Book Reviews

Pedro Jaime
Executivos Negros: Racismo e Diversidade no Mundo Empresarial (Black Executives: Racism and Diversity in Corporations)
São Paulo: EdUsp, 2016. 424pp.

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Written in Brazilian Portuguese, Jaime's book discusses the experiences of two generations of black men and women executives that permeated the Brazilian corporate world during the 1970s and 2000s, respectively. He wrote this book 'to fight against racial inequalities present in Brazilian society' (p. 40) and also to give voice to black executives who are rarely present in academic discussions. Jaime stresses very directly his anti-racist politics as a reason to write this book. I choose to review this book because (i) race equality is a topic of paramount importance in a world that seems to become more conservative and narrow-minded and because (ii) the display of Jaime's reflexivity in the research process is rather interesting and inspiring.

For the benefit of an international audience, some background and context about race relations in Brazil is important to contextualize the significance of Jaime's contribution. Slavery of black and indigenous people was lawful and widespread in the country from the arrival of the European colonizers in 1500 until 1888. Today, the marks of rampant and legal slavery are evident by way of the majority of Brazilians self-identifying as other than being part of a white ethnicity. Enduring racism in Brazilian society is evidenced by the levels of poverty and social exclusion affecting black and mixed-race Brazilians with black background (*pardos*). Black Brazilians and *pardos* are far more likely to be poor, to be arrested or killed by the police, and have less access to education compared to Brazilians with European ancestry. Despite the explicit inequalities that slavery has produced in Brazilian society, there survives a post-race 'myth' of the Brazilian racial democracy attributed to one of Brazil's classic foundational books, *The Masters and The Slaves* (Freyre, 1933). The 'myth' suggests that unlike in the United States, there is no prevalent racism in Brazil.

Contrary to this 'myth' of racial equality in Brazil, Jaime's book stresses that racism is widespread in Brazilian society and it explains the near absence of people with African heritage working as executives in Brazil's corporations. Thus, Jaime's book addresses a topic of intrinsic importance to the world of organizations and management: racism in corporations. This is a topic that is often under-represented and, when it has been analysed, we find that race has been historically discussed under Eurocentric assumptions (Nkomo, 1992) and that slavery has been rejected as a constitutive element of Western management (Cooke, 2003).

Jaime's analysis integrates non-Anglophonic epistemological frameworks informed by the works of Touraine (2005), Gaulejac (2009) and Ribeiro (2000). His book explores how perceptions of race in Brazilian corporations and society have become altered by the work black executives

have been committed to over two generations. His analysis uses life-story interview data about black executives in the 1970s alongside observational fieldwork that Jaime conducted in a corporation during the 2000s. The book is divided into three parts in addition to a methodological appendix. In the first part, Jaime articulates debates about the racial question in Brazil. The focus here is to explicate how black subjectivity is constructed in racialized and gendered social relations. However, rather than highlighting the passivity of blackness in relation to white supremacy, Jaime argues that the black subject acts on racialized social forces that acts upon him or her to construct themself as a black subject. As such, Jaime departs from an analysis of black executives as passive victims of malign social forces (e.g. racism). Instead, he proposes that black executives develop their own strategies to fight social forces acting against them, while at the same time they play the corporative political game to climb the hierarchical ladder in their workplace.

In the second part of the book, Jaime presents what he calls the first generation of black executives, detailing the executive's biographical narrative and their professional trajectory. Here, he differentiates between men's and women's experiences as he advocates that gender is an important dimension to race that needs to be taken into account when discussing experiences of black executive women. In this part, he also stresses how the first generation of black executives faced strong and explicit racism while working for corporations in Brazil. For example, some of the black executives interviewed by Jaime stated that they were even compared to monkeys by white co-workers.

In the third part of the book, Jaime describes what he names as the second generation of black executives and presents a well-written ethnography of his experience among black executives in a Brazilian bank. Racism in this part of the book emerges in a much more subtle and covert form. Lastly, the methodological appendix presents discussions about life-history methodology and ethnography. Despite including a discussion of how the research was carried out, the book does not offer a detailed description of how the data were coded and analysed.

Jaime's lively and thick description of black executives in Brazil explains that the first generation of black executives started to work during the military dictatorship in Brazil when social movements were opposed by the military regime, at a time when racism was not a crime. Thus, they had no social support or group networks to help them during their struggles and had to develop personalized and non-confrontational strategies against racism in order to grow in their careers. Black social movements were grounded in a Marxist perspective of defeating the system, while at the same time black rights social movements were scant in Brazil. At that time, black executives had to face racism, and sexism in the case of black executive women, on their own and to suffer alone the emotional stress attached to this fight. During that time, Jaime stresses that blacks were singled out in the corporate world: 'Olha lá, um negro!' ('See, there is a black in here!') is the phrase that summarizes how black executives felt during this period. Jaime argues that, during this time, black executives had to avoid expressing pride in their ethnicity in order to evade confrontation in their everyday working life. In a nutshell, the first generation was categorized by the development of a set of individual personal trajectories that allowed them to deal with racism and gain access to powerful positions in corporations.

The author argues that in contrast to the first generation, the second generation of black executives began their working lives in a climate where much more support was offered to black people. With the advent of the Brazilian democratization process in 1985, black rights movements started to gain traction in society. At the same time, they became professionalized and black rights began to be articulated in transnational advocacy networks in favour of affirmative actions for black people. The social movements adopted a less Marxist tone, not for destroying the system but becoming more concerned with defending specific actions to reduce racial inequality. As a result of pressure from activists, the Brazilian government began to espouse racial equality initiatives at the federal, state and city levels. NGOs also started to exert pressures on the local private sector to develop racial affirmative actions, and the language of diversity and inclusion became part of the corporate

lexicon. The financial sector, where Jaime conducted his fieldwork, was subjected to unambiguous demands for developing racial equality initiatives and responded by developing affirmative action programmes. Thus, Jaime argues that the second generation of black executives faced more positive social and organizational contexts that allowed them to develop a more positive black identity, expressed by the phrase 'Eu Sou Negro!' ('I am black!'). It does not mean that black executives did not have to face racism in the corporate world in the 2000s, but the actions of NGOs made it possible for a positive black identity to emerge. Power is a clear dimension underpinning the case of black executives discussed by Jaime and could have been more deeply discussed in the book.

Why exactly might the *Organization Studies* readership benefit from a close engagement with this book? First, it explores the changing faces of racism in organizations in the Global South. Second, it offers a detailed analysis of struggles that black people face to access powerful positions in corporations. Third, it shows in practice the value of exploring the same minority social group over different periods of time, and of putting together a mixed methods research strategy to make sense of identity work in different social contexts across time. Jaime's book makes an important contribution in a local academic organizational studies context where race has been denied for a long time, and with studies of race in organizations only emerging more recently (Teixeira & Oliveira, 2016) as well as studies of race in organizations in the Anglo-Saxon world (Gist-Mackey, 2017; Mirchandani, 2003).

Moreover, this book marks a shift away from English towards the political uses of other languages to inform an analysis of non-Anglo-Saxon subjectivities and an epistemology that resists the application of Anglo-Saxon frameworks to non-Anglo-Saxon contexts. In this way, we should welcome examples of resistance against Anglophonic publication by defending and promoting the use of local languages in academic publishing. By doing so, we actively problematize the colonial assumptions present in our field of inquiry. Moreover, Jaime's book is an important counter-narrative rubbing up against the taken-for-granted assumptions about what is considered 'acceptable' scholarship. It provides a clear signal to the English-speaking academic community that the rules for determining 'value' must and need to change dramatically if we are to aspire to any level of authenticity when speaking about the 'international'. Any academic field that claims to be international has to be multicultural and multilingual to be truly inclusive and global. Jaime's book is a well-crafted example of an anti-racist academic work that does not follow into blind acceptance of the (white-dominated) Anglo-Saxon style of academic credo.

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