



Book reviews

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Stephanie Taylor, *Narratives of Identity and Place*. London and New York: Routledge, 2010. vii + 146 pp.

Reviewed by: Emily Farrell, *English Department, Free University Berlin, Germany*

In *Narratives of Identity and Place*, Stephanie Taylor addresses a growing interest in the intersection of identity and place in the context of globalization, contributing to an increasing body of scholarship on the salience of narrative as a discursive resource. The book begins with a discussion of the relationship of migration to place and the complexity of the spectrum of belonging in contemporary life beyond a mere binary of ‘rooted belonging’ versus ‘rootless mobility’ (p. 3). Taylor outlines the importance of identity in the context of globalization, where individuals constantly navigate self within a mobile social world. Narratives are seen as a primary resource for the construction and presentation of self, a social resource that offers a ‘common sense’ way of understanding identity and place, and a sequence that ‘creates an expectation around what you should do next, a standard for living out life successfully’ (p. 15).

Taylor introduces her focus on women and place in the first chapter, asking what importance place has in the lives of women and whether contemporary society presents particular spaces or “‘new” identities of place for women’ (p. 4). She provides details of her recruitment process: a university newspaper advertisement asking for part-time students who were interested in a study about ‘place and identity’. Taylor recruited 20 participants, who all lived in London or southern England and were between 20 and 50 years old, and conducted semi-formal, one-hour interviews.

Chapter 2 focuses on narrative study and its place in the contemporary ‘identity project’. Taylor covers narrative theory in psychology as well as in theorizing of self, with an overview of the theories of Labov and Waletzky, Bruner and Gergen. She then presents her *narrative-discourse* approach, drawing from research in social psychology, social constructionism, discourse analysis and discursive psychology. Taylor proceeds with a loose definition of narrative as ‘a construction of sequence or consequence’ (p. 36). Narrative is seen as one site where we can analyze ‘identity work’ in talk, something which ‘is an ongoing and open-ended reflexive project for the speaker’ (p. 38).

Continuing with a literature review, Chapter 3 assesses the literature on the intersection of gender, place and identity. Chapter 4 begins Taylor’s data analysis. In this chapter, Taylor focuses on memory as a significant part of continuity. She provides the questions

used in her semi-structured interviews. The stress is on what appears in talk, rather than drawing lines between fact and fiction. Taylor provides illustrative data samples that show the pattern of usage for the 'born and bred' narrative, including the linking of house and family through current family ties and remembered childhood.

The examination of continuity is extended in Chapter 5. Taylor discusses the available subject positions for women within the 'born and bred' narrative as being those of 'daughters or wives, mothers and homemakers' (p. 74). Troubling for participants in contemporary life is the (lack of) continuity in relation to family and place, trouble that is resolved in part through recourse to other resources, for example the prevalence of the 'nature and landscape' narratives and future possibility of place in the corpus. Taylor points out that there is a gap between contemporary life and the existent narrative resources available, a gap that must be navigated in talk. A new future possible place of residence offers one way for participants to discursively construct a new future life and self (p. 87).

In Chapter 6, Taylor considers what potential new identities are offered in contemporary society. She focuses on the discourses of opportunity and choice present in her corpus. Chapter 6 is particularly interested in alternatives to the born and bred narrative, for instance the 'choosing self' as a more 'contemporary' possibility (p. 109).

Chapter 7 turns the focus to one participant, to exemplify the patterns across a single person's talk. The choice of focus is a 41-year-old single woman who migrated to New Zealand as a 12-year-old from a small northern England town, and returned to live in London at around the age of 37. Taylor's analysis examines the fantasy of upward economic mobility in international migration, the positioning of this participant by others as not belonging to New Zealand on the basis of accent, the local discursive resource of 'a nice house' and the 'trouble' of reconciling challenges to identity work on the basis of not belonging.

The concluding chapter provides a brief overview of the analysis, including the significance of the narrative-discursive approach used to analyze these narratives of identity and place. Taylor stresses the importance of the relationship of individual to social, of continuity across the lifespan, of the 'multiple orientations' of participants, and the narrative resources available to people, including the traditional 'born and bred' narrative, as well as the alternative discourses of opportunity and choice.

Overall, this is worthwhile research for those interested in contemporary narrative study, and particularly researchers interested in the examination of place and self in contemporary British society.

Toril Jenssen, *Behind the Eye: Reflexive Methods in Cultural Studies, Ethnographic Film and Visual Media*. Højberg: Independent Press, 2009.

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Toril Jenssen teaches at the Regional Centre for Child and Adolescent Mental Health at the University of Tromsø in northern Norway. Her specialist area of study is the production of ethnographic films. She has been involved in a number of practical film-making