

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



**Kathryn A. Manzo.** *Creating Boundaries: The Politics of Race and Nation.* London and Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1996. viii + 251 pp. \$43.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-55587-372-1.

Reviewed by Donald Lammers (Michigan State University)  
Published on H-Africa (August, 1997)

Oh, what a difference perceived “differences” make in how we humans think and act. This is the master theme of Kathryn Manzo’s study of the role played in modern nationalist movements by perceptible variations among human groups in their physical appearance and their cultural performance. After characterizing nationalism as a political religion which deliberately sorts people into “kin” and “alien” and celebrates the singularity of the resultant “nation’s” culture through a repetitive narrative of suffering and redemption, she explores the particular part played by racist ideas (amounting, in essence, to a doctrine of permanent human differences) in the processes by which political boundaries have been formed and political identities established in recent centuries.

Divided like Gaul into three parts, her book contains: (p. i) a pair of chapters which survey relevant scholarship on “nationalism” and “race” in order to frame and contextualize the investigation; (p. ii) a trio of chapters which submit three specific instances (all drawn from the former British Empire) to close analysis; and (p. iii) a conclusion which calls attention to some problematic practices (e.g., the international traffic in mail-order brides, adoptive children and human organs) that confirm the great likelihood that the tensions she describes between ideas of “race” and claims of “nation” will be with us for years to come. By thus situating her investigation in a global context she aims to illuminate the continuing discord between national political creeds and folk ways on the one hand and the boundary-leaping imperatives of contemporary international life on the other. In the main, she succeeds.

The principal virtue of the initial chapters is that they demonstrate the persistent centrality of racist thinking to nationalist practice even though the intellectual content of thought about “race” exhibits considerable incon-

sistency and even incoherence over time. While Manzo does not go so far as to say that modern-style nationalism without racism is impossible, the regular and intimate association between the two strongly suggests that they provide one another with virtually indispensable reciprocal support. Whether thought of as “lineage” or as “type” or as “sub-species”, the concept of “race” has functioned—and goes on functioning—as a basis for differentiated treatment of groupings of people within and between the constituted political entities we call states. Attempts to transcend racist politics, whether in the name of human rights or multiculturalism or some other non-racial organizing principle, have not enjoyed conspicuous success to date.

In the three core chapters of her book Manzo anatomizes the role of race in the politics of South Africa, Australia and the British Isles. For all the differences of context and circumstance, her researches reveal a dismayingly common story of persistent efforts by the political and intellectual leaders of nationalist movements to characterize the “aliens” (whether they be “natives” of the place or “immigrants”) as threats to the physical, economic and moral health of the “race-cum-nation” currently in control. No amount of social scientific and historical evidence and argument, it seems, makes more than a superficial dent in the tenacious hold which these fears of being “swamped” and “infected” by a rising tide of “others” (usually, but not invariably, people of color) have on the partisans of the nationalist cause. Whether the subject be apartheid, the “White Australia” policy, or British reactions to Jewish refugees and Commonwealth immigrants, the evidence Manzo marshals underscores the hypocritical and self-serving nature of most nationalist advocacy, along with the ironies and paradoxes that beset these all-too-human attempts to create boundaries

that, one may say, Nature never intended.

It is, then, no difficult thing to identify and disparage the follies and atrocities historically associated with expressions of racism in a nationalistic context. It remains, regrettably, substantially more difficult to accomplish two other desirable things. One is to reach impregnable intellectual clarity on such genuinely vexing questions as whether what we call "culture" can (and should) actually be taught, to the point where putting children of one racial/ethnic background into families of another becomes a morally acceptable choice. The second is to discover some principle other than the cool, unengaging abstractness of "multiculturalism" that can offer a more emotionally compelling basis for full social participation than the undeniable attractions of nationalism, which has

survived the discrediting effects of war, depression and revolution in ways that justify some pessimism about our collective future. Whether the "rainbow nation" envisioned by Nelson Mandela or the "integrated polyethnicity" on offer in Australia can help us who live in mixed societies to circumvent the massive problem potentially posed by group-based claims for shared or divided control of such institutions as schools, the courts, the armed forces and welfare agencies most definitely remains to be seen. Readers of Manzo's book will be alert to the challenge.

Copyright (c) 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@H-Net.MSU.EDU.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-africa>

**Citation:** Donald Lammers. Review of Manzo, Kathryn A., *Creating Boundaries: The Politics of Race and Nation*. H-Africa, H-Net Reviews. August, 1997.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=1196>

Copyright © 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at [hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu).