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Katharina Schramm, David Skinner, Richard Rottenburg, eds. *Identity Politics and the New Genetics: Re/Creating Categories of Difference and Belonging.* Studies of the Biosocial Society Series. New York: Berghahn Books, 2011. 266 pp. $80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-85745-253-5.

Reviewed by Tanmoy Bhattacharya (University of Delhi)
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Transdisciplinarity and the Biopolitics of New Genetics

The expression "re/creating" in the subtitle of this book is a clue to the overarching theme of the collection, namely, maintenance and establishment of old and new social categorizations, and their interaction. New Genetics affords new ways of forming and reforming boundaries of categories of groups and individuals. The analyses engage in local, national, and global aspects of science, policy, and identity through the lenses of biology and the politics of race and ethnicity.

The purpose of this "molecular gaze" is to tear open, and therefore to understand, the new semantics in terms of definitions and relations that succeed with regard to popular and scientific conceiving of race, ethnicity, and identity (p. 4). The various modules that the contributors to this collection employ range impressively from discursive practices to commercial ancestry testing to forensics and assistive technologies/transnational adoptions, involving medical science, anthropology, history of science, and sociology. In this process, at least two other important issues are examined: the situatedness of genomic studies across, at the interface of, or within the disciplines of natural and social sciences (about which more discussion will follow); and the nature of the rapidly developing notion of socialization of science (or "scientization of identity politics" [p. 132]).

The content is wide ranging, starting with a well-written introduction providing the necessary background to the issues highlighted. The essays proceed through theoretical perspectives followed by empirical substantiation through case studies and ending with an insightful lesson that may be initiated by genetic technology. This canvas therefore has relevance for our wider understanding of identity and categorization, and their interrelationship, which slowly but surely is changing the domain of science in general and which must incorporate social and political aspects of our lives. As a tool to assess this socialization/politicization of science, New Genetics is placed in a position to examine rapidly dissolving and reconfiguring of boundaries between different epistemologies.

Indeed, a qualm about the content begins at this transdisciplinary nature of New Genetics. Although most essays touch on the problematics of conceiving a sharp boundary between the natural and the social sciences and the inevitable continuity of traffic between the two, they fall just short of exploring the wider factorization between the natural, social, and humanistic studies, in spite of coming close to it in at least two essays that employ well-recognized humanistic tools, such as discourse (Andrew Smart, Richard Tutton, Paul Martin, and George Ellison) and interpretation (Katharina Schramm). Given that at least the social and humanistic studies are concerned with the same object of inquiry, namely, the social and cultural life of humanity (Raymond Allen Morrow and David D. Brown, *Critical Theory and Methodology: Contemporary Social Theory* [1994]), this oversight seems like a missed opportunity, especially in bringing about a supradisciplinary, critical theoretical perspective (Douglas Kellner, *Critical Theory, Marxism, and Modernity* [1989]) of a definite sociopolitical transformation that the New Genetics promises to radicalize. The fact that a book dealing with difference and similarities almost clinically avoids either a Foucauldian or a Derridian analysis is perhaps an indication of what is perceived here as an absence.

Further, the overall content also completely misses certain perspectives that may have crucial bearing on the biosocial angle of New Genetics, while other perspectives are only partially covered. In the former category, one would have liked to see a disability studies perspective, not only the deep and historically documented connection between geneticization and the eugenics movement

or with the bioethics of cochlear implants, but also the connection to embryo selection (see Ryna Rapp, *Testing Women, Testing the Fetus: The Social Impact of Amniocentesis in America* [1999], and John Glover, *Choosing Children: Gene, Disability, and Design* [2006]). Although Marianne Sommer does mention embryo selection, a disability perspective escapes attention. Connected to this is the partial oversight of a feminist perspective, in spite of the promise by Catherine Nash of a gendered differentiation in the Y-Chromosome tests, which does not really become a theoretical part of the analysis either structurally or in terms of a wider, politicized vision.

This brings up the question of "voices" of people and groups affected by New Genetics. As far as one can see, most of the essays emphasize the effect rather than the cause of the new science, even though the introduction sets up the theme of "distributed bio-sociality"–an attention to the contextual (p. 17).[1] Although the relationship between laypeople and knowledge is invoked in the introduction, the gaze quickly shifts to the understanding of the "mediated engagement" of the expert (p. 16). The essays representing the effect are embedded within the two extremes of a somewhat negative effect (David Skinner) and a somewhat positive effect with its associated complications very poignantly brought out in Noa Vaisman. The only voices we hear are of Victoria Donda (Vaisman) and of Gina Paige and Fatimah Jackson (Schramm).

Connected to this is, of course, the issue of the individual/psychological, again a perspective that although is not completely missing, does not become a central piece. Thus, though the link between the personal, the familial, and the collective is referred to in several places, this is not problematized to an extent that it becomes an integral part of the analysis. Again, Vaisman's contribution on the "living disappeared" in Argentina introduces the individual in terms of personal projects (and how they may be psychologically affected by the state), and complements the personal genetic history in Sommer's piece on genealogical ancestry testing in Switzerland, highlighting the cases of such Swiss icons as Renzo Blumenthal and Philippe Welti in a lighter vein.

I will now outline some specific issues that are raised in this volume. The otherwise brilliant discursive analysis by Smart,Tutton, Martin, and Ellison is tinged by certain references (for example, Howard University and the director of U.S. National Institute of Health, affiliation to the National Human Genome Center [NHGC], NHGC's position, and previous work of one of the coauthors), which though lying within a broader contextual presence, do not strictly comprise a "text" to be analyzed; inclusion of such contextual material in the "text" makes it a somewhat less challenging analysis. Furthermore, the over-insistence on the contextuality of NHGC is somehow disturbing; a discursive analysis of this chapter would have certainly taken this over-insistence seriously.

Peter Wade's essay discussing assistive reproductive technologies and transnational adoptions, among other issues, softens the sharp politicization of the biological and the social in Smart, Tutton, Martin, and Ellison, and also Skinner. This neutralizing effect is seen, for example, when Wade discusses the "uncertainty" of the long-term effect of genomic technologies, pushing it to the realm of the debatable, possibly nonexistent (p. 85). However, it must be said that the polarization is restored when the highly politicized issue of gamete matching for Assistive Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) is brought to bear, and when in concluding Wade refers to how breaching of boundaries of nations, cultures, persons, etc., nonetheless occasions reinforcing of the normative.

Nash's contribution touches on many themes familiar from the other pieces (e.g., the links between research labs and commercial testing houses, and the human genetic studies' naturalized interest in human difference and collective human origins, to mention a few). The author raises novel questions with regard to gendered differentiation mentioned earlier (e.g., differentiation between men and reluctance of the "natives" contributing to a genetic pool [p. 155]). However, one common theme that reverberates throughout the book, namely, that of genetics reinforcing racial categorization, is first refuted by showing how the projects discussed in the essay only provide provisional and complicated answers about origins with shifting categories, but is later restored when the author mentions that these projects are also about divisive distinctions between people.

Schramm raises a pertinent methodological point, also covered by others. She argues that personal genetic histories (PGHs) that commercial genetic testing services provide involve a methodologically weak process whereby ethnic categories are decided prior to genetic mapping, thereby permitting the reestablishment of racialized categories. This is also Sommer's point when she problematizes DNA as the supreme, error-free form of knowledge by questioning the construction of genetic profiles in the first place. Related to this problematic is the obvious outcome of genetic testing, often not clearly acknowledged by service-providing companies, that a particular ancestor is one out of the millions of possible

ancestors; Schramm brings out this point clearly in quoting Jackson, the expert who appeared on both the PBS series *African America Lives* (2006) and the BBC production *Motherland* (2003).

The last essay of the volume by Stephan Palmié is an important contribution in many senses. Although, to begin with, a somewhat oblique allusion to the idea of social capital with respect to Alfred Gell's notion of "technologies of enchantment" (*The Art of Anthropology: Essays and Diagrams* [1999]) is not extended to, or exploited in, the search of genealogical ancestry later in the essay (p. 194). "Social capital" is a term used most famously by Robert Putnam in his best-selling book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* and defined by him as the "connections among individuals–social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" that ultimately "enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives."[2] The allusion is convincing as Palmié comes back at the very end to reinvoke an Appadurian notion of "social life" (Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* [1986]), however, without building it into the analysis in any major way–perhaps a future project. That said, the reference to his own earlier work ("Genomics, Divination, 'Racecraft"') as a background to the current essay, especially in its questioning of products by companies that provide genealogical ancestry (one of which is his own colleague's at the School of Medicine of the University of Chicago), is without doubt of value and goes beyond mere score settling.[3] Further, a reference to Nash's 2004 article "Genetic Kinship" in this connection, where genetic testing is seen as occupying a possible political centrality which is nonetheless depoliticized in the context of the American consumer capitalism, is highly relevant.[4]

Apart from the social capital link, I also think that at this point, it may be interesting to see the similarity of connection between the severity of slavery as obliteration of African roots and the case of the "living disappeared" in Argentina that Vaisman discusses. Both events accompany a forcible severance from parents/parental land along with a violent identity erasure. Seen in this light, if genetic testing is a participation in the greater American dream of seeking roots, then the case of the familial restitution of the "living disappeared" can be seen in a similar way as finding roots back, even though it is not a national obsession in this case.

I would like to take issue with Palmié's over-insistence on the parallelism between African American PGH consumers and the Afro-Cuban divinity practice of *regal de ocha*–in spite of the uncertainty, provisionality, and ambiguity of answers to the question of genetic origin amid category shifting referred to above (Nash or Schramm). This can be read as an attempt at othering the community's inability to come out of the vortex of cult-specific, ritualistic practices that act as cultural inscriptions on its body and is further beset by the idea that the divinatory is therapeutic.

However, the real insight from the essay–and from the collection as a whole–is Palmié's suggestion that "routinization of experience" that knowledge generated out of genealogical ancestry and such practices (in my view, also of social capital building, along with its past accumulations) affords may act as the ground on which to base conceptions of selfhood and moral community (p. 205).[4] This may also be the only sensible response to worries of uncertainty about any prospect after a natural grinding to a halt of interest in genealogical projects once the cultural tourisms are participated in and other paraphernalia acquired (whether it is a totemic presence in a ceremony as in the case of Paige [Schramm], or milking of a satisfied-looking cow by Blumenthal as the purest symbol of *Homo alpines* [Sommer, among others]).

Notes

[1]. Margaret Lock, "Eclipse of the Gene and the Return of the Divination," *Current Anthropology* 46 (2005): 47-70.

[2]. Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Touchstone, 2000), 19.

[3]. Stephan Palmié, "Genomics, Divination, 'Racecraft,"' *American Ethnologist* 34, no. 2 (2007): 205-222.

[4]. Catherine Nash, "Genetic Kinship," *Cultural Studies* 18, no. 1 (2004): 1-33.

[5]. Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (Slough: Greenwood Press, 1986), 241-258.

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