

Toward a thoroughly cultural and discursive moral analysis of prejudice, discrimination, and racism.

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Toward a Thoroughly Cultural and Discursive Moral Analysis of Prejudice, Discrimination, and Racism

A Review of

The Nature of Prejudice: Society, Discrimination and Moral Exclusion

by Cristian Tileagă

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Reviewed by

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The study of prejudice, discrimination, and racism is now a widely variegated field in which social psychologists display various biases in favor of particular methods and theories. Using the example of the Roma (or Gypsies) in Europe, Cristian Tileagă in *The Nature of Prejudice: Society, Discrimination and Moral Exclusion* not only successfully challenges psychologists to incorporate societal and cultural perspectives and approaches in analyses of prejudice but also presents a wide-ranging analysis of prejudice as moral devaluation that gives discourse analysis a central, defensible role. A new framework is developed of prejudice as the personal, social, and cultural means by which dignity and worth are denied to particular groups of “others.” It should appeal to advanced students and researchers in social psychology who recognize the value of exploring old problems from new interdisciplinary perspectives.

The example of the situation of people of Romani ethnicity in Europe is an excellent choice for analysis because of the ubiquity and implied reasonableness of the prejudiced views of many moderate and middle-class European citizens. A particular claim that is often expressed as if it has widespread societal agreement (e.g., in Romania) is that it is the lack of civility of the Romani themselves that justifies dominant groups in restricting or withdrawing their solidarity, empathy, or support. In this analysis, prejudice is not simply a minority product of extreme right-wing views, faulty cognitive processing, or an authoritarian personality but rather is a collective product of the usually unspoken negative side of the European project—it is the collective enactment of moral reactions to infringement of liberal democratic freedoms of movement and settlement.

The argument is outlined convincingly in eight tightly written and constructed chapters. The style is dense but readable and bristles with references to classic and contemporary texts in psychology and its neighboring disciplines of sociology and anthropology. References to cultural analysis are drawn upon, and the irreducibility of prejudice to individual differences, implicit biases, or automatic cognitive processes is established with convincing arguments. The analytical focus on discourse is achieved without macro-reduction to social, cultural, and historical forces; cognitive, personal, social, national, and transnational features of prejudice against the Romani people all play important roles. Moreover, the focus on discourse includes important recognition of the rhetorical, dilemmatic, strategic, flexible, and changing deployment of negative moral evaluations and dispositional ascriptions in many European nations of Romani people as incorrigible, dirty, criminal, or revolting. Practices of

discrimination and exclusion are also examined in moral and spatial or geographic terms. Accordingly, acts of individual violence and organized structural violence (e.g., forced removals or relocations to the margins of towns and cities) are analyzed as manifestations of the deep ambivalence between inclusion and exclusion in Europe.

A text that aims to include a wide range of theoretical and empirical material will inevitably have limitations. Perhaps the most obvious omission, given Tileagă's impressive and wideranging analysis, is that the only voices of the Romani themselves are brief quotations from activists and policy makers speaking on their behalf. Readers are therefore denied the words of the Roma people about what it is like to be the objects of morally exclusionary practices. Instances of resilience, solidarity, dignity, resistance, and collective pride (Sullivan, 2014) from within diverse Romani communities are elided along with examples of any discussions of alliances and connections with other ethnonational groups. On a theoretical level, Billig's (1997) conceptualization of social repression in discourse is integrated, but useful psychosocial accounts of racist "defended subjects" (Hollway & Jefferson, 2009) are not. And despite including an account of disgust in terms of the "emotional capital of intolerance" and the complex mixtures of emotion that underpin racism, there is limited engagement with positions on racist affective practices (Wetherell, 2012) and affective economies (Hook, 2011), which could add further to the account of moral exclusion. But these are relatively minor criticisms. The range of theoretical and empirical material Tileagă engages with in the book is impressive and well balanced. The argument is compelling and the analysis overcomes many of the traditional biases and barriers in psychology to rigorous and innovative affective, discursive, social, and cultural analysis. This is an important contribution to the literature on prejudice from a European perspective, which has valuable lessons for researchers from other parts of the world and neighboring disciplines such as sociology and anthropology.

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