



Book review of Andersson, Mette 2022. *Rasisme: En innføring*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget. 241 pp (Title in English: Racism: an introduction)

BOOK REVIEW

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Racism is a phenomenon that has received a lot of attention in research, politics, and public debates over the past five years. The recent research has adopted theories to the Norwegian context, such as critical race theory and critical whiteness studies. And events such as the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 have had a major influence on the public debates about racism in Norway. The debates have been partly heated, both among activists, writers, and researchers. For this reason, there has been a great need for an introductory book that can act as a guide in a difficult and partly mined landscape.

The monograph *Rasisme: En innføring* (*Racism: An introduction*) provides both an overview of and insight into the theories, research, and debates surrounding racism. It is written by Mette Andersson, Professor of Sociology and Social Geography at the University of Oslo. The book was published last year, in 2022, and I contend that it could not have been written earlier and possessed the same qualities. In 2023, this is a needed and long-awaited book. Andersson has been researching racism for several decades and has demonstrated in the text why she is the right person to write this book in the context that it is written, also because she is conscious and transparent about her position as a white, middle-aged researcher. Her knowledge of theories and research traditions illustrates an impressive overview that would be hard to accomplish for beginner researchers.

Andersson's purpose with the book is to introduce us to the phenomenon of racism, in particular the science, theories, and research. The target groups that are explicitly mentioned are students at the bachelor and master levels and this book offers beginners in the field what they need, albeit with the ambition to show the complexity of the field. For example, Andersson refrains from giving a clear definition of racism, claiming that 'racism appears in ever new forms and new arenas,' and clear definitions can limit our understanding of the phenomenon (p. 14).

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The first three chapters give the reader an excellent introduction to relevant terminology that is used when researching racism and related topics. Three chapters are devoted to concepts such as 'race,' racialization, ethnicity, nation, intersectionality, prejudice, islamophobia, and discrimination. This is followed by Chapter 5 on different theoretical traditions in different countries or regions, for example, what differentiates American and British research regarding racism. In Chapter 6, called 'Societal level and degree of clarity,' Andersson shows her own contribution to this field. Using the sociological concepts of micro, meso, and macro, combined with the level of clarity in racist expressions, Andersson illustrates how looking at different levels of society can provide a deeper insight into racism. I believe these perspectives are especially useful, also for readers who are not beginners in the field, giving insights into the subtle forms of racism: the forms that are so hidden and veiled that they are often not regarded in the context of racism.

Andersson has devoted a chapter to anti-racism in Norway (Chapter 7), as well as a chapter addressing recent Norwegian research (Chapter 8). These two chapters show the value of a book on racism published in Norwegian, written in a Norwegian context. In the last chapter, Chapter 9, she summarizes and underlines the importance of defining racism in different ways.

There have been several publications as well as dissertations about racism and related topics, especially within education research. In 2022, the book *Rasisme: Fenomenet, forskningen, erfaringene* (Racism: The phenomenon, the research, the experiences), edited by Cora Alexa Døving, was published with Universitetsforlaget. The book is an anthology but covers several of the same terms, theories, and ambitions of illustrating the complexity of the concept of racism. Andersson also contributes to this book, not unexpectedly, with an explanation and discussion around the concept of 'race.' The two publications released in the same year, but by two different publishers, perhaps illustrate the need for more knowledge about the theories and good analyses of the phenomenon of racism in our time.

The last time an introduction to racism was published in Norway, was in 2015 with Cora Døving and Bangstad's *Hva er rasisme* (What is Racism). While this book gave deeper insights into Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, the strength of Andersson's book is linked particularly to the concepts and presentations of the various theoretical traditions. She excels in giving readers insightful introductions to the differences between American and British perspectives on racism. And it is unspeakably good to gain both insight into and an overview of various researchers' relationship to and use of, for example, the term 'race.'

However, because Andersson is particularly knowledgeable when it comes to the use and understanding of concepts, there is also something I miss when reading this book. Occasionally, Andersson uses the term 'melanin-rich' (p. 13, 67, 158) when referring to people of color. The last time she does it, she refers to Afrikan Youth in Norway (an association for youth affiliating to Africa) and their work to promote the use of the term. It was also Afrikan Youth who in their time, in 2004, created the expression 'melanin-rich' as a term referring to people of color. As far as I know, the term is a Norwegian phenomenon. After 2020, we have seen an increasing use of the term melanin-rich, both in public conversation and in books. We see people who support its use, but also skeptics (Majid 2021). Some have even ridiculed the term (Rolness 2020). Given Andersson's strength in conceptual discussions, it would have been especially

interesting to get her reflections and analysis on such a new concept, especially when she chooses to use the term herself.

There are also some public debates specific for the Norwegian context that could have been addressed in this book. Discussions about racism have in recent years become heated, especially in the context of humor. I can mention several comedian's cases that subsequently have led to debates about the n-word, black face, and boundaries regarding humor and racist harassment: the 'Satirix sketch,' 'Nissene på låven,' 'the Stovner revy and black face,' 'Tore Sagen and the speech of embarrassment,' 'Helt Ramm i Tokyo,' and lastly, 'the Atle Antonsen case.' There are enough cases to identify a tendency, which illustrates the sensitive and inflamed nature of conversations about racism. Humorists seek taboos in our society, and racism is a recurring theme with today's humorists. Being explicit about the Norwegian context and witnessing repetitive discussions, they could, as a tendency, be given a place in Andersson's book.

Andersson covers many perspectives about racism in about 200 pages, and what should be included and what should be left out is always a dilemma. In that case, I can mention that among the theorists and researchers who are highlighted, I miss both Henri Tajfel (2010) and his work from the 1970s on theories regarding social identity and intergroup relations as well as Sarah Ahmed's (2000, 2006, 2012) tone-setting and intersectional perspectives on gender, skin color, and sexual orientation.

Rasisme: En innføring (Racism: an introduction) is a timely book, a guide in an inflamed and sensitive landscape. It came at the right time, at the right distance from the debates and research that have taken place in recent years. It is educationally written: the language seeks an active reader and leads you through the chapters. In particular, the publication will be useful for students, writers, and researchers who want an up-to-date overview of theoretical traditions and term usage. In addition, it provides new insights for all, both students and experienced researchers, on how to understand different types of racism at different levels of society.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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