Ageing and Popular Culture

Andrew Blaikie

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‘Youth’ and ‘culture’ have been a rather more familiar pairing within sociology than ‘old age’ and ‘culture’. Enabled by young people’s unparalleled affluence, the 1950s and 1960s were marked by the explosion of a series of flamboyant youth cultures, giving expression to a distinctive ‘youthful’ identity. Young people’s spending on clothes, stereo equipment and cosmetics, and in coffee bars and the cinema, meant that the ‘teenager’ became a vitally important consumer of leisure goods and services. These features of young people’s experiences, along with their increasing proportion within the total population, inevitably caught the attention of several influential sociologists who went on to describe and analyse the phenomenon of ‘youth culture’. In recent decades, the situation has changed somewhat. With the ageing of the population, it is older people who represent an increasing proportion within the total population, some of whom enjoy relative affluence with high levels of disposable income. Consequently, it is older people, rather than younger people, who are increasingly regarded as important consumers of leisure goods and services. Although several sociologists have begun to analyse the cultural implications of population ageing, Andrew Blaikie in his book Ageing and Popular Culture is the first to address the phenomenon of ‘grey culture’ at length.

Blaikie focuses in particular on the change in styles of growing old encapsulated in Peter Laslett’s notion of the Third Age. This is the stage of the life course after retirement from paid work, where activity, leisure and pleasure are enjoyed before the onset of old age proper (the Fourth Age) brings social dependency, physical infirmities and death. Blaikie’s book is not about how individuals with an accumulation of chronological years actually experience later life, but is instead an examination of the changing discourses of growing old as these are expressed in popular culture. The book opens with a historical foray into discourses on old age, which challenges representations of the past as a golden age and instead stresses the multi-faceted roles and statuses of older people. Blaikie argues that, in combination, modernisation, increased administrative categorisation through the emergence of old age pensions and retirement and the medicalisation of old age informed a discourse of old people as a social problem. The subsequent chapter writes the more recent history of old age, through tracing the transformation of the post-employment life course stage, from a waiting room for death, to an active, leisure and pleasure-filled life style. Blaikie then goes on to explore the changing culture of later life primarily through analyses of visual representations, including cartoons, films, television and magazines.

It is, however, photographic images which are Blaikie’s main interest: three chapters are concerned with the ways photography has imaginatively represented those with long-lived lives. The argument here is that the administrative classification of older people as a chronologically determined social group, along with the institutionalisation of retirement and the medicalisation of old age, produced a stigma-laden fixed identity, clearly reflected in the photographic depictions of old age of the early twentieth century. By the late twentieth century, the growth of consumer culture has increased life-style choices, including for those in later life, and so ‘positive’ images of ageing, stressing health, vitality, activity, leisure and pleasure are increasingly to the fore.
Blaikie’s analysis is sensitive to the issues raised by the reconstruction of old age as a ‘leisure and pleasure’ filled life course stage, including its meaningfulness to those without the financial or other resources necessary to enjoy it. Importantly, he also discusses what the cultural reconstruction of the post-retirement phase of the life course means for our understandings and representations of ‘deep old age’ and the biological inevitability of death. In many ways, the Third Age is an expression of ageism, of the unbroken stigma of old age, and represents a discourse through which those older people who do not/cannot conform to the new cultural standards of ‘acceptable ageing’ are further marginalised and disempowered.

The back cover describes Blaikie’s use of visual sources as ‘adroit’. For a book so concerned with the analyses of visual representations of later life, there are few actual illustrations (only eight in total). This must be regarded as a weakness. More often than not, the reader is wholly reliant on Blaikie’s own description of visual sources and his interpretation of how these represent later life. The reproduction of a greater number of cartoons or photographs would have greatly improved the persuasiveness of his analysis. Nevertheless, this is a timely book which makes an important contribution to the literature on the cultural reconstruction of later life. As Blaikie himself recognises (p. x), Ageing and Popular Culture is a rather ‘esoteric’ work but one which it may be hoped will mark the beginning of a sociology of ‘grey culture’ to equal the significance and influence once held by the sociology of youth culture.

University of Leicester

JANE PILCHER

Political Languages of Race and the Politics of Exclusion

Andy R. Brown


In a period in which British race-related research has overwhelmingly shifted to a focus on cultural identities, sometimes to the detriment of debates around disadvantage and exclusion, a re-examination of post-war British racism using the sophisticated theoretical tools of post-structuralism appears to offer an exciting prospect. Brown’s Political Languages of Race and the Politics of Exclusion offers an innovative analysis of key parliamentary debates around immigration, race relations and nationality from the 1950s to 1980s, posing theoretical, methodological and empirical challenges to the existing substantial body of research in this area.

In the initial chapters, Brown critically engages with sociological debates about the analytical status of race and racism (Banton; Rex), as well as neo-Marxist and post-Marxist theories of racialisation (Miles; Solomos; Carter, Harris and Joshi; Reeves) and theories of new racism (Barker; Hall; CCCS Race and Politics Group; Gilroy). Each area of literature is extensively reviewed and subjected to critical commentary. Brown argues that the racialisation approach provides useful insights but is theoretically limited in positing language merely as an epiphenomenon of class forces, thus obscuring the reality constituting role of language. The new racism thesis is also taken to account for positing Powelism as a fundamentally new form of racism, which results from a partial and selective citing of material, and for a failure to engage with analytical debates about the conceptualisation of racism and nationalism.

The remainder of the chapters are based around finely detailed textual analyses of political debates, speeches and writing and a situating of these texts within the wider social and political context. Chapter 3 focuses on debates leading up to the first restrictive Commonwealth
immigration bill in 1962, including a closely substantiated account of the development of a narrative of ‘the alienated Englishman’ and ‘the overpopulated island’ (pp. 86; 91). Brown illustrates the transformation of this discourse as it moves from the backbench race populists to the frontbench of the Conservative party, eschewing the explicitly eugenicist themes of ‘old racism’ and initiating a new official language upon which the acceptance of the need for controls is constructed. Chapter 4 entails an analysis of pre- and post-1968 parliamentary debates in order to assess the significance of Powellism. In Chapter 5, Brown revisits the events in Smethwick leading up to the 1964 general election, examining the impact of this upon the liberal construction of racial language as dangerous and irrational. Finally, Chapter 6 entails an exhaustive assessment of Powellism as a multidimensional and changing entity, conjoining biologically reductionist racism, nationalist patriotism, Conservative institutionalism and political populism.

Brown’s central claim that the ‘new racism’ is a ‘language of post-race signification’ involving the political re-articulation of the ‘discursive signifieds’ of old racism to a new social exclusionary language (pp. 214-18), provides useful and innovative insights for contemporary analytical debates about theories of racism, ethnicity and nationalism. His discourse analytic approach also successfully combines a focus on social and political inequalities within an approach which centres the constitutive role of discourse as a site of the production of social meanings.

However, despite interesting theoretical discussions at various points in the book, for example, on the relationship between ideology, discourse and texts in Chapter 1, Brown’s discourse analysis approach as a whole is insufficiently elaborated in the book to enable it to be of wider usage as a methodological text. This is partly because of the organisational style, in which the theoretical arguments are widely dispersed throughout the text and too much of the necessary argument is confined to footnotes. Thus, the pivotal argument in Chapter 6, for example, around the discursive operations which re-articulate the old racism into new forms, lacks a solidly built theoretical base for the reader uninitiated in post-structuralist analysis of discourse. For the general reader, the text can come across as overly detailed and dry, which is not helped by poor editing reflected in frequent spelling errors and incorrect annotation in parts. Such drawbacks notwithstanding, however, the book provides an invaluable resource for the specialist reader engaged in the study of political racism, not least because of the impressive breadth of discursive texts included.

University of Manchester

KATHRYN RAY

Biography and Education: A Reader
Michael Erben (ed.)

Sociology of Education: Emerging Perspectives
Carlos Alberto Torres and Theodore R. Mitchell (eds.)

Michael Erben’s book is an edited collection of papers reporting on the educational biographies of a number of people from very diverse backgrounds. Erben begins with a clear and thorough explanation of the use of biography as a research method. A strong justification is provided for the use of such a method, along with some useful advice on undertaking biographical research.
As Erben rightly argues, although biographical research is often seen as a ‘new’ form of research, biographical analysis has almost always been used in sociology as a method of research. Evidence for this can be found in the work of the Chicago School; and Thomas and Znaniecki’s study *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918–20). More recently, a special edition of *Sociology*, in 1993, revitalised an interest in biography as a research method. Hence, this book provides a useful contribution to discussions about research methods, as well as educational experiences.

All of the papers in the book attempt to relate biographical data with education, both theoretically and empirically. In particular, most of the papers consider, in some way, the relationship between social structural features such as class, race and gender, and personal identity, especially in relation to educational experiences.

Robin Usher’s paper (Chapter 2), for example, provides a theoretical consideration of the meaning of ‘experience’ for education. Usher takes a somewhat postmodernist standpoint, in arguing against the use of biography/autobiography as a means to construct a sense of self. Instead, he argues for a de-centring of the self. That is, an acknowledgement that the self can only be constructed in relation to the selves of significant others. What is needed, Usher argues, is a story of the self which includes the life stories of others, thereby deconstructing the dominant self of the story. In this way, Usher points out the potentially problematic nature of discourses of the self.

Some of the other papers are most empirical. David Scott’s paper (Chapter 3) reports on the life of a teacher, who is experiencing constraints of time and changes in government policy. Scott discusses the relationship between the researcher and the researched, and the fact that, in biographical research, the public and the private can never be disentangled. Chris Mann, by contrast, relates the experiences of a number of adolescent girls studying for A-level examinations. Mann is concerned with the ways in which these girls’ identities are defined and constituted through a number of complex negotiations between the home and the school, and through family and personal history. Similarly, Gill Clarke’s paper (Chapter 5) looks at the ‘coping strategies’ that lesbian teachers adopt to ‘appear acceptable’.

These are just some examples of the contents of the eleven chapters, which were especially commissioned for the book. I suppose that some readers might pose the question, ‘So what? Why these biographies, and what use are they? After all, many of us have equally interesting and non-traditional educational biographies. These may be pertinent questions, especially if we are looking to educational research to inform policy. Nevertheless, all of the papers have some sociological significance, focus on the relationship between the theoretical and the empirical, and provide strong arguments for the use of biography in educational research. What is more, the book is an interesting and informative read, and that can be no bad thing.

Carlos Alberto Torres and Theodore R. Mitchell’s book, in contrast, is somewhat of a disappointment. I was initially excited by the prospect of a new text in the Sociology of Education, but the first thing that struck me about this book was its cover. It is a 1970s design in maroon and gold, which appears completely out of date. It just looks like an old book (publishers please note!). However, I am aware that one really should not judge a sociology book by its cover.

Another thing to say about this book is that it is an American publication, focusing on the American educational system; and it has to be recognised that there are differences between the British and American educational systems. This book also illustrates some of the differences which still exist between British and American sociology. I found the numerous references to positivism in American sociology of education somewhat surprising. Also, I was somewhat bemused by the assertion that positivism is only recently being challenged, by postmodernism and post-structuralism. I thought that interpretivism had mounted a pretty strong challenge, some thirty years earlier.
The ‘emerging perspectives’ the book considers, then, are postmodernism and post-structuralism in relation to education; and the implications of these for class, race and gender. Further, the book suggests that these new theoretical developments pose a number of new risks and challenges for educational research. The ‘risk’ it is argued, is to cast aside the need to obtain (positivist) data. The authors argue that some data, even with limitations, are better than no data at all. Most of us would agree with this, but not with the assumption that this should necessarily be positivist quantitative data.

The ‘challenges’ that these ‘new theoretical developments’ pose include those people deemed to have failed within the educational system, such as working-class and immigrant students, or students from non-mainstream linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Yet it seems to me that these are the very same groups which were identified as ‘challenges’ by the ‘old’ theoretical schools of the 1960s and 1970s.

The book then goes on to consider a number of other theoretical issues. Raymond A. Morrow and Carlos Alberto Torres discuss the contemporary relevance of cultural reproduction theory. They argue that cultural reproduction theory remains an essential aspect of critical social science, and cannot be readily subsumed under newer forms of ‘totalizing master narratives’. Thomas S. Popkewitz considers the work of Foucault and critical traditions, in an attempt to construct a theory of power and change. Michael W. Apple and Anita Oliver argue that the prominence of the New Right in educational policy arises through the ‘religious right’, and interactions which often take place at a local level, between the state and the daily lives of ordinary people as they interact with institutions. They go on to argue that people ‘become Right’ as a result of their interactions with ‘unresponsive’ institutions. Thus, there is a close connection between how the state is structured, the way it acts and the formation of social movements and identities.

Other papers focus upon issues such as credentialism, pedagogy, educational reform and historical perspectives on class and race in education, among others. Some of these chapters are interesting in their own right, but it is difficult to see how they contribute to the overall aims and objectives of the book. After all, postmodernism and post-structuralism are not really that ‘new’ any more. Whilst the book may provide an interesting insight into American sociology of education, I am not sure that it will be particularly relevant to most British undergraduate courses in the sociology of education.

*College of St Mark & St John*  
*COLIN DAWSON*

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**On the Pragmatics of Communication**  
*Jürgen Habermas*  

**The Inclusion of the Other**  
*Jürgen Habermas*  

These two recent collections of both old and new translations of articles by Jürgen Habermas show the scope and the development of Habermas’s theory of formal pragmatics, communicative action, discourse ethics and democracy. *On the Pragmatics of Communication* consists of articles
by Habermas on the pragmatic theory of language, knowledge and rationality from 1976 to 1996. *The Inclusion of the Other* consists of articles on politics and society from the years after the publication of *Between Facts and Norms*, Habermas’s paradigmatic work on law and democracy, in German in 1992.

In his formal pragmatics Habermas seeks to reconstruct the formal presuppositions and structures of language. As is shown in the articles compiled in the present volume, *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, Habermas’s aim is to show what are the universal normative presuppositions of the use of language, and from this he argues for a cognitivist understanding of moral language.

In *The Inclusion of the Other* Habermas develops his argument from *Between Facts and Norms* and applies it to historical and current issues of multiculturalism, the nation-state and Europe. Habermas conceives of law as the central social-integrative medium of modern complex societies. His theory of law and democracy is, so to speak, an attempt to ‘translate’ the universalist and normative project of formal pragmatics and discourse ethics into a universalist normative project of deliberative democracy. In deliberative democratic processes the subjects of law will also be able to see themselves as the authors of the law, and deliberative procedures will thus secure both the legitimacy and the integrative force of the law.

A central distinction in Habermas’s argumentation is the distinction between ethical and political integration of modern pluralist societies. Political integration through neutral, and thus fair, democratic procedures is supposed to secure the inclusion of the other without violating her ‘otherness’. Ethical integration, by contrast, rests on a particular conception of the good. If modern plural societies were to be integrated through general laws reflecting a particular conception of the good, certain groups would be excluded because of their otherness. As a result the laws would be illegitimate from the point of view of these groups, and the medium of law would lose its integrative force. Habermas’s argument about law and deliberative democracy thus relates to current debates on multiculturalism and citizenship. Habermas suggests that a ‘constitutional patriotism’ reflected in a political culture, rather than nationalist and ethnic patriotism, should integrate political units and generate solidarity. In addition, he suggests the building of supranational political units, such as the European Union (EU), to meet the challenges of the internationalisation of capital.

The distinction between ethical and political societal integration raises a number of questions. First of all, the political is always connected to a non-universal and hence particular we with concrete boundaries, such as the United Kingdom or the EU. Therefore the political institutions and procedures will also be the expression of a particular identity. That is, the political institutions will not only be the expression of what is equally good for all, but also of what is good for us (in the long run), to use Habermas’s terms. Hence, the distinction between ethical and political dissolves because the political is always (also) constituted by its embeddedness in ethical life. Furthermore, we may ask why we need this distinction at all. One problem is that Habermas seems to hypostatise it. Another problem is that deliberative democracy is defined by the ability of the citizens to contest any matter they wish. They can discuss ethical matters and bring these deliberations to bear on the political institutions. Hence, the distinction between ethical and political integration can never be stable. Habermas is ambivalent when it comes to the question of the possibility of laws and political procedures and institutions that are neutral *vis-à-vis* conceptions of the good life. These problems occur even though Habermas attempts to overcome such problems by stressing the co-originality of private and public autonomy.

There seems to be a tension between two lines of argumentation that Habermas follows in his political theory: On the one hand we have the liberal distinction between the ethical and the political inspired by Rawls’s distinction between the overlapping consensus and comprehensive
doctrines of the good. On the other hand we have the discourse theoretical argument that the subjects of the law must also be the authors of the law.

This tension is related to a development in Habermas’s formal pragmatics and discourse ethics, which is reflected in the articles collected in On the Pragmatics of Communication. Habermas’s argument for the cognitivist character of moral language rests on two ideas: the (counterfactual) idea of a single and final consensus on the rightness of a norm, and the idea of dialogue as a learning-process that is dependent on the possibility of negating and questioning any existing consensus: ‘the communicatively achieved consensus relies both on the idealizing supposition of the identity of linguistic meanings and on the power of negation and autonomy of unique, irreplaceable (unvertretbar) subjects’ (On the Pragmatics of Communication, p. 186).

Habermas now acknowledges that a final consensus would be self-contradictory in the discourse theoretical framework because of the presupposition built into communication that any participant of the dialogue has the right to say ‘no’ to any aspect of the dialogue and raise any question (compare p. 23 with pp. 316 and 365 in On the Pragmatics of Communication). There is a tension in Habermas’s theoretical framework between the aim of discourse (that is, rational consensus) and the process of discourse (that is, as a learning-process). As a consequence, Habermas proposes to shift the focus from the aim to the process of discourse (On the Pragmatics of Communication, pp. 365f). I would add that we may conceive of the idea of rational consensus as an ever-receding horizon (On the Pragmatics of Communication, p. 368). Any consensus on the ethical-political distinction must then be temporary and transitory.

Apart from these more philosophical and theoretical questions, On the Pragmatics of Communication and The Inclusion of the Other also raise more sociological questions such as: (1) is it possible to shift identities and loyalties from the ethical to the political; for instance, from a nationalist patriotism to a constitutional patriotism? (2) To what extent does Habermas’s ideas of constitutional patriotism and deliberative democracy fit current tendencies in the Western world as well as in the rest of the world? Is the world not characterised today by an emergence and proliferation of nationalism, ethnicity and a general phobia of the otherness of the other? (3) What are the socio-economic constraints on such a programme of deliberative democracy? What would be the critique of contemporary societies from the standpoint of deliberative democracy? Habermas seems to have lost his ‘critical touch’ in his later writings. There is definitely a critical potential in the formal pragmatics of communication and in discourse ethics, but all we get from Habermas are very general remarks, for instance, about the marginalisation of certain groups of citizens. Habermas seems to be content to reconstruct the normative content of liberal democratic systems, rather than point out the tensions between democracy and capitalism, as he did in some of his earlier works.

On the Pragmatics of Communication serves as an excellent introduction to Habermas’s theory of language, and The Inclusion of the Other develops the arguments put forward in Between Facts and Norms by applying them to concrete historical cases and engaging in discussions with other theorists such as John Rawls and Charles Taylor. One thing is missing, though; namely, the interesting and illuminating Reply, which is Habermas’s response to the critique put forward by a number of scholars at a conference on Between Facts and Norms, and which is included in the German edition of The Inclusion of the Other. The two present volumes show where Habermas has taken his formal pragmatics and his political theory. In this, they show the extent and the potentials of Habermas’s theoretical framework, as well as some of the problematical aspects of his theory.
The Political Economy of New Labour: Labouring under False Pretences?

Colin Hay


The great strength of this book is the theoretical underpinning and conceptualisation in which it grounds interpretations of New Labour. In the early chapters Hay gives a good review of the literature, sifting it out helpfully. He conceptualises what the ‘new’ in New Labour means, laying out different ways in which this can be looked at. Hay inspects the meanings of globalisation, socio-economic change and social democracy that lie behind changes in Labour ideas and policies. He makes good distinctions on the extent of structural determinism or agency behind changes in the Labour party, and on the degree to which the socio-economic context (in terms of which policy has been formulated) is real or perceived. He is good on the different things it could mean to say that New Labour is either Thatcherite or a modernised social democracy.

In later chapters Labour’s electoralism and business-friendliness are theorised in terms of Hay’s own particular use of Downsian theories of party behaviour and theories of state structural dependence on capital. There is real theoretical weight and conceptual sophistication to this book that greatly illuminates the picture of New Labour. And the theory is interdisciplinary, drawing on social theory, political science and political economy.

Yet if Hay is rigorous in putting the case for New Labour as too accommodating to globalisation and Thatcherism, he fails to carry this through by the cursory nature with which he glosses over alternative interpretations and contrary evidence. Clearly, under Blair and his predecessors there has been a shift to the right influenced by the ground that Mrs Thatcher laid down. Yet, after a detailed analysis of Thatcherite elements of Labour’s policies, a section intended to look at social democratic elements is tokenistic. There is little mention, if any, of aspects that mark New Labour off from Thatcherism: the minimum wage, Europe, devolution and the symbolically important rhetoric of community and inclusion. Where differences are mentioned they are sometimes dismissed too easily. Labour is, in fact, not Thatcherite, but post-Thatcherite, defined by the ground Mrs Thatcher left behind, but also, in part reacting against her economic individualism.

A general theme of the book is that New Labour has over-emphasised preference accommodation to the electorate and business and not tried hard enough to shape preferences. New Labour, it is argued, has given into an economistic view of the socio-economic context, especially to perceptions of things like globalisation, class dealignment and electoral preferences. For Hay other alternatives are possible, yet New Labour rules these out in the name of economic and electoral necessity. Certainly, the government could be more redistributinal and impose more constraints on business behaviour. Yet there is little discussion by Hay of analyses which suggest (whether they are right or wrong) that beneath its prudent rhetoric the government is redistributing by stealth. And one of the interesting things about the government’s communitarian rhetoric, and its more centre-left and liberal social and constitutional policies for inclusion, devolution and such like, is the way in which they have the potential to shift political culture a little in more pluralist and leftwards directions. Hay is good on critique but ultimately lets his argument down by failing to outline and discount interpretations which would suggest more preference-shaping and agenda-setting dimensions to Blair’s politics.

Finally there are Hay’s own attempts at an alternative preference-shaping agenda. These are based on a much-made analysis of the problems of British capitalism: short-termism, lack of indigenous investment, flawed industry - finance relationships, and so forth. Hay calls for an
alternative paradigm that breaks with New Labour’s alleged neo-liberalism. What are offered are familiar proposals consistent with a more long-termist approach, but not a policy programme in itself nor an alternative economic paradigm. Some of the suggestions could, in some form or another, sound acceptable to New Labour ministers. And Hay goes to the other extreme (from that he attributes to New Labour) with insufficient discussion of how electoral and economic opposition to his own approach would be overcome.

University of Sussex

LUKE MARTELL

Taking Care of Men: Sexual Politics in the Public Mind

Anthony McMahon


If you have ever found yourself in the unenviable position of trying to persuade a sceptical audience of the continued relevance of the feminist project in the era of ‘Superwomen’ and ‘New Men’, then this is a book for you. The optimistic ‘post-feminist’ message that we have entered an extraordinary period of gender confusion and convergence, and that this has rendered the political agendas of yesteryear hopelessly anachronistic, is a prime target of McMahon’s thorough and powerful examination of the current state of the domestic division of labour within marriage, and its representation. Using a wide array of quantitative and qualitative evidence, Taking Care of Men delineates how domestic labour is organised today, concluding that: ‘If there are no clear distinctions any longer, someone has forgotten to inform all those households which maintain the sexual division of labour in a depressingly uniform fashion’ (p. 39).

What is painstakingly revealed is that, despite widespread faith in the ‘revolving door model’ – as wives spend more time out of the house undertaking paid labour, husbands will spend more time in the house engaged in unpaid domestic work - men’s disproportionately small contribution to housework loads is an example of that rare sociological phenomenon which remains surprisingly stable across differences in family size and type, spouses class and educational background, racial and national divides; and in the face of widespread pressures and injunctions to change. At best, assessments peg the husbands’ share of the domestic burden at about one third of its total. Any apparent increases in this figure are merely, McMahon assures us, a function of the declining domestic efforts of increasingly busy working wives. The so-called New Man still does not undertake a sufficient share of the housework to cover the amount of labour his own presence creates. In so far as this is the case, he differs little from the ‘traditional’ man to whom he is always contrasted in the optimists’ accounts.

Furthermore, men’s contribution is fundamentally different to women’s. First and foremost, it is constructed as something they can elect not to do. They also remain strangers to the routine, boring, stressful and unpleasant elements of domestic work, yet they expect and receive disproportionate amounts of praise and gratitude for their efforts, whilst women remain the ones socially stigmatised if there are obvious shortfalls. In sum, even in the act of housework, men appear to be consumers rather than producers of domestic harmony.

As well as clarifying the picture with regard to husbands and housework, McMahon is concerned to analyse the persistence of a widespread folk belief in men’s increasing participation. Trawling an array of sociological accounts he demonstrates how commentators disregard evidential and anecdotal information in order to herald the dawning of an era of more equitable
gender relations within the home. Even those who do not ignore the evidence purvey false hope with the assertion that our cultural obsession with the New Man is, in and of itself, an indication that progress is afoot. McMahon is particularly keen to contest this assertion, arguing that our most commonplace ways of talking about this figure are dangerously, and perhaps deliberately, anaesthetising, because they occlude the ‘unpalatable’ and ‘unromantic’ truth at the heart of the institution of marriage: that an unequal sexual division of labour suits men very well indeed.

One of the most important, if contentious, elements of this book lies in McMahon’s plea for the return to a feminist materialist perspective, within which he believes adequate account can be taken of male interests in maintaining the status quo, namely, housework distribution. That is ‘interests’ in the old-fashioned sense. In this book men are seen as willing collaborators in a housework-avoidance conspiracy. The author is unimpressed by more complex explanations such as that proposed by object-relations theorists, i.e. that men are hamstrung by deep and largely unconscious psychological wounds that prevent them from providing more in the way of care on the domestic front. If this sounds simplistic, be assured that Taking Care of Men makes a good case for its author’s position in that it convincingly suggests that the subtleties to be found in some alternative feminist analyses may be missing the main point, i.e. that women are resolutely losing the battle of the sexes on the home front, and that this is most certainly not in their interests.

What this book fails to do, however, is build on this claim and provide an adequate analysis of why it remains in men’s interests to perpetuate this situation, and the extent to which these interests are conscious. It has long been known that men physically and emotionally thrive – commit suicide less, suffer from depression less, sleep better, drink less etc. – within the institution of marriage, whilst women thrive outside of it, but McMahon does not explore this evidence in detail, preferring to leave his claim of ‘interests’ being met tantalisingly vague. Equally, a whole variety of reasons have been mooted in the past as to why the institution of marriage, as opposed to cohabitation, might successfully induce a fossilised sexual division of labour, all of which are glossed over here. Furthermore, the author steers clear of making any precise statement on the thorny issue of how we might make progress in this arena if at least half of the marital unit does not really wish to, and possess the power to actualise these wishes.

Although it is a weaker book than it might have been for these omissions, it remains an invaluable resource for anyone teaching or studying sexual politics, as well as a fascinating and enjoyable read. It would be hard for anyone to come away from reading it still believing that past feminist critiques of the institution of marriage, the nuclear family and childcare practices are truly moribund.

University of Sussex

RUTH WOODFIELD

Children in New Religions

Susan J. Palmer and Charlotte E. Hardman (eds.)


Palmer and Hardman in their introduction to Children in New Religions make an important point when they note that the ‘study of children in new religious movements (NRMs) is a largely uncharted terrain’ (p. 1). Their book opens up this field of research through thirteen interesting studies by authors from Europe, Canada and the United States. Four main issues are considered: the impact of children on NRMs; the socialisation of children within NRMs; issues of religious freedom surrounding children in NRMs; and how children in NRMs construct meaning.
The addition of a second generation to an NRM can present dilemmas and points of conflict which affect how the movement develops. Berger, for example, describes how Wiccan communities have responded to their children by developing new rituals and, in some cases, re-evaluating their more liberal ideas in the light of new parenting responsibilities.

Educational provision within NRMs is examined by several authors in the book. NRMs have to decide whether to educate their children within the movement, and so protect them from outside influences, or whether to allow them to make use of public schools. Rochford’s study highlights some of the difficulties Hare Krishna youth have in negotiating their ‘alternative’ religious identity in public schools and considers the impact such external contact may have on a long-term collective identity of the ISKCON community. Puttick looks at the development of the Osho Ko Hsuan School and Coney discusses the different experiences of children educated in Sahaja Yoga in Britain and India.

When children enter NRMs, parents and movement leaders develop child-rearing practices in accordance with their models of childhood. Coleman provides an account of the Christian evangelical group ‘Word of Life’, and notes a conceptualisation of childhood that both separates children from the adult world and yet, with mastery of religious discourse, provides children with a degree of equality often denied them in the outside world.

NRM models of childhood are frequently seen as being at odds with established views outside the group. This can be a source of conflict. Siskind, for example, describes the approach of the Sullivan Institute (Fourth Wall Community) towards families and parenting, identifying difficulties their ‘alternative’ ideas generated for individuals both inside and outside of the community. Siegler and Introvigne consider the experience of growing up in the ISOT community and the Damanhur community respectively. In both cases they discuss difficult relations these movements had with their neighbours.

The degree of conflict between an NRM and the external world varies. Palmer, for example, describes an ambivalent public attitude in the United States towards messianic communities which she suggests is linked to two opposing folklore ideals that run deep within the American psyche - ‘the frontier’ and ‘the family’. Messianic communities seem to be in line with the former but out of step with the latter. The conflict can, however, go beyond ambivalence and give rise to allegations of child abuse and debates over what lies in the ‘best interests’ of children. Richardson in this respect examines how child-abuse allegations are becoming increasingly common as a way of controlling NRMs through the legal system. Child-abuse allegations can lead to questions of child custody. Homer and Bradney provide useful legal histories of custody cases in relation to NRMs in the United States and England respectively.

Finally, Hardman takes account of children as meaning-makers in their own right and considers how children from opposing types of religious groups (The Family, Transcendental Mediation and Findhorn) construct their moral world and the effect this might have on the long-term survival of the group.

Overall this book provides a comprehensive set of case studies about children in NRMs and will be of interest to anybody interested in the sociology of religion and the sociology of childhood. The empirical material in each chapter is handled with sensitivity and a clarity that makes it highly accessible to a wide readership. The detailed descriptions in each chapter demonstrate the complexity of issues surrounding children in NRMs. The book does not engage in heavy theorising, but certainly stimulates the reader to further thought. Children in New Religious Movements is, therefore, a welcome addition to the literature and is to be recommended.

Kingston University

SYLVIA COLLINS
Drugs, Cultures, Controls and Everyday Life

Nigel South (ed.)


This book is an edited collection of articles which explore the topical issue of drugs. The book is interdisciplinary in nature and examines a wide range of different issues and debates in this area. The chapters deal with many of the most popular issues, such as the normalisation of drug use amongst young people, as well as some more specific contributions such as Ross Coomber’s chapter on drug use in sport. All of the chapters contain a comprehensive review of the literature in their individual areas and as such provide useful sources of further reading as well as giving a good overview of the parameters of particular debates.

The introductory chapter by Nigel South provides an excellent introduction to the volume as well as providing an overview of some of the most pressing debates and issues in the field of drugs research. South contextualises the issues well within a brief but informative account of broader social changes and their impact upon current thinking on the drugs issue; for example, whether the increasing use of recreational drugs by young people can be linked to broader social changes associated with late modernity.

The substantive chapters are divided up into two sub-sections. The first, ‘Cultures: Forms and Representations’, looks broadly at the issue of young people and illicit drugs from differing perspectives. There are chapters on the history of pop music and drugs, gender and drug use and ‘race’ and drugs. Sheila Henderson’s chapter on gender and drug use is particularly important. The chapter details quite clearly how little we know in this area and one cannot help but agree with Henderson’s conclusions that more research is desperately needed on this topic.

The second part of the book is entitled ‘Controls: Policy, Policing and Prohibition’. The chapters look variously at policy issues and the criminal justice system, and there is also a chapter examining the legalisation debate. It is interesting to see the inclusion of a chapter on drugs in sport, an area which is generally overlooked in texts on drugs. Ross Coomber’s contribution raises many thought-provoking points, not least drawing attention to the relatively severe punishments attached to illicit drug use in sport compared with other forms of cheating. This raises questions which extend way beyond the world of sport, drawing attention to the hypocritical nature of society’s relationship with illicit drugs. Indeed, a key theme which runs through the whole of the volume is the necessity to question dominant popular discourses on illicit drugs, and as such the volume points to new and innovative ways in which to try to move the drugs debate forward. For example, Shiner and Newburn present a critique of the currently popular normalisation theory and suggest that rather than concentrating on the prevalence of illicit drug consumption we ought to pay close attention to the place and meaning of drugs in young people’s lives. This is an important point; there is a crucial absence of young people’s voices within contemporary discourses on young people and drugs. The suggestion that drug use is becoming normalised amongst young people has gained credence within both academic and wider debates. Given the significance of this powerful discourse I felt that this chapter might well have been better placed within the substantive section on ‘Cultures: Forms and Representations’, rather than as a concluding chapter. However, this is only a minor criticism.

Overall this is a timely and much needed volume with many of the contributions seemingly worthy of volumes in their own right. It provides an excellent overview of some of the most important and pressing issues in this area. Whilst the issue of drugs and drug consumption may be an expanding area of research, good literature in this area is surprisingly hard to come by. This book will provide an excellent resource for both lecturers and students who are interested in these issues.

University of Teesside

TRACY SHILDRICK