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Madiha Mohsin Syeda, *Miami University, Ohio*

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Review of *Power, Race and Higher Education*

By: Kakali Bhattacharya and Norman K. Gillen (2016), Paperback Edition, 230 pages, ISBN 978-9463007337

Madiha Mohsin Syeda
Miami University, Ohio

Centering at the Margins, Using Qualitative Research for Resilience and Emancipation

Power, Race and Higher Education is written by well-known transnational scholar and qualitative researcher Kakali Bhattacharya and her former EdD student Norman K. Gillen. In *Power, Race and Higher Education* (Bhattacharya & Gillen, 2016), the authors discuss and challenge their ways of knowing, their positionalities, privileges, and relationship with the culture they are living in. The authors call this book a “Cross-Cultural Parallel Narrative,” as the book features a voyage of self-discovery, an awareness of White privileges, and a sincere cross-cultural relationship (Bhattacharya & Gillen, 2016). Kakali Bhattacharya is a South Asian Brown woman who immigrated to the United States for her graduate studies and eventually became an assistant professor. Kent Gillen is a White doctoral student who was completing his dissertation under Bhattacharya’s supervision. They also discuss how we understand and do qualitative research framing research as a practice of resilience and emancipation. Combining narrative, reflection and theory, the authors discuss in detail how we imagine and do research.

In *Power, Race and Higher Education* (Bhattacharya & Gillen, 2016), the authors state that Western academia is generally considered neutral and promising. The authors challenge the neutrality of Western academia and problematize this claim. As the title suggests, the main theme of the book is power and privilege proposing the idea that people that have privileges are blind to their advantages making it more complex for the people that have less privileges. Often the superiors of the privileged people do not help them to realize it pushing it back (Bhattacharya & Gillen, 2016, p. xvii). Gillen does not realize his privileges as a White male American until Bhattacharya, as his supervisor, asks him to unpack them. In *Power, Race and Higher Education*, the authors describe how they unpack White privilege through fine layers of narrative, autoethnographic reflections, and theory, providing guidelines on doing art-based qualitative research (Bhattacharya & Gillen, 2016).

As a *Cross-Cultural Parallel Narrative*, the authors of the book talk about themselves and their a/political experiences through education. Described by writing, “Kent is a White man. Kakali is a Brown woman” established how parallel cultural narratives will be used to develop the story (Bhattacharya & Gillen, 2016, p. xviii). The readers are told that Bhattacharya is a Brown woman, a professor, and responsible for the teaching, advising, chairing, and mentoring of Gillen and other students. Bhattacharya was born in India, came to Canada at an age of 14 in 1987, subsequently, moved to the United States, and wondering “what exactly is my role as a Third World woman in Western academia” (Bhattacharya & Gillen, 2016, p. 46)? As Gillen’s professor, she challenges and supports him, while at the same time sharing her personal experiences, perceptions, and stories from her upbringing, education, and entry in/navigation through the a/political world of higher education as a tenure-seeking faculty member. Reflecting on her positionality, she says “I carry this shuttling between a good, colonized subject on the

one hand, while rejecting the position of being a colonized subject” on the other (Bhattacharya & Gillen, 2016, p.11-12).

The second author of the narrative, Kent Gillen, a Doctoral student, is in the process of writing his dissertation study on the life and education of a Chicana woman—Angie in the 1950s and 60s. Gillen is struggling to center his researcher positionality and unpacking the privileges he holds as a White, cisgender man, who has lived in Texas his entire life. Other characters help the writers unfold the main narrative by juxtaposing their positionalities. Gillen and Angie’s mothers are both widows, but they are living totally different lives. Gillen’s mother works in an office whereas Angie’s mother cleans houses for rich people. Some of the children whose homes Angie’s mother cleans meet her in her school too. Angie’s mother does not have additional familial support to raise her four orphans whereas Gillen goes to his grandparents whenever his mother needs some help with parenting him.

Sometimes writers highlight certain aspects of a character’s personality by using a foil. A foil character serves to spotlight on some qualities of the main character. In *Power Race and Higher Education*, the authors present characters that work as foils for the main characters. For example, Angie’s mother and Gillen’s mother foils each other. Angie is a schoolfellow and colleague of Gillen. She is the only participant in Gillen’s dissertation study. She is also the primary focus of the Ethnodrama scenes created by Gillen as part of his qualitative research study on Chicana women’s educational experiences and socialization within the 1950s and 60s in Texas. Angie, as a woman of color, serves as a foil to Gillen who is a privileged White man. Dr. Caroline serves as a foil to Dr. Bhattacharya. Dr. Caroline Sherritt is a White woman. Dr. Bhattacharya is a Brown woman. Dr. Caroline Sherritt, before passing away from cancer, served as a Professor of Educational Administration at Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi. Both work in a university – the colonized spaces that are not made for them. Dr. Bhattacharya, reflecting on the Western academia says that the universities “are the ugliest part of ... collective human history—White supremacy and its effects, not just in theory but in material lived realities” (Bhattacharya & Gillen, 2016, p. xvii). Bhattacharya, reflecting on Sherritt and her relationship, says that perhaps in befriending her, Sherritt wanted to see “the more colonized other” (p.32). Dr. Sherritt earned all her degrees from The Ohio State University. Sherritt was a former advisor to Gillen, and a mentor to Dr. Bhattacharya. Throughout the narrative, she serves in the capacity of a spirit guide to Dr. Bhattacharya.

Kakali Bhattacharya also talks about “ghosts in her writing” (p. 42). She states that these ghosts are what we understand in the literal “sense of ghosts” (p. xvii). According to Bhattacharya, these ghosts are “those people that are no longer in this world, but once were” (Bhattacharya & Gillen, 2016, p. xvii). She says we share a relationship with them in spirit, even when their physical form is not with us. These ghosts serve as the guiding spirits to Bhattacharya. She states she envisioned interacting with these guiding spirits although it never happened. (Bhattacharya & Gillen, 2016). It was like “dreaming while awake” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 5, as cited in Bhattacharya & Gillen, 2016, p. xvii). Dr. Caroline Sherritt is one of them, Dr. Gloria Anzaldúa serves as the other guiding spirit for Bhattacharya. Bhattacharya says these are the ghosts one obtains healing insights by bringing them back to one’s community. These ghosts guide Bhattacharya on cultural, social, and political issues by offering her inspiring visions of surviving in a hierarchical society.

The writers lay out the book as a *Cross-Cultural Parallel Narrative*. As we read the book, we see this evidenced in all characters. Bhattacharya is a Brown woman having Sherritt, a White woman, as her cross-cultural parallel. Angie is for Gillen, and Gillen's mother is a cross-cultural parallel narrative for Angie's mother. The researchers' positionalities and deconstructing privileges remain the dominant narrative throughout the book.

Another theme of *Power, Race and Higher Education* (Bhattacharya & Gillen, 2016) is the relationship between the mentor and mentee. Bhattacharya is the mentor and Gillen is her mentee. At the beginning of the book, readers are introduced with a tension between the supervisor and the supervisee- Dr. Bhattacharya wants her mentee to unpack his White privileges. She sends him an email, which is worth quoting at length here.

There is something that has been bothering me deeply from the onset of this project. It is your refusal to identify the privileges that you carry with you as a White man. [You must] identify unearned privileges that people have as part of the subject position(s) they occupy in our social structure. White male ranks at the top of the list. Yet nowhere in your dissertation that I have read so far have you unpacked your privileges in relation to the participant's. I am not sure if you didn't understand that you needed to do this or if I have been unclear or if you are simply resisting this to dismiss this idea as irrelevant to your work. However, if you do not identify the privileges with which you carry yourself and construct knowledge about this world, you are situating yourself as ahistorical, value-neutral, acultural, in the context of the participants' experiences. Therefore, you would automatically fall into the trap of the colonizing White gaze that describes the exotic other... (Bhattacharya & Gillen, 2016, p.38).

This brings readers to an important understanding, how can teachers and mentors make their students think about difficult questions such as society and their own complex history, without using shame, guilt, and institutional power. As a mentor, Bhattacharya is clear that:

We cannot deny the suffering of our fellow human beings when we benefit from the very same conditions that produce the suffering. Yet we cannot deny the anger we feel inside when we experience suffering as individuals and as a collective. How do we then move beyond that which divides us to discover what connects us in our shared humanity? (Bhattacharya & Gillen, 2016, p. xix).

Gillen, as a mentee, is self-absorbed and worried. As the narrative progresses, readers see that Dr. Bhattacharya steps forward from the traditional role of a mentor to ensure his success as her mentee. She reframes Gillen's ways of knowing and guides him to reconstruct them through a process of reflection. In this way, Bhattacharya challenges ways of knowing in general and readers are guided to reflect on doing research.

The authors use ethnodrama to disseminate research for Gillen. An ethnodrama is described as a written play script consisting of "dramatized, significant selections of narrative collected through interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, journal entries, personal memories/experiences, and/or print and media artifacts such as diaries, blogs, e-mail correspondence, television broadcasts, newspaper articles, and court proceedings and historic documents" (Saldaña, 2011, p. 13). Ethnodrama reflects the lives of people allowing the audience to connect with the characters because the themes enacted feel so real (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2011). Ethnodrama has been recognized as an effective way to reach people and inspire them to make a difference in their community.

Other than ethnodramatic scenes, other types of data are included for validity and reliability. The readers see pictures and artifacts that illustrate various phases of the lives of the researcher and the researched, transcribed interviews, and thick descriptions. The book is a comprehensive record of how to do arts-based research. I would recommend that *Power, Race and Higher Education* should be used in all qualitative research classes. This book will also help students understand Whiteness and White supremacy in academia.

To conclude, in *Power, Race and Higher Education*, the authors center their inquiry to understand marginalization by challenging their ways of constructing knowledge, discussing their intersecting social locations and complex power dynamics, privileges, and the relationship of their privileges within the culture they are living (Bhattacharya & Gillen, 2016). They also discuss how we understand and do research, using it as a practice of resilience and emancipation. In combining narrative, reflection, and theory, the authors discuss, in detail, how to conceptualize research. The main concern for Dr. Bhattacharya is to conduct cross-cultural qualitative research without reproducing patterns of hierarchy, subordination, marginalization, and oppression. Bhattacharya and Gillen, as mentor and mentee make use of the technique of ethnodrama and explain this technique in qualitative research. They illustrate situations, and by imagining these situations, challenge their ontological and epistemological knowledge.

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