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# The Racialized Social System

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## **Abstract**

Ali Meghji's *The Racialized Social System* (2022) examines the study of critical race theory (CRT) as a "practical social theory" that examines the micro, meso, and macro dimensions of race across time and space.<sup>1</sup> Meghji sectionizes his analysis into four chapters, the first of which adapts Pierre Bourdieu's theory of "social space" to link the inequitable distribution of resources to the social construct of racial hierarchy at the macro level. Then, in the next chapter, he explores the racialization of emotions on a micro level, detailing how dominant racial ideologies politicize emotions. In the third chapter, Meghji introduces the concept of interactional order and interactional risk(s)/right(s) as a measure of inequitable racial distribution and emotional regulation. Then, in the last chapter, Meghji examines how meso-organizational spaces (schools, workplaces, industries, etc.) are designed to restrict the agency of racialized individuals, while giving agency to their white counterparts. Through this multileveled approach, Meghji illustrates how the "practical social theory" of CRT is a viable tool for analyzing and understanding racism both theoretically and practically.

## **Keywords**

critical race theory, racialization, racism

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<sup>1</sup> Meghji (2022) defines micro (small) and macro (large) as intertwined, writing that "the racialized social system approach – offers a framework which links the macro structure of racial hierarchy to the micro workings of everyday life, emotions and perceptions" (p. 55). Regarding meso (middle), Meghji refers to this level as "those in-between *organizational* spaces – education, workplaces, industries and so on – that are worthy of analysis in their own right" (p. 90).

*The Racialized Social System: Critical Race Theory as Social Theory*

by Ali Meghji, 2022, vii+175 pp., \$20.19 (Kindle). ISBN: [15095399489].

Ali Meghji is an Associate Professor in Social Inequalities at the University of Cambridge who propels the scholarship of critical race theory (CRT) by examining the “racialized social system” as a nuanced approach to racism amid a broader societal spectrum. His book, *The Racialized Social System*, reveals how theorists in CRT scholarship have overlooked the paradigm as a sophisticated “racialized social system approach” (2022, p. 2). Meghji specifically reveals how CRT can be used as a tool to examine the multifaceted systems through which racism has been produced and maintained within modern society, both theoretically and practically. He first unpacks how “theorizing about race contributes to understandings of the social at large” (p. 19). He then argues that “it allows us to think of how CRT is a practical social theory . . . focusing on the social in defense of economic and social justice . . . This dynamic is captured in the racialized social system approach” (p. 19).

Meghji (2022) gives substantive focus to two “waves” within CRT scholarship: legal studies and educational studies. He highlights scholars from each wave who have contributed to the study of CRT.<sup>2</sup> In reviewing these two overarching currents within CRT, Meghji effectively situates the core argument of his book: that the racialized social system approach of the paradigm can potentially be posed as a “third wave” that analyzes racism theoretically and practically through a universal paradigm, encompassing the micro, meso, and macro levels of a transnational society. He writes that this wave of CRT allows: “different things to be known in a way that is more or less practical depending on the person’s objectives” (p. 31).

Meghji (2022) contends that the study of CRT is not a one-dimensional theory, but rather, constituted by various approaches that can all contribute to the understanding of how racism is structured globally. In each of the book’s four

chapters, he highlights specific aspects of the malleability of his racialized social system approach. First, he analyzes social space(s) to understand how “racial interests” are (re)produced by those of the dominant race (white), who have an interest in reproducing the social order, versus those of the subdominant race (non-white), who have an interest in contesting it (p. 45). Second, Meghji applies terms such as “colorblind ideology” and “racialized emotions” to the current examples of Trump’s America, Brexit Britain, and Bolsonaro’s Brazil.

Third, Meghji discusses two important theoretical concepts to the study of CRT: limit interactions and interactional making. These concepts are linked to the racialized interaction order, as it controls how images of racialized persons are perceived within the structures of society. Lastly, Meghji engages the idea of “social mechanisms” and frames them as a primary way to “think about the reproduction of social relations *and* social action” through “structures” and “racial grammars,” whereby he uses the examples of the US health care system and the Brazilian sugar mills to do so (p. 91, 94).

Meghji’s book re-establishes the positionality of CRT, introducing a “third wave” that aims to investigate racism on a global scale theoretically and practically. Since I am an emerging scholar within the field of CRT, I found the book useful for two reasons. First, Meghji references and explains past scholarships within the field of CRT, rigorously outlining prominent scholars who have contributed theories and concepts to the study of CRT. Second, Meghji builds from and expands previous scholarship, indicating how and why social change regarding race and racism, as well as other intersecting structural factors and realities need to occur on a multilevel scale. To conclude, I strongly recommend this book to scholars in the Humanities or Social Sciences.

<sup>2</sup> Refer to the Reference List to view other scholarships.

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## Author Biography

Vindra (Vanessa) Moonilal is a PhD student in the Humanities department at York University. Her research interest is in Caribbean literature.