Identity, contingency and the urban geography of 'race'

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Traditional research in urban geography concerned with issues of 'race' has focused on a series of substantively important issues, yet with conceptual foundation inadequate to the task. Specifically, this body of work has employed outdated and theoretically limited conceptions of identity without sufficient consideration to the importance of historical and geographic contingency. I argue in this essay that topics of traditional concern to urban geography gain new relevance and importance when they are reconsidered and reworked from a social constructivist perspective that takes seriously the importance of identity and contingency. I illustrate my argument with discussions of two aspects of my current research agenda. First, I discuss how research on urban residential segregation gains considerably from a more sensitive encounter with multifaceted notions of identity that explicitly address geographic contingency. Second, I review recent empirical research on US mortgage-lending markets that demonstrates the geographic and class contingency of discrimination. The paper ends with a call for research that employs multiple methodologies.

Key words: social constructivist perspectives, racialized identity, geographic contingency, urban geography, urban residential segregation, mortgage-lending discrimination.

Introduction

Geographers' efforts to understand the complex empirical and theoretical links between cities and 'race'[1] require a reworked conceptual framework that incorporates the complex, multifaceted and socially constructed nature of *group identities* and takes seriously the *geographic contingency* of social processes and outcomes. Several recent efforts to explore the links between identity, difference and place from post-structuralist, post-colonial and other recent theoretical perspectives have focused ex-

plicitly upon urban contexts (e.g. Anderson 1991; Fincher and Jacobs 1998; Smith 1989). Even so, traditional mainstream 'race'-related urban research, which tends to utilize essentialist conceptions of 'race', continues to draw considerable research and policy attention (see special issues of *Urban Studies* 1998: 35(10); *American Behavioral Scientist* 1997: 41(3); and recent books by Massey and Denton 1993; Jargowsky 1997; Marcuse and van Kempen 2000; Wilson 1996; among others). While many have highlighted the problems of these approaches over the years, I focus in this paper

upon the problematic tendency to essentialize group identity and to inadequately address the importance of geographic context. Despite shortcomings, I argue that traditional approaches and topics of urban geographic concern remain important *and* can be enlivened by sustained engagement with theoretical frameworks built on constructivist and contingent understandings of identity, space and place.

The paper proceeds in two parts. First, I discuss briefly the interdependence of racialized identity and the geographic contingency of social processes through a review of recent literature. This review is not comprehensive— other sources, including papers in this special issue, provide more in-depth coverage of this material (see also Anderson 1991; Fincher and Jacobs 1998; Jackson and Penrose 1994). Rather, I sketch the aspects of recent theoretical work that have the greatest potential to revitalize urban geography's traditional substantive concerns. In the latter part of the paper, I focus on two long-standing topics of traditional concern in urban geography— residential segregation and discrimination in housing markets. Drawing from my recent and ongoing research, I illustrate how these topics gain renewed relevance when placed on a firmer theoretical foundation that prioritizes issues of identity and contingency.

Recent theoretical debates: constructivist and contingency perspectives

Social constructivist perspectives argue that identity is formed and experienced discursively, and often conflictually, within specific sociogeographic contexts, and thus challenges essential and categorical understandings of identity (Anderson 1991: 13–17; Bondi 1991; Jackson and Penrose 1994: 1). Specifically, 'race' is no longer accepted as a pre-determined category defined by biological imperative, or fixed across time or space. Rather, identity is imbued with racialized meanings and material consequences through complex social relations whereby privilege and disadvantage are differentially distributed among groups (Smith and Feagin 1995: 4). Moreover, *all* members of society have racialized identity, even when not consciously recognized (Tatum 1997). The constructivist perspective also contends that identity is complex and multivalent in nature. Gender, class, religion, ethnicity, nativity and sexuality, among other factors, also constitute vital dimensions of identity, and shape the distribution of privilege and disadvantage in important ways. The multiple dimensions of identity do not just *intersect* as independent additive forces within individuals, they *interact*—i.e. we cannot understand how racial identities are formed or experienced without simultaneously referring to other dimensions of identity (Dyson 1997; hooks 1995; Ruddick 1996).

The notion that identity is constructed socially and simultaneously along several dimensions presents considerable challenges to traditional urban research that relies on statistical analysis of data that embody *a priori* classifications of identity.[2] Such quantitative analysis is not the only, or necessarily even the most important approach in Urban Geography, yet much of the mainstream research currently drawing attention continues to rely on large sets of second-hand data. In the spirit of the constructive dialogue over the appropriateness of quantitative methodologies in feminist research published in *Professional Geographer* (Hodges 1995; Lawson 1995; Mattingly and Falconer-Al-Hindi 1995; McLafferty 1995; Moss 1995; Rocheleau 1995), I argue that 'counting' retains an important role in this urban 'race'-related research, despite the ever-present epistemological problems. While such

work cannot fully accomplish the goals of the social constructivist perspective, it remains important because of its wide audience and policy impact. Even so, quantitative work must recognize explicitly that identity is *not* adequately captured by the categories reflected in the data and strive for appropriate and sensitive interpretation of the analysis (see Ellis, this issue). Note in this regard that *all* research and writing on issues of identity involve categorizations that to some extent do violence to the experienced subjectivity of identity. Indeed, even some advocates of the constructivist perspective recognize this tension:

It is important to clarify that construction theory does not deny the need for some kind of categorization. Human thought requires categories as fundamental communicative devices. Constructions theory only challenges the idea that some categories are more fundamental ('essential', 'natural') than others. (Jackson and Penrose 1994: 3)

The question thus shifts from 'whether' to 'what extent' and 'in what ways' does academic reflection and writing on these issues violate the experiences and processes we seek to understand.

A second arena of recent geographic theory, related to but also distinct from social constructivist perspectives, emphasizes that social practices and processes are embedded within geographic contexts. Contexts can be particular places (at multiple scales, sometimes simultaneously), and/or flows, depending on the social processes under consideration. Contextual embeddedness matters because social processes are modified and altered: that is they are *contingent* upon the contexts in which they are embedded (Gregory and Urry 1985; Jones and Hanham 1995; Sayer 1992). This perspective highlights that society and geography are mutually constitutive—one cannot be understood without referring to the other. We thus must address explicitly the issue of geographic contingency when we seek to comprehend the link between identity and urban geography.

Identity formation is deeply embedded within urban geographic contexts—the groups that interact within particular geographic contexts, neighbourhoods for example, form the frame of reference for identity construction. Bondi, for example, discusses the complex relationship between gender identity and gentrification: 'the issue is whether gentrification is a process through which changes in gender identities are constructed and expressed' (1991: 121). At the same time, the identity and functioning of places depends on the identities of, and the social relations between, the groups that inhabit, occupy or utilize those places. Indeed, several writers explicitly recognize the deeply intertwined nature of social and place identity (e.g. Hanson and Pratt 1995; Pratt 1998). In this light, Wacquant (1993) argues that inner-city neighbourhoods occupied by poor minorities become stigmatized, and that this place identity feeds back to further isolate and disadvantage the minority residents.

Another implication of contingency perspectives is that, like all social processes, processes of identity formation and consequences of identity operate in different ways, resulting in different outcomes, in different geographic contexts. Jones and Hanham define a contingent relation, for example, as 'any process that mediates between the operation of a general, necessary mechanism and a particular context' (1995: 195). This aspect of contingency bears particular importance for mainstream urban research—much of the existing literature continues to attempt to identify universal 'laws', 'truths' or 'generalizations' that operate independently of the contexts through which they are constituted. While much of the social constructivist perspective clearly embodies the

spirit of the contingency perspective (e.g. Pratt 1998), there is also much to be gained from mainstream quantitative analyses that demonstrate the importance of contingency. Indeed, recent methodological advances allow quantitative analyses to be much more faithful to a contingency perspective (see Jones 1991; Jones and Duncan 1996).

Conceptually reworking traditional topics

Insights about social construction and geographic contingency drawn from recent social theory provide a powerful base for re-conceptualizing and re-examining the links between racialized identities and urban space. As a first step, mainstream 'race'-related urban research no longer can afford to assume that binary categories of 'white' and 'non-white' or 'black' and 'white' adequately or unproblematically capture the dimensions of identity that shape urban social geography. Nor can mainstream research afford to presume that empirical associations characteristic of extensive data sets adequately describe or represent social relations for all of the geographic contexts under consideration. Even so, 'race'-related urban issues remain firmly planted on mainstream academic, policy and public agendas and geographers need to be able to speak to these debates with theoretically sensitive quantitative research. My intent is to affirm simultaneously the importance of these theoretical approaches while reorienting the nature of quantitative analysis (although I am not suggesting that quantitative approaches necessarily are the most appropriate approaches to the questions stimulated by constructivist and contingency perspectives). I turn now to two examples from my efforts to explore the linkages between mainstream urban research topics and social constructivist and contingency theories.[3] The

first describes an effort to construct a new conceptual framework of residential segregation that accommodates a broader view of identity and context. The second example depicts empirical research that incorporates a complex contingent conceptualization of racial discrimination in urban housing markets.

Race and urban residential segregation

Residential segregation persists as one of the most notable geographic patterns in contemporary cities. Segregation has received much academic attention recently, spurred in North America by renewed immigration (e.g. Roseman, Laux and Thieme 1996), ongoing discussions of urban disadvantage and the persistence of very high levels of residential separation despite legislative attempts to end housing market discrimination (Jargowsky 1997; Massey and Denton 1993; Wilson 1987). In the European literature, problems emerging from guest worker programmes, the weakening of national borders with the European Union and the falling of the Iron Curtain have also stimulated recent work on segregation (e.g. Kemper 1998; van Kempen and Bolt 1997). Much segregation research remains relatively thinly conceptualized, however, despite the volume of work produced. Tremendous effort continues to focus on mapping and measuring the extent of segregation or arguing over the forces most responsible for the high levels of segregation experienced by African Americans in North American cities. Moreover, the various parts of the literature seem to have little dialogue with one another. The conceptual framework that I outline here modestly attempts to re-orient and re-connect the various aspects of the residential segregation literature by drawing on social constructivist and contingency perspectives.

Four conceptual frameworks implicitly un-

derlay most segregation research and give rise to several dominant yet problematic interpretations of residential segregation. *Ecological theory* views urban social geography as a 'natural' or 'organic' outcome of social competition (Park, Burgess and McKenzie 1967 [1925]). Segregation is considered to be the spatial manifestation of the desire for social distance—often imposed by dominant groups, but also self-selected by immigrants. Moreover, segregation is viewed as functional and transitional, helping recent immigrants socially and economically adjust to their new environment. *Neoclassical economic theory* views segregation as an incidental by-product of market forces whereby economic actors make rational choices about housing production and consumption. Hence, segregation is a housing attribute naturally and justifiably evaluated by real-estate markets (e.g. Clark 1986). *Institutional perspectives* (referred to as neo-Weberian by van Kempen and Özüekren 1998) contend that segregation from restrictions on minorities' housing choices imposed by a dominant group through a suite of formal and informal activities, often state-sanctioned (e.g. Galster 1988; Yinger 1995). *Structuralist perspectives* agree with institutional perspectives that segregation is imposed from above, yet accentuate deeper economic, social and political structures that enable institutional agency (Fusfeld and Bates 1984; Marcuse 1997a, 1997b).

The theories that generally inform existing perspectives of segregation have many problems beyond the scope of this paper. I focus here on weaknesses that an engagement with constructivist and contingency perspectives can redress. First, in the search for 'generalized' and 'universal' explanations, complex socio-spatial outcomes are often reduced to simplistic causes. Ecological and neoclassical perspectives agree that segregation is an aggregate result of

individual actions, though they disagree over whether *social* or *economic* competition drives the system. These perspectives limit the degree to which the problematic nature of segregation is recognized because they portray segregation as 'natural'. On the other hand, institutional and structural perspectives over-emphasize the involuntary nature of minority segregation, thus limiting our ability to recognize potential benefits derived from self-imposed segregation.

Second, these perspectives over-generalize from the experiences of specific groups in specific geographic and historical contexts. Most notably, the experiences of European immigrants to North American cities during the late 1800s and early 1900s continue to stand as the explicit and implicit reference point for most discussions of segregation. Many observers uncritically cast segregation as functional to a process of socio-economic assimilation necessarily mirrored by spatial dispersal. While segregated neighbourhoods are commonly associated with poverty, physical decay and other social problems, segregation is acceptable *as long as it enables subsequent assimilation and dispersal*. Segregation is seen as problematic in the long run only if it persists longer than would be functional to the assimilation process. The experiences of African American migrants to North American Manufacturing Belt cities thus occupy ambivalent conceptual ground. On one hand, African Americans have been conceptualized as just another immigrant group moving into the core of industrial cities to take advantage of employment opportunities (Hershberg et al. 1979). On the other hand, blatant historical discrimination and the resultant extreme levels of residential segregation experienced by African Americans distinguish them from the earlier European immigrants (Hirsch 1983; Kusmer 1976; Massey and Denton 1993; Philpott 1991). Institutional interpretations over-generalize these distinctions to

condemn residential segregation as universally antithetical to values of societal equity (Massey and Denton 1993). Other interpretations have used African American experiences as a reference point—a perverse sort of ideal type—for interpreting the experiences of other groups in other contexts (e.g. Wacquant's 1993 comparison of Paris and Chicago) because they stand *in contrast* to earlier immigrant experiences.

A new framework for segregation research that takes seriously insights drawn from social constructivist and contingency perspectives requires that any account of segregation must be positioned explicitly within a frame of reference defined by specific group *identities* and *contexts*. Moreover, when specifying the group(s) and context, explicit attention must be paid to *scale*—a group that makes conceptual sense at one scale may not make sense at another scale. For example, while the neighbourhood may constitute a reasonable scale of analysis for one group, the sub-national region may be the most appropriate scale of analysis for another group.

The importance of framing segregation accounts with explicit attention to identity and context is accentuated when we consider two theoretical tensions that revolve around the *causes*, and the *consequences* of residential segregation. First, to what extent does segregation result from the *choices* of the segregated group and/or result from *constraints* imposed by other groups within the context? Constraints may be formal and informal, and may be established at a variety of scales ranging from immediate (potential) neighbours to national governments (e.g. Smith 1989). Second, to what extent does segregation, once established, *marginalize* and/or *empower* the segregated group? Note that while these tensions are interrelated, they remain distinct—how we resolve the causal tension does not dictate how we resolve the tension over consequences.

African American residential segregation in North America's Manufacturing Belt cities serves as a useful case to illustrate the importance of addressing theoretical tensions within an explicit framework where groups and contexts are identified in sensitive ways. First, the traditional segregation literature debates the relative importance of institutional discrimination, economic resources and preferences as the three main causes of segregation (e.g. Clark 1986, 1988, 1989, 1991; Galster 1988, 1989). Such debates are overly simplistic, ignoring the diversity of identities contained within category 'African American' and abstracting from specific historical and geographic contexts. Research that examines residential segregation at different income and/or educational levels within the larger group (e.g. Farley 1995) is far preferable to research that employs only a single ethno-racial category. Even so, such approaches usually consider only notions of class differentiation within African American communities, ignoring other dimensions of identity such as gender, sexuality, family status, immigrant status and place of birth. The forces responsible for the segregation of a particular sub-group of African Americans differ from those responsible for the segregation of another sub-group, even though both sub-groups undoubtedly confront similar institutional constraints. The framework proposed here demands the use of more refined and sensitive categories as a necessary first step—especially those categories that involve multiple dimensions of identity—even though such categories still constitute *a priori* impositions that do not fully represent relational notions of identity emphasized by the social constructivist perspective.

Context also shapes our ability to resolve the causal tension for African Americans. Historically, institutionalized discrimination was undoubtedly responsible for much of the segre-

gation of African Americans in northern cities (e.g. Hirsch 1983; Philpott 1991). Once established, however, many other forces combine to maintain deeply segregated urban landscapes. Silver and Moeser's (1995) discussion of segregation in Atlanta, Memphis and Richmond highlights the distinctive nature of residential segregation in the southern states of the USA. At a more localized scale within a single metropolitan area, African Americans are the predominant occupants of certain neighbourhoods for a variety of reasons. For example, in Columbus, Ohio, inner-city neighbourhoods to the east of Downtown are the historical core of the African American community. African Americans came to occupy a neighbourhood located on the north-east edge of the city for a completely different set of reasons involving a failed attempt by the Tuskegee Institute to build low-cost middle-class housing. In Atlanta, Georgia, a sizeable African American middle-class occupies extensive territory on the south-east side of the metropolis because of white flight during the 1970s and 1980s. In both of these cities there are also examples of neighbourhoods that remain predominantly white for a variety of reasons.

African Americans' experience of residential segregation is as complex when we try to understand the consequences of segregation as when we try to understand its causes. While most observers agree that the overall impact of segregation has been negative (see Massey and Denton 1993 for a strong statement of this sort), sub-groups enjoy distinct benefits from segregation. Historically, significant financial benefits were reaped by black real-estate agents who employed 'block-busting' techniques during the 1950s as the ghettos of many northern industrial cities were expanding (Hirsch 1983). Recent research also suggests that some middle-class blacks voluntarily choose to live in segregated neighbourhoods for the cultural and political benefits they perceive (Farley, Steeh, Krysan and Reeves 1993, 1994; Feagin 1994; Feagin and Sikes 1994; Zubrinsky and Bobo 1996). Similarly, while accounts like that offered by Massey and Denton (1993) suggest that residential integration is a universally valuable social goal, integration may also impose negative consequences. These examples, though illustrative, do not exhaust the insight that can be gained, even from sensitive quantitative analysis that pays attention to identity and context.

Mortgage-lending discrimination

The importance of constructivist and contingency perspectives also emerges when we look closely at discrimination against African Americans by mortgage lenders, a topic that receives prominent attention in traditional accounts of segregation in the housing market. The conceptual frameworks that underlay most of the research on mortgage-lending discrimination focus either on the operation of financial markets from a neo-classical economics perspective, or on institutional behaviour.[4] The debate over the continuing significance of lending discrimination, i.e. lenders restricting the flow of credit—both against individuals and neighbourhoods on the basis of 'race', has been particularly intense, and has been played out in the popular media as well as academic forums. Unfortunately, this debate has tended to generate more heat than light.

When we open this debate to issues of identity and contingency, we start to uncover much more complex discriminatory processes, and are able to understand some of the apparently contradictory empirical findings that plague this research. Part of the problem with most mortgage-lending research is the tendency to conflate discrimination against individuals with

discrimination against places, and thus deny the contingency of discrimination. The debate tries to resolve inappropriately general questions of whether mortgage lenders discriminate against minorities *in all places*, and/or whether lenders discriminate against *all applicants* seeking properties in minority neighbourhoods. Taking contingency seriously leads to more appropriately articulated questions about who encounters discriminatory behaviour in what kinds of places. Several recent empirical works examine available data for evidence of geographic contingency of discrimination in mortgage lending (Holloway 1998; Holloway and Wyly 1999; Reibel 2000; Schill and Wachter 1994; Tootell 1996).[5] These studies contend that individual experiences of racial discrimination in the mortgage-lending market may depend, in part, on the racial composition of neighbourhoods. Several forces support such expectations. For example, most of the policies in the USA designed to redress inner-city disinvestment (commonly referred to as Community Reinvestment Initiatives) incorporate spatial targets. As a result, the benefits of such policy initiatives are spatially limited to traditionally segregated and economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Holloway 1998; Schill and Wachter 1994). Holloway and Wyly (1999) further argue that economic motivations for loan officers to discriminate may be most accentuated when upwardly mobile minorities seek to purchase property in predominantly white neighbourhoods perceived to be vulnerable to housing value depreciation caused by racial transition.

These studies generally have found substantial empirical evidence of contingency in the outcomes of mortgage-lending decisions. The basic pattern observed is that African American applicants have the greatest difficulty having loan applications approved in rapidly growing, predominantly white, moderate- to high-income suburban neighbourhoods. Conversely, predominantly minority lower-income neighbourhoods in the central city present a racial advantage to African American applicants, suggesting a consequence (perhaps unintended) of spatially targeted policy. Despite the intriguing nature of these empirical findings, much more work is needed to adequately address the issue of contingency in discrimination. Research in this area also needs to explore the impacts of identity more carefully—little or no work has been done on differential treatment by lenders on the basis of gender, family structure, sexuality, age or multiple racial identities.

Conclusion

I argue in this paper that the traditional substantive concerns of urban-focused 'race' research continue to merit attention and can be revitalized through a sustained engagement with theoretical approaches that place the interrelated processes of the social construction of identity and of geographic contingency at the centre. I have illustrated my argument with a discussion of my own ongoing efforts to deepen mainstream understandings of residential segregation and mortgage-lending discrimination. This has revealed that the causes, meanings and consequences of segregation vary considerably, depending upon both the identity of the group experiencing segregation and the geographic and historical contexts in which segregation occurs. It has also shown that individuals encounter a variety of discriminatory experiences in contemporary housing markets, reflecting both their identity and the geographic context of the property they seek to purchase. Ultimately, the research described in this paper does not exhaust the potential for re-examining the topics of traditional substantive concern to

urban geography from a fresh theoretical perspective.

My objective in this paper has been to argue for a way to revitalize mainstream urban 'race' research with fresh theoretical insight—my main intent has *not* been to offer a methodological defence. Still, issues of methodology (and ontology and epistemology) are ever-present. I firmly contend there is also much to gain from employing multiple research methodologies—insights that can be gained with sensitive quantitative analysis will complement the insights gained from more in-depth qualitative studies. I certainly am not alone in calling for research that uses multiple methodologies; in summarizing the special issue of *Professional Geographer* mentioned earlier, Hodges (1995: 426) states that:

[T]hese papers collectively make a strong statement about the appropriateness and necessity of using quantitative methods along with qualitative approaches, in feminist research specifically and in geographic research more generally. But they do so while emphasizing the importance of understanding the epistemological roots of these methodologies to a creative and embracing research approach. None of these research methodologies provides a complete understanding—they all impose limits to the levels of understanding that can be learned from research even as they add insight that is probably not achievable any other way.

Notes

1 In the spirit of this special issue and consistent with recent critical research, continued usage of the term 'race' is problematic because it suggests an essentialized notion of identity that potentially obfuscates its socially constructed nature, although its positioning in quotes serves to mark its usage as a social construction. As mentioned below and developed more fully elsewhere, identity is a relational construct and considerable theoretical gains are realized by focusing on processes of 'racialization' rather than on the empirical fate of rigidly categorized groups. Nonetheless, much of the urban research literature that purports to study 'race' does not yet reflect these theoretical insights.

2 Jackson and Penrose (1994: 3) nicely represent some of the goals of the social constructivist perspective:

The social construction perspective works by identifying the components and processes of category construction. The resultant knowledge can then be used to reconstruct categories in ways that allow their inherent power to be used in the pursuit of equality. Alternatively, we can use the theory to deconstruct categories such that their power to engender inequality is dissolved. In either case, the objective is not to expose the falseness of constructs but rather to expose the falseness of our unquestioning acceptance of these constructs from which their legitimacy derives. From this perspective, social construction theory can be seen to offer a radical form of analysis and exciting possibilities for envisioning societal transformation.

3 My attempts to re-orient the conceptual foundation of traditional research on residential segregation largely are collaborative with David Kaplan. Our major work presenting this reworked conceptual framework is still in progress—preliminary efforts appear in Kaplan and Holloway (1998, 2000) and Holloway and Kaplan (1998). My theoretical and empirical work pertaining to mortgage lending is drawn from Holloway (1998) and from collaborative work with Elvin Wyly currently under publication review (Holloway and Wyly 1999).

4 Much of the existing literature extensively debates whether or not patterns attributed to discrimination emerge from economic motivations. 'Statistical discrimination' involves the attribution of empirically valid group characteristics to individual applicants in order to minimize the difficulty in accurately predicting future economic behaviour based on limited current information. 'Cultural Affinity' describes one mechanism whereby statistical discrimination can be applied—loan officers favour loan applicants with whom they share common cultural identity because they can more accurately evaluate the various forms of 'soft' information that potentially limit the risks of lending over a long time-frame.

5 This empirical work illustrates some of the difficulties inherent to this kind of work. The data underlying all of these analyses are extensive, and involve *a priori* objectified classifications of racial identity that cannot come close to capturing the relational and dynamic notions of

multivalent identity called for by social constructivist perspectives. Still, the demonstration that 'race' effects are highly contingent upon neighbourhoods (census tract — again an artificial *a priori* construction) unsettles and constructively complicates simplistic notions. As a minimum, the meaning of racialized identity, even when operationalized in a category too coarse to satisfy in the long run, is not constant or immutable. The demonstration of empirical contingency at the scale of neighbourhoods thus undermines the totalizing accounts too often found in mainstream research in a way that mainstream research is forced to acknowledge.

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Abstract translations

Identité, contingence et géographie urbaine du fait racial

Les recherches traditionnelles en géographie urbaine portant sur le fait racial se sont concentrées sur une série de problèmes d'une importance substancielle, malgré un fondement conceptuel pourtant mal adapté à la tâche. Spécifiquement, ce corpus fait appel à des concepts identitaires désuets et limités d'un point de vue théorique qui ne reconnaissent pas suffisamment l'importance du contexte géographique et historique. Je soutiens dans cet article que les sujets d'intérêt traditionnels de la géographie urbaine acquièrent une nouvelle importance et pertinence lorsqu'ils sont reconsidérés et retravaillés à partir d'une perspective constructiviste qui considère sérieusement l'importance de l'identité et du contexte. J'illustrerai ce point à travers deux aspects de mon programme de recherche actuel. Premièrement, en discutant comment la recherche sur la ségrégation résidentielle urbaine est considérablement enrichie par un contact plus sensible avec des notions identitaires multiples tenant explicitement compte du problème de l'emprise du contexte géographique. Deuxièmement, en faisant le tour des recherches empiriques récentes sur les marchés américains de prêts hypothécaires qui démontrent comment géographie et classe sociale ont un impact sur la discrimination. En terminant, l'article invite à des recherches futures qui feraient appel à de multiples méthodologies.

Mots clefs: perspectives constructivistes, attribution d'identité raciale, contexte géographique, géographie urbaine, ségrégation urbaine résidentielle, prêts hypothécaires et discrimination.

Identidad, contingencia y la geografía urbana de raza

Las investigaciones tradicionales de la geografía urbana que tratan el tema de 'raza' se han centrado en una serie de asuntos substantivamente importantes pero sin la base conceptual adecuada para la tarea. Específicamente, en este conjunto de trabajos se ha empleado nociones de identidad anticuadas y teóricamente limitadas sin considerar la importancia de la contingencia histórica y geográfica. En este trabajo sugiero que los temas de la geografía urbana tradicionalmente importantes ganan una nueva relevancia e importancia al estar reconsiderados y adaptados a una perspectiva constructivista social que toma en serio la importancia de la identidad y la contingencia. Ilustro este argumento con debates sobre dos aspectos del tema de mi trabajo actual. Primero hablo de como las investigaciones sobre la segregación residencial urbana ganan mucho de un encuentro más sensible con nociones multifacéticas de indetidad que tratan explícitamente la contingencia geográfica. Segundo, examino recientes investigaciones empíricas sobre el mercado de crédito hipotecario en los Estados Unidos; investigaciones que demuestran la contingencia geográfica y clasista de la discriminación. Termino por pedir investigaciones que empleen metodologías múltiples.

Palabras claves: perspectivas constructivista sociales, identidad racializada, contingencia geográfica, geografía urbana, segregación residencial urbana.