

# Book Review

Journal of Black Studies

2019, Vol. 50(6) 602–606

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Hossein, C. S. (2018). *The Black social economy in the Americas: Exploring diverse community based markets*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. 230 pp. \$91.75, ISBN 978-1-1376-0047-9

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DOI: 10.1177/0021934719867125

The edited volume *The Black Social Economy in the Americas: Exploring Diverse Community Based Markets* by Dr Caroline Shenaz Hossein (2018) entails an assortment of narratives by various prominent authors. The core emphasis of the book is to mainstream “cultural identities” of Black communities as “an essential part of the social economy discussion” (p. xvii). The book encompasses issues of economic injustice as well as marginalization of the Black communities in various parts of the world, particularly within the socioeconomic sphere. A main attribute of the book is the construction of counter-narratives and discourses, one which is centered on the examination of the political entanglements, but in a vehement and intense manner. Although the central discourse of the book provides for theorization within the framework of Black Social Economy, the intent specifically resides on an “activist approach” against oppression and enslavement tendencies of State as well as the society (p. ix).

The book begins with a broader conceptualization by the author, which ensues an attempt to contextualize; one described as the “Daring [act] to Conceptualize the Black Social Economy.” A core focus that the book tries to raise and problematize is the discriminatory socioeconomic conditions that (exclusively) exist and hinder the Black communities, all of whom are connected to “African diaspora” or their “descendants” or as “Afrikans” as such. In the first chapter, the focus is primarily on the issues of economic “racial marginalization” for Black people, the diverse nature of racism, the resultant reactionary commerce, and economic cooperation that emerged (mostly circumventing the mainstream economy). Besides, the history of African communities in a socioeconomic context predates the “primordial” European

conceptualization of “cooperative development.” Thus, the book rightly entails and elucidates on the rich culture, history, and civilizational values of the Black population. The emphasis on lived experiences of the population, a critical approach taken to analyze the inequitable-cum-hierarchical institutions, and to the end, the revisionist approach undertaken by the author provides an interesting fervor. Besides, it also increases the understanding of issues of stereotypes, stigma, and discrimination that existed in societies. In the second chapter, the author begins with a historiographic analysis of the emergence and influence of Black scholars and groupings, mainly through revolutionary (both passive and active) ideas and stages. Besides, the influence from Indian leaders and organizations on Black leaders like Martin Luther King has been elucidated. The spark of rebelliousness that emerged against the oppression and enslavement by White colonizers, capitalist markets, and governments has been dealt in detail. The author brings to our attention the literary endeavors, activities, and works of frontline leaders like Malcolm X and scholars like Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois, and the author also discussed the modern day issues, especially the real impact of 2008 economic collapse, one which gravely affected the Black population more than the Whites in the United States.

The third chapter focuses on lived experiences of African Canadian women through an intersectionality framework, as well as theorizations constructed by Marcus Mosiah Garvey and Karl Polanyi. The emphasis is toward the inherent and institutional issues of exclusion of Black people, especially women, from “mainstream banks,” toward the rise of “collective banks.” The emergence of informal spaces, reactionary perceptions as well as activities like *susus* (money pools) among “Banker Ladies,” are all enunciated by undertaking qualitative surveys in the eastern and western ends of various regions in Toronto (Canada). In the fourth chapter, a study of the social economy in Jamaica, the historical aspects related to issues of emancipation, colonialism, the development of *Maroons* (small communities), and the emergence and institutionalization of “free villages,” “agropreneurship,” along with an in-depth study of *Rastafari* (social movements), are being undertaken.

In the fifth chapter, the neo-institutionalization of informal spaces in relation to formation of financial alternatives has been examined in depth. The chapter analyzes the underpinnings laid down by Black women in the creation of Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCAs). The resultant effect steered the social economy within the Black community, especially in the formation of *partna* (partner banks) in Jamaica, *boxhand* (penny banks) in Guyana, and *sols* (informal banks) in Haiti. In the sixth chapter, the *la comunidad negra* (Black community) and the related social movements in the Choco region in Colombia (or Colombian Pacific) have been examined.

This is interconnected with the facets of *territorio colectivo* (collective territory), one which (arguably) developed into an “emancipatory political project.” Further theorization and critiques are undertaken based on the conceptual paradigm of scholars like W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and Marcus Garvey and lived experiences of general Black population as well. The author enunciates the rise of cooperative development and Black social economy as the rise of “post-capitalist economics.”

In the seventh chapter, an exemplary and impeccable analysis of the Black social economy in Buenos Aires (Argentina) has been undertaken by the author, with special focus on “collective economic practices.” The positioning of race in social economy is an important aspect on which this chapter expounds on, with extensive case studies on various Black mutual-aid societies like *Dock Sud Cape Verdean Union* and *Argentine Association of Senegalese Residents* providing greater insights into the development of new informal spaces through innovative practices. In the eighth chapter, the study details on livelihood issues and related societal inequities. This is undertaken through case studies in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (in Brazil), where Black community are in minority. The other related aspects entailed in this chapter include that of Black diaspora feminism, racial politics in Brazil, and matriarchalism. The author has provided a “collective social critique of gendered, class-based racism” and has detailed on issues related to *favelas* (urban slums).

In the second to the last chapters, the main emphasis is on the indigenous formal spaces developed by *quilombola* community, the Afro-Brazilian population who escaped from enslavement in colonial plantations before beginning of the 19th century. The particular emphasis is on the case studies of social economies (both urban and rural) of *quilombola* women and the *Fidelix Family quilombola* community and on the formalization as well as institutionalization of cooperatives outside the mainstream financial institutions. The last chapter of the book has been to a great extent able to generate a serious counter-discourse against the emerging threat from “mainstream white extremism.” The author stresses that this book aspires to focus on central issues related to “educational, social, cultural . . . judicial, religious, and agricultural structures that mediate the circumstances in which Black people find ourselves.” Besides, the chapter examines the issues related to economic justice, cultural endowment, and role and problems regarding communal solidarity (especially for Black Women), while critiquing the narratives of neoliberalism, individualism, and the (mis)use of state narrative of governance and governmentality.

This book is more relevant today, especially with the increasing destructive assertiveness of nationalist “White” populism and the institutionalization


of extremist “White supremacy.” The narratives and the related literature coalesced in this wonderful but poignant book evoke the likes of works by Franz Fanon and other similar “activist” scholars, who focuses on racial discrimination faced by Black communities. The book evokes a feeling as to why similar literature (historically as well as in contemporary times) have often been kept at the margins of mainstream literature and academic discourses or why scholars are hesitant in undertaking similar academic endeavors in a field usually dominated by the European or American White scholars or those who adhere to “White supremacy.” Although there are similar narratives brought about by various academicians and scholars like Sidney M. Willhelm (1981) and Linwood F. Tauheed (2008), this book is more unique as it emerged more like an assemblage of “scholars of colour” from various parts of the world. More interestingly, the book has been molded in the form of an “academic protest” against the currently established “Grand Narrative” of “White capitalism” and “supremacy.”

A major critique that could be directed against this closely knitted narrative brought about in the book is that it heavily criticizes the White-dominated societies without taking into consideration toward betterment of Black people in relation to other societies. Unlike many of the African countries and other emerging nations dominated by Black population, the U.S. and European nations have provided a better standard of living, access to education, and relatively more equitable life as well. There are increased incidences of racism, underdevelopment, and poverty in Global South countries. Moreover, Whites are also facing issues of racism, mainly in societies where they are minorities, one which has to be examined and analyzed in depth for understanding issues related to concepts like racial invariance. Besides, there are emerging forms of racism and hate speeches through digital technologies and social media that have often exacerbated racist tendencies of various societies and population (Bliuc, Faulkner, Jakubowicz, & McGarty, 2018; Castle, 1993; Latzer, 2018), one which the book does fail to examine.

The book presents substantial criticism (and rightly so) on the American “white” history, the Eurocentric discourses, as well as narratives that have mostly dominated the “whitewashed” societies, even in contemporary times. The counter-narrative developed, elucidated, and consolidated in this book entails and helps remind us of the kind of racist tendencies that tend to dominate the thinking and ideologues in societies. The latest development of Mr. Trump’s ascendancy to become the U.S. President, who solely adheres to the negative emotions of White extremism, and the increased attacks on the Black population of the country are concerning issues in the 21st century. Thus, the increasing coercion of White State(s), capitalist agenda(s), and ideologue(s) into the lives of the Black population, especially against the

Black people, should be contextualized and protested against. Although the book is successful in exposing the racial construction of metanarratives in the American society, it has more relevance based on the fact that global narrative in itself is (or has been) perpetuated to a greater extent by the institutions and States that have considerable traction over the World Order.

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