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Dimensions of Inequality in Canada (review)

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(Review)

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nable. They spark our neurons in ways even the most lovingly restored pickup and the wisdom of a grandmother simply do not, so Wagamese is required to tell us how we feel, rather than thrill us into feeling. Where he does thrill us, in vividly rendered depictions of the bull, of the bear, and of the mountains, we register awe, not stomach-churning horror.

What does it mean to write within a literary ethic in which violence and harm are, seemingly by common consent, more authentic than wisdom and healing? Perhaps we are trapped in despair and cynicism, content to let our Hansels and Gretels stay always on the edges of the witch's wood and find no deliverance, except in vengeance. Perhaps in losing the wisdom traditions of whitestream culture and religion in those of intolerance and domination, necessary for the colonization of the mind, we have devalued all wisdom traditions. The contrast between the sensations of these two fine books is striking — though the images of Tom and Paulie with their daughter are also sensations — as is my own learned response of distrusting the sentiment and trusting the violence. This, I think, is a mistake. Leslie Silko's great apocalyptic novel *Almanac of the Dead* attempts a reconciliation between the violence of the present world and the ancient wisdom traditions associated with Nature. These two novels by Canadian First Nations writers also seem to approach such a reconciliation in the shadows between them. The well-observed child in *Blood Sports* and Aiden's mean streets in *Dream Wheels* serve as a bridge between the two forms of sensation. Tom and Paulie are certainly in need of healing, and they find it in their child, in AA, and, particularly, in forgiving each other and themselves for the violence they had earlier committed against each other while they were in Jeremy's thrall. However, the last words go to Wagamese, a recipe for healing. Joe Willie realizes "that the power to heal lay within himself and the anger, the rage, were the spurs he needed to coax himself into action" (272). By the end of the novel, after he has restored the pickup, he can tell his grandfather, "Scars and breaks make us what we are, give us character. Make us unique. Make us beautiful" (388).

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David A. Green and Jonathan R. Kesselman, eds. *Dimensions of Inequality in Canada*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007. 477 pp. Index. \$29.95 sc.

Dimensions of Inequality in Canada is one of three edited volumes that came about from the Equality, Security, and Community project. The project was conducted over

a six-year period with the purpose of “explaining and improving the distribution of well-being in Canada” (ii). The book provides an overall assessment of inequality in Canada.

The most common inequality is income. A survey of income inequality over the 1990s using three data sources has come to different conclusions (due to the difference in the way income is reported). Survey data indicate stable levels of inequality whereas more reliable tax and census data point to rapid increases in income inequality during the 1990s (15). Measurements of inequality in terms of consumption have been similar to that of survey data. However, earnings mobility “is the dynamic complement of inequality” (101). The probability of staying in the same earnings category is higher for women than for men. The probabilities of moving up the distribution are generally higher for men, whereas the probabilities of moving down one or more earnings categories are higher for women (108). “Mobility is also much greater toward the bottom of the earnings distribution than at the top end where high-skill workers enjoy much more stable earnings patterns” (123). Unfortunately, “movements within the earnings distribution follow a pattern in which the rich tend to stay rich and the poor tend to stay poor” (14-15).

Examining employment levels is another method of measuring inequality. Disturbing trends are evident in the differences in the average working time of adults. According to data from the International Labour Organization, in the twenty-year period between 1980 to 2000 “average actual working time per adult (ages fifteen to sixty-four) rose in the United States by 234 hours to 1,476 while falling in Germany by 170 hours to 973” (155). Moreover, the relatively poor in the United States work significantly harder and still end up with less income than their European counterparts (i.e., France, Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom). Leisure time (an indicator of economic well-being) has a direct impact on an individual’s money income level. However, because of the substantial variation in leisure time between countries, “comparisons of the level of money income inequality likely *understate* the degree of differences in the inequality of economic well-being” (179). Compared to Europe, “the distribution of economic well-being among Canadians is even more unequal than money income comparisons alone would indicate” (179).

Ethnic and visible minorities face prevalent economic and health inequalities. All groups of Aboriginals are disadvantaged not only in wages and salaries but also self-report the highest cases of major chronic diseases. However, recent immigrants (especially from Asia) report fewer chronic health conditions than their long-term counterparts even though they are less likely to report having a physical checkup. This health advantage, nevertheless, disappears with time (266).

The most significant changes in earnings inequality in Canada has been in the economic progress of women. Women’s real earnings increased significantly during

the 1990s while men's earnings were declining (307). Over the last two decades "male earnings inequality increased more than female earnings inequality" (307). However, family earnings inequality, after declining in the late 1980s, increased again in the early 1990s (307). Increased assortative mating trends have played a noticeable role in increasing levels of family income inequality. Married women in the upper deciles of the family earnings distribution enjoyed rising incomes; however, many of them in the lower deciles saw their earnings erode due to their husband's earnings slipping into the lower deciles of the male earnings distribution. Furthermore, significantly more women were finding themselves sole heads of households (339-340). "The vast majority of single parents are still mothers (only 2.8 percent of children lived with single fathers in 1997)" (224). Children in single-parent families or in families with one parent working were in the lower deciles of the family earnings distribution (243). Notwithstanding the significant gains in women's real earnings, "the Canadian labour force continues to be more gender-differentiated than ethnicity-differentiated" (266). Further research is needed to examine and alleviate these inequalities.

The final conclusion is that Canada has experienced increased levels of inequality, especially in the 1990s. Furthermore, the new social paradigm in Canada "assumes that inclusion is achieved through movement into the paid labour force and that growing inequality among paid workers is of secondary interest" (423). Governments are more willing to reduce income-security protections, rather than increase their commitment to education and training programs, increasingly shifting the burden to private shoulders (418). The "compelling challenge before us is to integrate investment and redistribution by designing a redistributive complement to a human capital strategy" (419). We have the theoretical framework and the data; the next step is to implement policies to reduce these inequalities.

Dimensions of Inequality in Canada is an excellent multidisciplinary source for both social science students and policy makers interested in theoretical frameworks, Canadian data analysis, and evaluative policy issues about various inequalities that Canadians face.

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Laurence Alfonsi. *L'île ronde*. Dole (France): Gunten, Collection
« Adélaïde », 2006. 173 pp. 17 euros. sc.

La sociologue française Laurence Alfonsi publie son premier roman, qu'elle situe