strong and persuasive one and is an excellent rebuttal to arguments made by some in Aotearoa New Zealand, that what happened in the past to Māori, in particular the loss of their land, has nothing to do with their present situation. The chapter illustrates the generational wealth that Pākehā have accumulated and the economic and educational advantages this has resulted in for them, in contrast to Māori communities who lost their ancestral lands. This is epitomised by Aikman, 'By acquiring land cheaply or at no cost, otherwise landless white migrants were transformed into landed gentry almost overnight.' (p. 56)

Tze Ming Mok's 'Black Asian, White Asian: Racial Histories and East Asian Choices in the White Settler State' explores the very vexed issue of where Asians, both South and East situate themselves in the Black/White binary, especially in the context of settler colonialism. Mok makes the very important point that often the way in which you situate yourself in racial hierarchies is heavily influenced by the perspective of the majority (usually white) in the society in which you live. So, in the United Kingdom, for example, 'Asian' generally refers to people of South Asian descent (as they are the largest Asian group historically in that country). In contrast, in Aotearoa New Zealand Asian primarily refers to those of East Asian descent. Moreover, in terms of where these two groups are placed in the Black/White binary, the former is generally considered 'black' and the latter 'white'. This was especially

jarring for the author who is of East Asian descent but married to someone of South Asian descent. Mok also makes the plea that people of Asian descent, whether East or South, need to do their utmost to understand the history of Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand, and support their continuing efforts to overcome racial discrimination in the country, especially if they themselves have made huge personal strides in this respect.

‘The Future is Change: Reflections on the Black Lives Matter March in Te Whanganui-a-Tara’ by Beth Teklezgi, Selome Teklezgi, Vera Seyra, and Kassie Hartendorp is by far the most unique scholarly book chapter that I have ever read. This is mainly because of the approach of the chapter, which is in the form of a conversation between the authors (the first three of whom are of African descent and the fourth of Māori and Pākehā descent) about a large Black Lives Matter March organised in Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand in response to the death of George Floyd in 2020 by police in the United States of America and the continued killing of other African-Americans in that country. Beth, Selome Teklezgi, and Seyra assert that they have a strong affinity with African-Americans as a lot of their culture incorporates African-American music and film. Unfortunately, they also share the experience of racism from primarily white people. Therefore, the murder of George Floyd really resonated with people of color in Aotearoa New Zealand and spurred them to organise a march in solidarity. Hartendorp remarks on how proud she was to see Māori come out and support the march in solidarity, again reflecting partly on their own experiences of racism in Aotearoa New Zealand. She does, though make the plea for non-Māori People of Colour (POC) also to support Māori activists in their struggle for racial equality, and makes the broader point of a strong community of interest between all POC when it comes to this issue.

This is a very topical and thought-provoking book that I wholeheartedly recommend to readers. Although some of the chapters might appeal more to specialised readers rather than general, as they are quite theoretical.

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