

Samira K. Mehta. *The Racism of People Who Love You: Essays on Mixed Race Belonging*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2023. 187 pages. \$24.95 cloth. ISBN: 978-080702636-6.

I have the right:

- not to justify my existence in this world
- not to keep the races separate within me
- not to be responsible for people's discomfort with my physical ambiguity
- not to justify my ethnic legitimacy

I have the right:

- to identify myself differently than strangers expect me to identify
- to identify myself differently than how my parents identify me
- to identify myself differently than my brothers and sisters
- to identify myself differently in different situations

I have the right:

- to create a vocabulary to communicate about being multiracial
 - to change my identity over my lifetime—and more than once
 - to have loyalties and identification with more than one group of people
 - to freely choose whom I befriend and love
- Maria P. P. Root, *Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People* (1993/1994)

It has been three decades since Maria P. P. Root, a clinical psychologist and independent scholar, proposed the Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People. The bill has had significant impact on multiracial communities in the United States and on the practice of compiling the US census, opening the possibility to identify with more than one racial category in 2000. Growing research outside of the US also clearly demonstrates that multiracial and multiethnic persons exercise their rights to express their ethnic and racial identity and that their identifications are fluid. At the same time, research points to the persistence of constraints mixed persons experience in their ethnic options, in particular, the level of acceptance of individuals' asserted identification by wider society, which clearly shows the gap between self-identification and the practice of ascription of racial and ethnic identity by others. Using her personal experiences, in *The Racism of People Who Love You*, Samira K. Mehta illuminates this gap and the complex negotiations of racial positions as an Indian White American with a multireligious background. I read

Mehta's book as a manifestation and reminder of the Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People and for all of us to acknowledge the choices we make and the different privileges and oppressions that we experience.

My reading of Mehta's work is heavily influenced by my positionality. I grew up as a (semi-)third culture kid in Japan, absorbing US culture and language, and had contacts with persons of mixed-race background. I am a first-generation immigrant to Sweden and do experience racialization, struggling with the model minority dilemma. I am a mother of two mixed-race children, an immigrant parent trying to navigate a country that I did not grow up in and observing and accepting that my children are growing up identifying as full members of Swedish society. Despite our differences, I see myself in the stories of Mehta's father. Her stories reflect some of the difficulties that can emerge within my own family and may be the stories that my children will share with me (or not) in the future.

Chapter 1, "Where Are You Really From? A Triptych," deals with the infamous question "where are you really from?" The chapter highlights the complexity of the question when asked not only by someone who is White but also by someone who assumes that you share a common racial background or culture. Mehta points to the arbitrariness of race, showing that physical and visible differences become a vessel for racial ascription and assumptions; this becomes even more complicated for Mehta because she is a mixed person of Indian descent embodying the history of British colonization and the Partition of India. Chapter 2, "Meat Is Murder," is also interesting in relation to the expectations and assumptions that people make. Reflections on her practice of being vegan as an example of how people cannot really identify the origins of certain traditions or choices are relatable. But mixed people are forced to face the question of which "side" they are on, something that a monoracial person never has to contemplate. Chapter 3, "Failing the Authenticity Test," beautifully conceptualizes the slippery concept of "authenticity" through her experiences. People around mixed persons, and society in general, expect and test mixed persons' authenticity: "whatever you have chosen, you are not doing it well enough," when indeed culture and identity are never fixed for anyone (p. 70).

Chapter 4, "American Racism," is the most interesting chapter for me as a person of color, but a privileged one. As Mehta writes, "It is hard to know what to do when the racism is present in your private space, your home, your family," especially as it often comes in forms of microaggressions (p. 104). The chapter highlights the racial tensions that do not fit into the Black-White binary. In chapter 5, "Appropriation," as in the chapter on authenticity, Mehta discusses what is and what is not appropriation, noting that the line between appropriation and appreciation is very thin and blurry. I too have ethnic clothing, such as Chinese Chongsam and Japanese Yukata, hanging in my closet, not being used for the same reasons that Mehta offers for her hesitation.

Chapter 6, "Mentoring," made me reflect on the kind of leadership and mentorship we can provide. As a mixed person, Mehta writes, "And so, we had to choose between white spaces or non-white spaces, and in some ways, since neither of those spaces were meant for us, in the end, they both fail us" (p. 172). The question of choosing sides and the need for a space to communicate experiences of being mixed are highlighted. The concluding chapter, "The Racism of People Who Love You," shows the common difficulties for people of color to address racism with White people, but most important again, it illustrates that being part of, and embodying, the White community as a mixed person entails deeper implications. I too have, as a monoracial person, experienced uncountable moments of irritation because White women

equate their experience as women to my experience as a racialized Asian woman. Although I have an “understanding” of and share Mehta’s frustration, I cannot fully understand what that frustration means to her as a mixed person and what that does to her ethnic and racial identification and experiences.

I highly appreciate Mehta sharing her personal and often painful experiences. The book reminds readers that having multiple heritages and identities are common in the globalized world, especially for those who have a migratory family background. However, Mehta reminds us that despite the commonality of experiences as people of color, individual mixed-race experience is indeed unique. The book speaks to those who have migration history in their family, to those who live in interrelationships and have mixed children, and to the White majority who has someone mixed in their close circle.

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