

I Hear Voices: *In Our Own Voices: Learning and Teaching Toward Decolonisation*

Proma Tagore

135 pp, 2006, \$19.95 USD (paper)

Larkuma Press, Winnipeg

Reviewed by Joel Kuortti, University of Jyväskylä

In the contemporary globalizing world, questions of identity are negotiated much more widely and profoundly than ever before. The experiences and predicaments this negotiation generates extend to all spheres of life. In order to respect the variety of these experiences, one needs to listen to the stories that carry them. For this purpose, the anthology put together by Proma Tagore, faculty member and researcher at the University of Victoria, is an accessible vehicle. Its particular context is that of the classroom: the experiences of students, teachers and activists who are involved in pedagogical research that challenges marginalization. In the Introduction, Tagore gives as the starting point “the question of what it means to teach, learn, or undertake projects related to knowledge, consciousness, pedagogy, and education with the goals of decolonisation, anti-racism, or anti-oppressive struggle and practice” (7). This is a far-reaching and meaningful undertaking.

The book consists of twenty different pieces by nineteen contributors. Starting from the cover art by Izmer Ahmed, the genres include poetry, artwork, autobiography, and theoretical articles. While the approaches differ immensely, they share a basic constructive idea: the exploration of the production and dissemination of knowledge, and the relationship of these processes to the structures of power. It is problematic to assess such a variety within a single framework and still do justice to all of the contributions. For some audiences, the more expressive approach might best exemplify the complexities of marginalized positions. For others, the analytic and argumentative ways of probing the issues is more relevant. One of the strengths of the book is the combination of these different approaches. This is relevant particularly because the pieces question hegemonic (white, Eurocentric) epistemologies.

The contributors come from different ethnic backgrounds from First Nations to Malaysian. Many of them have hyphenated identities such as Chinese- or Indo-Canadian. Embedded in the marginalization of these people are ethnic, gender, sexual and racial marginalities. Even though the variety is not demographically fully representative (nor do I think it need be) it illustrates well the patchwork of contemporary Canadian – and more generally post-colonial – reality.

Besides the cover illustration, the artworks included in the book are by Olivia Ashbee, jennie duguay [*sic*], and Naomi Horii (of these

the last two have also contributed a written piece). In different ways and techniques, their images express hybrid states, interconnected lives, and complexities of signification. For example, Ashbee's black and white image represents (at least) a mixture of mapmaking, modernist portraiture, and traditional indigenous art. Through its winding lines, it conveys a palimpsest of geography, gendered relationships, nature, tradition, and history.

Poetry is present in the works of First Nations writers Chiinuks and Wil George. There are three to four poems by both, and they engage with a questioning of the epistemological givens. Thus, in "Where there is Story, there is truth" Chiinuks writes about stories woven into stars. George's "Raven's take on colonization" tells about contestation of colonial forms of containment: "oh press oppression/ oh press your will your desires/ your values and beliefs/ upon those of others/ ... Raven is not impressed" (35). The genres of the texts are not, however, absolute. For example, Rhonda Lee McIsaac's "Anishnawbemowin dash bimadiziwin" starts off more as a poem in Anishnawbemowin, develops into autobiography in English, and finally into an article about identity – "phonetically, my writing of anishnawbemowin is more in the English style than in the style of english" – complete with endnotes (120).

Correspondingly, contributions by njeri-damali (campbell) [sic], Lisa Okada, Tara Betts, Donyell L. Roseboro, Victoria Marie, Meghan Jezewska, Rachel C. Riedner, Shaunga Tagore, Rozmin Jaffer, and Michelle La Flamme, as well as the written pieces by Horii and duguay challenge the conventions of academic writing in their first person approach that can be seen as performative writing. In their own ways, they use a web of different genres in their texts: e.g., testimonial, academic article, autobiography, and ethnography. Only Rubina Sidhu's text about her own process of coming to terms with her identity, titled "Blankets of Silence," is a more or less straightforward autobiographical piece. By juxtaposing different writings within and throughout the texts, the anthology takes active part in the inquiry into the ways of knowing.

Between the texts and lines of this anthology, I hear voices—signifying and significant voices speaking about the predicaments and prospects of education. Even though the book is not an extensive volume, or maybe just because of that, it speaks volumes about the ethics and epistemology of education.