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## MUTUAL INTERCULTURAL RELATIONS – BOOK REVIEW

John W. Berry, ed

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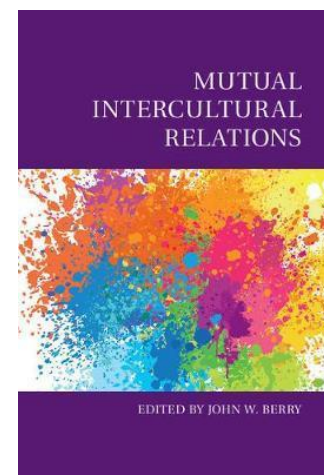
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This collection of short academic monographs by a large group of collaboration researchers attempts to assess and further the progress of cross-culture cohabitation of mixed societies in a variety of corners of the world. It reports the results of a project titled *Mutual Intercultural Relations in Plural Societies* (MIRIPS) which employed a consistent multidimensional methodology to research, describe and evaluate relationships between national populations and ethnic minorities in seventeen societies, largely in Europe (Azerbaijan, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Norway, Portugal, Russia, Spain and Switzerland), but also in India, Hong Kong, Australia and Canada. It carefully assesses the hypotheses used in the research, their functionality and their limitations.

We live in a time of rapid and often rabid manifestations of populism and tumultuous economic fluctuations, bias and exclusion, often created and propagandized by political agendas. Such conditions make solid explorations of this sort, conducted, as these were, in situ, examining dominant and non-dominant segments of nations and societies, to serve as important checks on assumed reality. They can provide information to challenge national policies. They provide talking points to challenge a variety of contemporary social ailments and call into question common erroneous and biased narratives that otherwise are inclined to hold center stage. It is to be hoped that the findings of this research will be understood and used to influence social policies and support or instigate programs for the betterment of our intergroup relationships.

The methodology of the research project was focused on evaluating three hypotheses of intercultural relations, listed as multiculturalism, contact and integration. The project's efforts sought to identify the psychological dynamics underlying these elements. The research explored equally both poles of the populations involved, both each country's established ethnic dominant resident population and the non-dominant ethno-cultural group(s).

Creating a solid multicultural environment is not just a matter of public policy, though that is an important element, but also requires levels of comfortable interpersonal and intergroup contact between different elements of the population and integration into the functions and services of a society in a non-discriminatory fashion. It is important to recognize that multiculturalism is just that, the rich variety of multiple cultural elements in a population. It means mutual acculturation, not forced assimilation. Assimilation may occur over time, but it is a slow and interactive process, not a condition for cohabitation. On the other hand, acculturation normally begins when a group moves into the space of another and various levels of contact develop. This is not without stress, the elements of which need to be managed by the cultural strategies and resources of each side. Cultural and linguistic differences require consistent awareness and continuing management.



In the individual national studies making up the body of the studies reported in the book, the researchers present in detail the results achieved on the various indexes used to assess the hypotheses under examination and then discuss their implications. While the study data are too extensive and complex to report in a brief review, those interested in the countries and populations studied will do well to review each analysis and discussion for both an overall picture of where the populations stand in relationship to the individual hypotheses regarding multiculturalism, contact and integration. Such a reading will show where dissonance and sticking points are to be found or expected, as well as identifying avenues that are productive in current practice and going forward.

Given this project's base, it is not surprising that studies of Russia and the Scandinavian and Baltic countries are focused on Russian populations, while central and southern European countries study a more complex diversity involving both European mobility as well as Middle Eastern, Maghreb and sub-Saharan elements. In the case of Spain, there is also a significant Latin-American post-colonial population to consider.

The research on India, on the other hand, focuses on the relationship of the Hindu majority and Muslim minority. It is a place where we may be inclined to blame the territorial sense imposed by British imperialism for the challenge of maintaining geographical divisions and boundaries post-Independence, Historically this has resulted in a decline in multicultural tolerance and most likely continue to foster conflicts in the subcontinent.

Needless to say, the research on Hong Kong is relevant to the current explosion of unrest in the territory. This deterioration of relationships calls into question the future acculturation of native born and immigrant Mainlanders to each other, and in fact, threatens the status and perhaps the existence of Hong Kong society itself going forward. One wonders to what degree the current crisis will leave an impact on the multicultural DNA of the residents.

The indigenous populations of both Australia and Canada, as we know them, are dominated by the descendants of colonialism of as well as by intensive influx of European and other immigrants who form a dominant white, though not necessarily harmonious majority. While Australia is more known for its historically "all white" policies, there are now emerging cracks in the Canadian experiment which has for some time been revered as a model of multicultural policy. The wide range of diversity in both of these countries makes it difficult to generalize from focused group studies.

In brief, this volume will be of interest to those who wish would explore its methodologies for undertaking further research based on the hypotheses it sets forward. It will also be a useful resource for deepening country-specific perspectives for those interested in the nations and populations that it reports on.