Book Review: Nurturing White Identities

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said, of Bhaskar's transcendental realism. Although much of the empirical material Hull is referring to – from Foucault and Butler – on sexuality, madness and punishment, for example, is social, Hull does not refer to the realist theoretical literature on the social realm. Durkheim, for example, was adamant that social facts are real entities existing in the real social world, external to the individual and exerting a causal effect on him or her. He argued that when we perform our duties as a brother, a husband, a citizen, for example, we carry out commitments we have entered into and which are defined by law and custom. These things are intrinsically social and are different from individual acts. They are general throughout society; external to the individual and constraining. He believes, indeed, that individual actions derive from society.

This could be argued to be a form of realism. Indeed, there are examples from Bhaskar himself that Hull could have referred to. But most of Hull's examples, in her sections of the book on realism, are taken from the natural sciences. This is especially unfortunate, given that some realists in the social sciences would like to challenge the assumption that there is a hierarchy of sciences, with physics at its root. Some would wish, and not in an anti-realist fashion, to assert the position of the social world as *sui generis*.

Overall, then there is much in this book that will be of interest to many different people. However, I doubt that it will convince those who are not already followers of critical realism.

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NURTURING WHITE IDENTITIES

Bridget Byrne
White Lives: The Interplay of 'Race', Class and Gender in Everyday Life

Bridget Byrne's qualitative analysis of white London mothers' discourse represents a major step towards establishing whiteness as a serious paradigm in British sociology. Not only is this an empirical monograph problematizing the racialization of white identities, but one that does so by focusing on the experiences of mothers, thus beginning to fill another hole in the literature. Byrne's work addresses key themes raised in fieldwork in Britain, and highlights methodological issues pertinent to all researchers interviewing people about 'race'.

Byrne opens with an epistemological discussion outlining the background of studies of whiteness: 'the assumption often is that we (everyday white people in Britain who are not particularly racist) cannot be interesting as "race" has nothing to do with us' (p. 1). Indeed, her project involves analysing how the 'we' she refers to is constructed, a project requiring 'hearing and seeing "race" in contexts where it is not explicitly felt as present' (p. 2).

This elusive quality of whiteness generates particular methodological problems illuminated here. In an engrossing section on narrative methods, she demonstrates how telling life stories can enable some respondents, but prohibit others from making themselves subjects: building a story around turning points requires seeing one's life in a particularly coherent way in which the self is attributed a

degree of agency that not everyone exhibits. There are specific ethical issues too (pp. 36–9). Aside from the usual assumptions about class and sexuality made by researcher and researched, a problem lies with the interpretation of the data produced. Byrne admits that whiteness might not be a topic with which the respondents have much sympathy. They may disagree with her interpretation and feel attacked. Byrne's strategy in analysis is to try to 'be sensitive to the complexities of what the interviewees say and how they say it', a tactic that leads to 'careful and sometimes painful' work (p. 38).

The key findings appear in Chapters 5 and 6. Byrne argues that 'race' needs to be understood as performative, and 'more specifically as a product of perceptual practices' (p. 74). She observes that questions about 'race' in her interviews were frequently met with a lowering of the speaker's voice. There were evasions (talking about other identities when asked about 'race'), and silences: talking about 'race' is awkward. Indeed, a common strategy deployed was not to see difference, i.e. to talk as if whiteness is not a social location. Yet in not seeing their whiteness, the women definitely see blackness. Black men, for example, emerge as simultaneously threatening and desirable. In narrating themselves, Byrne's white women subjects often evoke whiteness as an absence of 'race' during provincial, often rural, childhoods, followed by an awareness-raising confrontation in the cosmopolitan metropolis. For them, 'race' is something seen and done only when face-to-face with the 'Other'.

The chapter on socializing around schools is the strongest. At the 'core of motherhood', writes Byrne, 'lie the intersections of race, class and gender' (p. 106). She proceeds to demonstrate this in her examination of the ways in which the social networks of both mothers and children, and the choice of schools, are highly classed and raced acts. While there are obvious cultural and material conflicts over resources, what is fascinating is the view of multiculturalism as a form of cultural capital.

Many of the mothers are pro-multicultural: exposure to difference is deemed good for the children. Yet there is what François Mitterand once termed a 'threshold of tolerance'. There has to be the 'right mix', which involves enough minority (and/or working-class) children to make it interesting, but not so many as to degrade the school (even if the English Office for Standards in Education reports adequate educational standards based on its school inspection). Byrne's conclusion is that in the eyes of their mothers, children must learn to be white and middle class *in the right way*. Her emphasis on performativity leads her to state that: 'the security and stability of the white middle-class norm requires constant repetition and recitation in order for it to be ensured for their children' (p. 137). The mothers thus nurture their children's whiteness.

The final chapter, on belonging and Englishness, strikes me as being located slightly uncomfortably in this narrative. We have moved from life histories to the micro-management of school choices and friendship circles, and this section returns us to the macro level. I wonder if this would have been better inserted at the beginning, or as a separate project. However, this is a minor quibble. There is also a reference to a black interviewee, Dawn, who plays no other part in the project. What is Dawn's relationship to the project and why are we not told anything about her (or about Hope, who appears in Chapter 2)? This anomaly aside, there are interesting elements to this discussion. Britishness is located ambivalently vis-a-vis Englishness, and the subjects have quite differently experienced and class-based relationships to nationality. Byrne maintains that these narratives reveal a discrepancy between imagined white, middle-class, rural, clean Englishness and the reality of multicultural London: 'there is an inflexibility

in the formal narration of Englishness', she argues, 'which made it impossible to sustain in the everyday' (p. 166). One interviewee even recounts trying to evade Britishness while in Libya in the period after the 1986 bombings. Instead, the respondents embrace relatively local forms of identification, despite a range of emotional investments in the areas in which they live.

The conclusion deals with the justification of whiteness as a framework. Byrne cites the unsettlement generated by the Parekh Report, for 'those who have occupied normative subject positions' faced with having those positions 'questioned and challenged' (p. 169). Her rationale (pp. 174–5) makes no claim for the whiteness paradigm outside the social sciences' examination of racism, and underscores the enterprise of marking white as a privileged, racialized social location.

There are a number of interesting points arising here. The interviews were carried out in 1997–8, so eight years have elapsed: and not just average years. We are now post both the USA attacks of 9/11 and the London bombings of 7 July 2005, and there is blanket coverage of asylum and immigration issues. As I write this, a British home secretary has just been sacked over a related problem. It is certain that carrying out similar interviews now would produce qualitatively different responses. So the whole book is caught in a curious predicament, somehow both intensely current and lying on the other side of profound historical fault lines.

Second, the more studies of white identities I read, the more I am convinced that 'whiteness' is also an analytical framework in itself (and maybe 'for itself'). People engaged in such work share a particular view of the world that discounts purely positivist understandings of social science research. Among researchers this is not often a problem, but when the material is presented to non-adherents, the responses may be uncomprehending and defensive, as they were when Byrne was interviewed on the BBC Radio 4 programme *Thinking Allowed* in March 2006. Academics in the field share an understanding that all the findings to do with boundary-construction, loss, cultural capital, the intricate interplay between structure and agency, etc. are constitutive of racialized identities, *because of* our readings of other work in the field, and our own experiences. For me, addressing whiteness has made visible parallel gulfs between how different researchers understand data, and between how researchers and the public do so. As Byrne points out, the marking of white identities is particularly unsettling for people who are deeply invested in an unchallenged social location. There may therefore be a revealing connection between the nascent project of Britishness (as Byrne hints) and the increasing reflexivity around white identities, such as the prevalent and widely held belief that the white English are unfairly hemmed in by the parameters of political correctness.

Third, the effort to mark whiteness as visible, which in this case is mission accomplished, illuminates the central paradox facing those of us engaged in this field. Whiteness is only invisible and unmarked to white people, so from the standpoint of critics such as Barbara Fields and Sara Ahmed, while the white 'we' are puffing and panting up the hill of revelation, people who are not racialized as white live their whole lives at its peak. So what is the point? The first is that the 'race'–class–gender triad developed in the 'intersectionality' paradigm by academics such as Hill-Collins, Crenshaw, Yuval-Davis, Brah and Phoenix has been touched on infrequently in the British context. The work here is an empirical foundation stone. Second, Byrne makes no claim to a place in the pantheon of 'white studies', and wisely counsels against the constitution of such a subdiscipline, regarding its pursuit as potentially closing off discussion of racism.

This epistemological and political edginess and ambivalence emerges strongly from Byrne's reference to the principles of sharing research with respondents. How do you do this appropriately when working on how people are embedded in racist discourse and practice, without locating yourself as some kind of judge? As a white researcher of whiteness, you know that you are also implicated in this racialization process. Bridget Byrne's book succeeds in raising questions that contribute both to research agendas on contemporary social identities, and to making the reader reflect on the substantive issues of complicity in broader political change. Hopefully her next set of findings will be published more rapidly than these.

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PATHWAYS TO GENDERING POLICY

Kathrin S. Zippel
The Politics of Sexual Harassment: A Comparative Study of the United States, the European Union, and Germany
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 255 pp., ISBN 0–5218–4716–8 (hbk), 0–5216–0994–1 (pbk)

Within a period of three decades sexual harassment has evolved from a new concept to a multi-level policy field. Zippel's readable and detailed study traces how the issue of sexual harassment has been taken up by different political actors and resulted in a number of new regulations, institutional arrangements and provisions. Her comparison of policy change in three different contexts provides an excellent insight into how different institutional arrangements shape these struggles and outcomes. Zippel's study seeks to explain the very different ways states have responded to problems of sexual harassment. The three cases examined in the book show important differences in timing of, and in pathways to, legal reform. Although feminist activists, femocrats, experts and politicians in different contexts have been successful in promoting feminist frames of sexual harassment and effecting policy change, the outcomes have been different and it remains difficult to decide which path has most improved women's working position in relation to sexual harassment: regulation of working conditions or legal arms to redress offences.

Zippel compares three different cases: the US, the EU and Germany, each with a very different route to policy change, and hence, different outcomes.

The US legal-liberal path is characterized by Zippel as a revolution in judiciary that resulted in a feminist definition of law. Sexual harassment is defined as one form of sex discrimination and courts have accepted a definition of sexual harassment from the victim's perspective as unwanted sexual behaviour. In the US, the development of laws against sexual harassment happened in court rooms, by judges, not by lawmakers. As early as 1976, in the *Williams* v. *Saxbe* trial, a US court accepted sexual harassment as sex discrimination. The anti-discrimination law of 1964 provided a strong basis to build on.

The role of the women's movement in the US case can be labelled ambiguous. They have been important pioneers on the issue, yet feminist organizing has not been particularly strong and mainly took place at an early stage. Working Women